

THE PROCESS OF FAILING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY STUDENTS:
A STAFF PERSPECTIVE

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, October 1993

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have generously shared their experiences and expressed their support during the research. All this has been appreciated. A few deserve special mention. Firstly, all the academic and fieldwork staff who participated in each part, thereby giving me insight into their perspective. Colleagues at the Derby School of Occupational Therapy for their encouragement and role as peer auditors, particularly Joan Kenyon and Vivien Wallace. Also to Eric Hall, for his careful and caring supervision. The financial support from the Constance Owens Trust provided a valued link with the Liverpool College of Occupational Therapy. Finally, to David Ilott for his stamina, sensitivity and stability.

ABSTRACT

Assigning a fail grade, particularly when it results in the termination of a career goal, is a taboo and taken-for-granted aspect of an assessor's role. Hermeneutics provided the main framework for interpreting the subjective and objective experiences of both academic and fieldwork supervisors during this process.

An incremental research design, using a principal and two supplementary methods was used to investigate the minutiae of assessing whether a student has achieved the required standard of competence. Focused interviews were conducted with 25 academic and 5 fieldwork supervisors to compare the perspective of staff with different roles, relationships and responsibilities. These were preceded by two questionnaire surveys with trained, experienced fieldwork supervisors. On the first survey 64% (n=72) ranked 'failing a student' as their most problematical responsibility. The second survey comprised immediate and follow-up evaluations of five 'failure workshops' attended by 101 supervisors. They highlighted the importance of an assessor's affective response, reinforced effective supervisory strategies and the professional obligation to act as a gatekeeper of future standards.

The results revealed a diverse array of individual factors, institutional rituals and external pressures which seemed to facilitate or sabotage the quality of the process and outcome. These included an assessor's inexperience, the conflict in values and roles between therapist and educator; characteristics of the student particularly the pastoral relationship and stage of training; the valued impartiality of an external examiner or fieldwork organiser; and the threat to reputations and course viability if results provide the primary performance indicator.

An understanding of the complex constellation of factors which may influence an assessor's ability and confidence to fairly judge both initial and ongoing competence is important for all 'caring' professions to ensure only safe practitioners are registered to work with vulnerable clients.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

1.1 General introduction

Failure is a fascinating, multi-faceted topic. A 'fail grade' is a unidimensional symbol which has multidimensional meanings (Pollio et al, 1989). This research explores these meanings from the perspective of an assessor, in both academic and fieldwork settings, who is responsible for judging a student's 'competence to practise' as an occupational therapist. The assessors' perspective on the process of assigning a fail grade has received scant attention in educational research, although when mentioned the strength and commonality of language is both interesting and disturbing, for example

"while it affects comparatively few, it dramatically affects those few" (Howard, 1979).

Although a second fail, resulting in termination of training is a relatively rare occurrence, the costs seem to be disproportionate. These reasons suggest the need to scrutinize the whole process. The intention has been to understand and explain a complex, "emotionally taxing responsibility" (Meisenhelder, 1982). This is important for three main reasons, firstly, to optimise the quality of decision making at a difficult time, to reduce the incidence of "failure to fail" (Lankshear, 1990) and finally to support assessors during a "debilitating, emotionally draining experience" (Symanski, 1991).

The introduction provides a personal and professional context for the study of a subject which seems to enjoy a taboo status

(McGimpsey, 1988). Failure is an emotive label which carries many negative connotations for the student who is "branded as a failure" (Brown, 1991) because of the irrational association between failure to reach the required standard on a prescribed task and failure as a person (Schohaus 1932, Claxton 1984a). It is interesting to note how infrequently the word appears in the indexes of educational literature, the softer terms of non-attainment or non-achievement seem to be preferred. However, Plewis (1991) has challenged the value of these alternative words with their ambiguous definitions which cause "conceptual and operational confusion". Unfortunately this semantic avoidance seems to extend into avoidance of both the word and deed by assessors. A multi-disciplinary list will serve to illustrate this statement (and spread of the problem within the 'caring' professions) Brandon & Davies (1979), Morrell (1980), Illott (1988), Lankshear (1990), Green (1991). For example,

"Outright failure, resulting in discontinuation of nurse training, did not appear to occur at all. The system in use would appear to require further research" (Davenhall, 1985).

1.2 Personal context

This dissertation is the culmination of six years research into the minutiae of the process of assigning a fail grade. It has been an evolving, fascinating exploration which started with personal experience. As a fieldwork supervisor and lecturer I have been in the position of failing students, sometimes with the extra pressure of knowing that the judgement I have made

will result in their termination of training from their chosen career. I found the dilemma and responsibility awesome, but equally perturbing was the way in which some colleagues seemed to minimize the enormity of the task and trauma. It seemed to be a taken-for-granted aspect of an assessor's role which should be fulfilled without fuss. However, the first study which focused upon the supervisors' perspective (Ilott, 1988) and this one which also includes academic staff, has affirmed my experience, giving the assurance of a sense of universality (Yalom, 1985).

Throughout the research there has been a duality of emphasis upon understanding and utility. Understanding has encompassed the topic and self, to understand the sense of specific examples and their reference to the whole topic,

"the vital and emotional envelope of human experience ... the reservoir of meaning, the surplus of sense in living experience, which renders the objectifying and explanatory attitude possible" (Ricoeur, 1981).

The research was designed to be useful throughout the whole process. For example, failure workshops and conferences have been used to collect, share and challenge emerging themes. These have provided valuable opportunities for anecdotal comparison and to test whether my interpretations "fitted and worked" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) for assessors. They also fulfilled the 'mission' of confronting failure in public forum, thereby giving permission to differentiate between competence and incompetence. The workshops (with occupational therapists and other 'caring' professionals including osteopaths, physiotherapists, speech therapists and nurses) and paper presentations at conferences

have stimulated national and international interest in the topic. This has ranged from correspondence with colleagues in eight countries and a lecture tour in Sweden. The comment from a New Zealand fieldwork organiser seems to reflect the universality of the problem and applicability of the results.

"The paper addressed feelings and difficulties our fieldwork tutors and supervising therapists, experience here too" (Leary, 1990).

All, have sustained my motivation and confirmed a positive outcome to contradict negative stereotypes about failure.

1.3 Professional context

As an occupational therapist it has been natural to study failure within this context, while recognising the concern to safeguard standards of competency is shared by all 'caring professions'. This section will provide an overview of occupational therapy education, particularly the fundamental connection between assessment of competence and licence to practise.

During the last decade occupational therapy education has been characterised by review or restructuring, some welcomed but some imposed, causing concern about the future of the profession. For example, 1986 was the final year for a national curriculum with national examinations organised and validated by the College of Occupational Therapists (COT). This was superseded by Diploma '81, (a core curriculum) a proposal for

"schools to design their curricula according to their own strengths and philosophies around Diploma '81" (Grellier, 1983).

which gained Privy Council approval in June 1980. Simultaneously, the "shift of locus of basic education" (Jay et al, 1992) from private or National Health Service Schools towards institutions of higher education provided the opportunity for the development of degree courses. The first 3 year full time course started in Edinburgh in 1986 and by 1992 all full-time courses had achieved degree status. Another welcome change was the increasing diversity of educational routes including 4 year part time Diploma or Degree courses for support workers and 2 year accelerated courses for graduates.

However, these rapid developments and expansion (from 18 Schools in 1988 to 27 in 1993 with an intake of 1,600 students) have occurred within the context of major change within all aspects of the public sector. The Government's White Paper: Working for Patients, Working Paper 10 Education and Training (1989) has brought radical change, if not chaos, to the education of the majority of non-medical staff working within the National Health Service. The decentralisation of control, from the Department of Health to Regional Health Authorities, with the devolution of funding allocated on a per capita basis to contracted education providers' (internal or external educational establishments) by the purchasers (Regional Health Authorities), has impacted upon the whole educational process. This has ranged from gross reductions in places at particular schools due to regional oversupply based upon manpower planning projections, to time and cost consuming competitive tendering to obtain sufficient educational places to secure the short term

viability of an established School.

These changes reflect a revolution in the relationship between society and the professions, which extend from education to the structural reorganisations of the health and social care systems, all designed to increase cost containment and efficiency. For

"Where the professions were once accorded their own authority, were regarded as set apart from business, and were seen as motivated by the desire to offer the public unselfish service, now they are treated by governments and the public alike as if they were simply another form of industrial production whose end is to operate according to market forces and to add as much as possible to the capital base of the country" (Fish et al, 1989).

It is against this background that education providers are still expected to present a relevant curriculum (Alsop, 1991) and assessors' fairly judge competence to practise. Competence remains the primary purpose of both education and assessment (Hassard et al, 1990) whether for present or "future roles and performance within these roles" (Simms, 1979). This requires a "delicate balance between knowing and doing" (Shah & Cooper, 1992) to remove boundaries between academic and clinical learning to create a "totally integrated approach to professional education" (Jacobs, 1992). This ideal should provide a "shared vision of a desirable objective" (Ball, 1993) to help educators endure and manage in these uncertain times.

However, the desirable objective of an integrated curriculum fails to mask two crucial difficulties. These are the intrinsic problems of assessment in the clinical or fieldwork setting and

defining the desired outcome, competence at a particular stage or end of the course. Fieldwork is the practical or 'doing' component where the student "learns how to be in practice, both personally and professionally" (Peloquin & Davidson, 1993). Although it comprises one third of the curriculum, it is really "the heart of the educational programme" (Wong & Wong, 1987) and must be passed to enable registration as an occupational therapist. The literature is littered with statements which combine the importance, yet problems of availability, costs, learning and assessment "shrouded in subjectivity" (Meisenhelder, 1982). Fieldwork supervisors are

"charged with the awesome task of translating and transmitting the discipline's clinical knowledge and skill in ways that create safe, competent, knowledgeable practitioners" (Karuhije, 1986).

Yet competence is an ambiguous, relative and multidimensional concept. Two definitions will be offered to illustrate this complexity and prepare for the later discussion of competence.

"Health professionals must be technically competent, and knowledgeable in the basic and clinical sciences, life long learners, excellent communicators, and health care visionaries" (Sullivan, 1992).

"qualities of judgement and decision making which are indicative of capacities to make wise and intelligent responses in novel and unpredictable situations" (Elliott, 1991).

It is these qualities, or criteria of suitability and acceptability (Troyna, 1991) which are sought by employers when recruiting entry grade therapists (Alsop, 1991). This completes the circle, the purpose of education and assessment. Each student must achieve the minimum standard of clinical competence to

"protect the public, to ensure quality care and to establish credibility of members of the profession" (Coates & Chambers, 1992).

1.4 Societal context

The Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act (1960) is the primary mechanism for protecting the public. State registration in the United Kingdom has a long history beginning with the first Medical Act of 1858 and subsequent regulation of pharmacists, dentists, midwives, nurses and opticians. The benefits of state registration were noted by the Minister of Health in 1960 as being the

"Identification of trained and qualified persons with high ethical standards, not only for the purposes of the NHS, or even of other public services, but also in the eyes of the public generally" (Pickis, 1993a).

The Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act (PSM) is the statute which established the Council of Professions Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM) with Boards for chiropodists, dieticians, medical laboratory scientific officers, occupational therapists, orthoptists, physiotherapists and radiographers, both diagnostic and therapeutic. State registration sets the standard for each profession by acting as a kitemark for the protection of the general public, as a standard of professional behaviour, as a mark of true medical activity and as a standard for employment (Pickis, 1993a). These standards are achieved through three duties enshrined in the Act. These are firstly, registration of new and existing members of each

profession which is the criterion for employment in health and social care settings. Secondly, discipline with the maintenance of investigatory and disciplinary committees, and the receipt and processing of complaints from the general public. These are particularly related to Statements of Conduct which say the practitioner must be competent to do what they claim to do and avoid infamous conduct. This is defined as the deliberate endangering, adverse affecting of, and the abuse of relationships with patients. Finally, the approval of educational institutions and qualifications, which includes fieldwork placements. This restates the link between an individual assessor and the legislative framework. The assessment of 'competence to practise' is not merely to relieve an assessor's "anxiety or insecurity" (Holt, 1970) but is a crucial part of the vocational certification process which is entrusted to the profession by society (Rowntree, 1987).

Although the CPM Act requires review to reflect changing practices, the development of new professions and European Community legislation, the importance of protection of consumers remains a key function. For example, at a conference in November 1992, Sir Leon Brittan (vice-president of the European Commission and then competition commissioner) was asked if he thought that the PSMs (and other professions) should be deregulated to increase competition. In reply he said,

"... when you are talking about professions you are talking about occupations which I believe are skilled, and where the degree of skill could not possibly be known by the consumer or customer, and the possibility of lack of skill can be lethal, and therefore I think it is quite unrealistic and

undesirable to talk about deregulation. I think what one should talk about is mutual recognition of qualifications" (Pickis, 1993a).

A parallel process of screening examinations is operated in Australia, Canada and the United States (McFadden et al, 1990) to assess the competency of overseas occupational therapists wishing to practise in these countries.

The principles of registration or licensure seem laudable, however Low (1992) has challenged whether these are for the protection of the consumer or a professional monopoly. She argues that registration reflects a paternalistic attitude which underpins a medical model of illness,

"To the extent one protects a person from harm produced by causes beyond the persons' knowledge and control, the intervention has plausible claim to being morally justified, for the choices are substantially non-voluntary" (Low, 1992).

Although I disagree with this paternalistic argument, I share her concern about the need for rigorous enforcement (at all stages from pre-registration to continuous competence) to fulfil the aim of protection of vulnerable members of the public. The failure to protect vulnerable clients from the range of abuses perpetrated by a few unscrupulous professionals is rightly condemned. An editorial in The Times highlighted the "alarming similarity" in the career patterns of Beverly Allitt and Frank Beck, concluding with this statement

"the safety of the public must take precedence over 'fair' employment practices in the public sector" (19th May, 1993).

These extreme examples serve to illustrate an important point.

Although no qualification or examination can "guarantee that evil people would not get into positions of power" (Waldegrave, 1991) everyone has an obligation to be alert and take appropriate action, rather than avoid the failure of students or staff to attain or maintain, the required standard of competence.

1.5 Individual context

The last, emotive sentence bridges the dilemma between an assessor's professional obligation and their personal response. The teacher or supervisor is required to act as judge (Geary, 1988) during the process of assessment. This involves fine, subjective judgements which become 'accepted reality' in the final grade. This judgement is often a matter of degree, demanding synthesis of a range of evidence. The matter of degree is contained in legally accepted definitions of supervision, for example

"Supervision is a matter of degree ... the degree of supervision required was that which was required as good practice having regard to the stage of training reached and the experience of the unqualified person" (The Times Law Report 24th August, 1992).

The word judgement is used because it incorporates both "rationality and intuition" (Barsoux, 1992). This recognises (and values) an assessor's cognitive and affective responses when making fine judgements of degree. An assessor's feelings would seem to have a influential effect upon whether a fail grade is awarded or whether a student 'is allowed to just pass.' This applies to those with the most distant and closest relationship

with a student. For example, Turnbull (1992) reports that external examiners "also suffer from exam nerves" and

"Failing a student can be very damaging to the supervisor's morale and self confidence and their potential feelings of failure should not be underestimated" (Maybury, 1988).

The failure to differentiate between competence and incompetence which has been reported in occupational therapy literature would seem to be due a complex, variety of individual and institutional factors. Both Cooper & Crist (1988) and Grellier (1983) note in passing that assessment systems have allowed incompetent students to gain registration. This undesirable outcome justifiably damages the reputation of individuals, schools and the profession. The meaning of fails, particularly the number, is an important interconnecting factor which links personal ownership and institutional performance indicators. The introduction of contracts between educational purchasers and providers has put emphasis upon outputs rather than the process or outcomes (Kaufman, 1988) with the provider being judged on the performance of its students (Caple, 1990). The actual and symbolic dimensions (Airasian, 1987) of league tables of results impact upon individuals and institutions, particularly if results are perceived as a reflection of poor teaching rather than rigorous standards. This seems to be related to the number of fails, for example,

"Student failure (in a high school) is a common, persistent and complex subject ... some students will fail despite everyones best efforts ... a teacher can fail students and still be a good teacher who is doing a good job. When large numbers fail, something is wrong" (Stabile, 1989).

1.6 Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate an assessor's perspective on the process of assigning a fail grade within this complex, personal, institutional, professional and societal context. The research approach and methods have given priority to their experiential knowledge in ways which "seek to unite the cognitive and affective" (Elbaz, 1983). The dissertation reflects this incremental process in which a detailed descriptive analysis has illuminated an unexplored aspect of education, revealing patterns which seem to facilitate understanding. However, sufficient detail is included to enable the reader to interpret the findings, to challenge their trustworthiness and test their applicability as they confront failure.

2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

2.1 Introduction to the research problem

The title encompasses the area for investigation: the process of failing occupational therapy students - a staff perspective. The responsibility for making the judgement that a student has not yet reached the required standard of academic or professional competence is a pivotal part of an assessor's role. Assessors need to achieve a balance between justice to an individual student with the maintenance of standards to protect vulnerable clients (Duffy, 1987), the value of the qualification (Brandon & Davies, 1979) to fulfil their role in the vocational certification process (Rowntree, 1987) which is entrusted to the profession by society through the Privy Council, Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine, Schools and individuals.

However, this long term perspective seems to become obscured during the decision making by a variety of competing personal and professional factors which can sabotage the quality of both the process and outcome. One profession specific factor relates to the values and purpose of occupational therapy which Thorner (1991) defines as the promotion of health through enabling individuals to achieve competence and satisfaction in daily occupations. A fail scenario seems to provoke a conflict between the professional focus of optimising abilities and the educational obligation to confirm competence. This may lead to the provision of extraordinary pastoral and academic support to

ensure a pass grade but the assessor may then be "plagued with doubts about this decision" (Moeller, 1984) for they have failed to uphold the responsibilities vested in them to protect the public from incompetent practitioners.

The negative consequences of failure, both for an individual student and the institution are acknowledged in the literature. For example, Kim & Clifford (1988) describe the consequent decrease in performance and self esteem for students. A high failure rate (whether due to drop-out or non-promotion) is costly for institutions (Lewis 1986, O'Sullivan 1989). If student results, representing institutional output, are perceived as a primary performance indicator (Graham, 1991) then a low position on a 'league table' may have a negative impact upon both individual and institutional reputations.

In contrast the assessors' perspective, particularly when their judgement results in the termination of a student's career goal, seems to have received scant attention. However, when deemed worthy of mention the trauma for staff has been noted. A qualitative and quantitative example will illustrate this statement. Firstly, a quotation

"When faced with the reality of failure, both student and educator become uncomfortable, tense and depressed ... (they) feel insufficient and powerless ... both feel like failures" (Turkett, 1987).

Secondly, in a study into occupational stress and coping strategies amongst female baccalaureate nursing faculty in Canada, retaining failing students and failing clinically unsafe students were ranked as the second and third highest stressors

(Goldenberg & Waddall, 1990).

This study was designed to redress this imbalance by giving priority and value to a staff perspective. Although five general questions gave initial direction these have been enriched and expanded through listening, understanding and interpreting the experiences of assessors. I have gained a privileged insight into their world. I hope this thesis will give a sense of coherence and order, to make this social world less confusing so this unfamiliar and unpredictable aspect of the role may be confronted with courage.

2.2 Academic staff and fieldwork supervisors perceive the assignment of a fail grade as their most onerous responsibility.

The first hypothesis investigated the extent to which failure was problematical for both academic and fieldwork staff. The apparent evasion of failure, both as a word and deed, seemed to suggest denial. The statement is also comparative, contrasting the processes and dilemmas associated with the assessment of academic ability and professional suitability. Although each is difficult in different ways, both share some common features which may exacerbate or alleviate the occupational stress. These include the difficulty of giving candid, critical yet constructive feedback; working with intangible definitions of competence; and the tendency to use inappropriate attributions of responsibility which engender feelings of failure, blame or guilt. These

differences, related to different roles and responsibilities provided the focus for the second hypothesis.

2.3 A range of academic and clinical staff may be involved in a fail scenario. These include: the course leader, fieldwork supervisor, fieldwork organiser and lecturer. Their different roles, responsibilities and relationship with a student will result in different objective and subjective experiences of failure.

The focused interviews gave an opportunity to explore the obvious and subtle differences related to roles. The complex combination of contextual factors (personal and organisational) which influence staff perceptions were examined, contrasted and compared according to their respective roles and relationship with students. The intention was to identify themes between and within staff groups who share the ultimate, responsibility as the gatekeepers of the profession (Moeller, 1984).

2.4 The stress of making the judgement that an occupational therapy student has not achieved the required standard of academic or professional competence is exacerbated by the avoidance of the subject of failure within the professional and educational milieu.

This hypothesis contains the assumption (based upon personal experience and reading) that assigning a fail grade is stressful, and this is exacerbated by both avoidance (of the word and deed) and the non-recognition of failure as a natural consequence of life, learning and assessment. Several factors were postulated as contributing to this occupational stressor. For example,

the lack of preparation for assessors about failure which creates fear of the unknown, a focus upon negative rather than positive consequences for individuals and institutions, particularly if fails are considered to represent poor teaching (Ericson & Ellett, 1987) rather than rigorous standards. Failure would seem to highlight educational dilemmas for all staff, but particularly those separated from an educational establishment, who combine the role of clinician with assessor of 'competence to practise'. Their needs for training and support were given priority because of the added difficulties of assessment within a clinical milieu and the supervisory relationship (Morgan & Knox 1987, Wong & Wong 1987).

2.5 Training courses which are designed to confront the topic of failure, by providing an opportunity to reflect upon the personal and professional consequences of working with borderline or unsatisfactory students, will be appraised by the participants, as contributing toward an increase in confidence on immediate and follow-up course evaluations.

This was based upon a recommendation from the first study about the need for a specific course to help prepare staff for the responsibility of differentiating between competence and incompetence. This would supplement existing, generic supervisors' training courses. In response, five 'failure workshops' were held at Derby in 1989 and 1990. The participants' were surveyed immediately, four months and one year later to ascertain their perceptions of worth and obtain examples of any forward transfer of learning into their

supervisory role, particularly when working with marginal students.

2.6 An instrument which identifies a student's knowledge, skills and/or attitude as unsatisfactory will complement existing measures of "competence to practise", and assist in the differentiation of pass, borderline and fail grades in the clinical situation.

The final hypothesis was intended to provide a bridge between the failure workshops and other sources of staff support. Definitions or measures of 'competence to practise' are notoriously problematical (Hollis, 1993a). By studying the obverse it was hoped competence would become clearer. The failure workshops and focused interviews were used to collect definitions and differences between academic and clinical incompetence. Interestingly, discussions seemed to suffice in clarifying the constituents of incompetence. However, the opportunity to create, analyse, compare and criticise criterion revealed remarkable inter and intraprofessional similarities which deserve further study and verification.

2.7 Conclusion to the research problem

The five general hypotheses are inter-connected to the central theme of understanding and explaining the staff perspective on the process of failing an occupational therapy student. It was hoped the identification and interpretation of commonalities

would increase awareness, acceptance and action particularly through appropriate training and support. This would complete the research circle and fulfil the mission of giving assessors' needs priority, to prevent the failure to fail for

"Institutions who permit incompetent practitioners to pass their course are as culpable as those who unjustly fail a student" (Meisenhelder, 1982).

This culpability is pertinent with the present contractual relationship which emphasize consumerism, accountability, value for money and outputs rather than outcomes as performance indicators (Kaufman 1988, Nicklin & Lankshear 1990, Caple 1990). These external pressures upon both individuals and institutions compound the internal pressures. An understanding of the complex combination of factors which influence staff or outcome would therefore seem to be both important and timely.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction to the specific literature review

This aspect of an assessor's role seems to have been so taken-for-granted as to be "deemed not worthy of special study" (Bradby, 1990). An extensive literature search, covering a range of 'caring' professions revealed only fourteen references which related specifically to a health/social care assessor's perspective during a fail scenario. Of these 11 were from nurse education, 2 for social work and 1 for occupational therapy in America (9), United Kingdom (4) and Canada (1). A review of tangential references to the process of assigning a fail grade will be considered in the next section. Although this subdivision between specific and general references is for convenience, there is a striking similarity of themes between the content of both sections and the whole study. The literature review also provides the context for a discussion of the key concept of competence.

3.2 Research based studies

The majority of the literature was descriptive or informative rather than evaluative, with only three studies containing research rather than anecdotal evidence. The most comprehensive and detailed was Brandon & Davies (1979) study into the assessment of marginal students in social work. Using

interviews with course tutors, documentation (fieldwork assessments) and non-participant observation of examination boards they investigated the process and problems of defining and assessing competence by focusing upon a sample of 35 'at risk' students. Although they identified eight categories of fieldwork practise problems, (which relate to a criterion for failure), they comment upon the "multiple references to different problems within each category" with for example, 13 students demonstrating problems in four categories. This illustrates the complex combination of difficulties experienced by marginal students. They examined external influential factors and the outcome of the assessment process. Interestingly, despite this pattern of fieldwork problems only 2 from 35 failed to qualify and this was because of academic weaknesses. Their conclusions are still relevant for many professions:

"there is room for administrative improvement ... the difficulty of identifying an anatomy of competence, the reluctance of fieldwork teachers and tutors to stand firm in the defence of standards and the inability of tutors to give specific examples of the way in which students had failed to integrate theory with practise: all of these are clear indications of the continuing absence of agreement on what constitutes social work and what behaviours comprise professional social work skills."

The two other studies were related to nurse education in the United Kingdom (Lankshear,1990) and America (Brozenec et al, 1987). Lankshear described the "failure to fail" as part of an investigation into attitudes of clinical teachers and tutors to assessment. She reported substantial agreement amongst the 34 experienced and trained assessors who participated in small group discussions about the failure of ward nurses to fail students.

A variety of reasons were given including the difficulty of "telling the student face to face"; the confusion between being a 'good nurse' and a 'nice person'; the short eight week placements which required early identification of problems and action to prevent a 'surprise' summative fail; lack of knowledge about previous results which engendered the doubt "Is it just me? Have I seen something that no-one else has seen?"; the consequences of "feeling like an ogre" and lack of familiarity with examination regulations. These reasons and fears are repeated throughout this research, as was her recommendation for support for clinical staff. One notable difference, related to their criteria, which concentrated upon safety to the exclusion of other competencies. This was an implicit rather than explicit criterion for occupational therapists.

The need for staff support and training when assessing borderline students provided the impetus for Brozenec et al's (1987) follow-up evaluation of a half-day workshop. They considered the problems of fieldwork assessment, particularly subjectivity, the difference between learning and assessment times, the difficulty assessing the affective domain and inter-rater reliability were exacerbated with a borderline student. A case study was used during a workshop attended by 30 novice and experienced clinical instructors to explore and highlight these difficulties. On a one year, follow-up evaluation respondents reported the clarification of objectives and exchange of ideas had influenced their awareness and assessments. The article concludes with a description of strategies for the student and

supervisor. These, with the need for training contributed to the Derby failure workshops.

3.3 Personal and supervisory strategies

The next set of five articles, which relate to occupational therapy and nurse education in America, outline the problems and describe strategies by providing information about personal and supervisory mechanisms. These included Meisenhelder (1982), Carpenito (1983), Moeller (1984), Turkett (1987) and Symanski (1991). The title: "Let's take the "i" out of failure" (Turkett, 1987) is apposite for it encapsulates a core survival strategy: the ability to differentiate between personal and task failure for both supervisor and student. All agree, using emotive language that assigning an unsatisfactory clinical grade is "one of the most difficult situations" (Turkett, 1987) for it "presents an emotional struggle ... and awareness of one's own fallibility" (Meisenhelder, 1982) which can "debilitate those involved" (Carpenito, 1983) and

"repeated emotionally draining experiences ... may result in unfortunate outcomes such as burnout, loss of high-calibre clinical faculty members and erosion of teaching standards" (Symanski, 1991).

All provide advice on supervisory strategies designed to improve the quality and confidence in the decision making process while maintaining sensitivity to the support needs of both staff and students. The only article written by an occupational therapist (Moeller, 1984) uses an example of good and poor practice to

highlight supervisory skills and professional obligations when managing a problem student which she defines as one who manifests skill (inability to apply theory to practise) or personality (poor interpersonal relationships) deficiencies.

Carpenito (1983) and Meisenhelder (1982) acknowledge other forces and factors which may influence the process or outcome:

"Real or imagined fears may pressure the instructor into giving a pass grade: fear of the student's accusations, fears of inadequate support from administration, fear of parental backlash from the student's family and fear of legal ramifications and grievance procedures" (Meisenhelder, 1982).

The most recent article (Symanski, 1991) provides detailed and comprehensive guidance on methods of reducing staff demoralization when failing students. The focus is upon the immediate and long term costs and consequences for individuals and the profession. This reflects and summarises the emergent themes contained herein, for example the institutional avoidance, critical comments from colleagues, positive outcomes from a career change and the effect upon the cohort. The conclusion contains a plea for research into the staff perspective. Interestingly, her comments seemingly based upon experience, observation and reading have predicted much which follows in this study.

3.4 Legal aspects of failure

The next four articles relate to nurse education (three from America and one from Canada) and concentrate upon the legal

framework giving information about appeal or grievance procedures. Gocłowski (1985) presents a thorough historical review and description of appropriate legislation related to

"the possibility where an educator may be sued for both failing, and not failing, a student."

The concept of due process for student dismissal with the appeal procedure are outlined and compared with the new concept of educational malpractice when

"failure to instruct properly (which includes passing a failing student or failing a passing student) may be a negligent act."

This dual responsibility to the client and student are highlighted within the context of professional ethics and public service, thus linking the individual, institution and society.

The other three authors focus upon particular aspects of the legal framework. The 'landmark case' of the Supreme Court decision in the Board of Curators, University of Missouri v Horowitz 1977 is outlined by Poteet & Pollok (1981). This confirmed the right to make subjective judgements when appraising clinical behaviour, if based upon professionally accepted standards. The criterion for the dismissal of Horowitz, an academically able fourth year medical student included unacceptable personal hygiene, inappropriate bedside manner and tardiness.

In contrast, Wood & Campbell (1985) and Majorowicz (1986) focus upon the appeals and grievance process which affirm students' rights of appeal. They describe how the supervisor can ensure the student has received due process, for

"a person is entitled to prior notice and an opportunity to be heard before he may be deprived of a protected right" (Wood and Campbell, 1985).

and a fair, equitable evaluation of performance. Both focus upon strategies, particularly giving (and documenting) honest formative and summative feedback based upon clear learning objectives as evidence of due process. While Wood & Campbell (1985) emphasize the importance of the educator being aware of their responsibilities including familiarity with legal and school procedures by analysing an example of good and bad practice, Majorowicz (1986) concentrates upon the staff perspective at each stage of the grievance process, combining practical and emotional strategies.

3.5 Different perspectives

The final two references, both from the United Kingdom, have a different focus: Gallagher (1983) challenges the effectiveness of assessment techniques for identifying nursing students who may fail the final examination while Gardiner (1989) criticises both the process and outcome of an assessment of a social work student. Gallagher (1983) claims ward based assessments are

"marginally biased in favour of the students ... who are pleasantly natured, socially skilled."

He supports this observation by commenting about those whom it is 'known' have performed badly, but who receive assessments of 'average' or 'just good enough' which then engender false reassurances about their abilities when entering the final

examination.

In contrast, Gardiner (1989) in a case illustration of 'a failed placement' provides the only example when the judgement of a supervisor is criticised. The title indicates his emphasis upon 'blaming the supervisor'. He reports the interview presenting quotations which he then examines and judges. For example,

"despite these pressures (fatigue, social isolation, unhappy with course and accommodation), the student is expected to cope with some additional work, with short deadlines and explicit threat of failure. Not only does the supervisor act as a traditional teacher, but uses his authority in a controlling way."

My interpretation of Gardiner's interpretation reveals my value base. I believe he should role model acceptance rather than condemnation of supervisors who perform this most difficult action. Such criticism supports the taboo and virtually guaranteed success following selection (Brandon & Davies, 1979). I also dispute his interpretations. The supervisor presents patterns of feelings and action which emerge in this study.

When Gardiner states

"the difficulties which can arise from students and supervisors having different implicit models and assumptions about the activity of social work itself"

he repeats (but without irony or awareness) fundamental problems about the lack of consensus about what constitutes social work practise.

3.6 Conclusion to the specific literature review and introduction to the general review

This review of specific literature related to the staff perspective on a fail scenario has confirmed that it is an unexplored aspect of education. The paucity and limitations, with the majority of data being descriptive, seemingly based upon anecdotal experience rather than systematic study, (with only Brandon & Davies (1979) study providing sufficient detail to allow replication) gives the advantages of many avenues to explore, but with clear direction signs. The themes which emerged from the literature review re-emerge and dominate the study suggesting their applicability across professions, countries and time.

Although there was little specially written about staff thinking or feeling during a fail scenario, this lack was compensated for by tangential and relevant references which arose in other contexts. The following section considers this context, commencing with a discussion of the use and avoidance of the word, the incidence of failure linked to attrition rates and selection processes. This provides a general introduction to the substantial topic of competence which underpins the whole study.

3.7 Definitions of failure

Dictionary definitions promulgate negative associations and stereotypes, for example:

"lack of success ... an unsuccessful person, thing, or attempt, non-performance. Failing, a fault or shortcoming, a weakness especially in character. Failed, unsuccessful, not good enough, weak, deficient, broken down. Fail, not succeed (failed in persuading, failed to qualify, tried but failed) ... rejected as a candidate, be unable to, choose not to, disappoint, let down." (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1991).

This study challenges these destructive associations, particularly between failure on a task and as a person by considering failure as a natural part of life and learning (Ball, 1993). Failure is therefore

"the non-attainment of a prescribed standard. But failure defined in this way omits the quality of "invidious comparison" that makes failure an experience to be feared" (Birney et al, 1969).

Failure in an academic setting is comparative with peers along a continuum or normal distribution of grades. This contrasts with fieldwork where assessment is ideographic using a criterion-referenced scale which focuses upon personal, transferrable skills. A fieldwork organiser commented how this seemed to increase a student's sense of personal failure, rather than recognition of their non attainment of the required standard of competence for a particular stage of training:

"The first placement focuses upon the student as a therapist so a fail is related to interpersonal skills, the student as an individual."

3.8 Avoidance of the word

The word (and deed or topic) seems to hold a taboo status which encourages evasion through a range of softer, semantic labels or metaphors all designed to "avoid the written or spoken use of the word failure" (Presseisen, 1987). These include non-attainment, non-achievement and 'at risk' rather than the equally inappropriate 'branding students as failures' (Brown, 1991). The following illustrates this avoidance. Koehler (1988) during an investigation into teachers beliefs and thoughts about 'at risk' (of failure or dropping out) students commented upon their expressions of frustration with themselves and the school system but

"neither teacher used the words failure or failing with respect to any of their students at any point in the long interviews."

However the use of less stigmatising and more 'politically correct' words seems to be ineffective. For example, young kindergarten children who had been subject to the American system of retention recognised the reality of "flunking the grades", being teased and feeling a sense of failure. Their teachers' avoided informing them, allowing parents to give the bad news (Shepard & Smith, 1989). In contrast, Plewis (1991) advocates the abandonment of the ambiguous term 'underachievement' to reduce the conceptual and operational confusion which hinders educational research.

Failure needs to be redefined in a way which reduces the fear of failures (Scott, 1992). The use of the word 'fail' would seem to

be a prerequisite for awareness, acceptance and action. This study is intended to promote these three elements and to contradict the findings of a recent project into supervision amongst health visitors, social workers and general practitioners:

"Within the three professional groups there was a minority of practice teachers who had experienced 'failing' a student on placement. With few exceptions they reported on the strength of negative feelings involved. Many also reported on the lack of support they had received from their colleagues, managers and lecturing staff when it came to make the decision. In some cases, they had experienced considerable pressure to pass the student even though it was against their professional judgement" (Green, 1991).

This summarises many of the dilemmas and difficulties which were hinted at in the specific literature and which have formed the focus for this study.

3.9 Incidence: attrition rates

Attrition rates, particularly those which categorise termination of training due to inability to reach the required academic or professional standard would seem to support the statement that failure is a rare event. However, it is important to consider the possible reasons, for example does this low incidence reflect appropriate admission processes or is the action being avoided? The College of Occupational Therapists (COT) monitors admission and attrition (categorised into nine reasons) rates for the range of educational routes. These will be considered and then compared with the incidence in other caring professions. The loss, due to any reason, of a precious training place is

rightly termed wastage. During the last two decades the wastage rate in occupational therapy has been declining while the intake has been increasing. For example, between 1967 - 1974 the attrition rate ranged from 20% to 29% (Stewart, 1980) and between 1975 - 1983 from 22% to 13.3% (Paterson, 1988). Since 1980 the reasons for withdrawal, whether voluntary or required, have been collected (although the use of a single category which is open to individual interpretation are acknowledged limitations) (Paterson, 1988). The nine categories for student losses are: health, academic, clinical, wrong career choice, personal/domestic, immaturity, transferred, deferred and other. These categories are defined in Appendix 1. In the study reported by Paterson academic failure was the most common reason for drop-out with 112 in year 1, 68 in year 2, 21 in year 3 and 29 after final examinations, giving a total of 230 or 41%. In contrast, a total of 41 (7%) students left due to clinical work because they were "unable to function at the expected level, showed difficulty with relationships or demonstrated unsuitability to the profession in other ways." This comprised 5 in the first year and 18 in both the second and third years.

These trends provide a context for both the current figures and the respondents' experience. Appendix 2 identifies the reasons for withdrawal during the first, second and third year with the intakes for 1989/90, 1988/1989 and 1987/88. This time period corresponds with the experience of the academic and fieldwork staff who participated in the focused interviews although all samples contained staff with more than a decades experience.

There is an attrition rate of 7.4% (n=80) in year one, 5.1% (n=45) in year two and 2.0% (n=17) in year three. The pattern of a higher number of academic to clinical work fails is repeated from the earlier studies with 20 (25%) and 0 in the first year, 24 (53%) and 3 (7%) in the second year with 6 (35%) and 3 (18%) in the final year. This low attrition rate is comparable with those collected by the Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation in America which monitors the annual, national intake and output data for 26 professions. For the academic year 1989 - 1990 occupational therapists had one of the lowest wastage rates with 4.4% from an intake of 7,996, this included 5.4% of male entrants and 4.3% of female entrants (Gupta, 1991). These figures confirm the low incidence but they need to be balanced by the high personal and financial costs at both an individual and institutional level.

Attrition rates in occupational therapy will be compared with an impressionistic overview for other caring professions. In social work both Howard (1979) and Brandon & Davies (1979) comment upon the "notably low failure rates". Howard presents two reasons, firstly, a thorough and safe selection process which filters out 'at risk' students, or secondly, a process designed to allow a certain number of "more doubtful students" to enter so

"they can be helped to overcome their difficulties during the course. Such students cause the staff acute dilemmas if they become marginal or threatened failures."

She rightly condemns both as "unsound in principle and untenable in practice." Although both studies were conducted over a decade ago, recent studies suggest a continuation of these

problems, for example Gardiner (1989) and Green (1991).

Different attrition rates have been reported for different aspects of assessment in nursing. For example, only 1.8% of nurse tutors mentioned to Bradley (1990) the option of termination of training following poor ward progress reports, Dopson (1987) reports a 7% fail rate on the final national examination in Scotland and in contrast Harvey & Vaughan (1990) express concern about the 35% wastage rate in any given cohort. These figures compare with America, where on the National Council Licensing Examination for Registered Nurses the test is constructed to achieve a failure rate of 10% (Dell & Valine, 1990).

This final example makes the connection between a system which is designed to pass or fail a set proportion of entrants and licensure to determine competence to practise. However, recent reports in the media would suggest flaws in the system. Two random examples will serve to illustrate this statement. Preston (1993) reports the results of The New Teacher in School:

A Survey by HM Inspectors in England and Wales 1992

"About half (10%) were temperamentally unsuited to the profession, frequently refusing to acknowledge their weaknesses and resisting advice."

A similar figure is noted by Lawrence (1992)

"Privately, members of the General Medical Council estimate that between 5 and 10% of doctors perform poorly enough to cause concern."

This brief overview has highlighted the problem that pass or fail rates do not necessarily provide a sound measure of standards

(Armitage, 1992) or competence, either at pre or post registration level. Assessment is such a complicated process which is vulnerable to a variety of human and institutional errors. By exploring an assessor's perspective during a fail scenario the intention is to understand and improve the quality of the decision making.

3.10 Selection: a fallible process

More institutional attention has been given to minimising attrition through early identification and assisting 'at risk' students to succeed. Gupta (1991) observes this was initially based upon ethical concerns related to the "maximization of human resources" but has now become a "matter of institutional survival" due to demographic changes. Other factors linked to quantitative data are outputs, promoted in league tables as a publicly accountable, reputation enhancing performance indicator. All these factors contribute to an impression that institutions have an investment and vested interest in ensuring all successful applicants gain a pass grade but

"the selection process is not infallible and on occasions there will be students who fail" (Ford & Jones, 1987).

The factors which influence recruitment and retention to occupational therapy programmes have been investigated. For example, Rozier et al (1992) and Schmalz et al (1990) both noted the importance of selection criteria which could predict successful completion. Schmalz et al concentrated upon

attitudes and reasons for selecting occupational therapy as a career while Rozier et al focused upon personal and educational predictors of academic success, concluding with the recommendation that 'at risk' students could be monitored and offered remedial programmes. This recommendation is echoed in similar research in nursing. For example Payne & Duffey (1986) identified academic predictors available in the first semester. Remington & Kroll (1990) reviewed learning style preferences of students defined as at 'high risk' for academic difficulty; whereas Dell & Valine (1990) examined academic, demographic and self-esteem variables with grade point average (GPA) proving to be one of the best predictors of success on national examinations. The final study provides an interesting combination for it supports academic predictors (particularly the GPA) of success, the possibility of early identification of problems and remedial programmes, with recognition of the emotional and financial costs of failure for the student, their family, the cohort and staff who

"experience loss when they see their personal time and energy was of no use in trying to assist the student to achieve" (Lengacher & Keller, 1990).

A similar study has been conducted in medicine (Croen et al, 1991) producing parallel results. They confirm the possibility of early identification of 'at risk' students from marginal performance in three or more courses during the third month, but not the predictive power of GPAs. Also, the importance of support systems to alleviate the student costs of failure which they list as demoralisation, depression and decline in

motivation.

There are also other confounding individual and institutional reasons, whether real or perceived, which may tip the scales in favour of a marginal student. For example, concern with student costs may tempt staff to adopt a therapist rather than educator role, financial losses from voluntary or involuntary wastage may threaten course viability and a remedial emphasis may give an impression of investment to guarantee success rather than setting minimum standards. This impression of maintaining vested interests is supported when supervisors are challenged to justify their decision (Ford & Jones, 1987) or when the supervisor's assessment is perceived as a criticism of admission procedures (Green, 1991) or when difficult decisions are

"postponed by avoidance which are then harder to take at a later stage because of the investment of time ... and ... scarce resources ... once the decision is postponed to the second year, the pressure towards granting an automatic pass becomes almost irresistible" (Brandon & Davies, 1979).

The final and most disturbing reason was the pressure to pass, with lack of support for a fail. Although this is an impressionistic reason, it has been reported by teachers (Norcross 1991), health visitors, GPs (Green 1991) social workers (Brandon & Davies 1979, Howard 1979), nurses (Symanski 1991) and occupational therapists in this report. For example,

"Some spoke of feeling pressurised into passing a student - often by the educational institution ... (which) could at times make the practice teacher not only doubt the quality of his/her own judgement, but also feel unsupported" (Green, 1991).

3.11 Conclusion to the literature review

The specific and general literature review gives glimpses into the world of assessors. This study attempts to pursue these leads in a systematic, yet sensitive way to illuminate the multifaceted experience of assigning a fail grade. However, it is important to place this process within a professional context, particularly the difficulties of defining and assessing competence to practise, for the concept of competence provides the theoretical and practical framework.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Introduction to the theoretical framework

The literature review revealed a few tantalizing hints about the process of failure from an assessor's perspective. These gave direction for both the methodology and facets of failure studied. However, it did not form a sufficient or suitable body of knowledge to provide a theoretical framework. This section will focus upon the key components of competence and assessment which, when combined seem to conspire to increase the difficulty of judging competence to practise. All these terms are contentious, with different dilemmas and definitions although "fitness for purpose" (Ball, 1986) seems to connect competence, quality and employability. This concern with quality is crucial for the survival of all 'caring' professions. Quality in occupational therapy education means creating a product fit for its purpose, that is, someone who is safe, competent and trustworthy to work with vulnerable people (Ilott, 1990). The contextual or theoretical framework will start by considering the difficulties associated with defining and assessing competence, particularly in the 'real' or fieldwork setting.

4.2 Incompetence an important construct

There is a plethora of literature about competence. Much extols the virtue of clear definitions and assessment processes but few report systematic studies of this complex,

multidimensional and relative construct. This study attempts to clarify the concept by concentrating upon incompetence. Accusations and evidence of incompetence are costly for all parties whether in terms of litigation, reputation or distress. The costs bring into sharp focus the importance of fair, accurate assessments at entry-grade level. Although an obvious, implicit point it often only becomes explicit in undesirable, exceptional circumstances. For example unethical/incompetent colleagues were ranked as the second most current concern by a group of 72 occupational and physiotherapy staff and students (Barnitt, 1993). This concern is substantiated and quantified by the Registrar for the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine

"Discipline is the mark of self-governing professions with high ethical standards ... In the last year, we have had as many disciplinary hearings - 12 - as in the previous three years. These are expensive ... (and) are largely an open-ended budget commitment" (Pickis, 1993b).

Extreme examples of incompetent 'caring' practitioners have been the centre of much media attention recently. This 'failure to protect the public' has damaged both the professions' and employers' reputation. Such cases highlight the need for clear, explicit definitions of competence both as a baseline for entry into and also continuance within a 'caring' profession. The life-long process of self-evaluation, with recognition of boundaries of knowledge or skills, is a connecting theme for professionalism, competence and incompetence, as Claxton (1984b) notes

"The more one can acknowledge one's incompetence, the quicker competence comes."

Although Burrows (1989) accepts that competence is an elusive, ambiguous concept she observes it "is recognisable more by its absence than by readily measurable behaviours". This supports my interest in incompetence.

4.3 Definitions of competence

Before attempting to define competence or competencies or competency (or any other fashionable associated term) it seems appropriate to consider whether such a definition is either needed or feasible. This question is not posed to perpetuate any mystique or status, as a form of professional protectionism but in recognition of the possibility of "an unspoken consensus on what constitutes competence" (Davies & van der Gaag, 1992a). It also recognises the disagreement about the meaning of competencies (Finn, 1993), particularly when they reduce professional skills to lists of technical skills presented as performance criteria or behavioural descriptors (Elliott, 1992). Such lists confuse competence with performance, behavioural descriptions of outcomes with standards for judging the performance outcomes. All of which trivialise the skills and knowledge valued by workers who profess to be professional not technicians. The context specific nature of such competencies also ignore differences due to changing structures for service delivery, rapid developments in and therefore expansion of knowledge bases (Davies & van der Gaag, 1992a), the diversity of individual practice and settings (Aggleton et al, 1987) all of

which contribute to evolving, future definitions of competence.

Competence is therefore a concept which is easy to approve but difficult to define. Hassard et al (1990) suggest it represents an "intuitive integration of a variety of clinical skills." This focus upon skills is atypical for competence usually encompasses knowledge and attitudes too. The CPSM (1979) definition states

"The possession of knowledge, skills and attitudes enabling an individual to perform fully in a basic professional role. It includes performance of tasks and relationships ... which meet specific objectives of safety, efficiency and social acceptance in the environments normally encountered."

These components of knowledge (intellectual competence, problem solving ability, appropriate application of), skills (psychomotor, the actual quality of performance) and attitudes (interpersonal skills and concerns for the clients welfare) are accepted by various writers (Harden 1979b, Cross 1983, Claxton 1984b).

Another component which is frequently mentioned is safety or safe practice (Darragh et al 1986, Meisenhelder 1982, Davenhall 1985, Blomquist 1985, COT guidelines 1984). Caney (1983) adds the ability to recognise, select and act appropriately upon significant cues because

"failure to notice or appreciate the significance of relevant cues may lead to ineffective, inappropriate, inaccurate or dangerous treatment which are the marks of incompetence."

Therefore, a definition of competence is one which is decided by and can be recognised, nationally and internationally if

possible, by members of the profession. It is a relative term which only has meaning in the context in which it is used (Caney, 1983). For a newly qualified entrant into occupational therapy it has been defined as

"the ability ... to integrate knowledge, judgement, affective behaviour and professional skills in such a way that they meet or exceed the standard of professional functioning that are demanded by a professional body deemed qualified to set those standards" (Ernest & Polatajko 1986).

4.4 Determining definitions of competence

These broad, general definitions seem insubstantial, open to multiple or misinterpretations which are inappropriate in the contemporary health care business with an internal, social market which is seeking new ways of delivering services. The purchaser-provider principle underpinned by quality assurance and cost effectiveness seems to be challenging 'professional' definitions of competence by demanding evidence that existing professions are not only necessary, but also possess sufficient knowledge and skills for contemporary health and social care (Davies & van der Gaag, 1992a). These challenges have stimulated research into the constituents of competence in a range of 'caring' professions. These will be summarised for they connect the principles of competence with 'fitness for purpose' as an assessment criterion in an increasingly employer-led educational system.

A variety of methods have been used to determine entry level

competence. These include observational methods which examine clinical practices and workload management in context including job and task analysis; and the consultative techniques of critical incident analysis, behavioural event interviews, the delphi and nominal group methods. Three of the most systematic studies defined competence in public health nutritionists (Simms, 1979), speech therapists (Davies & van der Gaag, 1992), and occupational therapists (Missiuna et al, 1992). Interestingly, each was devised for a different purpose. These were, respectively, planning a competency-based curriculum to guarantee relevancy; to provide evidence to combat proposals for skills-mix and vocational training for support workers; and to identify the assessment items and fieldwork hours required to demonstrate competence in core domains of occupational therapy practice.

Many professions have also sought to determine the constituents of competence. Two examples will be given. They present remarkably similar evidence which if reversed, compare with definitions of incompetence. For example, Beenhakker (1987) combined observational methods and critical incident techniques to determine competencies and minimal standards for physiotherapy education in South Africa. In contrast Scott et al (1991) used an Exit Objectives Survey to identify the clinical behaviour and skills Faculty staff expected medical graduates to be able to demonstrate.

These studies reflect an increasing interest in employers'

requirements about definitions of both initial and ongoing clinical competence (Hollis & Clark, 1993a). Studies in occupational therapy have used three approaches. Firstly, definition of the outcome of training required by employers (Alsop, 1991), clarification of core competencies required at different grades (Hollis & Clark 1993b and Sheffield 1992) and finally to obtain understanding of the dimensions of excellence through the description of personal traits, knowledge and skills of 'master' practitioners (DePoy, 1990). These approaches reveal some interestingly different constituents of competence. For example, DePoy (1990) and Alsop (1991) both comment upon the priority given to personal qualities, attitudes and interpersonal skills rather than occupational therapy specific knowledge and technical skills. These "abstract moral traits" including 'loyalty', 'honesty' and 'reliability' have also been consistently highly rated by employers (Hyland, 1991). It is these affective and attitudinal components which are so important, yet difficult to assess (Katz & Raths 1985, Holmes et al 1990, Battles et al 1990 and van der Gaag & Davies 1992b).

4.5 Constituents of competence

Although there are many methods for determining the constituents of competence the results are remarkably similar, not just within occupational therapy but also with other 'caring' professions. A summary of these uni- and inter-professional constituents will be presented in tabular form to highlight the

commonalities of competence. The obverse of which provide the criterion for incompetence.

The first table compares the categories (which are assumed to be the constituents of competence as contained on the fieldwork assessment forms) used in the United Kingdom (Barr 1980, Aina 1982, Alsop 1993), America (Crocker et al 1975), Australia (Barker 1990) and Canada (Missiuna et al 1992). The categories reflect different parts of the treatment process (assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation), interpersonal or communication skills, attitudes and values related to a code of conduct and professional ethics and finally management skills.

The second table presents definitions and assessments of competence from other 'caring' professions. These are nursing (Aggleton et al 1987), physiotherapy (Beenhakker 1987), public health nutritionists (Simms 1979), medicine (Scott et al 1991), social work (Brandon & Davies 1979) and speech therapy (Davies & van der Gaag 1992). If the distinctive knowledge and skills relevant for the practice of each of these professions are taken into consideration, there are still some interesting commonalities. For example, the treatment or problem solving process, interpersonal or written communication skills with clients and colleagues, management and administration of self and the service, legal and ethical requirements linked to professional values, attitudes and codes of conduct.

These broad categories of competence (which each contain profession specific and generic constituents) echo the broad

Table 1

Constituents of Competence in Occupational Therapy

Constituents of Competence	United Kingdom			Australia	Canada	America
	Barr 1980	Aina 1982	Alsop 1993	Barker 1990	Missiuma et al 1992	Crocker et al 1975
Safe practice			✓			
Student and her personality	✓					
Communication	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Professional skills				✓		
Professional standards and behaviour			✓			
Professional relationships			✓		✓	
Professional characteristics						✓
Professional competence					✓	
Client-centred care			✓			
Occupational therapy process			✓			
Assessment		✓		✓		
Data Gathering						✓
Identify and evaluate function and needs					✓	
Treatment planning	✓	✓		✓		✓
Plan and develop programs					✓	
Treatment implementation				✓		
Treatment skill	✓					
Practical ability		✓				
Utilise therapeutic procedures					✓	
Select and utilise equipment and materials					✓	
Treatment evaluation				✓		
Integration of theory and practice			✓			
Reflective practice			✓			
Management	✓	✓				
Personal management			✓			
Work management			✓			
Occupational therapy promotion				✓		

Table 2
 Constituents of Competence in Other "Caring" Professions

Constituents of Competence	Nursing Aggleton et al 1987	Physiotherapy Beenhakker 1987	Nutritionists Simms 1979	Medicine Scott et al 1991	Social Work Brandon & Davies 1979	Speech Therapy Davies & Gaag 1992
Activity with clients and others in client's environment					✓	
Client and service management skills						✓
Assessment skills	✓	✓				
Perform screening			✓			
Organ system examination				✓		
Interpret scientific data			✓			
Problem definition/hypothesis generation				✓		
Planning skills	✓	✓				
Program planning			✓			
Implementation skills	✓					
Therapeutic teaching/skills						✓
Psychological skills						✓
Nutrition services to community health programs			✓			
Safe implementation		✓				
Clinical and diagnostic procedures				✓		
Prepare educational materials			✓			
Evaluation skills	✓					
Professional and interpersonal skills	✓					
Communication		✓	✓			
Written communication					✓	
Patient interviewing/screening examination				✓		
Motivational skills		✓				
Counselling			✓			
Empathy			✓			
Communicate in teaching			✓			
Multidisciplinary team work		✓				
Collaboration/communication with colleagues				✓		
Ability to work within the agency					✓	
Consultative and administrative capacities		✓				
Management skills	✓					
Service and client Management						✓
Food service management			✓			
Program administration			✓			
Legislative activism			✓			
Consumer advocates			✓			
Supervise paraprofessionals			✓			
Long term service planning			✓			
Mass media communication			✓			
In-service education			✓			
Ethical and legal requirements		✓				
Legal, ethical and value concerns				✓		
Knowledge: policy, education						✓
Attitudes and values expressed in the work					✓	
Professional presentation					✓	
Personal attitudes to professional life		✓				
Core attitudes						✓
Maintaining currency within the discipline				✓		
Availability and application of relevant theory					✓	
Knowledge: speech and language, psychology, medical						✓

definition provided by the CPSM and the phrase 'fitness for purpose'. This section, by considering global definitions and the constituent components, provides the platform for the topic of assessment which incorporates the responsibility for predicting 'fitness for purpose'.

4.6 Assessment of competence

It is assumed that agreement about competence, whether implicit or explicit, informs the process and procedures for assessment both in academic and fieldwork settings because clinical and academic competence are the

"twin foundations of a developing profession such as occupational therapy" (Ernest & Polatajko, 1986).

However, their importance only serves to highlight the problems. Assessment and competence are both difficult and controversial topics. There are many different definitions, types and problems associated with each singularly which are exacerbated when they are combined. These will be illustrated as they provide the context and add to the dilemmas associated with assigning a fail grade.

The first difficulty stems from differences between academic and clinical competence which should converge in the integration of knowledge and practice (Wong, 1979). However, the real and perceived tensions between these twin towers of the curriculum seem to have a negative effect upon this

"powerfully sanctioned if vaguely defined expectation ... (because) the two subcultures - theoretical and practice are

each comparatively unaffected by the other" (Brandon & Davies, 1979).

This divergence with a lack of explicit agreement about what constitutes competence in each setting and at different stages of the educational programme would seem to aggravate the assessment process (Howard, 1979).

The whole process of specification and then assessment seem to be fraught whether micro or global definitions of competence are used. Burg et al (1982) listed three ideal components of descriptions of competence. These are the specific abilities manifested by a competent individual, the conditions under which the ability will be manifested and the standard of ability at, or above competence will be declared. This degree of pre-specification has the potential to trivialise by giving priority to "routinised and habitual skills" (Elliott, 1992) rather than reflective, ethical reasoning which links the sum - the art and science of a profession - rather than the total constituent parts. However, there would seem to be equal dangers from either over and under definition of competence (Howard, 1979) for both impact upon the validity and reliability of the assessment process and outcome.

A variety of instruments have been developed by health related professions to measure, test and evaluate clinical competence including anecdotal records, check lists, rating scales, critical incident reports, simulations, (Ernest & Polatajko 1986), video-recordings (Edelstein & Ruder 1990) and Objective Structural Clinical Examinations (Harden 1979b). Time constrained

unseen written examinations have also been used but with little credibility, for as Harden notes

"by excluding the clinical component of the examination in the interest of reliability, (it has) impaired the examination as an assessment of clinical competence."

Observational strategies in the natural situation may seem more meaningful, valid methods in comparison with examinations which only test "the ability to work at speed under stress" (Miller, 1970) and are poor predictors of performance (Elton, 1987) but they are vulnerable to other problems. The assessment methods of observation, questioning and discussion are prone to

"all kinds of prejudices, oversights, misinterpretations and idiosyncrasies of standard" (Rowntree, 1987).

The supervisor may be influenced by bias, the "halo effect" (Crocker et al, 1975), selective perception, over generalisation, stereotypes, the "Hawthorne effect", implicit assessment constructs (Rowntree, 1987) and the difficulty differentiating between learning and evaluation time (Brozenec et al, 1987). The milieu provides more confounding variables which include ever changing circumstances, multitude of personalities and high turnover of patients. These make it impossible to ensure a completely comparable experience for students and, for supervisors with other responsibilities, to sample only a selection of the students' performance (Wood, 1986a). All of which obviate against objectivity and reliability.

Although there has been much interest in devising an objective, reliable and valid measure of competence few seem to have overcome the combined problems of definition and measurement.

The literature contains almost as many criticisms, as examples of assessment tools. Two studies will illustrate this point.

Barker (1990) makes a comprehensive condemnation:

"The criterion and factors underlying concepts and practices of clinical competence and evaluation are poorly researched and understood. Objective, comprehensive and standardised assessment measures ... have not been developed and rigorously applied ... many are ad hoc and neglect the planning and feedback functions of supervision ... (and) have limited predictive validity and are not a reliable gauge of student performance."

These criticisms were echoed in Coates & Chambers (1992) integrative literature review of tools to assess student nurses' clinical skills.

However, there has been some noteworthy research in the pursuit of valid, reliable and objective measures of occupational therapy performance and competence in America (Crocker et al 1975 and Cooper & Crist 1988), Australia (Barker 1990) and Canada (Ernest & Polatajko 1986 and Missiuma et al 1992). The American and Canadian studies share three similarities, firstly a focus upon entry grade competencies which are expressed in a criterion referenced assessment which sets an absolute, minimum standard of competence - safe and effective performance - for licensure (Francis & Holmes, 1983); and finally, they have been subject to periodic review and modification to retain relevancy between assessment and practice. The ability to discriminate between competence and incompetence was noted by Cooper & Crist (1988) who reported "95% of the students would be recommended for entry level work". While Ernest (1985) noted marginal students were being identified earlier and specifying problems with greater

precision. In contrast, Missiurna et al (1992) report that "even poor students" demonstrate the expected level of competence on over 80% of core skills to which they are exposed, even though these were attained at a slower rate.

Interestingly, Crocker et al (1975) used a "hiring rating" scale during the development of the Fieldwork Performance Report.

This acted as a

"primary criterion of overall student performance on the assumption that if the supervisor would be willing to have the student fill a permanent position in his facility, then that student's performance must have been acceptable, and conversely, if a student's performance was inadequate, the the supervisor would express reluctance to hire him."

This criterion which epitomises 'fitness for purpose' has been a key and consistent criterion for judging incompetence, giving assurance and acting as a deterrent to avoid the failure to fail.

In the United Kingdom there have only been three studies of assessment of clinical competence reported during the last decade. These are Barr (1980), Aina (1982) and Alsop (1993). All are descriptive, with Barr and Alsop presenting new assessment tools while Aina reports a mechanism for "reducing the cognitive distance" between Schools and supervisors using a national report form. The developmental model of skill acquisition in fieldwork devised by Alsop focuses upon competency statements, with grading criteria for self and supervisor assessment, appropriate for each level of the Dorset House degree programme. This tool is notable for making explicit the criterion of safe practice which is often subsumed within management categories in other report forms.

The study by Barr (1980) presented definitions to assist supervisors and students interpret the general categories contained on the Edinburgh assessment form. This influenced the design of the Derby assessment form, a criterion referenced profile, introduced in 1986 and used by respondents in this study. The profile encompasses formative and summative assessment. The guidelines issued by the College of Occupational Therapists (COT 1984) and the School both state the requirement for a formal half-way report and many supervisors use the form during weekly feedback meetings. It incorporates self and supervisor assessment through a process of negotiation (Harvey & McGovern, 1985). This requires time, an increasingly costly commodity and a collaborative partnership based upon "trust, sharing and a healthy degree of equality" (Sergiovanni, 1986). The profile is considered as a tool for continuous assessment, monitoring learning and progress thereby reinforcing the concept of education as a lifelong process (Dopson, 1987).

The profile with accompanying guidelines (Appendix 3) purport (because there has not been any studies to assess the validity or reliability) to specify the level of competence in the categories of personal, professional and practical, communication and management skills. It also includes a narrative analysis of the student's performance, which Rowntree (1987) suggests "helps to humanize the reporting process." The profile is intended to provide an ideographic assessment of competencies and deficiencies. Thus eliminating the invidious comparison of normative assessments and the

"system induced failure rate (which) is sometimes institutionalized by the process of mark normalization" (Elton, 1987).

However, when a fail grade is awarded it occurs in a less anonymous and impersonal way for both assessor and student. There may be more risk of the result being viewed as a reflection of personal rather than performance criterion or competencies, threatening the self-esteem and confidence of both parties.

4.7 Conclusion to competence

Although the concept of competence is the central to the whole process, it remains so intangible to define and difficult to assess, particularly in the fieldwork setting. The ability to differentiate between competence and incompetence requires fine judgement from an assessor who recognises

"the complementary nature of intuitive and analytic thinking ... to grasp the situation as a whole and separate relevant from irrelevant information" (Blomquist, 1985).

The methodology was selected to combine objective and subjective perspectives, to be systematic yet sensitive to the intrinsic complexity of assigning a fail grade.

5. METHODOLOGY: RESEARCH APPROACH, DESIGN AND METHODS

5.1 Introduction to methodology

This section contains four sub-divisions. These are firstly, an introduction to hermeneutics as the research approach. Secondly, influences upon and a description of the incremental design which uses a qualitative and descriptive quantitative methodology. The details of the principal and two supplementary methods (focused interview and questionnaire surveys) are contained in the third section. The final part is intended to be integrative, with an appraisal of the rigour and trustworthiness of the methods, in preparation for the discussion of the results. Although presented as separate, each sub-division is inter-dependent and continuous, containing obvious and hidden strands. For example, each was selected as most appropriate (MacKinnon, 1987) to illuminate the process of assigning a fail grade. The staff perspective, expressed in plain and metaphorical language is interpreted using both personal and public theories (Griffiths & Tann, 1992). Such combinations reflect the complexity of failure which the research design was intended to investigate in a sensitive and systematic way.

An acknowledgement of the value-laden quality of these statements will remind the reader of the author's bias and personal involvement. This provided a fore-understanding (Ashworth, 1987) which enriched the whole process. It contributed to confidence

in the method, for the results seem to "fit and work" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) for the participants and peer auditors. The detail contained within the methodology and results sections are intended to enable the reader to assess the 'fit', as an assessor's world is unfolded in front the text, revealing a different dimension of reality (Ricoeur, 1981).

5.2 Hermeneutics: the research approach

The work of hermeneutic scholars has been described as dense and seemingly remote from the problems of everyday life (McAuley, 1985). However, the principles of understanding, explaining and interpreting the meaning of text (whether a word, work or action) described by Ricoeur (1981) added clarity to the problem, method and outcome of this research. His concern

"to avoid the pitfall of an opposition between an 'understanding' which would be reserved for the 'human sciences' and an 'explanation' which would be common to ... primarily the physical sciences."

reflects the research design which utilises quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the informants' reflection upon their practise in a sensitive and systematic way.

Text, either as the spoken or written word provided the mass of data for analysis, whether obtained from the focused interviews or questionnaire surveys. This was a three stage process starting with a review of the whole to become "immersed" in the data (Perkins, 1986) and to identify general themes (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). This was followed by a content and then

structural analysis which highlighted the internal relations of the whole discourse. Finally, a reconstitution of the whole text to recover the meaning (Ricoeur, 1981), by moving from its sense (the internal organisation of the work) to its reference (an understanding of the topic and self). This completes the hermeneutic circle as the text is unfolded

"no longer towards its author, but towards its immanent sense and towards the world which it opens upon and discloses" (Ricoeur, 1981).

This approach recognises the individuality of language, as influenced by the context (and form) of the methods. This leads to the possibility, if not probability of multiple interpretations of the text, but this is welcomed for it would reflect

"the moment of hermeneutical circle between understanding initiated by the reader and the proposals of meaning offered by the text" (Ricoeur, 1981).

The relevance and importance of assigning a fail is a meaningful action, a criterion for text (Ricoeur, 1981). The consequences endure beyond the immediate action for both staff and students.

"As a result of this emancipation from the situational context, discourse can develop non-ostensive references which we called a 'world' ... as an ontological dimension" (Ricoeur, 1981).

These consequences are expressed in both plain and expressive language allowing entry into the 'world' of assessors, particularly their beliefs, values and feelings. A typical example of text, spoken by a fieldwork organiser during a focused interview, will serve to illustrate the power of metaphor to redescribe reality:

"I feel a failure, as though I have let them down by selecting the student. It makes me question my judgement. No one likes to fail. It is an unpleasant experience. It is a cliché to say you can learn from it. I feel emotionally drained, wrung out at the end of the week."

Each sentence constitutes text and the whole quotation illustrates the multi-level meaning of the totality. It is the relation between the whole and the parts, (whether in this example, an interview or all the data) which is judged during the process of understanding, explanation and interpretation. For

"The text is more than a linear succession of sentences ... plurivocity is typical of the text considered as a whole, open to several readings and to several constructions" (Ricoeur, 1981).

These multiple constructions or interpretations are subject to procedures of validation as an "argumentative discipline" rather than empirical verification. This is because human action is confounded by these different constructions of reality and

"this methodological perplexity is founded in the nature of the object itself" (Ricoeur, 1981).

Therefore, meaning of actions must be sought from the perspective of the actor, recognising the complex combination of objective and subjective factors for "events flow from the way situations are seen" (Ruddock, 1974).

Although these processes emphasize sensitivity, they need to be conducted in a systematic way to achieve the desired complementarity and balance. The detailed descriptions of the primary and secondary methods (focused interview and two questionnaires) report a systematic approach to data collection. This was reinforced by the techniques of triangulation

(Hutchinson et al, 1988) and peer examination (Krefting, 1991) to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of the results.

5.3 Influences upon the research design

Although the research strategy was influenced by different practical and theoretical factors, two were particularly prominent. These were the historical, evolutionary unfolding of multifaceted aspects of failure and an appraisal of methods used in similar studies. The first reflects the spur of personal curiosity which stimulated the first study in 1988. Surprisingly intrinsic motivation has been maintained, although fuelled by interest from inter and intra-disciplinary colleagues in the United Kingdom and overseas. This has given both reassurance and assurance about the applicability (Krefting, 1991) of this taken-for-granted aspect of an assessor's world.

The methods, results and recommendations from the first study have been developed giving a sense of progression and coherence (Little, 1991) to this evolving study of failure. In 1988 a dual approach with quantitative and qualitative methods was used to investigate the perspective of fieldwork supervisors. Firstly, the results of a questionnaire survey completed by 65 experienced and trained supervisors provided confirmation that assigning a fail was problematical with 45% (n=29) ranking it as their most difficult supervisory responsibility. This method was replicated in the present study. The similarity of results obtained in 1988 and 1993 is supportive in the sense of verification and face

validity (Lather, 1986). Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with an opportunity sample of eleven supervisors. These provided an insight into their subjective worlds, the difficulties and dilemmas as they judged incompetence to practise. This study develops the themes which emerged in two main ways. Firstly, the results contributed material for the content analysis of key topics for the focused interviews (Merton et al, 1956). Secondly, the recommendation regarding a training course to prepare supervisors, was implemented and evaluated using questionnaire surveys, to investigate the hypothesis about the immediate and enduring value of a specific course.

This study is therefore an extension of the previous one, both in method, outcome and as text because

"writing preserves discourse and makes it an archive available for individual and collective memory" (Ricoeur, 1981).

Although the information obtained from both questionnaire surveys may be considered as secondary to the primary source (the focused interviews), the whole work should be considered as a

"singular totality ... (for) it is an architecture of themes and purposes which can be constructed in several ways. The relation of part to whole is ineluctably circular" (Ricoeur, 1981).

This circularity, which also encompasses other text examined during the literature review, would seem to support a variety of validities including face, content, construct, internal, external (Hutchinson et al, 1988) and catalytic validity (Lather, 1986). The latter applies particularly to workshop participants and interviewees who acknowledged gaining self-understanding and

self-determination through participation in the research process. Two examples, one from a supervisor reported on a failure workshop immediate evaluation form and the other statement made by a head of school at the end of the focused interview, illustrate this catalytic validity:

"Failure is not always as disastrous as I had always imagined - for example if the student is not committed to occupational therapy as a career."

"I needed to talk about failure actually, to help clarify my own thinking and needing affirmation that I am doing it right."

The review of the literature was the second major influence upon the research design. A range of methods for investigating a staff perspective on failure had been reported. For example, questionnaire surveys were used by Brynes (1989) to obtain and then compare the opinion of parents, teachers, principals and students about grade retention. Smith (1989) used clinical interviews with teachers to highlight their practical knowledge derived from experience with specific children and circumstances of retention. Open-ended interviews with vignettes of common, realistic problem behaviour and classroom observations, were used by Brophy & Rohrkemper (1988). This study provided a model, both as a whole and in practical parts. For example, the emphasis upon

"drawing upon the wisdom accumulated by experienced practitioners" (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1988).

Practical details which were replicated included starting the interview guide with biographical and institutional contexts and, sending this to the informants one week in advance to enable

them to prepare. In contrast to Brophy & Rohrkemper's focus upon "natural responses", Graham (1984) used set scenarios and trials with puzzle solving tasks to investigate the influence of teacher affect (sympathy and anger) when failure was attributed to low ability, effort, bad luck or task difficulty.

These American studies concentrated upon failure within an educational system rather than on a vocational course. However, Brandon & Davies's (1979) research into the margins of competence in social work was more relevant. Their methods included interviews with tutors of finalist students, a review of documentation (fieldwork assessment policies and specific report forms) and observing examination boards where the decision to pass or fail was made. This study provides interesting points of comparison and similarity. For example, their focus upon the margins of competence was "the most serious stumbling block to cooperation", whereas an interest in the topic was the second most frequently given reason for volunteering to participate in the focused interviews. Brandon & Davies's reluctance may have been related to ethical dilemmas associated with methods which could have contributed to the Hawthorne effect.

5.4 The research design

The research design consisted of a principal and two supplementary strands. These were focused interviews

supported by two questionnaire surveys which were implemented in an incremental way:

1. The first personal, questionnaire survey ranking difficulties in the supervisory relationship was distributed in March 1988. This was completed by 65 trained, experienced supervisors attending a biannual fieldwork supervisors day held at the Derby School of Occupational Therapy. The results provided the impetus for the study by confirming 'failing the student' as a problematical responsibility.
2. A recommendation arising from the first study was the need for specific training to prepare assessors for this aspect of their role. Between February 1989 and September 1990 five failure workshops were attended by 101 fieldwork supervisors. An immediate questionnaire survey and two follow-up postal surveys (four months and one year) were used to ascertain their perceptions about the value and any forward transfer of learning into the supervisory role.
3. The principal method was focused interviews with 25 academic staff and 5 fieldwork supervisors. These were held between March-July 1991 and contained staff reflecting different roles and responsibilities from 13 of the 25 Occupational Therapy Schools in the United Kingdom.
4. In March 1993 a revised questionnaire ranking difficulties in the supervisory relationship was completed by 48 trained, experienced supervisors attending a supervisors' day at Derby. This final, supplementary method was intended to confirm and verify the results obtained in the first personal survey.

The 30 focused interviews with self-selected representatives from academic and fieldwork staff provided substantial data, while the questionnaire surveys provided supplementary sources and information which contributed to a coherent whole. The surveys fulfilled several purposes. Firstly, to suggest topics for the development of the focused interview. The 1993 questionnaire ranking difficulties in the supervisory relationship also provided negative evidence for the hypothesis that assigning a

fail grade is an assessor's most onerous responsibility. The other questionnaires investigated the hypothesis regarding the immediate and long term value of the failure workshops. Finally, both surveys contributed to triangulation, revealing continuities and discontinuities from different sources and methods.

The focused interviews generated a wealth of text or data from a staff perspective about the meanings associated with assigning a fail grade. The selection of this qualitative method complements both my interest in their subjective worlds and a professional domain of concern and values.

"There is a special harmony between the concerns of the occupational therapist and the ... methods of qualitative research. Both focus on the realities of everyday life. Both appreciate the deep richness of mundane affairs. And both attempt to gear their techniques to the realities of the people involved" (Kielhofner, 1982).

Each method will be outlined starting with the most simple to the most complex ie the supervisor problem ranking survey, the evaluations of the failure workshop and the focused interviews. The description will include details of the method, process, sample and data analysis.

5.5 QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY: RANKING DIFFICULTIES IN THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

5.5.1 Introduction to the personal surveys

The aim of the questionnaire survey conducted in March 1988 was to ascertain the degree of difficulty fieldwork supervisors ascribed to failing students. The results gave the impetus for the past and present study for they validated my experience by providing a supportive, quantitative, comparative baseline. A slightly modified and improved version of the questionnaire was readministered in March 1993. The results again validated, but this time by the process of verification, the original study. Although these questionnaire surveys have a subsidiary status they deserve recognition for two reasons as they mark the start and close of the research and, represent the first attempt to measure the difficulty of assigning a fail grade.

5.5.2 Questionnaire design

Each structured self-completion questionnaire was designed to be distributed and completed during the business meeting at fieldwork supervisors' days held at the Derby School of Occupational Therapy. The main advantage of this method as a preliminary and confirmatory tool was the ease and efficiency of personal distribution, completion (average 5 minutes) and return from a convenience sample (Allen, 1989) of 113 supervisors.

Although practical considerations of time and expense prevented a pilot study or assessment of reliability and validity in 1988 the results obtained from the repeat survey five years later, would seem to rectify these initial limitations.

The questionnaires (Appendix 4) were contained on a single side of A4 and consisted of two sections. Firstly, five areas of difficulty and a final, open category with instructions to place the categories in rank order. Secondly, general biographical closed questions related to their supervisory role. The areas of difficulty had been identified by a small group of experienced supervisors. The results of both surveys (with the literature review) would seem to support the face validity and reliability of the items.

The second questionnaire contained an additional question asking respondents to briefly state the reason for selecting their most difficult supervisory responsibility. The responses provide another text to interpret providing additional, supplementary data about failure. They are also important because they provide the only source of negative examples: those who consider other topics more problematical than failure.

5.5.3 Characteristics of the sample of fieldwork supervisors

The second part of each questionnaire contained biographical information related to their supervisory role. Other personal

details were not requested to avoid increasing the size of the questionnaire and impertinence (Youngman, 1978). However, this does preclude comment upon the representativeness of both samples. They may be considered as an opportunity sample of the appropriate population. The questionnaires were completed by 113 fieldwork supervisors - 65 in 1988 and 48 in 1993.

The sample were analysed in two categories, those who ranked failing a student as the first or second most difficult task and those who gave priority to other problems. This was to enable comparison and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) between these and other supervisors.

5.5.4 Length of experience as a fieldwork supervisor

The first table illustrates the number of years the sample had been supervisors. The results are reported in two categories for comparative purposes. These comprise supervisors who ranked 'failing a student' as the first or second most problematical responsibility and those who gave priority to other difficulties. This table introduces the theme of inexperience, for those with less than four year experience most frequently assigned failure a high rank.

Table 3 Number of years as a fieldwork supervisor, related to whether failure or other problems were ranked most problematical, on the 1988 and 1993 surveys.

Number of years as a supervisor	Failure ranked 1st or 2nd		Other problems ranked 1/2	
	1988	1993	1988	1993
0 - 4 years	26% n=17	35% n=17	21% n=14	10% n=5
5 - 9 years	15% n=10	14.5% n=7	6% n=4	8% n=4
10+ years	14% n=9	17% n=8	5% n=3	14.5% n=7
No response	6% n=4	-	6% n=4	-

5.5.5 Specific and general training courses attended

The majority of respondents (96% n=63 in 1988 and 98% n=47 in 1993) had participated in the sequential programme of supervisors' training which is validated by the College of Occupational Therapists. The following table illustrates the differences between the samples and level of training completed.

Table 4 Number of supervisors who had completed the level 1/2 and level 3/4 part of the sequential training programme

Level of training	Failure ranked 1st or 2nd		Other problems ranked 1/2	
	1988	1993	1988	1993
Level 1/2 (basic)	60% n=39	64.5% n=31	40% n=24	33% n=16
Level 3/4 (intermediate)	29% n=19	27% n=13	17% n=11	21% n=10

Attending a recognised supervisors' course does not seem to reduce the trauma of assigning a fail grade. Although both levels include the principles of counselling and assessment the course objectives do not specify failure as a discrete topic.

Many respondents had also attended other relevant, general courses. This included 23% and 21% from each sample who ranked failure first or second and, 11% and 10% from those who ranked other problems more difficult. Although these general courses had counselling, educational or management components they did not seem to allay concerns about assigning a fail grade.

5.5.6 Aspects of the supervisory process: length of placement and supervisor-student ratio

These combine two aspects of the structural framework for the supervisory relationship - the duration and intimacy. The following tables illustrate this framework which is set by the School and curriculum. Both would seem to increase the vulnerability (for staff and students) in difficult situations.

Table 5 Average length of fieldwork placements

Number of weeks	Failure ranked 1st or 2nd		Other problems ranked 1/2	
	1988	1993	1988	1993
3 - 6 weeks	23% n=15	35% n=17	18% n=12	17% n=8
7 - 12 weeks	35% n=23	29% n=14	18% n=12	12.5% n=6

Although the supervisory relationship is transitory it can be quite intimate due to the demands of the role and the one-to-one relationship. Regardless of the model of supervision used, for example apprenticeship (Barker, 1986), directive (Magill et al, 1986) or collaborative (Smyth, 1986) the quality of the relationship remains pivotal for the teaching-learning process (Boydell, 1986). The following table indicates the frequency of a one-to-one relationship.

Table 6 Supervisor-student ratio

Supervisor -student ratio	Failure ranked 1st or 2nd		Other problems ranked 1/2	
	1988	1993	1988	1993
1 to 1	45% n=29	50% n=24	25% n=16	25% n=12
1 to 2	14% n=9	4% n=2	9% n=6	-
1 to 3	-	6% n=3	3% n=2	2% n=1

5.5.7 Previous experience of completing this questionnaire

The final question asked supervisors to recall whether they had participated in the 1988 survey. A majority of respondents (87.5% n=42) stated they had not completed the first survey, only two (4%) replied in the affirmative, with four (8%) stating they were unable to remember. While acknowledging the vagaries of memory it is likely the second survey extends rather than duplicates the first study.

5.5.8 Data analysis

The surveys contained nominal and ordinal scales with respondents providing a yes/no response and rank ordering statements. The completed questionnaires were divided into two subgroups: respondents ranking failing a student as the first and second most difficult task and respondents who gave priority to other problems. The quantitative data was totalled and converted to percentages for each subgroup. The open question probing respondents' reasons for selecting the first rank problem was subject to the "complementary techniques" (Curran, 1976) of content and structural analyses. The coding categories emerged from the respondents' reasons, with each word forming the recording unit and all statements providing the context unit. These parts were then re-considered as a whole, particularly the inter-relationships. This method took into consideration the small sample size (n=44) and was intended to "reflect the range of responses with minimum loss of detail" (Youngman, 1992).

5.5.9 Data presentation

Each respondent on the 1993 survey was allocated a personal identification code which summarises their supervisory experience and reports their ranking of 'failing a student'. These codes accompany the reasons and are intended to allow the reader to compare an individual's response with other supervisors' in the

5.6 QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS: IMMEDIATE AND FOLLOW-UP EVALUATIONS OF THE FAILURE WORKSHOPS

5.6.1 Introduction to the personal and postal evaluations

The immediate and follow-up evaluations of the five failure workshops held in 1989 and 1990 provide the second, subsidiary method. The workshops, which were attended by 101 fieldwork supervisors, were intended to fulfil three purposes. Firstly, to fulfil one of the recommendations of the 1988 study through the provision of a specific training course for those with the responsibility for judging incompetence to practise. As an opportunity to gather general information about the topic for the hypothesis generation needed for the focused interviews. Finally, to investigate the hypotheses about the participants' immediate and long term perceptions of the value of a course designed to confront failure. This section contains a description of the immediate personal questionnaire survey and the two follow-up postal surveys.

5.6.2 Questionnaire design

Brief, self-completion questionnaires were devised to collect the participants' views on the value of elements and the whole failure workshop. The aim was to provide formative feedback for the organisers to provide "illumination of the scheme in practice" (Hutchinson et al, 1988). Therefore, the priority was to design straightforward questionnaires to encourage

completion and enable quick, easy analysis. All three contained a varied format including semantic differential, Likert scales, ranking statements, open and closed questions on a single sheet of A4 paper. This variety, with the use of personal experience was intended to engage interest and obtain information about related topics, for example the forward transfer of learning into the professional setting. This purpose and expediency influenced the design, particularly the omission of biographical information or a pilot study. These limitations need to be considered when reviewing the results.

5.6.3 Immediate evaluation

The questions included on the immediate evaluation (Appendix 5), which was returned at the end of each failure workshop, were divided into two categories. An evaluation of elements and the whole programme with general information about failure. A nine point semantic differential scale was used to elicit "individual reactions over a broad range of personal involvement" (Youngman, 1978) about the 'helpfulness' of specific parts of the programme. An invitation to add comments was part of each question (as was an 'any other comment' question on each questionnaire). The next question, using a yes/no format, asked participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the whole workshop in meeting their expectations, needs and objectives. The second category of questions focused upon the supervisors' perspective, with two open questions about their reasons for attending and whether the

workshop had influenced their thoughts or feelings about failure.

5.6.4 Four month follow-up postal survey

The questionnaire (Appendix 6) contained open, closed and rank order questions intended to evaluate the impact of elements and the whole upon their supervisory role. It commenced with a closed, biographical question (about their experience with borderline or unsatisfactory students) to arouse interest (Youngman, 1978) and refocus attention upon the theme of failure. Open questions requested examples related to their transfer of learning with marginal students and upon their practise as supervisors, sharing information with colleagues, and identifying the three most important points learnt. Respondents were invited to place seven statements, ranging from direct recollections to theoretical aspects related to the aims, objectives and elements of the programme into rank order according to perceptions of 'helpfulness'.

5.6.5 One year follow-up postal survey

The second, follow-up evaluation (Appendix 7) comprised open, closed and Likert scales. Again, the focus was upon the appraisal of specific elements and the whole failure workshop, particularly any forward transfer of learning. The closed biographical question and the open questions about experience with marginal students and the three most important points learnt

were repeated to allow comparison. The questionnaire contained more structured formats as cues to aid retrieval and obtain a long term perspective on the worth of the workshop, for example four point Likert scales about the value of specific parts of the programme; changes in confidence about the whole subject of failure; rating the overall worth of the workshop; and a yes/no format about the inclusion of failure within all fieldwork supervisors' courses.

5.6.6 Response rate for the immediate and follow-up surveys

The immediate evaluation was completed by all 101 participants. The follow-up questionnaires were distributed to the 62 supervisors who volunteered to participate in the postal survey. The four month evaluation forms were returned by 26 participants, a response rate of 42%. The one year follow-up survey achieved a response rate of 60% with 37 completed questionnaires returned. These response rates may be considered as satisfactory for they represent the sample population i.e. fieldwork supervisors attending the five failure workshops. However it would be inappropriate to label this self-selected sample of supervisors who had paid to attend a failure workshop as a random, representative or opportunity sample of all fieldwork supervisors.

The following table indicates the number attending each failure workshop and response to the follow-up evaluations. There are

similarities in the pattern of response between each of the five workshops with the initial enthusiasm to contribute flagging at the four month stage but reviving one year later.

Table 7 Number of participants and volunteers with the return rate for the follow-up evaluations for each of the five failure workshops

Failure workshop	Number of participants	Volunteers for the follow-up	Four month returns	One year returns
3.2.89.	20	13	4	6
20.11.89.	20	9	2	4
1.12.89.	27	16	3	13
14.9.90.	18	14	8	6
28.9.90.	16	10	4	8
TOTALS	101	62	26	37

The difference in response rates on the follow-up evaluations may be explained by an incentive (Cohen & Manion, 1985) which was an offer to provide respondents with a copy of the paper "Failure - the clinical supervisors' perspective" (Ilott, 1990). However, this speculation is undermined by the 8 returned forms which did not include this question (the participants' having received the paper following the return of the four month evaluation). The paper was intended as a gesture of appreciation rather than infringing their right to anonymity. Interestingly, there was a consistency of results given by both anonymous and identifiable respondents. This would seem to support the validity and

reliability of the method and also militate against socially desirable responses or respondent bias (Wragg, 1978).

An alternative explanation may be related to the lapse in time allowing further opportunities to experiment and integrate knowledge into their supervisory practise. This explanation would seem to be supported by the increase in experience of working with borderline students reported on the follow-up questionnaires: increasing from 1, four months later to 11 students one year later. This may be attributed to two factors, for example their confidence in confronting the possibility of failure by giving honest feedback at the half-way stage, or the longer period of time available for supervision.

5.6.7 Characteristics of the sample: fieldwork supervisors attending the failure workshops

The immediate questionnaire did not include a section on biographical details. This omission means that it is impossible to comment upon the characteristics or representativeness of this self-selected sample of supervisors.

Biographical information pertinent to the topic of failure was collected on the follow-up questionnaires. The informants were asked whether they had been involved with a borderline or unsatisfactory student, either before or after, attending the workshop. All those who completed a follow-up questionnaire were assigned a personal identifier which reflected this experience.

The codes are:

- N no experience of borderline or unsatisfactory students
- Bi indirect experience of working with a borderline student
- Bpre experience of working with a borderline student gained before the failure workshop
- Bpost experience of working with a borderline student gained since the failure workshop
- Ui indirect experience of working with an unsatisfactory student
- Upre experience of working with an unsatisfactory student gained before the failure workshop
- Upost experience of working with an unsatisfactory student gained since the failure workshop

Where possible codes are attached to each quotation to enable the reader to trace and compare the views of individual participants from the immediate to the one year questionnaires. However the facility to identify individuals with certainty on the initial and two follow-up evaluations is limited to 5 respondents who agreed to participate in the follow-up evaluations and requested a copy of the incentive paper. A total of 17 follow-up forms were completed anonymously while 36 respondents added their name on either the four month or one year questionnaires therefore allowing codes to be attached to these respondents. Of these, it was possible to identify 14 who completed the initial and four month follow-up, and 15 who completed the initial and one year follow-up questionnaires.

5.6.8 Data analysis

The three evaluations provided a range of quantitative and qualitative data which, because of the small-scale nature of the study are accepted as producing illuminative rather than generalizable results (Goulding, 1984). The quantitative data was derived from nominal (yes/no questions) and ordinal scales (semantic differential and Likert scales). The frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were calculated as appropriate. The comments from the open questions were subject to a dual analysis: firstly, a content analysis with coding categories based upon the respondents' language. The replies for each question, from all five workshops (representing the context unit) were then enumerated. The parts were then reassembled and reviewed as a whole. This structural analysis revealed three multifaceted, yet distinct themes first emerging in the reasons for attending the failure workshop, continuing into the immediate reactions expressed on the first questionnaire and repeated on both follow-up evaluations. The results are presented in these themes along a temporal continuum. This is to allow these relationships and links between distinct parts of their world to be clear. Also, to enhance interpretation and understanding from a coherent description (Ashworth, 1987).

5.7 FOCUSED INTERVIEWS WITH PEER AND ELITE COLLEAGUES

5.7.1 Introduction to the focused interviews

The third and final method was the principal one for examining the staff perspective. The format and structure described by Merton et al (1956) provided the framework for the interviews conducted with an opportunity sample of representatives from the different groups of staff (course leaders/heads of schools n=10, lecturers n=8, fieldwork organisers n=7 and fieldwork supervisors n=5) whose role contains the responsibility for assessing academic and professional competence. The interviews, focusing upon the specific stimulus of assigning a fail grade, were designed to investigate and compare the informants' objective and subjective responses to failure according to their role, responsibility and relationship with the student.

This section is sub-divided into four parts. These are a review of technical and ethical principles; a personal perspective on the process of interviewing colleagues perceived as peers or the ultra-elite; a description of the characteristics of the informants and finally details of the data analysis, for the transcripts demonstrated "the power of the text to open up a dimension of reality" (Ricoeur, 1981).

5.7.2 Technical aspects: research interviews

The research interview has been defined as

"a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives" (Cohen & Manion, 1985).

Many texts describe the procedures for conducting a research interview including Wragg (1978), Cohen & Manion (1985) and Powney & Watts (1987). These definitions and procedural details contain assumptions regarding the difference in status and relationship between an interviewer and interviewee which were inappropriate, or only partially appropriate, for this research involving colleagues who were perceived as peers or the ultra elite.

It is difficult to disguise the instrumental and manipulative nature of a research interview for the purpose and content is clearly to fulfil the research needs of the interviewer. I was embarrassed by my task orientation when visiting informants which was expressed, for example, by declining invitations to look around their departments.

The interviews could not be separated from other relationships and roles for we belong to the same community. This commonality served to eliminate anonymity or status differentials and provide a temporal context for the relationship. It also formed the third most frequently given reason for volunteering to be interviewed: to facilitate the researcher and research process. The advantages of shared background knowledge and sub-cultural understandings (Turner, 1991) contributed to ease of access into 'their worlds', assisting the development of rapport and establishing my credibility. However, this was balanced by

self-generated pressure to conform to accepted technical practices and perform competently with colleagues who possessed equal or greater research experience.

In addition, it was difficult to distance myself from the project because the participants knew my interest, ownership and investment. This raises the numerous potential problems associated with interviewer and interviewee bias, particularly socially desirable and expected responses (Cohen & Manion, 1985).

5.7.3 Focused interviews

The characteristics of a focused interview are outlined in the manual of problems and procedures (Merton et al, 1956). These will be identified using examples to illustrate how the four distinct characteristics were applied in this research. Firstly, all informants had been involved in the particular situation of assigning a fail grade to an occupational therapy student in a fieldwork or academic setting. Secondly, the researcher's extensive experience of the topic, both theoretical and practical (gained through literature review, interviews conducted in 1988, workshops on the topic of failure with intra and inter disciplinary professions and piloting the interview schedule) provided a valuable source for a comprehensive content analysis. The interview guide (Appendix 8) contained the major topic areas with their implicit criteria of relevance. This was distributed to all informants a week in advance to provide assurance about confidentiality and anonymity. Also, to

enable informants to prepare through awareness of the expectations, format and content, thereby linking with the criterion for an effective focused interview. Finally, with my additions in parenthesis:

"the interview is focused on the subjective experiences of persons exposed to the pre-analyzed situation (the process of failing an occupational therapy student) in an effort to ascertain their (the staff perspective) definitions of the situation" (Merton et al, 1956).

Therefore, before and during the interview informants were encouraged to recall the stimulus situation and their reactions. This process is termed retrospection and involved stimulus linked and detailed responses obtained by helping the informant recall her immediate reaction to a failing student, rather than reconsidering the stimulus situation and reporting present reactions to the fail. This seemed to be very easy for the majority of the informants who appeared to need to "tell their story" about a particular student, to explore previously unverballed dimensions. An opportunity to share personal experiences was the most frequently mentioned reason for participating in the interviews. Little prompting or probing was required to achieve wide ranging, highly specific, profoundly self-revealing responses which indicated the personal context for the process of failing an occupational therapy student. The congruence between their non-verbal behaviour and use of metaphors to describe their subjective responses to specific incidents, I believe confirms the authenticity of their reports. The patterns and consistencies between and within informants regarding predicted and unanticipated responses seems to support

both the applicability and confirmability of the results.

5.7.4 Interview guide

The use of the interview guide as an interview schedule is a variation on the accepted format for a focused interview. This modification was made to enhance the qualities inherent in a focused interview - being able to pursue a difficult, even taboo subject in a systematic and sensitive manner. Reports of the use of this method (Merton et al, 1956) define the time needed as that which is available or required. These imprecise terms were considered inappropriate when estimating the logistical requirements and costs for the interviewer and informants when agreeing to participate in the study. The interview guide reflected the content analysis of key topics related to failure in an academic or fieldwork setting. It also provided a time efficient structure for the interview enabling the informant to prepare and control their response - an important means of respecting the equal status of colleagues.

The interview schedule was designed to fit the four criteria for an effective focused interview (Merton et al, 1956). These are

1. Range: the targeted and comprehensive nature of the interview schedule provided a full range of evocative stimuli, situations and responses pertinent to the subject. This assertion is supported by the limited number of new aspects which were introduced in response to the final, open

question "Is there anything else about failure which the interview has not included and is relevant for you?" The informants tended to reiterate earlier opinions or feelings. The paucity of response contrasts with the expansive replies given for other questions, although it may also be attributed to fatigue at the end of an intensive encounter.

2. Specificity: the interviews elicited full, specific responses rather than generalised reports about their subjective and objective experience of failure.
3. Depth: the informants described the affective, cognitive and evaluative meanings of a fail scenario. I was surprised by the depth of spontaneous or prompted self-disclosure and emotional expression.
4. Personal context: the interview elicited the attributes, prior experiences and values which endowed a fail scenario with distinctive, personal meaning. The results will enable the reader to identify individual and collective themes which seem to influence whether the experience has a central or peripheral significance for each informant.

5.7.5 Ethical issues

While the principles of ethical reasoning and decision making are promoted (and safeguarded by Ethical Committees) with patients, clients and informal carers (Bagshaw & Pinnington, 1992) they seem to be given less attention with colleagues as

subjects. However, an ethical approach associated with non-directive and focused interviews was used to complement the underlying values of the study. This included respecting the autonomy and rights of the informant by emphasising choice of participation, convenience and control of the venue and time for the meeting. Confidentiality and anonymity were respected. The purpose and method of the study were explained in correspondence before the interview and verbally at the start of each interview to avoid deception.

The interviewer attempted to convey both verbally and non-verbally a non-judgemental, fully attentive and accepting manner. Interventions were restricted to reflection and clarification of responses to the unstructured and semi-structured questions contained on the interview schedule or as follow-up probes. Occasionally informants asked a direct question, sought reassurance or validation. My response depended upon the stage of the interview, perceptions of the purpose of their statements and the effect of silence or evasion upon the rapport and relationship. The aim was to collaborate with a colleague and encourage self-exploration.

However it was important to maintain clear boundaries between a research and therapeutic interview (Cohen & Manion 1985, Hutchinson & Wilson 1992, Holloway 1992). Several informants commented upon the "therapeutic value" of sharing their personal and professional trauma. The interviews had provided a legitimate opportunity to "off-load" their distress and gain

self-understanding about an familiar aspect of their social world

"to lend coherence, render it less confusing, make it more understandable" (Ashworth, 1987).

Although there were opportunities to overstep the boundary between a research and therapeutic interview, for example when an informant was on the verge of tears, I attempted to respond in a sensitive way while clearly respecting the original contract for a research interview. The psychological cost of containing the depth and breadth of emotions through "empathetic immersion" and "intense interest" (Ashworth, 1987) was fatigue, which resulted in a self-imposed limit of three interviews per day.

5.7.6 Pilot interviews

The four pilot and twenty-six interviews shared a non-directive approach although there were considerable differences in the interview guidelines. The interview schedule was piloted with an informant from each of the staff groups : a course leader, assessment officer, lecturer and fieldwork organiser. At the end of each, direct feedback on the relevance and sequence of the questions and, the interviewer's technique was sought. Three informants were close work colleagues who could be trusted to give an honest, objective appraisal. The first pilot interview revealed major structural deficiencies related to the sequence of topics which resulted in a disjointed flow. The interview schedule was further refined following each of next three pilot interviews (Wragg, 1978). The changes included introducing three separate sections (biographical details,

departmental context and personal experience of failing students) and clarifying the differences between borderline and unsatisfactory students. In only one of the 26 interviews did I feel dissatisfied when the structure seemed to constrain the informant's divergent thinking. However this was necessary to maintain the criteria of specificity and depth.

5.7.7 Structure of the interview guide

The interview schedule (Appendix 8) was divided into three sections designed to funnel the focus from objectivity to subjectivity, personal and departmental facts to opinions and feelings, from the general to the specific (Cohen & Manion, 1985). This structure seemed to facilitate disclosure (which was mirrored in non-verbal behaviour through increasingly open postures and animated gestures). It was particularly apparent in the final section when their responses to specific, self-generated examples contained expressions which were "invested with affect, urgency or intense feelings" (Merton et al, 1956) suggesting their central significance. Each section contained similar questions for each of the four staff groups enabling the perspective of staff with different status, roles and responsibilities to be investigated and compared.

The first two sections contained brief biographical and institutional details. These provided an idiosyncratic and role context (Merton et al, 1956). However, it felt presumptuous and dismissive to condense a life-time's work into a few "tick-box"

categories. This discomfort was managed by the interviewer apologising and explaining the focus was upon one small part of their experience. The third section allowed informants to recall systematically and vividly a specific fail scenario.

Depth was also combined with specificity. Although the interview guide gave direction to their retrospection it was not prescriptive. The results contradict the assertion that "direction in interviewing is largely incompatible with eliciting unanticipated responses" (Merton et al, 1956). The use of unstructured (stimulus and response free) and semi-structured questions (response structured, stimulus free and stimulus structure, response free) with a non-judgemental approach seemed to give freedom and permission to emphasize aspects of failure which were significant for them at the time. For example, one unanticipated specific theme which emerged was the extra trauma involved in failing mature students because of

"the sacrifices and investments they and their families have made to gain access into occupational therapy."

This seems to be a salient for it is based upon cumulative evidence gathered from all the interviews.

The interview structure was also advantageous for the interviewer particularly, the ease of recording while attending. I quickly learned the correct terminology for the formal course committee structure and describing "iffy students". The act of note-taking (having gained permission) also focused attention while avoiding the intrusion or intimidation of audio recording. The predictability provided security in an unfamiliar territory with

a stranger. It also encouraged flexibility to follow-up and probe as needed.

Silence was a valuable technique for pacing the encounter and encouraging spontaneity. Pauses were used to prevent the interviewer forcing and imposing preconceived or irrelevant aspects. The successful use of silence was influenced by other subjective and objective factors for example, the author's perceptions of rapport, the meaning of the silence (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1992) and pressure of time limits.

5.7.8 Conclusion: technical aspects

This description has been included to assure the reader of the researcher's priority for using a systematic and sensitive method. It is hoped this detail will allow the reader to make an informed judgement about how successfully the "countless opportunities for inaccuracy or distortion in interviewing" (Wragg, 1978) have been avoided while acknowledging the possibility (and importance) of multiple constructions of reality. The focused interview provided an appropriate method complementing the underlying hermeneutic-phenomenological rationale which allowed the researcher, via a personal encounter and analysis of the resultant text, to gain access, understanding and offer an explanation about the subjective worlds of colleagues.

5.7.9 A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROCESSES OF INTERVIEWING COLLEAGUES : Introduction to the process notes

Interviews as a 'genuine human encounter' (Ashworth, 1987) are susceptible to the subtle complexities of interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics. The personal processing in the fieldwork notes was almost as revealing as the outcome! The acknowledgement of the meanings attributed to my perceptions and consequent behaviour is intended to alert the reader to any biases from my personal involvement in and with the world being researched (Ashworth, 1987).

The interviewees were regarded as informants as defined by Platt (1981) rather than subjects or respondents. Each informant was viewed as a "distinct person" who would provide objective, unique information. The informant and their contribution would be respected as such, rather than becoming a "randomly sampled and replaceable member of the crowd". This ethos reflects a value which underpins occupational therapy (Yerxa, 1991).

All the interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient for the informant. This involved extensive (and expensive) travelling within the United Kingdom. The motives for this tactic were obvious and ulterior. To encourage a reasonable response rate and for each informant to gain the convenience, security and control of their own territory while discussing a potentially difficult topic. This seemed to be successful with 30 interviews being conducted during March-July 1991.

5.7.10 Colleagues

All the informants could be classified as colleagues sharing a common interest and involvement in occupational therapy education. This term evades but does not defuse the status differentials which are inherent in designations, qualifications and years of experience. The presentation, maintenance and negotiation of these identities provided an opportunity to explore these processes. (It would have been fascinating, but inappropriate and intrusive to ask informants to reciprocate although some spontaneous, observations were made. Two informants from the same School commented that they had both been "worn out at the end of the interview". This fatigue factor, which I shared, may be due to the degree of energy which is needed to contain emotions associated with failure, and which as listener, I absorbed.)

Platt (1981), who uses the terms peers and colleagues interchangeably, identifies their characteristics as:

"in a diffuse sense one's social equals, they are one's equals in role specific senses, they share the same background knowledge and sub cultural understandings, and they are members of the same groups or communities."

At a superficial level all matched these criteria. However there were to my surprise, subtle and interesting differences between individuals which effected the process and outcome. The following outlines the continuum of relationships: three (10%) were conducted with close, work-based colleagues, four (13%) were peers sharing the same designation with whom I had had some personal contact, nine (30%) were acquaintances and fourteen

(47%) were strangers.

Although the majority were equal in a role specific sense through sharing past or present designations of fieldwork supervisor (17% n=5), lecturer (23% n=8) and course leader/head of school (33% n=10), my perceptions were very different, which of course effected the interview. The most influential factors of age, experience and qualifications were powerfully combined within a group labelled 'elite colleagues'.

5.7.11 'Elite' colleagues

The majority of course leaders/heads of schools deserve to be classified as the pioneers and "ultra-elite" of occupational therapy in Britain. They fulfilled Zuckerman's (1972) criterion for they comprised

"a typically thin layer of people who exhibit especially great influence, authority or power, and who generally have the highest prestige within what is a prestigious collectivity to begin with."

However, even within this group there were differences related to status, age and the nature of our relationship. The realisation, when gathering biographic information that some had been occupational therapists for the whole of my life-time, combined with the wealth of their experience at a national and international level, with high professional and academic qualifications I found particularly awesome. This was reflected in a variety of ways, for example, in the fieldwork notes I report a reluctance to ask probing, personal questions

with remarks such as "I did not/dare not ask"; less use of silence and pauses; more justification of the interview format and structure particularly in response to comments, which I perceived as criticisms about lack of clarity or grammatical errors in some questions; greater self-consciousness and attempts to model good practice when interviewing those with a record of research and who teach research; more use of self-disclosure and openness in response to replies as a means of creating reciprocity and in return for the time given. These seem to reflect a desire to prove my competence and commitment. It was this which was occasionally tested by some, but certainly not in the continuous manner reported by Zuckerman (1972).

My perceptions about the quality of the relationship, (based upon prior and immediate experience) was the mediating factor. This group contained colleagues who were strangers, acquaintances and closer colleagues. There was a sense of comfort with colleagues and those acquaintances who used the tactics of experienced interviewees to reassure and relax.

5.7.12 'Peer' Colleagues

The interviews with members of the other groups (lecturers, fieldwork organisers and supervisors) elicited a contrasting approach in which I emphasized the peer relationship. This was managed in two ways. Firstly by using my name rather than designation and secondly by referring to the research as part of

a course rather than a research degree. The intention was to focus upon the role specific equality gained from shared group membership, common background and professional understanding. This strategy seemed to be successful with these groups which consisted of a majority of strangers. Although these relationships had a limited or no history, in a small profession with only twelve thousand practitioners the probability for a future relationship is high. This factor increased the pressure to

"appear well in the eyes of the people who constitute a significant reference group and with whom one will continue to live when the research is over" (Platt, 1981).

Three strategies were employed with all informants: conforming to accepted interview practices, the use of reciprocation, particularly regarding research interests and the assurance of shared feelings and experiences about the subject of failure.

Some informants made direct or indirect attempts to locate me professionally and socially by evaluating my competence as an interviewer. These perceptions are based upon comments and intuition, for example, remarks given at the end of the interview included "10 out of 10 for interviewing". Another referred to her ability to "quickly tune into feelings expressed non-verbally" which provoked a response of self-awareness, caution and control. In all interviews I was conscious of being an "object of judgement" (Zuckerman, 1972). This of course balances, and thereby equalises the relationship between peers, in contrast with the usual interviewer-respondent relationship which involves the "instrumental use of another person" (Platt, 1981).

5.7.13 Conclusion to the processing notes

One important, but seemingly neglected process which influenced the size of the interview sample was the boredom factor. Conducting 30 similar interviews, particularly when the same information was being elicited was boring. This impaired my ability to be authentic and express genuine interest. It also affected my ability to concentrate on the task and listen. For example at the beginning of one interview I "forget" to record the comments. It would be easy to intellectualize and provide alternative justifications for the sample size, for example Ashworth (1987) describes the qualitative research process as

"iterative, sequential. The first interview or interaction is the most informative and thereafter each extra encounter should provide new insight. When the new insights get thin, it's probably time to stop."

I know why! The time is also right to pursue new directions, to confirm via triangulation, replicate with a different sample, extend the study or analyse the data.

5.7.14 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE: Introduction to the sample

In January 1991 a flyer entitled 'Desperately seeking subjects' was distributed at a Council for the Heads of Occupational Therapy Training Schools meeting. This request for volunteers elicited a response from 15 of the 25 Schools and comprised 24 academic staff and 2 fieldwork supervisors. There was not any attempt to follow-up the reasons for non-responses. During June-July 1991 26 interviews were conducted with colleagues working in 13 educational establishments in England, Scotland and Wales. (The results from the 4 pilot interviews held at Derby in March are also included in the study giving a total of 30 focused interviews.)

The 25 academic staff and 5 fieldwork supervisors contained people with experience of the range of educational routes (two year accelerated, three year full-time and four year part-time Diploma Courses, three and four year Degree Courses) based in private, National Health, Further and Higher Education establishments. The group, comprising 23 of the original volunteers and 7 from Derby (3 academic staff who participated in the pilot and 4 fieldwork supervisors with experience of failing a student who had been approached via a third party) formed a reasonably representative sample of the well established and new occupational therapy educational provision in the United Kingdom. They also reflected the range of staff with different roles and responsibilities including 10 heads of schools/course

leaders, 8 lecturers, 7 fieldwork organisers and 5 fieldwork supervisors. The following biographical details reveals the breadth and depth of teaching, supervisory and clinical experience possessed by this opportunity sample.

5.7.15 Biographical details: designation and duration in present post

The informants' designations reflect job titles which are influenced by institutional and national criteria. For example, the title Head of School and Course Leader were accepted as synonymous as both indicate managerial responsibility and accountability for a specific educational programme. In some Schools fieldwork organisation and visiting was shared by several lecturers, whereas in other Schools one fieldwork organiser had primary responsibility. The fieldwork supervisors' designations reflect the national Whitley Council grading structure which is determined by clinical expertise and managerial responsibilities. The following table illustrates the depth of the informants' experience in their present post.

Table 8 Designation and duration in present post

Designation	Number	Length in present post (in years)	
		Range	Mean
Head of School	6	0.8 - 15	5.5
Course Leader	4		

Designation	Number	Length in present post (in years)	
		Range	Mean
Lecturer			
senior	4	0.6 - 14	5.4
lecturer	4		
Fieldwork Organiser			
primary role	4	0.9 - 10	5.5
shared role	3		
Fieldwork Supervisor			
senior I	2	2 - 12.5	5.9
head IV	2		
head III	1		

Although this table states the duration and designation these titles disguise the multifaceted nature of each role which contain a demanding mix of educational, management, clinical and research responsibilities. For example, all heads of schools had a teaching role and seven were also personal tutors; three of the five supervisors combined clinical, supervisory and managerial responsibilities. The significance of these multiple roles are pertinent when considering the "enormous amount of time" which a fail scenario entails for all participants. It also highlights the potential for conflict between academic and pastoral responsibilities, whether in an educational or practice setting for all supervisors are expected to combine the roles of assessor and counsellor (COT 1984) and 19 of the 25 academic staff were also personal tutors.

5.7.16 Biographical details: previous clinical experience

The range of experience gained in previous employment (both in hospital and community settings primarily in the United Kingdom, but also in Australia, America and Hong Kong) is illustrated in the following table. The informants possessed a breadth of clinical experience across all specialities except for learning difficulties.

Table 9 Present and previous practice experience: number of informants with experience in major specialities

Designation	Physical medicine	Elderly	Mental Health	Mental Handicap	Other
Head of School	6	3	8	-	5
Lecturer	4	5	5	1	2
Fieldwork Organiser	4	2	3	1	2
Fieldwork Supervisor					
Present	3	-	2	-	-
Past	3	3	2	-	1

5.7.17 Biographical information: previous educational experience

The range of clinical experience is complemented by the educational experience of academic staff. The next table highlights the difference in educational experience between academic and fieldwork staff. A majority of academic staff (21 of 25) had been fieldwork supervisors whereas the supervisors'

experience was confined to the practice setting.

Table 10 Number of informants with previous experience in other educational roles and settings

Designation	Lecturer	Fieldwork Organiser	No.	Fieldwork Supervisor Duration (in years)	
				Range	Mean
Head of School	8	1	8	0 - 30	7.2
Lecturer	-	1	7	1 - 12	6.8
Fieldwork Organiser	4	-	6	3 - 20	8.8
Fieldwork Supervisor	-	-	5	3 - 10	6.5

These tables illustrate the breadth and depth of experience within academic and clinical settings possessed by all informants, but particularly those working in Schools. They provide objective reasons for my trepidation about interviewing the ultra-elite.

5.7.18 Biographical information: fieldwork supervisors

This section focuses upon the supervisors' background, training and responsibilities. Although a small sample (n=5) the proportion of experienced, trained fieldwork supervisors parallels those obtained in other parts of the study. These results are included for the purpose of comparison and to provide the reader with sufficient information to assess the transferability and "fittingness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) of the

findings.

Table 11 Comparison of training and experience of fieldwork supervisors in the 1988 and present study

1. Length of experience as a fieldwork supervisor

Duration	Number of fieldwork supervisors			
	Questionnaire survey 1988 (n=65)	Semi structured interviews 1988 (n=11)	Focused interviews 1991 (n=5)	Questionnaire survey 1993 (n=48)
0 - 4 years	31	6	1	22
5 - 9 years	15	3	4	11
10 + years	11	2	-	15

2. Number of supervisors who had undertaken parts of the sequential training programme validated by College of Occupational Therapists

Level of training	Number of fieldwork supervisors			
	Questionnaire survey 1988 (n=65)	Semi structured interviews 1988 (n=11)	Focused interviews 1991 (n=5)	Questionnaire survey 1993 (n=48)
Level 1/2	60	11	5	47
Level 3/4	31	6	3	23

Although the sample was small, they seem to be reasonably representative. They supervised an average number of 2 - 5

students per year with a supervisor-student ratio of 1:1 for one supervisor and shared (2:1) for the other four supervisors. Four supervisors accepted students at any stage of the educational programme with the fifth (working in a community mental health setting) only offering placements to second or third year students. The next table indicates the length of fieldwork placements.

Table 12 Average length of fieldwork placement

	Questionnaire Survey 1988 (n=65)	Focused Interviews 1991 (n=5)	Questionnaire Survey 1993 (n=48)
3-6 weeks	37	3	30
7-12 weeks	28	2	18

5.7.19 Training courses

All were asked to identify any course they had attended which had been helpful with borderline or unsatisfactory students. The general categories of education, management and other (eg counselling) were offered in this stimulus structured but response free semi-structured question. These categories were based upon those used in the earlier study. The responses paralleled those previously obtained. Educational courses were reported by 13 of the 30 informants. Management training was identified by 17 informants. Other categories were used by 8 informants. The content identified under each category provided some interesting examples related to failure. For example, the

specific elements of management courses included: managing people, disciplinary, dismissal or redundancy counselling, leadership, assertion and quality assurance. Under education the informants tended to use the qualification or the topic of counselling. Two lecturers reported how their interest in failure had been dismissed on education courses, for example

"It wasn't talked about on the Certificate in Education course. They did not cover how to deal with our own feelings."

The most frequently mentioned "other" topic was counselling. This may have been a response to the cue contained in the question. However, the specification of bereavement counselling promoted the exploration of loss as a conceptual framework for understanding failure. Other topics were related to the general value of continuing education and diversity of professional practice for example, behavioural and psychodynamic frames of reference providing guidelines for understanding and action.

The majority had participated in the sequential programme of training courses for fieldwork supervisors. This included 15 academic staff who had attended the first level course and 13 who had completed the second level course. All five supervisors had attended the first level course with three having completed the second level course. Many of the academic informants also contributed to the teaching (n=22) and assessment (n=9) of these courses. It is noteworthy that neither attendance or teaching on these courses insulates the staff from the trauma of failure. This would seem to support the recommendation contained in the

first study: failure needs to be addressed as a single, specific topic. However, the results from the one year follow-up evaluation of the failure workshops is contradictory recommending the topic be incorporated into the set curriculum for all supervisors courses.

5.7.20 Cumulative personal and collective experience

These biographical details demonstrate the diverse and extensive experience possessed by individual informants and the whole group. The focused interviews provided a method for drawing upon this accumulated wisdom to obtain personal theories about failure in a sensitive, systematic way. Informants were treated with respect appropriate for peers who were not experts, but practitioners with a wealth of personal knowledge and experience. This was preferred to other methods which seek to obtain consensus amongst colleagues (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1988). Although they were encouraged by the specific phrasing of questions to respond from their present role, to have ignored the configuration of their total experience would have devalued the gestalt of their personal context. For example, some informants were able to compare the subjective and objective experiences of failing a student from the roles of fieldwork supervisor and organiser. This added another dimension to the data collection which reinforced the rationale of respecting the distinct contribution of each colleague who was not

"just a randomly-sampled and replaceable member of the crowd" (Platt, 1981).

5.7.21 Reasons for volunteering to participate in the research

This final part of the biographical details section complements the research rationale, particularly the desire to understand rather than treat informants as subjects to be controlled or manipulated. When asked, 25 of the 30 informants acknowledged they volunteered to participate. The five exceptions, (a lecturer, two fieldwork organisers and two fieldwork supervisors) stated they had either 'been volunteered' or 'felt obliged'. Four of the five supervisors had been approached by a third party to allow refusal:

"I was asked to participate so I did not really volunteer."
During the interviews I was unaware of any differences. However, as this was the penultimate question on the interview schedule the answers did not generate expectations or sensitivity towards differences, either at the time or in retrospect.

Their reasons for volunteering were categorised into three elements. These were an opportunity to share their personal experience, an intrinsic interest in the topic of failure linked to their role and responsibilities and, to facilitate the researcher and research process. These reasons were balanced within each group although the heads of schools most frequently cited cognitive rather than affective reasons. The next table illustrates the distribution of reasons between the staff groups. This is followed by examples of the comments given under each category (please refer to pages 117-118 for an explanation of the personal identification codes).

Table 13 Distribution of reasons for volunteering to participate in the interview.

	Research process	Interesting topic	Share experiences
Heads of Schools	7	5	3
Lecturers	1	3	4
Fieldwork Organisers	1	3	4
Fieldwork Supervisors	1	1	2
TOTAL	10	12	13

The table suggests a balance of reasons which seem to reflect a combination of personal interests and professional roles. Even the most impersonal reason related to assisting the research process was underpinned by personal motives, with five identifying their own difficulty obtaining subjects. The category of research contained several facets including supporting and encouraging colleagues undertaking research and

H>5/1U>M "because it is a thorny topic and I wanted to help you. I think you are brave taking on this area."

These reasons recognise the authors' membership of, and relationship with colleagues in the community of occupational therapy.

The topic of failure aroused informants' interest for several reasons related to their role and responsibilities. These included

L>7/3U> "Failure interests me, I have a growing interest. We are planning a failure workshop ... it is timely because it is an up and coming subject."

L<7/2U< "Because it is a taboo subject. All the power is weighted with the authorities and the lack of self-analysis of some staff."

C>12/1U> "Interested in failure as a whole because it takes so much of my time and is a major part of my job. It will not go away and we need to learn how to handle it better."

C>5/2U> "Because it is the bottom line in education. We are here to enable students to succeed but not everyone does."

H>3/1U>M "I've been interested, it is a worthwhile topic, a taken-for-granted part of the job. It intrigues me and challenges me to think."

These quotations reflect the reality of failure as part of life and learning, but which like other inevitable realities of life, it is easier to ignore.

H>3/1U>M "I respect people who do not find euphemisms (for example about failure, death or cancer), useful."

This desire to learn about, and prepare for failure echoes the reasons for attending a failure workshop.

The most frequently mentioned category contained subjective experiences and feelings. These reasons supported my perceptions that the interviews provided a legitimate opportunity for some informants to share their experiences and 'off-load' their distress about failure. The range of personal reasons included:

H>1/1U< "I am aware failure is hurtful and we need to learn how to handle it."

H>11/1U> "Because I feel uncomfortable about failure."

L>6/1U<M "Felt strongly about failure, it was important to talk about because of recent experiences, to share the trauma with someone else."

L>7/2U< "Nobody likes to fail anyone. I feel ghastly but I can separate the rational from the emotional."

C>9/2U>M "Because it is a live issue and why do people avoid it? I can't understand this. I wanted to talk to someone about it - students and supervisors are worried about it."

S>6/3U<M "Because I had such a traumatic time it increased my awareness of the importance of having the courage to fail a student."

S>8/7U<I "I am keen to know how much failure affected me, as another mechanism for unloading it and if it helps others."

These statements parallel the reasons for and value of attending a failure workshop, particularly the opportunity to express and listen, to share and exchange the trauma of assigning a fail grade.

A central theme running through the categories seemed to be the opportunity for reflection, personal learning and understanding as a means of contributing to their own, and others knowledge about the topic of failure which is simultaneously a taboo and taken-for-granted aspect of education.

5.7.22 DATA ANALYSIS: Introduction to analysis of the focused interviews

The transcripts provided the text for understanding, explaining and interpreting the staff's perspective on the process of assigning fail grade. The results section combines both results and discussion in an attempt to reflect the integration between personal and public theories of failure. This section will outline the process of data collection, collation, analysis and presentation in preparation for the results section.

5.7.23 Data collection

The responses were written on a gapped interview schedule. This method of note taking, although vulnerable to errors was preferred to audio-recording to minimise the anxiety provoked by potential equipment failure (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1992).

The duration of the focused interviews ranged from 50 to 135 minutes. The mean was longest with fieldwork organisers (95 minutes) and shortest (65 minutes) with fieldwork supervisors. The table identifies the designation and duration of the interviews with the four groups.

Table 14 Number, designation of informants and duration of interviews

Designation	Number of Informants	Duration in minutes	
		Range	Mean
Course Leader/ Head of School	10	70 - 115	84
Lecturer	8	60 - 115	87
Fieldwork Organiser	7	60 - 135	95
Fieldwork Supervisor	5	50 - 80	65

The differences between the range and mean for the fieldwork supervisors and the other staff groups is interesting. The following reasons are offered as possible explanations for this variation. Time management is a consistent problem for supervisors:

"managing time and dealing with workload pressures ... balancing clinical and supervisory responsibilities" (Alsop, 1991).

Participating in a research project is an extra time consuming commitment. The supervisors may also have been more aware of status differentials due perhaps to the interviewer's membership of the academic community. Finally their experience of borderline and unsatisfactory students was limited, with each supervisor having a single experience of a fail scenario with a total of 5 other instances of direct or indirect borderline or unsatisfactory students. Also, their experience was confined to the fieldwork setting, whereas all other informants were able to draw upon examples from an academic and clinical setting, over a longer career span.

5.7.24 Data collation

The notes were collated directly onto a disk with separate files for each staff group and question to facilitate the process of analysis. Verbatim transcriptions of each interview were made within 48 hours to aid recall (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1992) and reduce the inevitable distortions due to forgetting. The technique of commencing each transcription with fieldwork notes assisted the retrieval process by recalling the actual and emotional context (Atkinson et al, 1983).

5.7.25 Data analysis

There are "few canons for the analysis of qualitative data" (Hutchinson et al, 1988). The process of reviewing the text as a

whole, in parts and as a whole again over an eighteen month period, using methods of content and structural analysis was intended to provide a systematic approach to the text within a hermeneutic framework. Also, the use of triangulation of data sources and methods (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989) with peer examination (Krefting, 1991) would seem to give rigour to the methods and trustworthiness to the results. However, each reader acting as an independent auditor will need to judge the appropriateness of this assertion from the framework of personal meaning and multiple interpretations.

Data analysis was a circular process starting with the whole, moving to the constituent parts before returning to the whole. This involved reading and re-reading all the transcripts, giving detailed attention to each part when reporting and discussing the results, and finally placing the focused interview within the context of the complete study. This circularity was essential to ensure familiarity with the text, extraction of expected and emergent themes, validation and interpretation of patterns (or inconsistencies) to achieve coherence to fulfil

"the requirement that the elements of the interpretation should hang together as a consistent, meaningful whole" (Little, 1991).

The transcripts formed a complex, multi-level text containing plain words of 'common sense' and practical action, rich metaphorical language to describe both beliefs and feelings, with some theoretical terminology to explain or label their perspective. A combination of content and structural analysis

(Curran, 1976) was used to link these private and public theories (Griffiths & Tann, 1992). The transcripts from the 30 interviews provided the context unit with coding categories emerging from, and determined by frequency of report. However, it is important to acknowledge that frequency and manifest content does not necessarily equate with importance. The latent content of language, the different levels of meaning in communication, particularly the inter-connections and symbolic value of metaphors were also considered when the whole was reassembled. Thus giving value to the contribution of both objectivity and subjectivity to the process of interpretation.

5.7.26 Data presentation

The presentation of the information gained from the focused interviews combines both results and discussion. The purpose is to integrate private and public theories or understandings. The results are presented in both numerical and narrative forms to illustrate the frequency and diversity of emergent themes. Each informant was assigned an identification code which preserves anonymity but provides a personal and institutional context (Youngman, 1992). This also permits the reader to trace and compare individual responses (Bull, 1978). The code contains the following elements:

1. Designation: H = Head of School and Course Leader
L = Lecturer
C = Fieldwork Organiser
S = Fieldwork Supervisor

2. Duration in present post: > more than 2 years
 < less than 2 years

3. Clinical experience in mental health: M

4. Experience of more than or less than 3 unsatisfactory students whose educational programme was terminated: U> or U<

5. Number of informant from each of the 13 Occupational Therapy Schools: eg 4/2 the second informant from the fourth School

6. Successful completion of a level 3/4 (intermediate) supervisors' course: I

For example:

H> 2/1 U> M identifies a head of school with more than two years experience in present post. She is the first informant from the second educational establishment. She had worked with more than 3 unsatisfactory students and has experience in mental health.

C< 2/2 U< identifies a fieldwork organiser from the same School who has been in post less than two years and who has been involved with less than three unsatisfactory students.

The use of identification codes for questionnaire respondents and focused interviewees are intended to be helpful, supporting interpretations while allowing the reader to form their own.

5.8 RIGOUR AND TRUSTWORTHINESS: Introduction to the appraisal of rigour and trustworthiness

The concluding part of the methodology section is intended to be integrative, by combining comments pertinent to the approach and design, but particularly testing rigour to assess the trustworthiness of the results. The details, with their limitations and strengths are explicit, to allow the reader to partake in the process of "validation as an argumentative discipline" (Ricoeur, 1981) through the hermeneutics of suspicion and meaning-recollection (Ashworth, 1987) to illuminate the text and, their perspective on the process of assigning a fail grade.

The methodology is scrutinised using the "naturalistic solutions to methodology problems" suggested by Guba & Lincoln (1985) for they seem to combine sensitivity with a systematic approach.

Rigour is important for all research for it

"arises from the inquirer's need to persuade other inquirers or audiences of the authenticity of the information provided and the interpretations that are drawn from it" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

They suggest four major criteria which need to be tested and met as a "requisite for establishing trust in the outcomes". These are truth value (internal validity), applicability (external validity and generalizability), consistency (reliability) and neutrality (objectivity). These and their associated techniques will be described separately although there is overlap between criteria and techniques.

5.8.1 Truth value and credibility

This is obtained "from the discovery of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by informants" (Krefting, 1991). This reflection of multiple realities should be immediately recognised by those who share the experience (Sandelowski, 1986). Truth value is presented first as it is considered the most important criterion for the assessment of qualitative research (Krefting, 1991). A range of recommended techniques will be presented. However, before these are described the reader is invited to consider the question: "Do the results fit or match or illuminate your experience?"

The first strategy is simply sufficient time to gain familiarity with the topic and informants to allow expected and hidden themes to emerge and be verified. This study seems to have taken an inordinate amount of time for practical and theoretical submersion to the point of saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each method had demanded different times related to rapport. For example, the supervisory problem survey (March 1988 and March 1993) were distributed, completed and returned within an hour. In contrast, the 30 focused interviews lasted nearly 43 hours over a five month period in 1991. Each full day failure workshop held in 1989 and 1990 was followed-up four months and one year later. Although these figures illustrate the time for each method and span several years they omit two mediating factors. Firstly, membership of the same community which facilitated access and secondly, the extra information gained

from "anecdotal comparison" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with other inter and intra disciplinary groups in the United Kingdom and Sweden. This anecdotal experience has supported the credibility, which I believe is one of the strengths of the study.

However, this closeness both to the study and informants, may also pose a threat to the truth value. The strategy of reflexive analysis or reflexivity (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989) is intended to combat over-involvement or enmeshment with loss of critical perspective. Throughout I have acknowledged my interest particularly in the processing notes for the focused interviews. In this way, understanding the text has contributed to self and shared understanding and action.

The confidence in the results arises from the "degree of structural corroboration" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), the convergence and coherence of data gained from different sources and by different methods. Triangulation is recognised as "critical in establishing data trustworthiness" (Lather, 1986). Sources have included academic and fieldwork staff from different Schools within England, Wales and Scotland. These sources have been probed to varying extents along a continuum from superficial meaning with the 113 fieldwork supervisors completing the supervisory problems questionnaire, to increasing interaction with 101 supervisors participating in five failure workshops and, finally the in-depth focused interviews with 25 academic and 5 fieldwork staff. The literature review provided a fourth data

source which, by encompassing different health care professions enabled comparison to be made with occupational therapy specific outcomes. These sources reflect a variety of people, time, settings and professions. However, it is important to acknowledge omissions, the most obvious is the student who is awarded a fail grade and the reaction of the cohort and relevant others. Their perspectives has received much attention (Wilson 1972, Thayer 1973, Waters 1983, Stevens & Pihl 1987, Shepard & Smith 1989, Glover-Dell 1990, Dell & Valine 1990, Croen et al 1991) and although important, was not the target of this research.

The three methods were intended to provide a critical distance from particular students. This was for ethical reasons which included preserving anonymity and, preventing the possibility of contamination from the Hawthorne effect, which may have occurred with case studies. The methods (two questionnaire surveys and focused interviews) allowed cross comparison. However, this comparison would seem to be based upon similarities because of the self-selected nature of two of the three groups ie those who paid to attend a failure workshop and volunteer to be interviewed. Interestingly, these similarities were maintained in the supervisory problem survey and the literature review which covered diverse professions in different countries. Although each method contains imperfections and limitations they all provide evidence which tends in the same direction suggesting stability and credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

The two other forms of triangulation, theoretical and investigators, were utilised to a lesser extent. The contrasting theories of loss and attribution were considered, with the former emerging spontaneously during the focused interviews, while attribution theory contributed to the construction of the interview guide. However, neither seemed to "work" or "fit" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) fully when the whole was compared and analysed. Triangulation of investigators was impossible as the investigation was conducted by a single researcher, although other perspectives were introduced during supervision and discussions with colleagues.

The above techniques may increase the probability that the data and interpretations are credible, but the "backbone of satisfying the truth-value criterion" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) is member checking ie asking informants whether they find the results plausible. However, to reduce the time demands for busy informants to encourage participation, the parallel technique of peer examination was preferred. There was informal member checking through the recurrence of themes from different sources and methods, between interviewees and at other workshops where interpretations could be challenged by larger, different, relevant audiences.

This informal approach was supplemented by two impartial and knowledgeable colleagues. They were a lecturer and fieldwork organiser, who were both familiar with the topic and qualitative research. They selected four (from 14) sections, reviewed the

transcripts and interpretations for the focused interviews. As peers, they examined and compared the raw and analysed data, to check the interpretations were derived from the transcripts. Also, they were invited to comment about the match or mismatch of the results with the wealth of their experience in academic and fieldwork settings. Both confirmed the consistency between the raw and analysed data, suggested additional explanations or emphases. These have been incorporated to enhance the plausibility of the discussion.

5.8.2 Transferability and applicability

This criterion illustrates the tension between individual meaning or situational uniqueness (Krefting, 1991) and the discovery of themes which may be generalizable. The aim was to identify occupational therapy specific themes. However the research has highlighted their applicability through convergence (from both literature and discussions) with other health care and management perspectives related to competence and "breaking the bad news" (Finn, 1993) for example. Although enticing, these tangents were only considered from the research focus.

The range of respondents and informants were all members of relevant groups (academic staff and fieldwork supervisors) although it is not possible to comment upon their representativeness due to the lack of national data for comparison. The detail in the biography sections is intended to

allow others to make this comparison, assess the transferability of the findings particularly their "fittingness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) to their time and context while respecting the possibility of multiple realities.

5.8.3 Dependability and consistency

The dilemmas associated with uniqueness versus consistency are equally relevant when considering replicability. In many ways this research may be viewed as a preliminary study for it has concentrated upon a relatively unexplored aspect of education, the affective aspects of assigning a fail grade. A dense description of methods and decision making processes have been included to enable replication.

The use of three overlapping methods in tandem, all producing consistent results, would seem to strengthen the reliability claims (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), although the availability of a single researcher precluded the possibility of step-wise replications. The third technique of audit was adopted in a modified form when an independent, 'elite' ex-colleague scrutinised the completed thesis to assess consistency between the data and conclusions. Her summary would seem to support the dependability of the study.

"I could identify with lecturers, supervisors, fieldwork organisers and head of schools, having been in those roles at various stages of my career. Very realistic and I was not surprised by the context or comments."

5.8.4 Neutrality and confirmability

This final criterion uses techniques of audit, triangulation and reflexive analysis to test whether the data is factual and confirmable. The concept of neutrality or objectivity seems to be fallacious when considering my (or any researcher's) interest and investment. I hope, by making my reasons and values explicit this will help others to judge my ability to use subjectivity (and self as the primary instrument) to be sensitive, systematic and trustworthy.

5.9 Conclusion to the methodology section

The methodology was intended to possess a natural flow or internal consistency between the philosophical and the pragmatic. The reader is invited to consider whether this coherence has been achieved and whether it extends into the results, if the

"elements of interpretation ... hang together as a consistent, meaningful whole" (Little, 1991).

The following results and discussion are combined to maintain this integration and assist the process of interpretation. The three methods are presented in sequence, from simple to more complex, with the questionnaire surveys providing an incremental introduction to the focused interviews. The first two present the supervisors' perspective, firstly about the difficulty ascribed to failing and then their evaluations of the failure workshops. While the focused interviews review the impact of different roles and responsibilities on the process of assigning a fail grade.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY RANKING DIFFICULTIES IN THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

6.1 Introduction to the questionnaire survey

The brief, structured self-completion questionnaire was completed by a total of 113 experienced and trained supervisors in March 1988 and March 1993. On both occasions two thirds of respondents, who were unaware of the purpose of the study, ranked failing a student as their first (1988 n=28 43% and 1993 n=23 48%) or second (1988 n=12 18% and 1993 n=9 19%) most problematical responsibility. This result would seem to support the first hypothesis for supervisors:

Academic staff and fieldwork supervisors perceive the assignment of a fail grade as their most onerous responsibility.

It also allows the rider that it is "probably" the most difficult situation (Hickerson Crist, 1986) to be removed. This result supports the findings of Goldenberg & Waddall (1990) and Alsop (1991) who also obtained quantitative measures of the difficulty of working with marginal students, although in both instances this result was subsidiary to the main focus of the research. Goldenberg & Waddall (1990) investigated the sources and levels of perceived stress and coping strategies among female baccalaureate nursing faculty in Canada. Using questionnaire surveys a sample of 70 nurse educators ranked 'retaining failing students' and 'failing clinically unsatisfactory students' as their second and third highest occupational stressors. Alsop

(1991) as part of a study into clinical practice curriculum development in the United Kingdom, also used a questionnaire survey to ascertain the reasons why occupational therapists choose to become supervisors and factors which contributed to success or difficulties. The results obtained from 102 supervisors revealed that difficulties related to students were the third (from nine) most frequently mentioned factors and comprised unpreparedness for fieldwork practice (n=8), a "student's attitude" (n=8) and "experiencing difficulties" (n=5).

These three studies seem to support the onerous nature of working with students who are performing at the margins of competence in the fieldwork setting. Although the next table illustrates the spread of rank ordering responses in 1988 and 1993, the numbers do not illuminate the reasons why it is so stressful. On the 1993 questionnaire, respondents were invited to state the reason for selecting the first rank problem. This was intended to give an insight into causal factors, providing both positive and negative evidence for second hypothesis:

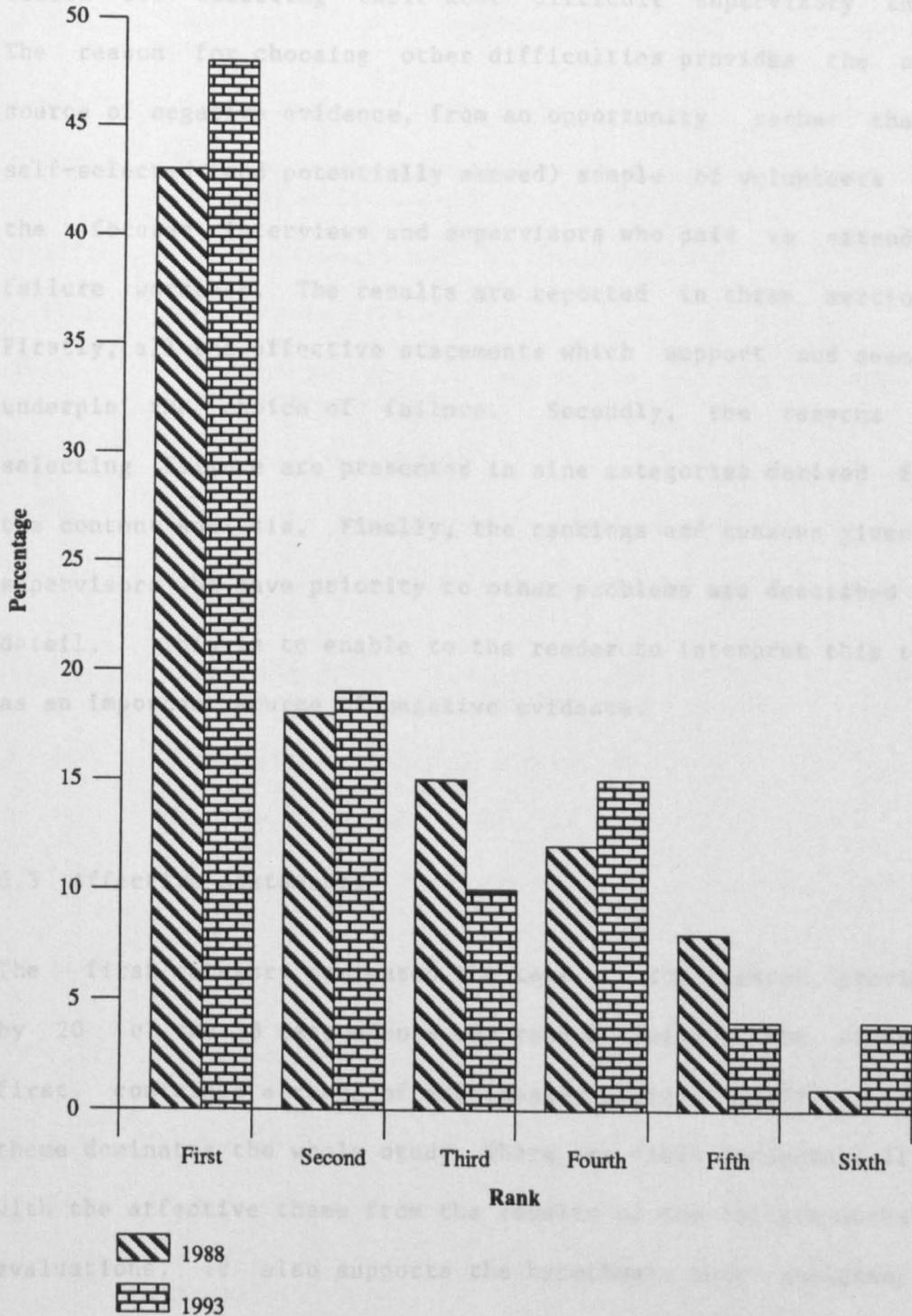
The stress of making the judgement that an occupational therapy student has not achieved the required standard of academic or professional competence is exacerbated by the avoidance of the subject of failure within professional and educational milieux.

In this section the reasons for the selection and non-selection of 'failing a student' as a supervisor's most difficult responsibility, will be discussed. The reasons for the selection of other problems are also described as they provide the only source of negative evidence within the study.

Table 15

Results of the Questionnaire Survey: Ranking Difficulties in the Supervisory Relationship

5. Failing the student



6.2 Reasons for selecting the 'failing the student'

On the 1993 questionnaire 44 of the 48 respondents stated the reason for selecting their most difficult supervisory task. The reason for choosing other difficulties provides the only source of negative evidence, from an opportunity rather than a self-selected (and potentially skewed) sample of volunteers for the focused interviews and supervisors who paid to attend a failure workshop. The results are reported in three sections. Firstly, all the affective statements which support and seem to underpin the choice of failure. Secondly, the reasons for selecting failure are presented in nine categories derived from the content analysis. Finally, the rankings and reasons given by supervisors who gave priority to other problems are described in detail. This is to enable to the reader to interpret this text as an important source of negative evidence.

6.3 Affective statements

The first category dominated the text. The reasons provided by 20 of the 23 respondents who ranked 'failing the student' first, contained a range of emotionally charged words. This theme dominates the whole study. There are clear conceptual links with the affective theme from the results of the failure workshop evaluations. It also supports the hypothesis that assigning a fail grade is an occupational stressor for both academic and fieldwork assessors. The affective responses were associated with

all nine reasons but are given a separate category to emphasize the onerous nature of this responsibility.

- 1>4B1 "It is difficult to give the bad news."
- 3>4B1 "Difficulty of constructively addressing problem areas."
- 4<10BY1 "This a most difficult task."
- 5<10IY1 "It is very stressful for staff to fail a student both professionally ...and personally."
- 6>4IY1 "It is difficult when a student fails."
- 8>9IY1 "Seems more difficult."
- 9>9I1 "It's never easy to fail anyone ... the thought is still difficult."
- 10>4B1 "It is hard to 'fail'."
- 12>4B1 "Guilt of supervisor in failing student."
- 13>4I1 "Emotions and proportion of blame for both supervisor and student."
- 14<10I1 "Most traumatic for staff and student - whole department, most difficult to make yourself face."
- 15>4B1 "Great pressure on the supervisor."
- 16>4I1 "It remains a dread for the future."
- 17>4I1 "Because of the emotions involved and trauma for the student."
- 18<10I1 "This is difficult for both student and fieldwork educator."
- 19<10IY1 "'Let down' by my colleagues who really should have addressed this before me."
- 20>4B1 "Perceive it as very difficult."
- 22>9B2 "Nobody likes to fail a student."
- 31>9BY1 "Feelings of failure in yourself/abilities as a supervisor."
- 32>10IY1 "It is not in our nature to admit to failure."

This list highlights the negative affective response failing seems to evoke in experienced and trained supervisors. All had completed the basic fieldwork supervisors' course with eleven completing the intermediate course. Nine respondents had been supervisors between 0-4 years, four between 5-9 years and seven for more than 10 years. These biographical details provide a professional context for the personal expressions of difficulty and dread.

6.4 Reasons for ranking failure first

The reasons were placed in nine categories illustrating a diversity of factors which may contribute to this dread and stress of making the judgement that a student has not achieved the required standard of professional competence. The most frequently mentioned category (n=9) encompasses three aspects of the conflict in values between therapist and supervisor roles.

6.4.1 Therapist versus educator role

The first sub-category was concern for the student. This was noted by five respondents.

- 3>4B1 "Implications for the student and their future."
- 8>9IY1 "Seems more difficult ... since the course was a degree and the implications with failure of a placement regarding this."
- 15>4B1 "The consequences to the student who fails are great."
- 17>4I1 "Because of the emotions involved and trauma for the student."

22>9B2 "Nobody likes to fail a student, given the effect it may have on their future/education."

Although this sensitivity to the practical and emotional implications for the student is commendable it reflects a focus upon the negative and immediate consequences,

"frequently students view failing a course as a life tragedy - the worst of all possible fates" (Meisenhelder, 1982).

rather than recognising the possibility of positive immediate and long term outcomes. This concern for the student should not determine or deter the appropriate professional judgement.

The second facet was related to concern for both supervisor and student being noted by two respondents.

14<10I1 "Most traumatic for staff and student - whole department."

18<10I1 "This is difficult for both student and fieldwork educator. Both will require considerable support in the process in order to help them through and accept the reasons for failure. This is sometimes successful and other times very difficult."

These demonstrate awareness of the spread of stress within a department and the need for support for all concerned. Interestingly, both were made by supervisors with more than ten years experience and, who had completed the intermediate course, although it is not possible to assess whether their response was based upon actual experience.

The final element, reported by only one respondent (who had attended a failure workshop), encapsulates the conflict in roles between therapist and educator.

32<10IY1 "As therapists it is not in our nature to admit to failure. We always look for the positive amongst some staff there is a need to 'treat' the student

rather than supervise."

The importance of resisting the "temptation to 'casework' the student" (Ford & Jones, 1987) and the susceptibility to 'treat' was clearly stated by Towle (1954):

"An inordinate demand is made on the fieldwork instructor when she carries this responsibility alone. Students may bring an excessive need for supportive identification and dependency into this relationship. Experience has shown how readily and ill-advisedly the supervisory relationship can 'crash the line' between educational help and therapy."

6.4.2 Students' response

The unpredictability of, and dealing with, the students' response was given as a reason by six respondents.

1>4B1 "Especially if they disagree with your decision."

5<10IY1 "Students can 'blame' the supervisor and be very resentful."

12>4B1 "Resentment between student/supervisor at a time when good communication and honesty is paramount."

16>4I1 "Not knowing how they will respond or the effect it may have on them (despite reassuring discussion on level 3/4 course!)"

19<10IY1 "Need to be objective is not a problem from my point of view but I always anticipate that a student will not be objective."

21>41 "The student expectations and lack of experience clouds their views somewhat."

The results from the focused interviews suggest students react in various ways according to the consequences and circumstances of the decision. However, a pattern had emerged with tears, anger and denial occurring most frequently. Similar reactions are reported in the literature for example, Brown (1983),

Lawrence (1985) and Lang (1988). Perhaps, if failure was confronted and discussed this fear of the unknown could be allayed.

6.4.3 Giving bad news

The next reason, given by five respondents, is the ability to give honest, unambiguous feedback which differentiates between failure of performance and as a person.

1>4B1 "It is difficult to give the bad news."

3>4B1 "Difficulty of constructively addressing problem areas."

10>4B1 "It is hard to 'fail' rather than look for a positive attitude."

11>4B1 "Actually telling the student rather than recognising it is the problem."

14<10I1 "Most difficult interview with the student."

This would seem to be one of the main reasons why failure is avoided because it is easier to

"back off and fail to resolve the matter ... or leave it to the next supervisor to discover and deal with" (Ford & Jones, 1987).

This failure to fail (Lankshear, 1990) with a reluctance to write adverse comments (Bradley, 1990) and avoidance of the written or spoken word (Presseisen, 1987) has been reported in nursing and education literature.

6.4.4 Anticipatory anxiety due to unfamiliarity

The lack of experience of a fail scenario seemed to contribute to

the 'dread' for four supervisors.

9>9I1 "It's never easy to fail anyone - I haven't had to do this, but the thought is still difficult. Perhaps it gets easier if you've had to do it several times?"

16>4I1 "It has not occurred as yet and so it remains a dread for the future."

19<10IY1 "Rarely happens so something which we aren't familiar with on a daily basis."

20>4B1 "I have never been in this position but perceive it as very difficult."

This reason may be linked to two factors: the low incidence of failure and the avoidance of the subject within professional and academic milieux. Interestingly, an increase in the incidence of assigning a fail grade at the half-way stage was reported by failure workshop participants.

6.4.5 Own sense of failure

This, and feelings of guilt illustrate inappropriate attributions of responsibility arising from a causal theory of teaching, negative stereotypes about failure and the difficulty differentiating between teaching and learning.

6>4IY1 "Feelings of failure as supervisors (did I do enough) - value judgements."

7>9B1 "Possibly failing a student may lead to personal feelings of poor performance."

31>9BY1 "Feelings of failure in yourself/abilities as a supervisor."

These faulty cognitions need to be challenged for they contribute to guilt, self-interrogation (Ilott, 1988) and reduced confidence in supervisory abilities (Maybury, 1988) particularly if the

grade is appraised as "evidence of their (ie, an assessor's) own worth" (Eble, 1976).

6.4.6 Time demands

Three respondents reported the high time demands a marginal student requires and how this time detracts from their primary, clinical responsibilities. This cost factor has permeated the whole research.

10>4B1: "This includes time problems as well as the problems of failing ie negatives ... Plus the need for longer communication levels with the college."

13>4I1 "Time involved, changing priorities with maintaining a clinical case-load."

21>4I "The amount of support needed for a failing student takes away a great deal of clinical time."

The new business ideology of the "health care industry" (Penn, 1991) may preclude or charge for this extra cost. Time management and allocation of priorities are essential skills which are likely to be increasingly pressured by the purchaser-provider split with contracts in health and social care.

The student who fails may complain that the supervisor has been too busy to devote sufficient time, not realising

"that she had got time for the average student but can't reduce her patient work-load any further in order to give the student the extra time she needed" (Maybury, 1988).

6.4.7 Feelings of guilt and blame

Although this category is similar to an earlier one it was

separated to emphasize the debilitating emotions which may accompany the process of failure.

12>4B1 "Guilt of supervisor in failing student. Guilt of student in perceiving self as 'a problem'."

13>4I1 "Emotions and proportion of blame for both supervisor and student."

These shared emotions have also been reported in the literature, for example

"empathy makes it more agonising ... the teacher's experience can be as painful as the student's" (Meisenhelder, 1982).

6.4.8 Lack of support from Schools

Although this reason was only mentioned by two respondents it is still disturbing. It reflects a challenge to the supervisors' judgement and the School's apparent investment in their selection procedures rather than quality outcomes - a competent practitioner.

4<10BY1 "Lack of communication and support from school often makes this a most difficult task."

6>4IY1 "Pressure from college to pass students as fieldwork placements are supposed to provide supportive learning environments."

This attitude was encountered during the focused interviews and in the literature, for example

"the reluctance of supervisors and tutors to stand firm in defence of standards ... we are faced with what might look slightly absurd to the outside observer - in a profession which claims to be responsible for undertaking tasks requiring high standard performance, all those admitted to training from a wide variety of educational backgrounds are virtually guaranteed success" (Brandon & Davies, 1979).

Although this quotation applies to social work, unfortunately it still seems to be true today for this and other 'caring professions'. During the last six months the media has contained 'horror stories' of incompetent practitioners. Failure and incompetence need to be discussed and confronted in both academic and professional settings.

6.4.9 Professional obligation

The final reason provides a conceptual link between the failure workshop evaluations and the prime reason for assigning a fail grade.

4<10BY1 "It is in the best interests for OT not to pass unsuitable candidates."

19<10IY1 "May feel if a student has achieved in previous placement that I have been 'let down' by my colleagues who really should have addressed this before me."

Interestingly, in other parts of the study this obligation has acted as a mediating factor, reducing the trauma whereas here it is given as the reason for the difficulty. This contradiction would seem to reflect the potential for multiple constructions of reality. However, the last statement does reflect the consensus amongst the interviewees that failure was more tolerable earlier, rather than later in the course.

6.5 Negative examples

Although 23 from 48 supervisors rated failing as the most

difficult task, the reasons provided by those who did not also deserve attention. They provide the only source of negative data in contrast to the other potentially skewed, self-selected samples. These results will be presented in two sections. Firstly, the ranking given to the other statements and then the reasons. These will be given in full to allow the reader to interpret. The questionnaire did not probe their motivation, for example asking why they had not selected 'failing the student'. This was to conceal the purpose and therefore to reduce the potential for bias.

6.5.1 Ranking of other problems

The results of the six statements are presented in order of presentation on the questionnaire (Appendix 4) and are supplemented by histograms to highlight the differences.

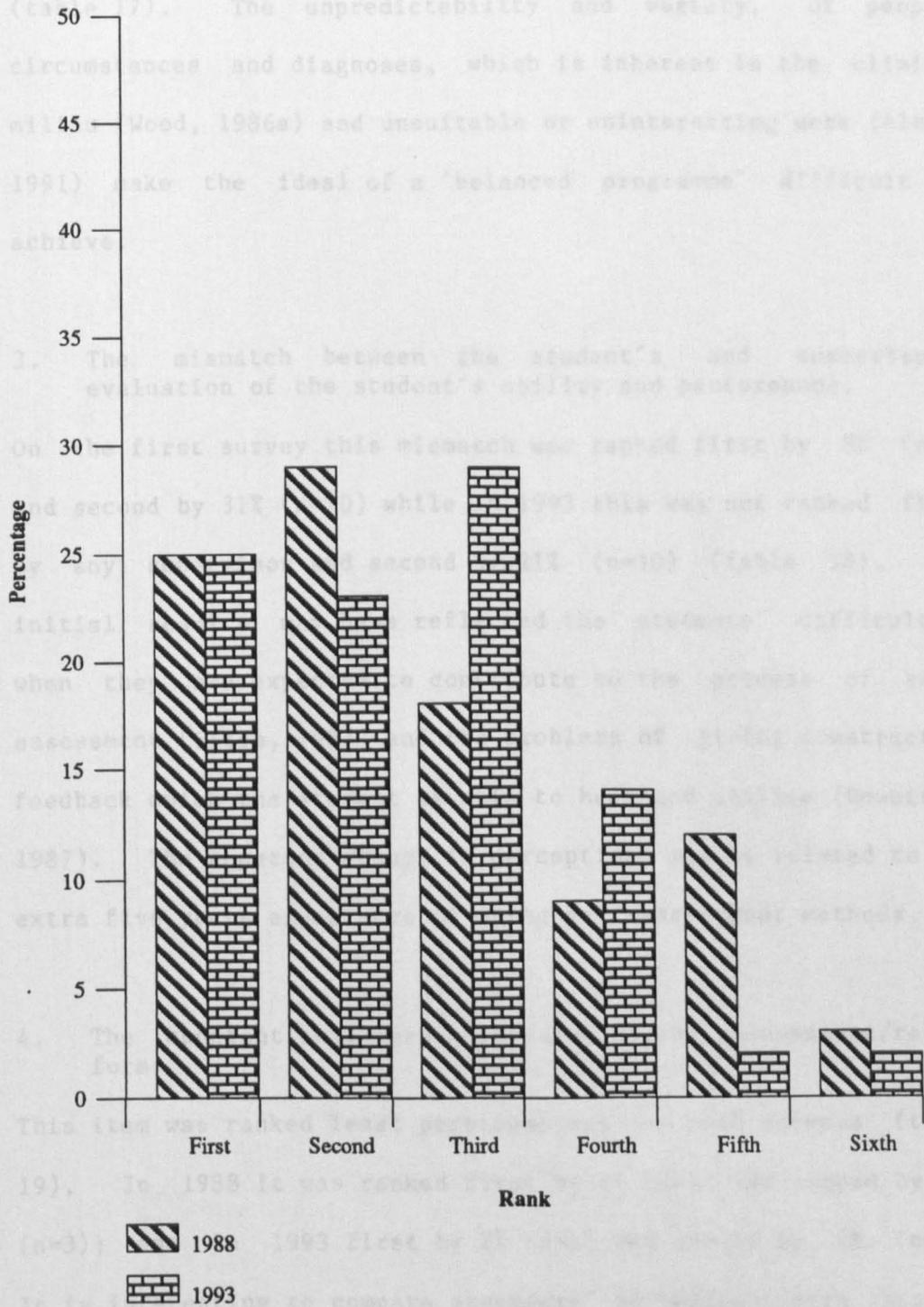
1. The amount of time involved in the tasks of preparation, programme planning, supervision and feedback, for example.

On both surveys time (table 16) was ranked as the second most problematical aspect. In 1988 it was ranked first by 26% (n=17) and second by 29% (n=19) and in 1993 first by 25% (n=12) and ranked second by 23% (n=11). The constraints of time and the dual but often conflicting demands of the role of supervisor and clinician has been reported many times, for example by Struthers (1977), Watt (1981), Everden (1986), Marson (1987), Cohn & From (1988), Maybury (1988) and Alsop (1991).

Table 16

Results of the Questionnaire Survey: Ranking Difficulties in the Supervisory Relationship

1. The amount of time involved in the tasks of preparation, programme planning, supervision and feedback, for example.



2. Providing a balanced programme which is relevant to the student's level of training.

In 1988 this difficulty was ranked first by 15% (n=10) and second by 20% (n=13) in comparison with 10% (n=5) and 23% (n=11) in 1993 (table 17). The unpredictability and variety, of people, circumstances and diagnoses, which is inherent in the clinical milieu (Wood, 1986a) and unsuitable or uninteresting work (Alsop, 1991) make the ideal of a 'balanced programme' difficult to achieve.

3. The mismatch between the student's and supervisor's evaluation of the student's ability and performance.

On the first survey this mismatch was ranked first by 8% (n=5) and second by 31% (n=20) while in 1993 this was not ranked first by any supervisor and second by 21% (n=10) (table 18). The initial results may have reflected the students' difficulties when they are expected to contribute to the process of self-assessment (Elton, 1987) and the problems of giving constructive feedback which the student is able to hear and utilize (Rowntree, 1987). The apparent change in perceptions may be related to the extra five years experience of using self-assessment methods.

4. The constant awareness - threat - of the assessment/report form.

This item was ranked least problematical on both surveys (table 19). In 1988 it was ranked first by 1% (n=1) and second by 5% (n=3); and in 1993 first by 2% (n=1) and second by 8% (n=4). It is interesting to compare assessors' perceptions with those of students. On measure of anxiety Kleehammer et al (1990)

Table 17

Results of the Questionnaire Survey: Ranking Difficulties in the Supervisory Relationship

2. Providing a balanced programme which is relevant to the student's level of training

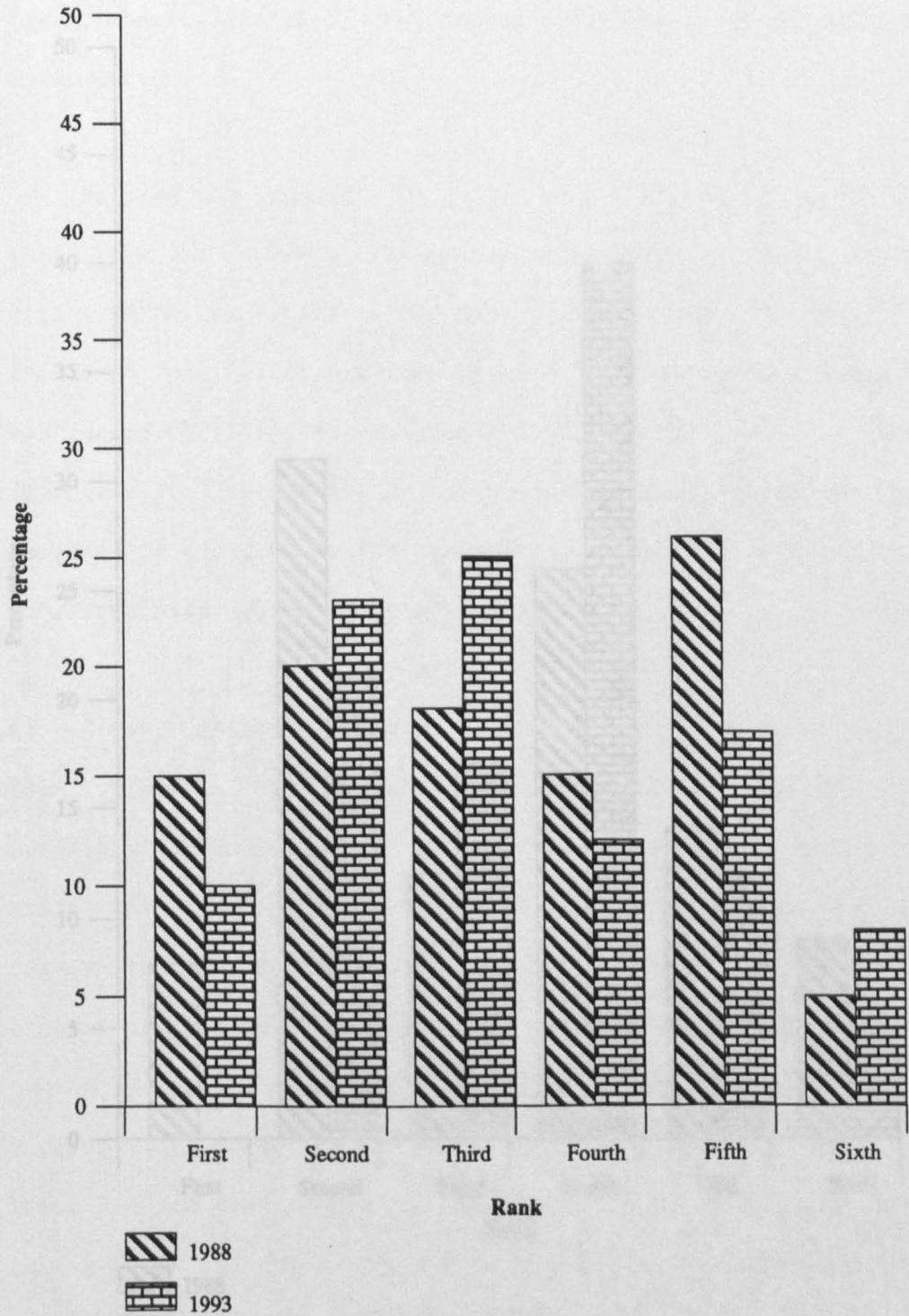
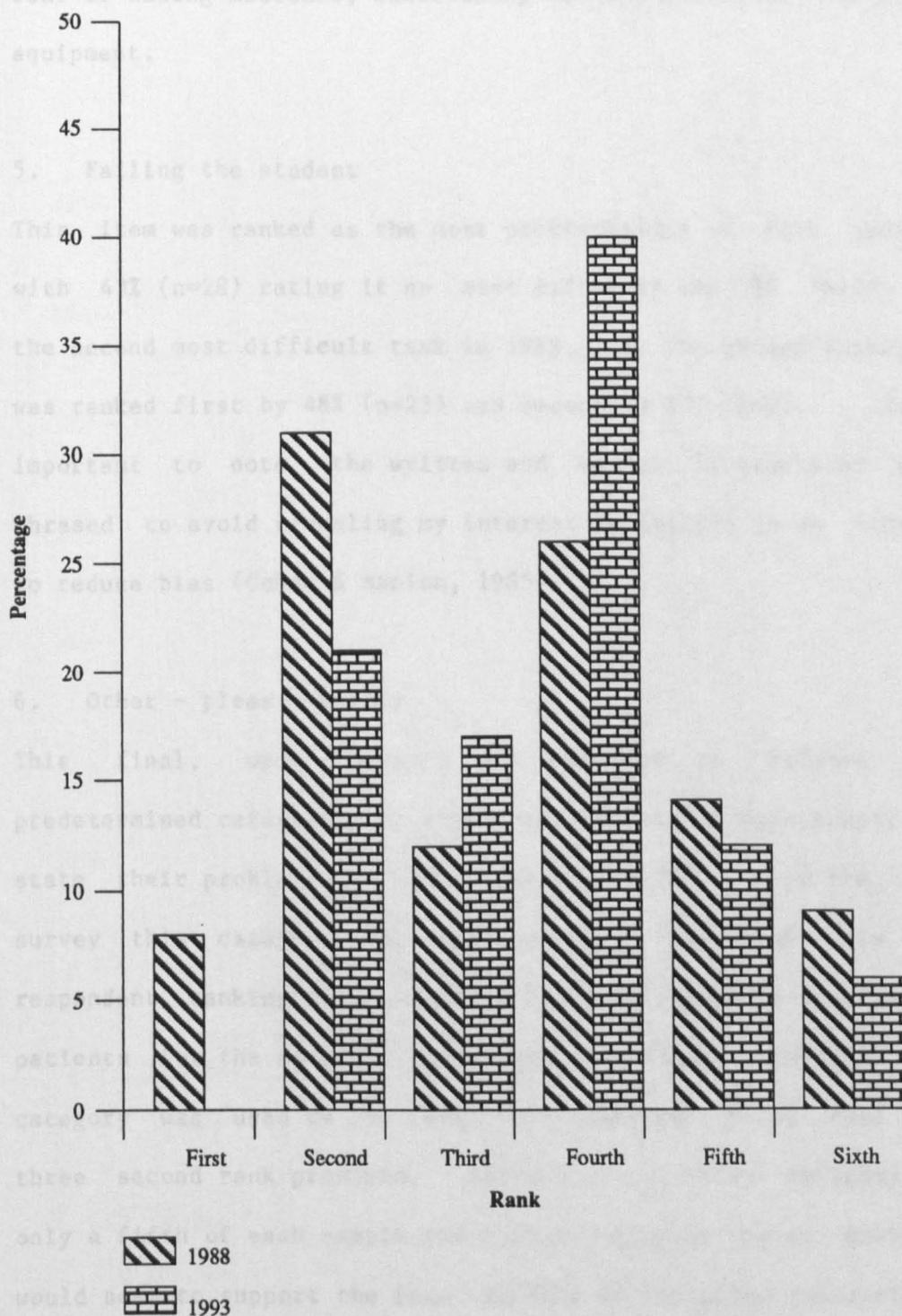


Table 18

Results of the Questionnaire Survey: Ranking Difficulties in the Supervisory Relationship

3. The mismatch between the student's and supervisor's evaluation of the student's ability and performance.



reported 67% of nursing students identified being observed by instructors as anxiety provoking, with 62% reporting anxiety when being evaluated by faculty staff. Most anxiety provoking was fear of making mistakes, undertaking nursing procedures and using equipment.

5. Failing the student

This item was ranked as the most problematical on both surveys with 43% (n=28) rating it as most difficult and 18% (n=12) as the second most difficult task in 1988. On the second survey it was ranked first by 48% (n=23) and second by 19% (n=9). It is important to note the written and verbal instructions were phrased to avoid revealing my interest in failure in an attempt to reduce bias (Cohen & Manion, 1985).

6. Other - please specify

This final, open category was provided to balance the predetermined categories by giving respondents an opportunity to state their problems and priorities (table 20). On the 1988 survey this category was used by 21% (n=14) with only one respondent ranking their selected problem (related to selecting patients for the students' case-load) as second. In 1993 this category was used by 25% (n=12) including one first rank and three second rank problems. The use of this open category by only a fifth of each sample and mainly for lower ranked problems would seem to support the face validity of the given categories.

Interestingly, the results from these six statements were similar

Table 19

Results of the Questionnaire Survey: Ranking Difficulties in the Supervisory Relationship

4. The constant awareness - threat - of the assessment/report form

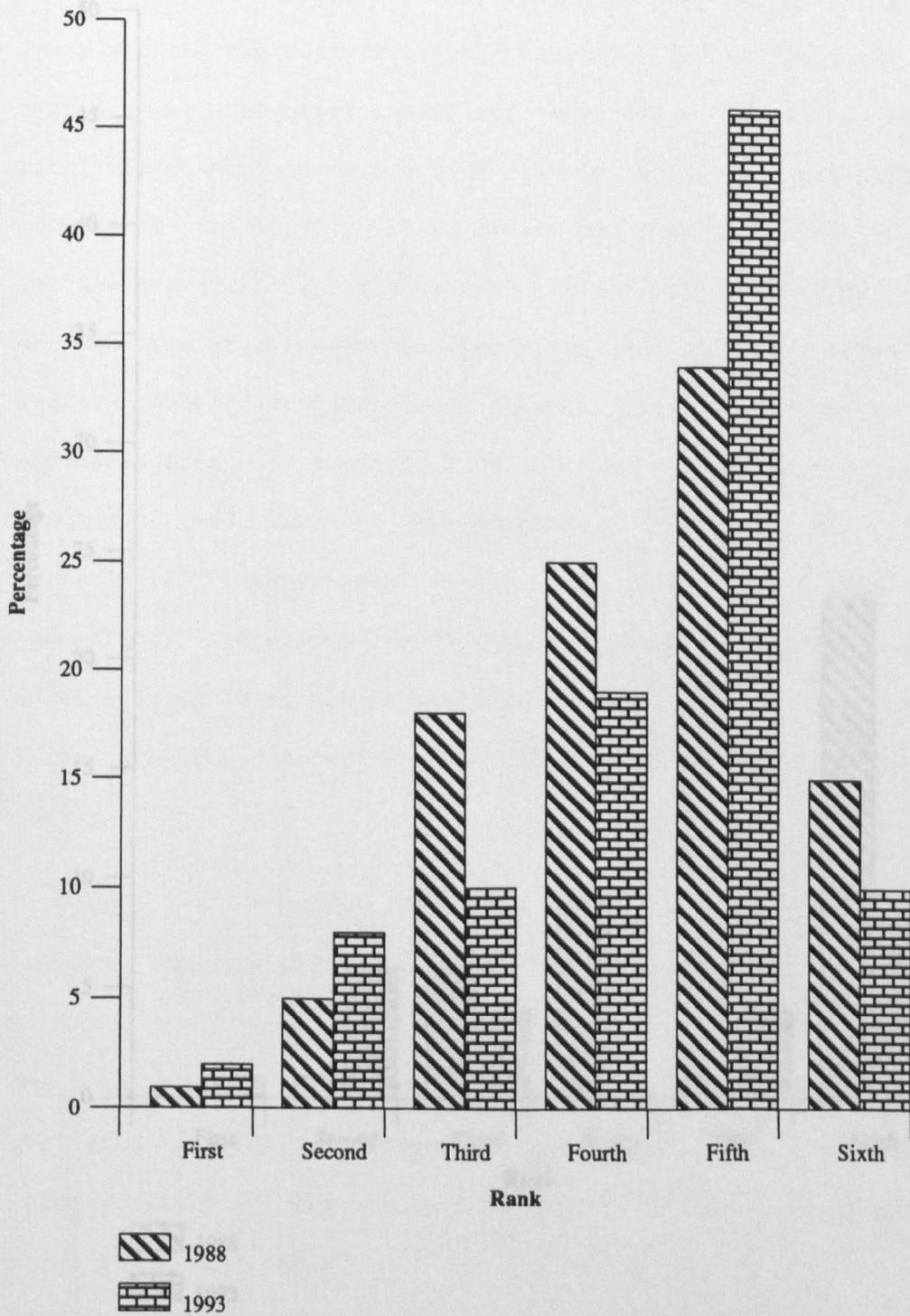
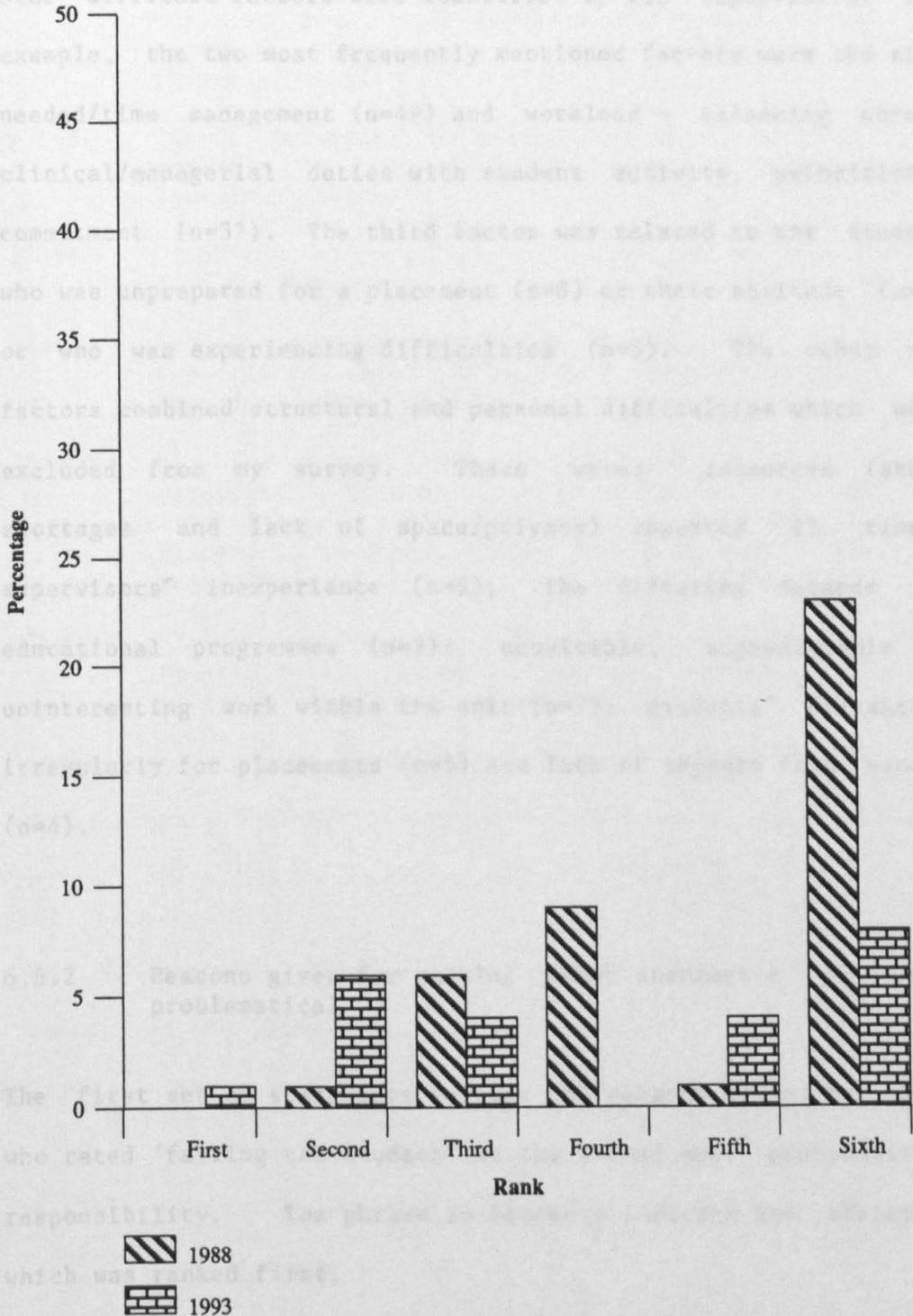


Table 20

Results of the Questionnaire Survey: Ranking Difficulties in the Supervisory Relationship

6. Other



to those obtained by Alsop (1991) using an open question on a postal questionnaire about fieldwork curriculum development. Nine difficult factors were identified by 102 supervisors. For example, the two most frequently mentioned factors were the time needed/time management (n=49) and workload - balancing normal clinical/managerial duties with student activity, prioritising commitment (n=37). The third factor was related to the student who was unprepared for a placement (n=8) or their attitude (n=8) or who was experiencing difficulties (n=5). The other six factors combined structural and personal difficulties which were excluded from my survey. These were: resources (staff shortages and lack of space/privacy) reported 13 times; supervisors' inexperience (n=9); the differing demands of educational programmes (n=9); unsuitable, unpredictable or uninteresting work within the unit (n=7); students' presenting irregularly for placements (n=5) and lack of support from others (n=4).

6.5.2 Reasons given for ranking other statements as most problematical

The first set of statements reflect the reasons given by those who rated 'failing the student' as the second most problematical responsibility. The phrase in brackets indicate the statement which was ranked first.

22>9B2 "Nobody likes to fail a student, given the effect it may have on their future/education." (Time)

24>4B2 "Trying to give the appropriate amount of time

without it affecting time spent on clinical duties too much - difficult when majority of work is weekly individual sessions." (Time)

25<10I2 "Just the sheer amount of time it takes to provide a clinical experience for the student - and one does as well as possible. Supervisors are busy anyway and something has to go in order to supervise the student properly." (Time)

26>4B2 "Staff shortage, heavy case-load - usually it is possible to cope adequately with all these aspects however." (Time)

27>4B2 "I am the only qualified OT in my area and workload is high." (Time)

29>4B2 "Sometimes the students have very high and unrealistic expectations about the amount of supervision which they should receive." (Time)

30>9B2 "I have a very mixed case-load with many long term patients. Student placements depend on what is happening at that time in the hospital. Longer placements have made follow through easier." (Balanced programme)

28>9IY2 "This often interferes with the student behaving in a relaxed way. Therefore produce 'abnormal behaviour patterns'." (Threat of assessment)

These reasons were given by six who rated time as the most problematical factor with one respondent giving the statements related to a balanced programme and the threat of assessment.

The next statements were made by those who ranking 'failing the student' as the third most difficult task.

33<10I3 "Ever moving workforce, new placement being set up, opening of new hospital, keeping all staff to the same standards with new joining." (Time)

44<10I3 "Competing demands on the therapists time - increased clinical workload, contracting, other students in dept/service." (Time)

47<10IY3 "Rapid change over of students - different courses and years, essential to have planning in place." (Time)

34<10I3 "Fitting everything into a 6 week time limit especially

with other demands being placed on you in the work due to all NHS changes." (Other)

42>4B3 "Particularly difficult as such in a specialised area and community. Also do not know workload until the Monday of each week therefore planning is difficult." (Balanced programme)

The primary problem for three respondents was time, with a balanced programme noted by one. Interestingly, four had been supervisors for more than 10 years.

The following statements were made by those who ranked failure as fourth most difficult.

35>9BY4 "Planning supervision and feedback - difficult to stick to arranged time, when working in a busy OT dept especially when also short staffed." (Time)

36>9I4 "I have quite a busy time moving sites anyway and supervising others. The chores listed in 1 do take up a lot of time, fitting them in requires management and forethought." (Time)

38>4I4 "Nos 1,3,4,5 represent practical difficulties and difficulties coping with emotions .. . also they may not occur on any one placement. No 2 however is a constant problem which challenges our skills given finite resources, to provide the very best for a student." (Balanced programme)

41>4B4 "Whether there is enough variety/resources within the placement to meet the students' needs and to be a useful placement." (Balanced programme)

45>9I4 "Ensuring adequacy of experience/case work for short placements in a community mental health setting: need to identify clients which student may work with prior to student commencing without knowing experience or learning needs. Short placement times make it difficult for student to gain any experience of being responsible for a case-load yet unrealistic to accompany supervisor all the time." (Other)

46>4B4 "Mainly related to the unit I work in - neurosis day unit. I find this difficult to do for a basic grade on 6/12 rotation and even more so for first and second year students - particularly as regards individual work. Experience in group therapy is much easier to provide and grade." (Balanced programme)

The next set of statements were made by supervisors who ranked failure fifth from six statements.

40>4BY5 "Pressure of wanting to be able to provide the best possible placement for student. Very difficult when procedures are so complex and time is so limited and rushed." (Balanced programme)

43<10IY5 "The pressure of work in the acute unit sector is often unpredictable. Referrals may be heavy/light and students' expectations of patient stay does not match up to real lengths of stay of patients on acute wards." (Balanced programme)

These two supervisors, who had both attended other relevant courses, gave priority to the difficulty of organising a balanced programme.

The final statements were given by two supervisors who rated failing as the least problematical responsibility.

48<10IY6 "Too many systems but these do not seem to produce 'better' OTs. The multiple systems, forms etc from the different OT courses where students come from is a waste of time. If we had one system it would be much simpler!" (Other)

37<10I6 Time - no statement

All these statements seem to reflect the supervisors' pragmatism for their priority was planning and implementation. The context of organisational change or constraints and multiple roles seemed to stimulate their concern to enhance the student's learning experience.

6.6 Conclusion to the questionnaire survey

Although these short, self-completion questionnaires formed a

subsidiary part of the study, they provided an additional source of data about the supervisors' perspective. On both the 1988 and 1993 surveys more than two-thirds of trained, experienced supervisors ranked 'failing the student' as the first or second most problematical aspect of their role. The qualitative data supplemented results gained from other methods, particularly about affective responses and supervisory skills, thereby supporting the two hypotheses. There was one notable difference. The opportunity sample of 113 supervisors provided negative examples ie supervisors who gave priority to time constraints and programme planning, rather than assigning a fail grade. However, due to methodological limitations it is only possible to speculate about the reasons, for example whether this is due to chronic daily hassles, lack of 'failure' experience or other reasons.

7. FAILURE WORKSHOPS - ARE THEY WORTHWHILE?

7.1 Introduction to the failure workshops

In 1989 and 1990 101 fieldwork supervisors attended five failure workshops at Derby. The workshops were intended to fulfil three purposes. Firstly, to provide a training course to support those responsible for judging incompetence to practise. They provided an opportunity to gather information for a content analysis of failure in preparation for the focused interviews. Finally, to investigate the hypotheses related to the participants' perceptions of the value of a course designed to improve their confidence and the quality of their decision making. This second, subsidiary method is an intermediary, a progression from the previous survey and in preparation for the focused interviews.

This section outlines the content and format of the programme and then reports the results of the participants' immediate, four month and one year follow-up evaluations. The description is presented with the results from the immediate evaluation about elements of and the whole programme. This formative feedback obtained from brief, self-completion questionnaires provided "illumination of the scheme in practice" (Hutchinson et al, 1988) as the organisers' piloted an innovative workshop. The general information about the process of failure and the forward transfer of learning are then reported in three themes of affective responses, reinforcement of supervisory strategies and

professional obligations. These multi-faceted themes emerged in the reasons for attending the workshop and were sustained throughout the evaluations. Although the data is accepted as producing illuminative rather than generalizable results (Goulding, 1984) because of the small scale nature of this element, they are consistent with and as such, complement the whole study.

A course which specifically addressed the topic of failure was a recommendation arising from the first study (Ilott, 1988). There was unanimous agreement amongst all interviewees (n=11) about the twofold importance of training: to help prepare supervisors and to "get failure out into the open". An extensive literature review revealed only three references to courses which considered failure as a separate topic. A half-day workshop on assessing a borderline student, with a one year follow-up evaluation was described by Brozenec et al (1987). A case study was used to focus on the "especially difficult task of evaluating intangible characteristics". She describes the differences of opinion amongst the 30 experienced and novice nurse assessors regarding assigning a pass or fail grade as "somewhat unsettling". This exercise demonstrates that supervisors may vary in their judgement of the same student, even when presented with exactly the same evidence. The value of the workshop was acknowledged in the follow-up evaluation. Participants reported implementing suggested strategies and a greater understanding of personal perceptions on assessment. In a personal communication Best (1988) reports including sessions on failing students as part of

fieldwork supervisors' workshops. These combine counselling skills with recommendations to use a structured system of observation and daily written feedback for all students to allow early identification of problems and for the supervisor to feel "satisfied that she has done everything possible to help." Bradley (1990) describes a training course and a 'helpful hints handbook' for new nurse assessors which emphasized strategies particularly recording and honest report writing rather than "a luke warm satisfactory" grade, suggesting both are necessary to ensure the few students who perform so badly are not allowed to pass as this would be

"unfair to patients to allow them to qualify simply because of the reluctance of qualified staff to record accurately their assessment of a students' failure to achieve competence."

This statement encapsulates the importance of preparing assessors for a fail scenario. These exemplars of good practice, supplemented with suggestions from fieldwork organisers and supervisors at Derby influenced the design of the failure workshops. They received favourable immediate and follow-up evaluations. This would seem to support both their effectiveness and the hypothesis:

"Training courses which are designed to confront the topic of failure, by providing an opportunity to reflect upon the personal and professional consequences of working with borderline or unsatisfactory students, will be appraised by the participants, as contributing toward an increase in confidence on immediate and follow-up evaluations."

However, this was subject to a logical contradiction on the one year survey when 94% (n=35) supported the inclusion of failure within the curriculum for all fieldwork supervisors courses.

The success of the failure workshops mean they should become redundant because the topic is relevant for all supervisors.

7.2 Aims and Programme for the failure workshops: Introduction

In 1989 and 1990 101 fieldwork supervisors responded to local and national advertisements to participate in five failure workshops organised by the author and colleagues from the Derby School of Occupational Therapy. The same programme was presented by the same team. The similarity in response on the immediate and follow-up evaluations suggests the participants' experience was comparable. The following description of the workshop programme and the discussion of results will therefore encompass all five workshops.

7.2.1 Aim and objectives

The aim stated on the workshop programme was:

"To explore the challenges and consequences, both personally and professionally, of failing an occupational therapy student on clinical practice".

The intention was to acknowledge the dynamic interdependence between personal and professional needs thereby discrediting the

"destructive belief that helpers can cope with anything and do not themselves need help and support" (Roberts, 1986).

Supervisors' needs may be masked or denied by their professional role and status as assessors. The workshop aim reflected the need for balance between understanding and acceptance of the personal trauma with the professional

obligation to fairly judge competence, or incompetence to practise through the collection of sufficient, suitable evidence to justify either outcome (Howard, 1979).

The aim was supported by four objectives:

1. To identify the criteria for failure.
2. To appreciate a range of strategies which may be utilised by a supervisor.
3. To improve understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the student, school and fieldwork supervisor.
4. To provide an opportunity to share experiences and exchange ideas.

The appropriateness of the aim and objectives seem to be confirmed by the participants' evaluations. For example, on the immediate evaluation 94% (n=94) affirmed the workshop had met their needs, their expectations 96% (n=96) with 91% (n=91) agreeing the workshop objectives had been achieved.

7.2.2 Workshop programme. Morning session: description and evaluation

The programme simulated the natural sequence of decision making and action with a student whose performance is borderline or unsatisfactory. The workshop commenced with an introduction designed to place the topic in a personal, historical and research context. Important elements were the use of self-disclosure and quotations from the first study, for example:

"It's been like a shadow hanging over me. It was five years ago and I still feel guilty. I felt awful - what had I ruined in just one afternoon; exhausted and put off having other students. All that effort, explaining to someone who was disinterested and making no effort to learn. I didn't gain anything" (Anon 1988).

The audience were invited to react, to acknowledge the reality of failure as a difficult, but essential event which needs to be confronted, not evaded.

Identifying a criterion for failure formed the next part of the programme. The participants were asked to sub-divide into groups with a mix of people with and without experience of assigning a fail grade. Two tasks were set. Firstly, time was allowed for the members to introduce themselves and outline their experience of working with borderline and unsatisfactory students. Secondly, to compile a standard or checklist of behaviours, skills and attitudes which would constitute failure and also differentiate between borderline and unsatisfactory performance. Each group presented their criteria to the whole group. The detail, opinions and values expressed in these presentations provided a natural springboard for a discussion of general educational principles. These included the dilemmas and benefits of subjective and objective aspects of assessment (Blomquist, 1985), a review of the causal theory of teaching (Ericson & Ellett, 1987), the contradictory characteristics of an apprenticeship model of supervision, particularly related to the roles of counsellor and assessor (COT 1984), and aspects of attribution theory relevant to feedback strategies (Daines, 1977) and affective responses (Graham, 1984). The collated checklists supplemented with summaries from similar studies (Darragh et al 1986 and Ilott 1988) were distributed after the workshop.

The morning session was evaluated on a nine point semantic

differential scale followed by an invitation to add comments. This single question therefore covered a considerable part of the failure workshop which may have been to the detriment of discrimination.

Table 21 Results: percentage and number of responses to question 1. How helpful was the session 'criteria for failure'?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	extremely unhelpful			neutral			extremely helpful		
Frequency			1	1	1	8	47	33	10
Percentage			1	1	1	8	47	33	10

(Mean 7.36 Standard Deviation 0.98)

The results indicate that 90% (n=90) rated this part of the workshop toward the extremely helpful pole. A majority of participants, 59 from 101, used the opportunity to comment. The content analysis highlighted three themes: the reassurance and support gained from sharing experiences (n=47); aspects related to assessment, particularly the complexity of criteria for failure and increased awareness of the subjectivity or objectivity involved (n=27); and comments related to the small group format which provided an appropriate introductory forum (n=16).

The most frequently reported comment made by nearly half of the respondents (n=29) may be illustrated by a single, but typical quotation:

"It was very helpful sharing other people's experiences about failing students."

Other facets of this theme included the sense of reassurance and support gained from expressing and sharing personal feelings:

"It gave at last a chance to share uncomfortable experiences."

These two quotations encapsulate the benefit of listening and expressing concerns within a small group. They reflect the assurance gained from a "sense of universality" (Yalom, 1985) which was expressed by five respondents:

"It was good to see that others feel as I do about failing students."

Aspects of assessment was the second most frequently mentioned theme. The sense of reassurance gained from recognition of similar standards regarding unsatisfactory performance was noted by seven supervisors.

"It was very helpful. It was good to pool ideas, see that people are feeling the same way about failing students and are using the same criteria."

This may reflect their 'expert role' which supports the validity and inter-rater reliability of their definitions of incompetence.

"So long as experts share similar paradigms of the behaviours being measured. When experts agree, not only do we get inter-rater reliability, but we also get some form of validity, since the experts judge performances in real-life performance as well as the specific criteria generated for the test" (Friedman & Mennin, 1991).

The difficulty of quantifying performance indicators (n=2) related to the dilemmas about subjective (n=5) and objective (n=2) aspects of the assessment with the onus upon the students' responsibility to learn (n=4) was commented upon by thirteen supervisors:

"It has helped me to be more objective - I hope - to see where it is not my problem but theirs."

These statements seem to suggest the discussion was successful in reinforcing aspects of supervisory skills, particularly appropriate attribution of responsibility for teaching and learning.

Although the majority of comments were positive there were some criticisms. These were related to the length of and digressions which occurred during the discussion (n=3), the need for a group facilitator or leader (n=2) and lack of a specific criterion (n=2).

7.2.3 Afternoon session: description and evaluation

Strategies for coping with failure were considered next. The participants returned to their groups to watch a video of three final report giving meetings between supervisor and student. They were joined by two facilitators, a fieldwork organiser and a lecturer skilled in group dynamics. The video was intended to trigger an emotional response followed by intellectual reflection upon the scenarios. These included student distress and regression, an angry confrontation demonstrating lack of understanding with rigid 'professional' stereotypes between a female supervisor and male student and a manipulative student who persuaded the supervisor (who wanted/needed "to make everything better") to change the result from a fail to a pass. The emotional impact was acknowledged before the situation was analysed, to identify alternative coping strategies along a temporal continuum from prevention, to more appropriate ways of

dealing with the students' reaction and suggestions for follow-up support for the student and supervisor. They ranged from simple, practical points for example, ensuring the availability of tissues anticipating a tearful response, to awareness of gender or generational conflicts and non-verbal methods of reinforcing the reality of a fail grade.

This session was rated towards the extremely helpful pole of the semantic differential by 84% (n=84) of the participants. The next table reports the range of results followed by an analysis of the comments made by 72 of the 101 participants.

Table 22 Results: percentage and number of responses to question 2: How helpful was the session 'strategies for coping with failure'?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	extremely unhelpful			neutral			extremely helpful		
Frequency		1	1	3	12	33	44	7	
Percentage		1	1	3	12	33	44	7	
(Mean 7.33 Standard Deviation 1.04)									

The comments about the quality and value of the videos were divided into three categories. Firstly, compliments about the usefulness and standard of performance (n=30) for example an "Oscar goes to the actors in the video". Their value for stimulating discussion (n=17) and sharing personal experiences (n=9). Finally, as an interesting, enjoyable teaching tool (n=6) which illustrated the perspective of the student and supervisor (n=2) through the use of specific examples (n=5).

The videos were intended to trigger an honest discussion of difficult situations which would engage both affective and cognitive responses. The following quotations seem to support their success in achieving the first element.

"Very interesting. The videos provoked interesting and valuable discussion."

"The videos were good, 'stomach churning' triggers to discussion."

"Very useful because they brought home aspects we may have all dealt with and felt guilty about."

"The videos promoted a lot of feelings about personal experiences and interesting discussion."

The second element, considering and clarifying a range of strategies seemed to be less clear with seven participants complaining about the lack of concrete strategies (n=4), or the need for more structure (n=2) or set School guidelines (n=1) with one supervisor commenting

"Very basic. ? role play to increase relevance."

Only three participants referred to the co-facilitators. They were appreciative of their supportive and leadership role. Their contribution may have been implicit, taken-for-granted rather than an explicit element which gained specific attention. This illustrates the limitation of a general, open self-report questionnaire which is vulnerable to the vagaries of memory retrieval rather than perceptions of importance.

The final session consisted of two elements. Firstly a panel comprising the Principal, Assessment Officer and Fieldwork Organisers from the Derby School of Occupational Therapy. The

participants were invited to pose questions related to the panel members' role and responsibilities linked to assessment, examination rules or regulations and appeal procedures. This provided a forum to connect and highlight the interdependence of the academic and professional components of the educational programme. The conclusion consisted of a review of the positive consequences of failure for the student, supervisor and profession. This provided an opportunity to reinforce the immediate and long term value of failure for all parties to contradict the pervasive destructive connotations. The conclusion therefore reinforced the beginning. The principles and practicalities of failure were considered from a multiperspective recognising the personal trauma but professional obligation.

This session was also evaluated using a semantic differential scale giving a split response between neutral and extremely helpful.

Table 23 Results: percentage and number of responses to question 3: How helpful was the 'consequences of failure' and the panel session?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	extremely unhelpful			neutral			extremely helpful		
Frequency			6	24	52	55	20	7	
Percentage			4	15	32	34	12	4	
	(Mean		6.49	Standard Deviation			1.12)		

Only 31 of the 101 participants used the comment section. The most helpful aspects of the 'open' panel session were categorised

into three themes. Information about School procedures including the appeals policy (n=9). Reassurance gained from confirmation of support networks available to students and supervisors (n=7) and finally the opportunity to ask questions and gain clarification on points of personal interest (n=6). These details confirm the educational partnership.

"The panel session emphasized the enthusiasm of the School to work closely with fieldwork supervisors."

13Upre "I liked the Principal's reassurances about listening to our professional judgement. It was a comfort."

The summary gave priority to the positive consequences of failure. These points received limited attention with only one supervisor repeating the need to maintain standards and two supervisors focusing upon positive outcomes:

"It was the first really positive look at failure."

Interestingly, these aspects were sustained and gained prominence in the follow-up surveys.

7.2.4 Overall evaluation

The participants evaluated the effectiveness of the whole workshop in meeting their expectations, needs and the workshop objectives. The following table indicates that over 90% considered these had been achieved.

Table 24 Results: percentage and number of responses to question 4: Did the workshop meet your expectations, needs and the objectives?

	Yes	Partially	No	No Response
TOTALS				
Expectations	96% (n=96)	2% (n=2)	3% (n=3)	-
Needs	94% (n=94)	1% (n=1)	3% (n=3)	3% (n=3)
The objectives	91% (n=91)	2% (n=2)	3% (n=3)	5% (n=5)

This table seems to affirm the effectiveness of the structure and content of the programme in meeting the immediate expectations, needs and objectives for the majority of participants. However, this positive immediate evaluation was treated with caution for such impressions are susceptible to initial euphoria and conformity effects which are unlikely to be sustained or transferred into practice. The follow-up evaluations were designed to investigate whether any effects were enduring particularly those related to confidence and competence in confronting failure.

7.3 Fieldwork supervisors' perspective on the process of failing a student : Introduction

All the evaluations contained general questions about the process of failure. This section contains the results presented in three themes which span the reason for attendance to the one year

follow-up survey. The themes provide an insight into the subjective world of assessors and suggest ways in which the failure to fail could be prevented or reduced.

The four month and one year postal surveys provided two interesting sets of results related to the the incidence of assigning a fail grade and perceptions of failure. The biographical detail seemed to highlight an increase in the incidence of confronting failure with one supervisor reporting experience of working with a borderline student on the first survey, this number rising to 11 one year later. This increase may be related to the lapse in time allowing further opportunities to experiment and integrate knowledge into their supervisory practise or extra confidence in confronting the possibility of failure by giving honest feedback at the half-way stage.

In contrast to these objective outcomes, the subjective perceptions extending from the reasons for attending to the one year follow-up were categorised into three, multi-faceted themes. These were

1. Affective response: recognition of the feelings associated with assigning a fail grade including guilt, isolation, personal failure, fear and anxiety; the support gained through sharing experiences (either through expression or listening) which is related to the realisation that such feelings are a normal/usual response; the increase in confidence and conviction which accompanies confronting the prospect and process of assigning a fail grade; understanding the spread of stress within departments and sources of support available for supervisors and students.

2. Reinforcement of the supervisory role, responsibilities and strategies: the desire to learn about and therefore to be prepared for dealing with failure including recognition of the positive aspects of the process and outcome; clarification of criteria for incompetence; increased awareness of objective and subjective aspects of assessment; recognition of the importance of honest, regular and documented feedback; understanding the 'students' responsibility to learn' underpinned but not determined by appropriate supervisory strategies; knowledge of the School examination rules, regulations and appeal procedures.

3. Obligation to maintain future standards of professional practice: appreciation of their responsibility to differentiate between competence and incompetence; ability to place the immediate personal trauma within a longer term professional perspective.

These complementary themes permeate the whole research.

Each theme will be considered along a temporal dimension, from the reasons for attending, to their immediate reaction and the forward transfer of learning into their practise, at periods of four months and one year. The intention is to highlight continuities and variations in emphasis starting with the personal affective theme and moving outward to supervisory skills and professional obligations.

7.3.1 Affective response: Reasons for attending a failure workshop

The third and fourth most frequently cited reasons (from five) were related to the affective component. These were the opportunity to share experiences, both through expression and listening with other supervisors. This formed 20% of the total reasons and was mentioned by 29 participants, 19 of whom related

their experience of working with borderline or unsatisfactory students. The second reason related to support (n=23 16%) and comprised three aspects, gaining support which included increasing confidence (n=8), decreasing guilt (n=2) and as a source of reassurance (n=5), obtaining information on sources of support available to supervisors (n=5) and means of giving support to departmental colleagues during a fail scenario (n=3).

For example,

"To share experiences on failure and to bring back some ideas on how to cope with failing a student."

"Having experienced failing a student it seemed appropriate to attend! It is such a traumatic, soul-searching responsibility one needs as much knowledge and support as possible."

"Having recently failed a student and having very little experience supervising students, I felt it would be valuable to look in more detail at this area and listen to other's opinions."

"I have been involved with failing a student and had felt guilty about this, although I basically felt it was the right thing to do. I wanted to hear others' views on this and their ideas."

Having failed a student at the half-way stage I was interested in other supervisors' feelings about this; to gain support and confidence to help make these decisions in the future."

17N "To explore the implications of dealing with failure when supervising students and to enable support of other staff in the department when this happens to them."

"I recently made a decision on a borderline student. I now regret passing them, I realised it was my lack of confidence."

The final statement summarises the important relationship between confidence and experience which seems to influence the judgement.

7.3.2 Immediate evaluation: affective changes

Participants were invited to comment upon the overall impact upon their feelings and thoughts with 90% responding in the affirmative stating their views had been influenced in a variety of positive directions. The first and third (of six) most frequently mentioned differences related to changes in their affective awareness. These were a recognition of the shared feelings of isolation, guilt and fear which dealing with failure evokes (n=35 30%) and an increase in confidence in dealing with borderline or unsatisfactory students (n=19 16%).

The category of shared feelings was expressed in three ways: as a general statement linked to recognition of feelings (n=15), a reduction in feelings of guilt associated with assigning a fail grade (n=15) and a decrease in the fear of failure (n=5). For example,

- 11N "It has reassured me that my thoughts and feelings are very similar to those of other therapists on this topic."
"Less of a feeling of isolation."
"I am less afraid of having to fail a student."
"Emphasized the responsibility of failing a student when appropriate and not to feel guilty about it."
- 20Upre "I don't feel so anxious, worried or guilty about considering failing."
"Recognised other supervisors have difficulties too - a relief. It's OK to find it hard to deal with my feelings."
"Feel less uncomfortable about failing a student, more aware of own feelings."

The third most frequently mentioned change related to the word 'confidence' (n=19). The emphasis was upon an increase in confidence and coping abilities, for example

"More comfortable and confident about failing a student and see it in perspective."

"I see the prospect of a student failing as less daunting. I feel I would be able to cope better."

24N "In making me feel a little more confident in my own feelings of having the courage to face the student with her failure to meet requirements."

"I now feel much more confident in what I look for in students and has made me realise that I can't be afraid of failing students."

Although these immediate, positive changes in perception support the hypothesis they may have been transitory, reflecting the support gained during the workshop. The applicability to the supervisors' work with marginal students is a more appropriate indicator of success.

7.3.3 Four month follow-up survey: affective changes

Respondents were invited to describe their experience of working with borderline or unsatisfactory students since attending the failure workshop. This section was completed by 6 of the 26 respondents. They reported the following influences upon their feelings. Half noted a reduction in feelings of anxiety or guilt for example,

17N "It made me more aware of the students' responsibility for failure. This relieved my guilt feelings associated with failing a student."

"It helped alleviate the guilt and shoulder the burden."

4Bi/U1 "I felt less anxious than I would have previously
Post (although it was still not easy)."

Other feelings included reassurance, more confidence and sense of control and are summed up in one statement:

5N "It is not a crime to fail a student if the student is not good enough"

These six examples seems to confirm the continuation and incorporation of confidence to confront failure into their supervisory roles.

This assertion is also supported by results from other parts of the survey. A recognition of the feelings associated with assigning a fail grade (incorporating feelings of guilt, fear of failure and personal feelings of failure) was the most frequently mentioned point the respondents' stated they had learnt/appreciated from the workshop (n=17 23%). This category comprised the components of feelings of guilt and inadequacy (n=10) and an acknowledgement of fear of failing students (n=7). The following quotations illustrate each of these complementary and powerful components.

2N "The feelings of guilt and personal inadequacy which one feels when failing students is experienced by all supervisors."

1N "My own fear of failing a student, not wanting to make the student 'feel bad' needs to be challenged."

5N "Not to feel guilt ridden."

10Upost "It is normal (or usual) for the supervisor to feel a failure herself when her student fails."

26Upre "Other people have felt the same desolation caused by having to fail a student - not just me."

23Upre "Not to be afraid of failure."

8N "The effect upon the whole department of failing a student."

Awareness is a prerequisite for acceptance and action, particularly the recognition that such feelings are common and probably 'normal'. This gives the dual assurance of rationality and universality.

The penultimate question on the four month survey was intended to trace the application of ideas from the failure workshop into the professional setting. All 23 respondents identified positive changes with the first and third (of six) most frequently mentioned changes linked to emotional aspects. These were increased confidence (n=8 23%) and recognition of the feelings and fears associated with failure (n=6 17%).

The term confidence was applied in a variety of ways including:

16N "Greater confidence in myself should I supervise a borderline student - I feel I should be more able to handle it early on."

13Upre "I feel more confident in my ability and judgement."

12N "More confident in my own convictions and being able to take the appropriate action if the student is not good enough."

20Upre "Greater confidence in my assessment of students especially when borderline."

The fears and feelings associated with failure was the third most frequently mentioned category, forming 6 of the 35 statements including

19Bpost "The recognition that we are human too, that the trauma and upset is not just felt by the students."

4B1/U1 post "It has helped me get over my fear of having to fail a student. I now know that if it is necessary I would do it."

13Upre "I feel more objective and have less desire to be 'liked' by the student. I feel as though I am a better supervisor."

6N "Relief that it is acceptable to fail a student. One tends to believe, albeit wrongly, that everyone wants you to pass the student because it is easier."

The recognition of personal needs and shift from negative to positive feelings is noteworthy, perhaps reflecting their increase in confidence.

Although there is internal consistency between these qualitative results there was an inconsistency related to this theme at the four month stage. The statement 'Recognition of the personal consequences and trauma for the fieldwork supervisor' was ranked as the fifth (out of six) most helpful element of the failure workshop. However, another statement: 'The opportunity to share experiences with colleagues' was ranked as the second most helpful aspect. This discrepancy is noted rather than explained.

7.3.4 One year follow-up survey: affective response

The questionnaire also commenced by probing personal experience of working with borderline or unsatisfactory students during the past year. This question was completed by 17 of the 37 respondents. The affective changes attributed to participation in a failure workshop included several facets. An increase in confidence was noted by 5 respondents:

36Bpost "I had the confidence to fail the student at the half-way stage after discussion with the School."

37Upost "Felt confident to make the decision and displayed this."

54Bipost "More confidence in looking at the problem."

An increased sensitivity about the need to support staff and students was noted by two respondents, including one who extended support to another profession.

12Upre "Have been able to offer support to a physiotherapy supervisor who had to fail a student."

28Upre "More understanding of the student's and supervisor's feelings: more able to support both."

The most frequently mentioned affective change was a reduction in self blame and sense of failure. This was reported by 6 respondents:

29Bpost "I did not blame myself for the situation as I had done in the past - thinking that I could have altered the situation earlier."

28Upost "I was less upset, but perhaps because I was not personally responsible."

38Upost "I felt I had done my best for that student and I really didn't feel his failure was my fault."

This decrease in inappropriate attribution of responsibility was complemented by an increase in awareness of the 'normal/usual' feelings associated with assigning a fail grade. This was commented upon by three supervisors:

36Bpost "The course enabled me to act on my own feelings. I also knew that the feelings of guilt and inadequacy were part of the process."

10Upost "Helpful just to know that I wasn't alone in my reactions and that we had done the right thing."

33Upre "Reassuring to know other fieldwork supervisors are in the same situation."

These feelings seem to be confirmed by two factors, a sense that they had made the right decision and acknowledgement of their

professional responsibility. For example,

55Upre "Felt that failing a student may not be the worst decision if passing her meant she was unsafe to practise."

13Upre "Felt it was less of a personal failure and more a Bpost professional judgement."

These changes seem to affirm the value of the failure workshops. However, as one respondent commented the workshops seem to lessen rather than eliminate the emotional trauma:

37Upost "Still felt for the student."

The respondents were again asked to identify the three most important points they had learnt and integrated into their practise. A content analysis of the 104 responses revealed ten categories. The first and eighth category were linked to affective responses. These were the feelings associated with failing a student (n=20 19%) and an increase in confidence in dealing with a fail scenario (n=6 6%).

The first category included all statements (n=20) which contained the word 'feels/feelings'. These were identification of the feelings experienced by supervisors (n=6), acknowledgement of these feelings (n=4), use of support for coping with these feelings (n=4), being prepared for and therefore not avoiding failing (n=3), failure of the student rather than the supervisor (n=2) and the fear of failing students (n=1). For example,

8N "All supervisors share feelings of guilt, stress, etc, etc at failing a student."

10Upost "Realising that feelings of personal failure are common and will pass with time."

- 26Upost "That other people have had the same feelings/thoughts/problems etc and survived!"
- 55Upre "Support from School and OT staff is important in helping you sort out your feelings."
- 10Upost "The importance of sharing feelings with colleagues."
- 55N "Need for all supervisors in department to be aware of the possibility of failure and to be prepared."
- 26Upost "That failure can be an option and the supervisor/student doesn't have to keep on struggling endlessly."
- 30N "Acknowledgement of my 'fear' of having to fail a student."

A general increase in confidence was acknowledged in six statements including:

- 12Upre "Confidence to face the issue."
- 39N "Confidence in all aspects."
- 33Upre "Having the confidence to fail a student - realising its importance."

Perceptions of increase in confidence permeated all three evaluations. Initially this may have reflected the comfort gained from the supportive, confrontation of failure. Whereas the follow-up evaluations allowed time to reflect and implement the coping strategies with understanding, reducing guilt and practise strengthening confidence.

The workshop aim had been sustained in the affective theme which provided a personal baseline for professional responsibilities. An understanding of the 'usual' feelings which accompany assigning a fail grade seems to have contributed to a reduction in the fear of failure and an increased awareness of the need for

support during the decision making process. The workshop confirmed the acceptability of awarding a fail grade and added to the repertoire of supervisory skills.

7.3.5 Reinforcement of the supervisory role, responsibilities and strategies: Reasons for attending a failure workshop

The supervisors' wish to learn or extend their learning about failure within the context of fieldwork supervision (n=50 35%) and to prepare for the eventuality of working with a borderline or unsatisfactory student (n=34 24%) were the first and second most frequently stated reasons for attending a failure workshop.

The primacy of learning is predictable for it provides the purpose for attending therefore establishing a self-fulfilling prophecy. This theme contained five sub categories: an interest in the topic of failure (n=29), in particular processes and responsibilities including clarifying a criterion for failure (n=7), understanding 'what happens next' (n=4) and strategies to prevent failure (n=3), to learn more about a difficult and infrequently discussed subject (n=4) and to improve their skills for dealing with failure (n=3). For example,

"Failure is a difficult subject for anyone but in some cases it is unavoidable. We need to know how best to cope with it."

"I feel the consequences and implications of failing a student are very important. Therefore I felt the course would be interesting and useful."

- 21Upre "To explore different concepts of failure, to see failure as a learning experience and 'failing' a student is part of our responsibilities as assessors, if this is the true outcome."
- "To see whether criteria for failure are consistent, to up-hold general standards of proficiency to practise."
- 23Upre "To further knowledge and develop coping strategies."
- "Looking for strategies to help to prevent failure and to present a report to a student."
- 15N "To improve myself as a fieldwork supervisor."
- "To be made aware of how to cope with failing students particularly the different approaches taken and to learn what happens to students when they do fail."
- "Learn about the consequences of failing a student and how it may be achieved as painlessly as possible."

These categories and comments seem to reflect a pragmatic interest in the subject of failure. This interest is continued into the next reason (and somewhat overlapping category) of preparing for the eventuality of working with a borderline or unsatisfactory student. This was the most frequently mentioned single category recorded either directly or indirectly in 34 (24%) of the statements. The following comments are typical:

"To prepare for the event if it happens and to be aware of the process of failure."

"I am just starting to take students. It is better to deal with this subject before it arises than afterwards!"

"Preparation for the time when I may have to fail a student."

"To widen my knowledge, thoughts and feelings about the topic of failure to prepare myself for the event of having to fail a student."

"This is a necessary part of being a fieldwork supervisor. Often we are left to deal with it. I wanted some experience of coping with 'failure'."

students."

A feature of these responses is the use of the word failure. A term usually evaded or replaced by euphemisms. Learning to use the word failure is a vital part of the preparation process.

7.3.6 Immediate evaluation: supervisory skills

Changes related to supervisory skills provided the last three of six categories describing the way the workshop had influenced their thoughts and feelings. These were acknowledgement of the potential for positive processes and outcomes (n=18 15%), increase in understanding the complexity of the topic which could be shared with other fieldwork supervisors (n=15 13%), and reinforcement of supervisory principles such as programme planning and objective assessment (n=11 9%).

The use of words 'positive' and 'less negative' related to the whole process of failure and the possibility of positive outcomes. For example

"Not feeling so negative about the whole process."

"Generally made me think more positively about failing students."

10Upst "By addressing the subject it made it more palatable and acceptable - seeing failure as a positive experience, if handled well."

"I feel less negative and more willing to consider, that when necessary, it can have positive results."

"It can be a positive thing for the student and that supervisors' have feelings too!"

The recognition of positive aspects of failure seem to form a

bridge linking the themes of increased confidence with the professional obligation to judge incompetence to practise.

An appreciation of, and interest in the complexity of the topic was mentioned by 15 participants, for example

"Failure isn't a topic I've faced before. So today has provided a lot of food for thought."

"It has increased my understanding of this difficult subject and made me feel more interested in the research of 'failure'."

"It has helped me to feel it was an important issue to be looked at."

"It has provoked more thought, and issues arising, to take back to the department and discuss with other supervisors."

This category would seem to relate to the primary reasons for attending - to learn about and prepare for a fail scenario - mirrors one of the reasons for participating in the focused interviews.

The final category contained several elements related to supervisory skills including the assessment process (n=4), reinforcement of the students' responsibility to learn (n=3), confidence in 'knowing what to do' (n=4) and programme planning (n=1). For example

"Reinforced the importance of fair, accurate assessment."

"Reinforced that 'failure' is not the supervisor's fault and that we do not need to 'pull them through' as such or spoon-feed them."

"Learnt ways of coping with different ways students react to failure - what to do and what not to do."

22N "Makes me realise that one has to plan student placements in far more detail and have on-going support

and evaluation."

These references to supervisory strategies indicate generalisation and synthesis of knowledge from different sources. This seems to suggest understanding failure can supplement and sharpen existing skills.

7.3.7 Four month follow-up survey: supervisory skills

The use of supervisory skills was reported by the six respondents with experience of working with borderline or unsatisfactory students since the failure workshop. This included two behavioural aspects, the importance of honest feedback and confidence in the quality of the decision making. The skills of "giving open feedback particularly when it was negative" was reported by four of the six supervisors, for example

19Bpost "The workshop made me more positive about tackling the problem early. This included being honest and straight with the student during feedback sessions and trying to prepare an action plan."

The second change noted by half the respondents was linked to attitudes and reactions of self or colleagues:

10Upost "It helped to be sure that the difficult decision to fail the student was the right one."

17N "The workshop reinforced the reactions of myself and other staff when we were confronted with failure."

A greater clarity of thought was acknowledged by three supervisors by focusing upon the student's performance rather than "concentrating upon my failure as a supervisor." The other three supervisors' comments were related to a criterion for

failure.

4B1/Ui post "My thoughts are clearer now about why a student should fail."

17Bpost "To think 'would I want to work with this student as a basic grade and would I employ her?'. This helped to put the failure into perspective."

These influences seem to support the immediate evaluation results. The complementarity of emphasis upon recognition of feelings of guilt and anxiety, with the reinforcement of supervisory skills and the professional obligation to assign a fail grade, are notable as being sustained through time (four months) and the real experience of working with a borderline or unsatisfactory student.

The experience of these six supervisors was complemented in other parts of the evaluation. For example, aspects linked to the theme of supervision formed the last five of seven categories of the most important learning attributed to the workshop. These were: the importance of honest, objective and timely feedback (n=11 15%); recognition of the potential for positive outcomes from a fail grade (n=6 8%); the value of the criteria for failure (n=5 7%); reinforcement of the students' responsibility to learn (n=5 7%); and miscellaneous elements linked to strategies for coping with failure (n=15 20%).

The third most frequently mentioned point was related to giving honest, objective and timely feedback because

"students are not always aware of what is required of them. Often they are unable to monitor their performance adequately with their supervisor. Problem areas are not detected early enough to be dealt with effectively.

Identifying expectations and providing regular feedback is fundamental to good clinical supervision" (Warrender, 1990).

For example,

- 16N "The importance of feedback."
- 3N "Failure should not come as a surprise to the student at the end of the placement."
- 13Upre "Use the final assessment form as the basis for weekly feedback. Use it honestly to give straight forward, open feedback even if it is negative, instead of trying to be nice. Give feedback honestly, constructively, immediately and write it down."
- 9N "Regular, honest supervision citing examples of good and poor standards is realistic and of more use to the student."

The workshops seemed to have highlighted the importance, of candid communication rather than complimentary feedback to prevent misleading formative assessments. If the summative assessment is a surprise then the student has been treated neither fairly or justly (Pope, 1983).

The possibility of positive outcomes was recalled by six of the twenty five respondents. Their statements included

- 4Bi/Ui "Failure is not necessarily harmful to students."
post
- 10Upost "Failure is not the worst thing which can happen. It can be positive if it is handled in a mature way."
- 18N "Failure is not always as disastrous as I had always imagined - for example if the student is not committed to occupational therapy as a career."

These statements illustrate the negative associations and terminology which surround failure which are contradicted in this response.

- 21Upre "Failure should be used as a learning experience. Failure is normal. There are (should be) some positives in every failure."

The value of identifying and discussing criteria for failure was the fifth most frequently mentioned point. A range of reasons were reported including

20Upre "Discussing the fail criteria. This has given me increased confidence in my assessment of students, especially where failure is looking possible."

3N "Students fail on a combination of weaknesses"

1N "The criteria for failure has provided me with a good baseline to work from."

A clear baseline which combines the complex reasons for failure with the confidence to be able to differentiate between competence and incompetence are essential to prevent

"virtually guaranteed success ... (when) the limits of competence (are) bewildering elastic" (Brandon & Davies, 1979).

The next category 'reinforcement of the student's responsibility to learn' is important because it contradicts the causal theory of teaching and inappropriate attribution of responsibility, two factors which seem to contribute to supervisor's guilt feelings.

This was summarised by one supervisor who stated

13Upre "It is not wholly my fault when a student fails. The onus is upon them to learn."

Other facets of this category included

12N "Some students can fail despite all the efforts of the supervisor."

26Upre "Ultimately it is up to the student to prove competence to an acceptable standard. Failure to do so is not the fault of the supervisor."

This last statement is significant because it emphasises the positive expression of competence rather than just the absence of incompetence. This emphasis was noted as unusual in a study with

social work tutors and fieldwork teachers

"It is generally assumed that a pass grade should be given if there is no evidence of bad practice" (Brandon & Davies, 1979).

The final category contained a collection of points related to general supervisory strategies including the value of subjective assessment (n=3)

1N "A student's personal approach and personality do matter even though these are subjective. Such gut reactions need to be thought through and clearly explained."

The importance of peer support, whether from College or within a department (n=3), an increased awareness of appeals procedures (n=1), and the need for "early intervention when weaknesses become apparent".

The theme of application of learning was further probed when respondents were asked to report the impact of the workshop upon their practise. The reinforcement of general or specific supervisory strategies formed the largest category containing 16 of the 35 statements. General supervisory responsibilities included

1N "It has made me more aware of my role as a facilitator of a student's learning, realised ways of finding out their knowledge, experience and strategies the student uses as a therapist."

22N "It brought home to me how important my own role and responsibility are to the student and the profession, particularly the need to give time to planning the placement and to the student so they can get the most from the experience."

19Bpost "The importance of going with 'gut' feelings yet also with specific objectives."

The specific strategies were linked to feedback and assessment,

for example

- 5N "It reinforced the importance of weekly feedback sessions in preparation for a pass or fail. This was highlighted on the fieldwork supervisors' course."
- 9N "I am more organised about regular and honest supervision."
- 18N "I feel that I give much more effective feedback."
- 4B1/UI post "My assessments of students seem to be less generous but perhaps more realistic and helpful."
- 11N "It has made me re-evaluate my criteria for assessment."
- 23Upre "Greater awareness of objective versus subjective in assessment."

The respondent's ownership, though the use of personal pronouns would seem to suggest the success of the failure workshops in reinforcing supervisory strategies.

The final category 'positive outcomes', although only mentioned twice, is important for it contradicts the negative stereotypes about failure. For example

- 7N "Realisation that failing is not totally negative."
- 23Upre "Not be afraid of tackling failure and dealing with it as a positive concept."

This statement seems to summarise the main results contained in this section. The majority of respondents described the positive influence providing a forward transfer of learning from the immediate evaluation to action in their work places. This combined an increase in confidence and competence expressed through the reinforcement of supervisory skills, underpinned by recognition of the personal trauma but professional necessity for confronting failure.

7.3.8 One year follow-up survey: supervisory skills

This questionnaire also commenced by probing the respondents' experience of working with marginal students since the failure workshop. It was completed by 17 of the 37 respondents who described the influence upon their behaviour, feelings and thoughts.

The second most frequently reported behavioural change noted by 4 of the 17 respondents was related to feedback strategies. For example

- 10Upost "Given weekly feedback to students since the workshop."
38Upost "Much more feedback and counselling was given than I would normally give a student."
55Upre "Tried to give good, documented feedback."

Other changes were related to the decision making process. Three respondents reported qualitative differences in awareness and understanding the need to assign a fail grade, including

- 29Bpost "Made me analyse the difficulties more clearly, to be aware of the situation, talking through the problems with the student."
41Bpost "Worked harder to help her pass as I felt she had potential."
26Upost "I was able to decide on failure much more readily and then apply the strategies discussed during the workshop."

Other supervisory strategies were noted by 3 respondents each citing different aspects.

- 13Upre "Tried much harder to give objective 'proof'. Much
Bpost more honest with the student ie less kind and vague.
Set tasks which had to be achieved."

57Bpost "Realised need to act early rather than at last minute."

12Upre "To ensure my methods of teaching were more consistent."

The final part of the question investigated the influence on their thoughts. An increase in objectivity was noted by 6 of the 15 respondents, for example

35Bpost "Took time to think though things objectively."

13Upre "I was more logical and objective."
Bpost

55Upre "Helped me to remain objective."

29Bpost "Made me think more clearly about the situation."

The next most frequently mentioned change in thinking was related to positive perceptions of failure. This was noted by three respondents.

28Upost "More able to assist all concerned to view failure as being a positive."

37Upost "Regarded it as a positive measure that is necessary to maintain a degree of professionalism."

33Upre "Reinforced a positive attitude towards failing a student."

These and other examples from different parts of the questionnaires support the utility of failure to highlight effective supervisory strategies. Respondents were asked to grade the value of specific elements of the programme in relation to their supervisory responsibilities using a four point Likert scale. This question was completed by 33 of the 37 respondents. The session 'strategies for coping with failing a student' was most frequently rated as highly valuable; followed by 'roles and

responsibilities', the 'criteria for failure', 'consequences of failure' and finally the 'subjective and objective aspects of assessment'. These results provide an interesting comparison with those given on the immediate evaluation when the participants used a nine point semantic differential scale to rate the degree of helpfulness of these aspects of the programme. The participants' immediate appraisal rated the criteria for failure (which incorporated subjective and objective assessment) as the most helpful, followed by strategies for coping with failure and finally the panel session (which included roles and responsibilities and the consequences of failure). These differences are interesting and any explanation must be speculative for example, it may be related to the increase in experience of borderline students which necessitated use of coping strategies and understanding of the roles of all concerned.

This theme was continued in the response to the question inviting respondents to identify the three most important points they had applied from the workshop. The question was answered by 34 of the 37 respondents contributing 104 statements which were sorted into eleven categories, seven of which were related to the theme of supervisory skills. These were coping strategies utilised by and for the supervisor, student and department (n=16 15%); the importance of honest, timely and documented feedback (n=15 14%); principles of assessment particularly objective assessment (n=11 10%); possible positive outcomes of failure (n=10 10%); clarity regarding a criterion for failure

(n=8 8%); willingness to assign a fail grade (n=3 3%); and an increased understanding of School procedures for dealing with failure (n=3 3%).

The second most frequently mentioned category (n=16) comprised varying elements of coping strategies used by and for the student or supervisor. These included coping mechanisms for self (n=6), importance of support from colleagues (n=5), need for early identification of problems (n=2) coping strategies for students (n=2) and awareness of the effect of failing a student upon the whole department (n=1). This emphasis upon personal awareness and coping strategies is pleasing for it combats the "The danger of being a therapist to the student" to the neglect of personal needs and professional obligations. For example,

29Bpost "How to cope better as a supervisor in situations involving a borderline student - more confidence."

36Bpost "That it is important to seek advice and support, both for the student and myself."

49N "Coping strategies for supervisors and ways of supporting a student positively and constructively."

35Bpost "The need for support from supervisors, senior/other staff."

8N "Importance of early identification of a student who may be borderline or fail."

8N "The effect of a failure on the whole department, from supervisors to helpers."

Although the third most frequently mentioned category 'honest, timely feedback' may be considered as a coping strategy. It is given a separate category because of the number of times it was identified (n=15) and as it is recognised as a strategy employed by effective supervisors (Ogier & Barrett 1985, Morgan & Knox

1987 and Nehring 1990). The importance of feedback was also rated third on the four month evaluation.

55Upre "The importance of documented, regular feedback."

10Upost "The importance of supervision and weekly feedback (using objectives and report form)."

31Bpost "Honesty - it doesn't help any student to have the problems covered up."

27Bpost "Regular supervision time is necessary and vital if you are to know your student's capabilities."

46N "Feedback from team and other disciplines."

These features of feedback, honesty, regularity and documentation were emphasized during the failure workshops.

Strategies linked to assessment were mentioned 11 times. The majority were related to the need for objective assessment (n=6) followed by individual comments about principles of assessment including fairness, honesty, subjectivity and improved report writing skills. These included

37Upre "The importance of being objective when assessing a
Bpost student."

52N "To be honest when assessing students."

45Bpost "To be a fairer marker because of not being tempted to be over-generous."

31Bpost "Improved report writing - somehow it helped me to report more concisely."

The recognition of potential positive outcomes was reported on 10 occasions. This is another factor identified in the immediate evaluations which was sustained in both follow-up evaluations. They were related to general factors (n=6), for the student (n=5) and the supervisor (n=1). For example,

- 26Upost "There can be a positive element to failure, for both the supervisor and student."
- 53N "Realisation that failure can be a positive step for certain students."
- 35Bpost "The positive side of failure - allowing the student to make another choice without too much time/energy wasted."
- 31Bpost "Positive aspects of failure - with tactful handling there can be benefits. I had never thought of that."

This final statement illustrates the importance of presenting a balanced approach to failure to challenge negative stereotypes.

Clarification of a criterion for failure was noted in 8 statements either in general terms (n=6) or as the over-arching criteria of employability (n=2). For example

- 29Bpost "To think more clearly re criteria for failure."
- 52N "Consolidation of knowledge of criteria for failure."
- 30N "Clarification of what constitutes 'failure' behaviour."
- 43N "Would I work with this person if they qualified?"

The public discussion of failure by representatives from a School of Occupational Therapy contradicts assumptions that Schools want all students to pass and gives permission to assign a fail grade.

- 12Upre "Confidence in the knowledge that not all students are 'designed' to be occupational therapist."
- 38Upost "It is OK to fail a student if they are not fit to pass."

This is essential if the failure to fail is to be eliminated.

The re-emergence of an 'understanding of the School's perspective' would seem to stem from the panel session. This

was rated as neutral rather than very helpful by 51% (n=82) of the participants on the immediate evaluation and was not mentioned in the four month survey. The points raised by the 3 respondents were

53N "Appreciation of what is involved at School level when a student fails a placement."

41Bpost "Liaison with the School."

9Bpost "College involvement."

The workshop seems to have contributed towards 'bridging the gap' between academic and professional settings, for both share the common purpose of ensuring competency. It reduced

"the cognitive distance that persists between schools and clinical placements ... such a gap can be bridged by continued joint activity" (Aina, 1982).

The combined increase in confidence and competence expressed through the reinforcement of supervisory skills was an unexpected positive spin-off from the failure workshops. Difficult situations, including the possibility of student appeal, highlighted aspects of effective supervision particularly the importance of giving (and documenting) regular, clear, unambiguous objective feedback on performance with guidelines for improvement for this gives evidence that the supervisor has fulfilled their responsibility and made a fair

"expert evaluation of cumulative information" (Poteet & Pollok, 1981).

7.3.9 Professional obligation to maintain standards: introduction

The final, unifacted theme affirms the obligation to maintain future standards of practice. This explicit affirmation of the responsibility to judge incompetence has emerged as an important mediating factor both from these results and the focused interviews. The ability to place the immediate personal trauma within a broader, longer term perspective seems to support the supervisor's personal and professional integrity. Although the role of 'gatekeeper of the quality of future practice' was only mentioned in the conclusion it continued to pervade the results.

7.3.10 Immediate evaluation: professional obligation

On the final, open question participants described a variety of the ways in which the workshop had influenced their thoughts and feelings. The second of six categories related to the reinforcement and reassurance, at a personal and professional level of the obligation to assign a fail grade (n=20 17%). The following statements are typical examples

"Made me realise that it is a valid professional judgement, therefore not a decision to be afraid of making and not to feel guilty about."

"I am happier that supervisors are sharing their feelings and acknowledging that they have a responsibility to the profession and to the student to fail, if that is appropriate."

"Made me understand more clearly the importance of having the courage of your convictions."

"It has certainly helped me to realise more of my responsibility as a supervisor ie responsibility to the

student, profession and myself."

7.3.11 Four month follow-up survey: professional obligations

Acceptance of the obligation to maintain professional standards and assign a fail grade retained second place in response to the question about the most important points learnt/appreciated from the workshop. This category formed 18% of the responses (n=13). The need to act as the gatekeepers of quality and accept responsibility for assigning a fail grade were the key components, for example

4Bi/U1 "Failing an unfit student is essential to maintain a healthy profession."

24N "Passing a student who does not meet the criteria for being an occupational therapist is as unfair to the student and as to the profession."

17N "The importance of the supervisor in upholding the standards of the profession. There is a responsibility to the student, other staff and the patients to do so."

The discussion of the professional importance of assessing clinical competence and failing students was ranked as the third (of seven) most helpful element of the workshop.

In contrast, the category maintenance of professional standards was placed in the penultimate position in response to the question inviting respondents to describe the impact of the workshop upon their supervisory practise, being included in 3 of the 35 statements. These included

19Bpost "Maintenance of professional standards."

7N "It is my responsibility, not only for the future of the profession, but also for the student that he/she fails."

7.3.12 One year follow-up survey: professional obligations

An understanding of the professional importance and responsibility was rated as the third largest change on a set of five statements using a 4 point Likert scale with 35% (n=13) acknowledging a large increase, 51% (n=19) an increase and 13% (n=5) stating no change. A significant implicit factor has become explicit.

Finally, in response to the open question asking respondents to identify the three most important points applied to their role maintaining professional standards was joint fourth (out of eleven) being noted 11 (10%) times. For example

57Bpost "Need to hold on to the quality and standard expected by the profession."

48Bpost "Supervisors are gatekeepers of the occupational therapy profession. It is important to look at a student and think of them as a work colleague/basic grade therapist."

35Bpost "The responsibility of the supervisor to assess competently even if this results in failure."

44N "My responsibility to the future of our professional integrity."

These phrases state accountability to future professional practice. Although this was the smallest, in the sense of being an underpinning, unifacted theme its continued presence from the immediate evaluation is important for it represents

"licensure (which) is to protect the public from incompetent practitioners" (Francis & Holmes, 1983).

which should be the primary reason for assigning a fail grade.

7.4 Conclusion to failure workshops

The three themes were combined at the end of the one year survey when 94% (n=35) supported the inclusion of failure within the curriculum for all fieldwork supervisor courses.

Table 25 Do you think the topic of failure should be covered as part of the sequential approach to fieldwork supervisor training?

Yes		No		No response	
n=35	94%	n=1	3%	n=1	3%

Only one respondent disagreed, stating

38Upost "I prefer it to be done separately I can get more depth."

In addition, 22 of the 37 respondents used the opportunity to comment. These were sorted into two categories general affirmative statements (n=8) and specific reasons (n=14). The specific section included reasons (n=11), when (n=2) and how (n=1) the topic of failure should be included. These illustrate the dynamic inter-relationship between the themes, for example

31Bpost "I am sure all fieldwork supervisors find failing a student difficult. It is something we should prepare for, so that it can be diplomatically dealt with; and also so that we will not avoid it because it is too difficult."

28Upost "If assessment is covered then I think failure should also be covered."

43N "It's an issue which is raised quite naturally by supervisors and which obviously needs addressing."

51N "Very important. A supervisor should be aware that they are also part of the success or failure of a student and need to be clear as to their responsibility in planning/developing placements."

46N "Fieldwork is perhaps the most important part of training and if we as supervisors fail to pick up problems and act on them or support and encourage a student to develop we are failing them."

26Upost "A new supervisor needs to be made aware that failure happens, that it isn't necessarily because of the supervisor's inexperience, and that there is a workable system to overcome the problems encountered."

48Bpost "It is important for supervisors to realise that they need to address their own emotional needs and the demands it makes on their time/stress levels."

The two supervisors who considered the timing of the topic within the sequential courses agreed that it should be included at all stages.

8N "I think it should be briefly addressed from the first stage including need for early identification, need for support for supervisor etc etc."

33Upre "This is something that should be covered on all levels - initially to share concerns/anxieties re failing and later to include experiences."

The final comment related to how failure should be included:

9Bpost "If it is done in a similar way - importance of proper supervision not a negative approach."

Although this result contains a logical contradiction: the success of the failure workshops should mean they become redundant, the hypothesis is supported (and extended) because they were effective in increasing confidence (if the participants' self-report is accepted as truthful. There is no reason to doubt this. The respondents were frank and forthcoming

(Bull, 1978). Their anonymity would reduce any need for concealment so as to appear socially acceptable (Perkins, 1986); and the topic is relevant for all supervisors. This verifies the approach adopted by Best (1988) and Bradley (1990). Failure, if confronted in a supportive way which recognises the emotional trauma can reinforce supervisory skills and make explicit the professional obligation to judge incompetence to practise. This should be available to all fieldwork supervisors as they undertake the problematical, yet essential responsibility for judging competency in the most appropriate setting.

7.5 Conclusion to the questionnaire surveys

Although both questionnaire surveys were considered to have a supplementary status to the principal method, (the focused interviews), their contribution to the whole study was important. The results obtained from these methods illuminated distinct aspects of fieldwork supervisors' experience and contributed to the whole research through the convergence of central themes. This would seem to support the salience and plausibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) of the findings, while adding to the coherence and credibility of the whole.

The questionnaire ranking difficulties in the supervisory relationship provided quantitative evidence which identified and then confirmed 'failing a student' as a problematical responsibility. On the 1988 and 1993 surveys, two thirds of

an opportunity sample of 113 experienced, trained fieldwork supervisors ranked this statement either first (45% n=51) or second (18% n=21). The reasons given related to personal, professional and organisational factors, including feelings of failure and guilt, the conflict in values between educator and therapist and the lack of support from Schools. These themes pre-empt those obtained by the other methods.

The failure worksops provided an opportunity to prepare and support fieldwork supervisors as they confronted the difficult, yet essential responsibility for assessment at the margins of competence. They made a dual contribution to the whole research. Firstly, through the outcomes obtained from the immediate and follow-up evaluations which commended their value and relevance for all supervisors. The three themes related to affective responses, supervisory responsibilities and professional obligations seem to connect (and strengthen through triangulation) all aspects of the research. The second contribution derives from the collaborative, participatory, action research type process (Cohen & Manion, 1985) which allowed informal member checking of emergent themes with different colleagues, provided additional evidence from "anecdotal comparison" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and offered topics for the focused interviews.

Focused interviews provided the principal method for understanding and explaining the minutiae of a fail scenario from the perspective of both academic and fieldwork assessors.

8. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: FOCUSED INTERVIEWS
The subjective world of assessors

8.1 Introduction to the focused interviews

The 30 focused interviews provided the principal source of insight into the process of assigning a fail grade from the perspective of academic and fieldwork assessors. Many of the themes which emerged from the literature, questionnaire surveys and failure workshops were elaborated upon during the interviews. These secondary methods guided the focus, permitting the minutiae of a fail scenario to be examined. The opportunity to interview staff with different roles, responsibilities and relationships with a student enabled the hypothesis to be studied by the process of comparison, for

"individuality can be grasped only by comparison and contrast ... We never directly grasp an individuality, but grasp only its differences from others and from ourselves" (Ricoeur, 1981).

The continuities and discontinuities of individual and collective experiences, revealed by all methods, has provided a rich text in which the world of assessors is unfolded, discovered and revealed (Ricoeur, 1981). This section reports and discusses these results or revelations for self and others' understanding, explanation and interpretation. For interpretation

"brings together, equalises, renders contemporary and similar, thus genuinely making one's own what was initially alien" (Ricoeur, 1981).

The results are presented in two sections with the institutional context providing the framework for individual experience.

8.2 INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT : Introduction

The second section of the interview guide was intended to provide an overview of the informants' work context. This section contained two sub-divisions with facts about the institution, programmes offered, staff and student numbers followed by details of the institutional procedures for dealing with borderline and unsatisfactory students.

It is a truism to state that each educational establishment and programme is unique although there are commonalities, one example was the grounds for appeal. However the purpose of this section was to gain an understanding of the professional and educational milieux, particularly those organisational factors which seem to help or hinder the judgement of competence to practise. The questions also assisted the transition from objective to subjective responses, by presenting wide ranging stimuli which required specificity and depth about the procedures for dealing with borderline and unsatisfactory students. A brief overview of each School's size and staffing precedes the description of the institutional factors which influence the decision making process.

8.2.1 Size of the Schools

Schools or Departments of Occupational Therapy tend to be small, operating either as a separate institution or as part of a larger further or higher education establishment. A total of 1,055

students commenced training in September 1990 in 25 Schools. The following table indicates the range and mean student intake in 1990 for the 13 Schools represented by the 25 academic informants.

Table 26 Range and mean intake of students at the Occupational Therapy Schools represented by the informants

	Range of student intake	Mean intake	Total
Sample	22 - 77	46	597

The impact of the size of the School was an unexpected variable which emerged during the study, particularly the advantages and disadvantages of "knowing the students well in a small school".

8.2.2 Staffing

The staff complement in the Schools ranged from 1.6 to 16 members of staff, with an average of 7.6 whole time equivalent occupational therapists, supported by a number of teaching and non-teaching staff. They form a "ready made" team in the sense of shared educational goals, even though these are likely to be subject to a variety of interpretations.

In contrast all five fieldwork supervisors were members of occupational therapy departments and/or multi-disciplinary teams whose primary goal was health and social care rather than education. The three supervisors working in physical medicine were all based in an occupational therapy department. The other two worked in multi-disciplinary community mental health

teams but were also part of an occupational therapy service. This accounted for two important differences one expected and one unexpected. Firstly, the dual role as clinician and supervisor. The tension between, and difficulty balancing priorities between practise and supervision have been well documented, crossing professional and national boundaries (Watt 1981, Cross 1983, Everden 1986, Wood 1986a, Wong & Wong 1987, Marson 1987, Cohn & Frum 1988, Maybury 1988 and Alsop 1991). Secondly, the supervisors' comments contradicted the commonly held assumption that they single-handedly undertake the responsibility for assessing competence to practise. Membership of an occupational therapy service ensured opportunities for shared supervision or split placements. These provided valued structures for support, confirmation and team decision making, mirroring the processes in academic settings.

8.3 Introduction to institutional policies and procedures

General questions related to the policies for dealing with failure generated factual responses and perceptions about the organisational factors which influenced staff occupying different roles. This section gives an institutional context for the informants' experience, starting with the written and verbal use of the word fail. The incidence of fails both within the School and the informants' experience leads into a discussion of monitoring results. The process and procedures for decision making in both academic and fieldwork settings, including appeal

systems are reviewed. Finally, the personal and organisational costs of failure provides a link with the informants' subjective world.

8.3.1 The use of the word 'fail' related to assessment

The literature review suggested the word 'fail' has a taboo status because softer, more 'politically correct' terms seem to be preferred to describe the non-attainment of a required standard. In one of the hypotheses, this avoidance both of the word and deed, was postulated as exacerbating the assessors' stress. This was examined by asking informants to outline the use of this, or other equivalent words in the course documentation and during discussions, both within academic and fieldwork settings.

The majority of informants from each of the staff groups reported the term was used during discussions and in the course documentation. There was unanimity amongst the heads of school and lecturers regarding the use of the term failure. However, it is the exceptions and variations which are interesting and will be described. For example, the use of a grading system with letters A to F accompanied by descriptors, with E and F representing unsuccessful and unacceptable may be considered as an institutionally sanctioned and sanitised means of avoiding the word fail. This contrasts with a comment from a head of school

H>3/1U>M "We believe in calling a spade a spade here. We use the words credit, pass and fail."

However, at the Higher Education establishment with the grading system the use of clear, unambiguous terms was being imposed with directives for examination boards to use the word fail when notifying students of their results, rather than unsuccessful. Clear, unambiguous language is essential for the individual student and to protect the institution from appeals. If there is reticence to use the word fail in anonymous, written communications in an academic environment (or recognise the existence of fail with pass lists), it is unsurprising that there is even more difficulty in the fieldwork setting which involves direct, face-to-face contact between supervisor and student.

8.3.2 Use of the word 'fail' in fieldwork settings

Although the fieldwork assessment forms used by supervisors in this study included a fail category, two of the five supervisors admitted to avoiding the word fail.

S>8/5U<I "I think we use unacceptable, weak, more than weak and not making the grade. We were careful in our use of words so we didn't upset the student, so they feel worthless, we treated them with kid gloves."

This quotation illustrates the difficulty and the evasive tactic of adopting the counsellor or therapist role as a means of protecting the student's, and possibly the supervisor's, self-esteem (Ilott 1988, Turkett 1987).

In this situation, the role and ability of the fieldwork organiser to crystallise the problems as a fail is pivotal. Five

of the seven organisers asserted their belief in the importance of using the word fail for the benefit of both supervisor and student.

C>12/1U> "I feel this word is hedged around too often, with words like unsatisfactory. If this is so, then the student will hope for the best in the situation if they haven't heard the word fail. I don't use it liberally, but I encourage the student and supervisor to use the word, be honest, to use it cautiously and then the student isn't surprised."

Two commented that they are likely to be the first person to use the word fail, often to counter the excessive constructiveness of the supervisor's description that "the student needs to ...". However, one fieldwork organiser acknowledged hesitation and avoidance.

C>4/1U<M "I find it difficult to be judgemental. I am weak. I find it difficult to face up to the situation."

An additional reason for avoiding a fail grade was identified by two organisers. This was the supervisor's perception that the C>9/2U>M "school will view a fail as a black mark against the placement"

and that they will be

C>12/1U> "condemned by the school who will see the students' failure as their fault."

These reasons illustrate the recurring theme of striving to preserve "the reputation" of the school, fieldwork placement or supervisor. The fear that their judgement will be challenged or ignored by the academic establishment repeats the findings of the other studies (Brandon & Davies 1979, Ilott 1988, Green 1991).

The importance of using the word clearly, honestly and

unambiguously in verbal and written communications was stressed by the fieldwork organisers. This view receives support from the recipient - the student. The study conducted by Bradley (1990) into the assessment of clinical progress of student nurses revealed that 95% favoured receiving "justified adverse comments" on their performance.

One fieldwork organiser made an interesting observation about the impact of the verbal and written form of the word. She had noticed that 'fail' written in pencil or pen had less impact, because it could be "rubbed out", but if fail was type written it was more visible, powerful and was "seen" as straight communication particularly by mature, assertive students. The power of written, rather than verbal feedback was reported in Gleason's (1984) study where meetings failed to produce any significant improvement because

"the students need something more concrete than words to guide them toward satisfactory grade acquisition."

When the meeting was supported by a grade adjustment plan, a visual record charting problems and action negotiated with the student with monitoring through periodic meetings, this resulted in 70% of students improving their grades.

"The students feel the plan helps to reduce the ambiguity of exactly what they must do to increase their grades" (Gleason, 1984).

This parallels the system of weekly formative meetings which culminate in the half-way and final summative assessment on fieldwork placements. These meetings provide important opportunities for giving constructive, consistent feedback,

suggesting and monitoring the implementation of alternative solutions (Majorowicz, 1986).

8.3.3 Failure as a discussion topic

One of the central hypotheses for the whole research is that the stress of making the judgement that an occupational therapy student has not achieved the required standard of academic or professional competence is exacerbated by the avoidance of the subject of failure within both professional and educational milieux. Interestingly, several informants drew spontaneously analogies between the taboo subjects of death or cancer and failure. All are either inevitable or common (in some form) but are usually avoided as a topic for public discourse.

A question was included to ascertain informants' perceptions of the degree of openness or denial in their academic or professional setting. The results were both predictable and surprising. Only 5 (including three lecturers) of the 30 informants reported that failure was not discussed. The majority described informal staff discussions (n=6) or specific discussions during a fail scenario (n=17). Discussions tended to be student or task specific, related either to assessments and examination boards or when revalidating a course to plug loop holes in the assessment regulations. The tendency to be reactive to specific situations, rather than discuss the subject of failure is illustrated in this statement:

L>7/3U> "No, not enough. It arises and we need to discuss it rapidly in a short time. Therefore there is not enough time to discuss the implications. We are just trouble-shooting."

The response to specific student failures seemed to be considerable and protracted, for example

H>2/1U>M "In the summer term when the examinations are held we identify boundary students. We recently spent two days discussing two such students. It was consistent, informal discussion amongst the staff team."

S>6/3U<M "Failure was not discussed until it happened. Then it was discussed very much and for a while afterwards."

These discussions had several purposes which included gaining an understanding of the situation, verifying all the information

C>9/2U>M "if at internal moderation a student fails then everything is double read."

and evaluating the process and outcome of the fail.

Informants identified factors which seemed to influence the degree of discussion for example, there was extra concern when a student failed a fieldwork placement.

H>5/1U>M "Informally, mostly about fails on fieldwork placements because this area exercises the most concern because of the lack of standardised assessments."

In contrast there was concern when fieldwork supervisors did not fail a student who academic staff considered to be professionally unsuitable, but who was successful on academic assessments. They emphasized the role of supervisors in assessing competence to practise on degree courses giving three reasons. Firstly, the increasing use of recruitment by application form (King, 1988), secondly the appeals procedures which protect the student and finally, the ability of students

with higher entry qualifications to pass the academic component of the course regardless of professional suitability. One fieldwork organiser described how such an example of a failure to fail provoked considerable discussion.

C>4/2U<M "Some students have reached the end of their training who should not have done - we've not been brave enough to terminate them. We have had a final report form with passes, comments saying the the student needs to do, but then the supervisor has sent a separate letter to the school saying the student should not be doing occupational therapy. We followed up with a request for documentation so we could confront the student. They said they had been given all the information but they wouldn't or couldn't assimilate it. Therefore they had passed a very weak student."

This example of bad practice, should and does damage the reputation of the supervisor.

A fail scenario seemed to highlight the subjective, infallible process of assessment, particularly with new members of staff.

C>9/2U>M "Recently we had a new member of staff so marking has become an issue. We used to cross mark and were compatible, as if by osmosis. The new staff need to know how and why they failed."

The balancing of objectivity and subjectivity in the "inexact science of assessment" was reiterated by a course leader working in small school.

H>11/1U> "We are a small group and we know the students well therefore there are personal dynamics. We want to be fair and not stereotype students as having problems."

These points reflect a focus upon the practicalities of the topic. The principle of reputation, whether for the institution or an individual, was also mentioned by informants from each subgroup. Two lecturers from a well established school, with a tradition of "no fails", reported the effects of the first

termination of training which had followed the introduction of a system of internally assessed and externally moderated examinations and a new head of school. Failure was now permissible, discussed and accepted. This had increased the status for the school amongst fieldwork staff. A supervisor's concern for her reputation is clear in this statement:

S>8/6U<M "It was very, very difficult. I felt guilty as though I hadn't done my job properly. What would the school think and say about me? What would the fieldwork organiser think about me?"

The role of the head of school in discussions about failure seemed distinctive in several respects. These included being informed formally and informally of all students who were at risk.

H>2/1U>M "I keep an eye on the bottom level all the time, particularly if there are academic failures in year 2 and 3. They need more support."

Another difference was supporting staff, both academic and fieldwork in their decision making and when "they are anxious about a student".

Interestingly, two heads of schools and three fieldwork supervisors spontaneously reported an increase in discussions about the subject of failure.

H>7/1U>M "There have been more discussions of late, because we have heard on the grapevine that it is being discussed elsewhere"

The supervisors attributed the change to the failure workshops which "opened up the topic of failure".

S>8/4U<I "I think it is beneficial that it is out in the open. Before, we felt as though we had failed, that it reflected upon the supervisor or the department if the

student 'wasn't up to scratch'. We felt guilty. Now we have more confidence, can say that the student should fail and do not feel worried about discussing a difficult situation with school staff."

These unsolicited comments reinforce the outcomes identified on the immediate and follow-up questionnaire survey evaluating the failure workshops. The authors' mission (Ilott, 1990) based on a recommendation from the original research, has been to "get failure out into the open" as a means of reducing the occupational stressor of assigning a fail grade (Goldenberg & Waddall, 1990). These comments, and the reports by two fieldwork organisers that they had included the topic of failure in nationally approved, sequential training courses for fieldwork supervisors, seem to support the success of this mission and the main recommendation of the failure workshops.

8.4 Incidence of fails: institutional context

An interest in the incidence of fails within a School, and as part of the experience of each informant, has interconnections with assumptions about rarity value, which may reflect an avoidance of the deed. It also complements the national attrition rates by 'localising and personalising' these figures.

Informants were invited to estimate the number of academic and fieldwork fails during in each year in their School. The question was modified for supervisors by enquiring about their direct and indirect experience of borderline or unsatisfactory students in a fieldwork setting. The responses confirmed the

infrequency of failure which results in termination of training, while suggesting patterns about the incidence and spread between the years, particularly the difference between a first and second fail in academic or fieldwork settings. The trends reported by academic staff are presented in the following table.

Table 27 Trends in the incidence of failure in academic and fieldwork settings in year one, two and three reported by academic staff

Year	Academic		Fieldwork	
	Borderline	Unsatisfactory	Borderline	Unsatisfactory
One	6	3	1	-
Two	3	1	2	1
Three	1	1	2	1
TOTAL	10	5	5	2

The fieldwork supervisors' experience are contained in the next table.

Table 28 Direct and indirect experience with the number of borderline and unsatisfactory students reported by fieldwork supervisors.

Number of students			
Unsatisfactory		Borderline	
Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
Experience		Experience	
5	1	2	2

In the context of this study the following definitions are used:

BORDERLINE: a first failure on one subject or the cumulative annual assessment but the student is successful on the retake and is able to progress to the following year of the Course.

UNSATISFACTORY: failure on the retake assessment which normally results in the student being required to withdraw from the course

for academic or professional reasons.

DIRECT: primary fieldwork supervisor with ultimate responsibility for the assessment.

INDIRECT: working in the same setting or receiving a student who had failed the first part of a split placement so the supervisor may contribute to the discussion but would not be responsible.

These tables indicate trends which parallel the national wastage rates (Paterson, 1988). First or borderline fails are more frequent than second fails which results in termination of training. Fails, in whichever category, are more likely to occur early in the Course. Failure occurs more frequently in an academic than fieldwork setting. However, it is important to remember that the incidence and consequences are also dependent upon the curriculum and course regulations. For example, in some courses the first fieldwork placement (year one) is unassessed and a year three fail (borderline) is expected due to the integrative nature of the objectives which demand entry level performance.

The informants added comments to explain the incidence rates. They emphasized the complex, combination of factors which included personal problems, academic ability, professional unsuitability which is only apparent in the fieldwork setting, wrong career choice, ill-health, home sickness, isolation on placement, health and financial difficulties. These factors reflect research findings into the cause of failure from the perspective of the student (Miller 1970, Prout 1987, Alsop 1991) and some of the categories used by the College of Occupational Therapists (Appendix 1).

The language and metaphors used to explain these trends were illuminating, for example

H>9/1U>M "We try to weed out early in the academic setting."

H>7/1U>M "We are still not stringent enough. We cushion them through in year one. This leads to conflict and tension."

This perception is contrasted with a comment made by a lecturer from the same School.

L>7/3U> "My feeling is that we are more likely to, and do, fail students early in the course."

Metaphors, "as text in miniature" which facilitates explanation of the whole (Ricoeur, 1981) and the timing of the failure are two themes which will be considered later.

8.4.1 Incidence of fails: personal experience

The personal experience of lecturers and fieldwork organisers was probed by asking them to total their experience of fail scenarios. This question was designed to progress the informant from the institutional to a personal context, and to compare the amount of experience between staff with different roles and responsibilities. This question was not used with the heads of schools because it was assumed that they would be involved with all such scenarios. This assumption was verified in the answers given to this and other questions.

All seven fieldwork organisers were involved with fieldwork fails. The degree of involvement varied according to institutional arrangements for example, whether they had

overall responsibility for the whole programme or one year and whether other lecturers participated in fieldwork visits.

All eight lecturers had also been involved with borderline and unsatisfactory students, either as a subject or personal tutor, with four reporting direct experience with a total of 11 students whose second failure resulted in termination of training. They emphasized that in both circumstances, their judgement would be supported and confirmed by a second marker, an external examiner or the Examination Board, for example

L>7/2U< "I would never do it on my own. It is taken extremely seriously."

8.4.2 Incidence of fails: member/s of staff who have most contact with a student who fails

The personal experience of assessors was then compared with their perceptions about the involvement of other staff, with different roles and responsibilities. This question revealed a dichotomy between the academic and fieldwork setting. This may have been due to the phrasing of the question, which allowed spontaneity based upon personal experience, rather than follow-up probes which may have elicited consideration of the whole Course.

The dichotomy was related to the divide between the academic and professional components of the Course. For example, none of the fieldwork supervisors mentioned the possible involvement of any academic staff, other than the fieldwork organiser. Their focus was confined to the professional setting, identifying colleagues

from multi-disciplinary and uni-disciplinary teams. In contrast, only two (a lecturer and fieldwork organiser) of the 25 academic staff included fieldwork supervisors. Although two heads of school and four lecturers acknowledged the involvement of fieldwork organisers, so maybe the involvement of the supervisors was implicit rather than explicit.

However, this polarisation may be another reflection of the

"pathological dichotomizing of the theory (knowing) and the practise (doing) of occupational therapy" (Shah & Cooper, 1992).

which sabotages the desired (and desirable) objective of an integrated curriculum. This tension is expressed in other ways, for example by the continuing debate regarding the minimum number of fieldwork placement hours (Tarrant & Tarrant, 1990) and the allocation of 11% of academic resources to fieldwork which comprises one third of the course (Alsop, 1991). Such a division does a disservice to a profession which claims to adopt a holistic approach to people. It also seems to create an attitudinal barrier, with fears about personal and departmental reputations. Such a barrier may also prevent access into support networks, which are available for both staff and students, within academic settings.

The personal tutor was the second most frequently mentioned person who had contact with a student who was failing. This role was mentioned by all eight lecturers who combined pastoral and academic responsibilities. The majority of academic informants (n=15) referred to this dual responsibility which

involved lecturers' providing subject-specific advice, while in the role of personal tutor, they offered personal support. For example

L>8/2U<M "I have helped a student through their feelings of denial, shock and acceptance, to help them clarify their situation."

C>9/2U>M "The head of school will conduct the formal, exit interview and then the student sees their personal tutor to 'finish off' on a more informal basis."

The head of school was the person who was reported to have most contact with a student who was failing. This role was recognised by 20 of the 30 informants. However, there were interesting differences in the perception of power and involvement by heads of schools and other academic staff. The lecturers and fieldwork organisers stressed the formal responsibilities of the head of school, particularly related to power.

L>5/3U<M "The course leader has the formal contact. She is 'the big guns'."

In contrast, four of the ten heads of school stressed their pastoral role, rather than formal responsibilities, when describing their involvement. For example,

H>2/1U>M "There is usually counselling, because I think it is devastating for the student. Therefore I spend time with the student to consider their other life options."

The next quotation illustrates a pastoral exercise of power:

H>5/1U>M "I would become involved if the student did not seem to be hearing the seriousness of the situation. Therefore it is more like giving a warning, but not always in a controlling way. For example, I can inform them about special opportunities or circumstances which may be available to them, like extra time or an alternative assessment method."

These examples hint at the potential for conflict between the

experience and roles of therapist and educator. This fundamental conflict seems to be a common theme for all staff, regardless of their role or responsibility.

8.5 Introduction to monitoring results

The topic of monitoring results naturally follows a review of wastage rates because both represent educational outputs or performance indicators. The practice of monitoring results, whether subject, fieldwork or course are acknowledged within education, by the public and politicians, as one means of assessing the quality of a course. For example, a feature of internal quality assurance mechanisms within higher education is the annual course report. This includes a statistical analysis of cohort results, with tables of results and comments about historical and national comparisons, with analyses of value added. These reports and results are viewed as performance indicators which form a key feature of reviews: the institutional processes of self-evaluation and quality audit (CNAA 1992).

Increasingly, assessment results are subject to media attention (and speculation) with the production of "league tables" (Lewis et al, 1991) of the "best" educational establishments for academic achievement. These are produced for all educational levels from the Norrington Table "that celebrated league table of (Oxford) college exam performances" which Clark (1991) proclaims as a "public guarantee of quality"

to the publication of primary schools results on the national curriculum standard assessment tasks (Daley, 1991).

It would be inappropriate to repeat the debate regarding the validity and reliability of such assessment scores, either as an educational outcome or predictor of a student's present and future abilities. However, it is important to note the pervasive influence of results, particularly linked to perceptions of blame and credit for fails or distinctions. The dilemma is expressed as whether fails are accepted as part of the learning process and an expression of standard setting, or as a reflection of a poor quality institution or instructor. These internal and external perceptions contribute to the reputation of the education provider. A powerful, if intangible factor which impinges upon monitoring procedures.

Considering the private and public importance of monitoring failure rates, the informants' reported some interesting variations in personal and institutional mechanisms. There was a contrast between academic and fieldwork staff. All five supervisors were unaware of formal mechanisms for monitoring results. The following is a typical response

S>8/5U<I "I don't understand this question. I don't know if college monitors us."

They attributed this lack of knowledge or a fieldwork monitoring system to the rarity of assigning a fail grade. However all reported informal mechanisms for "mentally logging", retaining student records and departmental or district discussions following incidents of failure.

8.5.1 Academic monitoring mechanisms

Institutional systems for termly or annual monitoring of academic and fieldwork results operated through course committee structures. All course leaders and fieldwork organisers were conversant with the different procedures. In contrast, two lecturers from the same School commented

L>7/3U> "I don't think they truly are looked at or published. I think we should do this, with the reasons why."

L<7/2U< "I don't know and that is interesting in itself. I imagine it is the course leader but I don't know how, when or why and I think I should do. Patterns and consequences are not discussed at all, it seems to happen. There is a flurry and then it settles down until another student fails."

These lecturers with 6 years and 18 months experience respectively, worked at the School where the course leader admitted

H>7/1U>M "Student progress is a regular item on the weekly staff meeting agenda. I do not think it is tackled well, not really monitored acutely enough."

She continued to say

"Do you let a student sink or warn them that their aggregate mark is heading toward an overall fail? This is quite difficult to do. When we are busy doing other things this gets put to the bottom of the pile."

This metaphor eloquently expresses the theme of evasion rather than confrontation. It is an interesting example of one of the most experienced, elite members of the profession using (apparently) diversionary tactics and tasks to avoid the topic of failure.

The degree of familiarity with formal monitoring procedures

seemed to be related to role and responsibilities. For example, none of the lecturers noted the annual course report as a primary review mechanism, whereas this was mentioned by half the course leaders, who would be responsible for writing the annual report. Two course leaders also made explicit reference to the impact of Working Paper 10 particularly, Regional accountability and the potential for conflict arising from different definitions of quality and value for money related to the funding input, output or outcome.

H>2/1U>M "The Region in their contract have specified a six monthly and annual report on the performance of the school. They may seriously interfere with quality and judgement. They are funding input not output."

A range of formal and informal monitoring mechanisms operated in academic settings. These included discussion about individual students and the cohort, the annual report at staff meetings, course committee and examination board meetings with external examiners or moderators. These departmental systems were then subject to institutional and national review through Academic Standards Committees and the Joint Validation Board (COT/CPSM).

There were also variations on the openness of these formal and informal systems. In some Schools the decisions were taken by a small group.

H>4/1U> "We meet behind closed doors to stop staff gossiping about students' exam results. I do not think this should be done in a public forum with the whole staff. It is now done by the coordinators and me, so it is anonymous."

In contrast

H>1/1U< "There is a lot of soul searching amongst the staff.

We are a small school with few staff. Whatever cause of drop out, we take a close look to see what and why it went wrong. We do this in private rather than at an examination board."

These collective, anonymous, institutional systems mirror the assessment procedures. Both, seemingly designed to protect individual staff from the stress and responsibility. The effectiveness of these organisational mechanisms will be considered in a later section.

8.5.2 Fieldwork monitoring mechanisms

There was an interesting split in responses between fieldwork organisers. Three monitored the fieldwork placement results. Methods included records of individual results, a cohort analysis, the results awarded by specific departments and fieldwork supervisors, a report presented to the examination board, the fieldwork placement committee, moderators, external examiners and the fieldwork supervisors at bi-annual workshops. One explained the reasons

C>4/2U<M "The supervisor only sees one fail student. Here we see failure as a natural part of the learning/distribution curve and not because they have been wrongly taught. Therefore I monitor and feedback to the supervisors the results as a whole."

The other four fieldwork organisers either did not monitor failure rates, or commented that there were insufficient records, or numbers to justify a separate system. Although the latter explanation reflects the low incidence of fieldwork fails, the lack of a systematic procedure for monitoring the equivalent of one third of the curriculum is concerning. The following is

commended as an example of good practice.

C>12/1U> "I now run through the whole Course with a profile for students, placements and supervisors. I am able to see patterns, for example those supervisors who more regularly award fails or merits, some are more or less rigorous in their assessments. When I see a pattern emerging I will visit and discuss this with the fieldwork supervisors."

8.6 The assessment process: decision making, informing and appeals

The assessors' perspective on the whole process, from individual and collective responsibilities for making the judgement of competence, to informing the student of the outcome and then coping with a challenge of an appeal, provides the institutional and individual framework for assigning a fail grade. Each stage in this process will be described.

8.6.1 Introduction to the responsibility for assessment

The first part of the process was examined in a question about the responsibility for judging non attainment on a specific assessment, a fieldwork placement or the whole course, which would result in termination of training. A secondary consideration was whether this responsibility was undertaken alone or shared and if so, who else would contribute to the decision making process. The purpose was to probe two assumptions, firstly, that single-handed fieldwork supervisors would experience most difficulty in assigning a fail grade and

secondly, lecturers would experience least difficulty because the system of double marking and moderation would act as a protective device, by distancing and therefore defusing both decision making and emotional involvement.

The term judgement was used to acknowledge the balance of subjectivity and objectivity which are inherent in all assessments (Blomquist 1985, Ernest & Polatajko 1986, Geary 1988). Assessment is one of the primary functions of a teacher or fieldwork supervisor. The phrase 'teacher-as-judge' (Hoyle, 1969) seems to be a particularly powerful and appropriate description of the assessor role. Three informants acknowledged their discomfort at adopting, what they perceived to be a judgemental stance.

C>4//2U<M "I hate making judgements about people anyway. Who is to say that I am better or right to do so?"

A reasonable reply could refer to their status and role as a teacher or fieldwork supervisor. However this obvious, superficial answer fails to address an underlying conflict between the roles of a teacher as assessor and source of pastoral care which is an expectation in the role of supervisor and personal tutor.

The notion of failure is inherent in the judgement process "that the student is judged as being unacceptable" (Geary, 1988) because s/he has not yet attained the required standard. This consequence would seem to be particularly difficult for occupational therapists because of the professions' humanistic values (Yerxa, 1991). These are expressed via acceptance, non-

judgementalism and facilitating optimum independence in occupational behaviour as determined by each client, rather than censuring for non-achievement of standards set or imposed by others. The dilemmas and conflicts between the roles and values of educator or therapist is a key theme which was investigated at the end of the focused interview.

The responses revealed a dichotomy between the organisational support networks available to those responsible for judging academic or professional competence. In all academic settings there were formal procedures and systems, at all levels, from subject based tutor assessments to examination boards. It would be inappropriate to describe the details of the different mechanisms for each course because it was the implementation of common procedural principles which impacted upon the role and responsibilities of head of schools, fieldwork organisers or lecturers which is more relevant.

In contrast, the support networks available in the fieldwork setting were more informal and personal. The fieldwork assessment form provided the structure for the weekly formative and final summative assessments. The supervisors sought and received support in their decision making from occupational therapy and multi-disciplinary colleagues, particularly the fieldwork organiser. These differences are described for they illustrate important aspects of assessment processes which seemed to influence the assessor's ability to assign a fail grade.

8.6.2 Academic settings: group decision making and shared responsibilities

There was consensus that an individual would never be responsible for making the judgement that a student had failed a specific assessment or the whole course. It would always be "a group decision". Academic informants identified certain factors which may be taken into consideration by the staff group (either the whole team or a sub-set). These included: the students' profile of performance throughout the course; whether the student "deserved to fail"; attendance and professional behaviour exhibited in the academic setting; and whether the student may have grounds for appeal. These implicit assessment constructs (Rowntree, 1987) seemed to be negotiable and negotiated during staff discussions. Such processes highlight the danger of subjectivity in small departments where all students are well known to staff. A quotation from a lecturer illustrates this problem.

L<7/2U> "How on earth do you make an accurate assessment. This worries me because the decisions seem arbitrary. I think we should try harder to justify the decision. I have seen scapegoating occur and some students are more visibly unsuitable than others."

This observation is balanced by a comment from another lecturer which highlights the underlying conflict between therapist and educator values.

L>9/3U> "Our decision making is coloured by being therapists. We want to nurture, to be fair and encourage them because fail is such an undesirable scenario."

These personal perspectives on the process provide an interesting contrast with the carefully defined and regulated institutional

examination procedures. All courses had formal procedures for dealing with borderline and unsatisfactory performance. These included systems for independent double and triple marking, specific assessments with "tight answer and marking guidelines", internal and external examiners or moderators, and students where there was a student-negotiated approach to assessment. All seeming to provide

L>6/1U<M "reassuring confirmation and validation of your judgement."

These systems highlight the shift from individual to team responsibility and decision making. This change is reflected in the progression from lecturer's comments, to numerical symbols of performance, according to an agreed grading scale. The process becomes more objective and formal according to the set regulations with the pass mark, possibilities for referral, deferral or compensation contained in the course documentation. The interpretation and implementation of the rules and regulations are vested in the examination board which accepts collective responsibility for approving the pass list. Interestingly, there were variations in perceptions of this formal, final stage. For example, the examination board may merely ratify or "rubber stamp" the recommendations made by the head of school, or review and adjust the marks awarded, thereby changing or "interfering" with earlier judgements.

The assessment rules and regulations seem to provide an institutionally sanctioned mechanism for separating the individual teacher from the consequences of their judgement. The

support implicit in peer confirmation becoming more formal via course committees and examination boards, who operate regulations which have been approved by the course, departmental, institutional and professional hierarchies. There seems to be a progressive and anonymous increase in distance between the lecturer and student which may function as a protective device. This is expressed in an extreme form with the organisational ritual (Farrington, 1990) of posting a pass list on a notice board. Students who have failed are (obviously) excluded from the 'pass list' as though the institution were denying or ashamed of their existence. However, these organisational mechanisms for protecting staff from the trauma of assigning a fail grade were found to be ineffective, particularly for lecturers, those staff with direct responsibility for making the judgement. This may be related to a range of reasons, including the conflict between roles and values, which lecturers have to contain within their

"ritual power as (they) 'live up to a particular role expectation" (Travers, 1982).

8.6.3 Role and relationship with moderators/external examiners when arbitrating and adjudicating fail grades.

Moderators or external examiners provide another external, monitoring mechanism and formal source of support for academic staff during the decision making process. One question explored perceptions about the effectiveness of this common quality assurance mechanism, and particularly their role in the fieldwork

setting. These systems of peer review follow guidelines issued by the College of Occupational Therapists and Council for National Academic Awards, for example

"The role of the external examiner(s) is to ensure that justice is done to the individual student and that the standard of the institution's award is maintained" (CNAA 1992).

There was a considerable difference between academic and fieldwork informants' contact with moderators/external examiners. All academic staff had experience of working with, or as, a moderator. In contrast, the five supervisors' experience was limited to three routine visits which were unrelated to borderline or unsatisfactory students. Although based upon a limited sample, this finding would seem to suggest that section 6.5 of the 'Procedures for ensuring satisfactory assessment and moderation' (COT 1988) is not being implemented. This section states:

"Clinical practice may be considered as a separate course element but will be moderated and assessed as fully as the non-clinical elements of the course."

It seems sad that this support network does not extend to those who are responsible for assessing one third of, and the outcome of the Course - competence to practise as an occupational therapist. This is a further indicator of the relatively isolated position, and lack of institutional support, for fieldwork supervisors.

The supportive role of external examiners/moderators were acknowledged by academic staff. All 25 informants valued their contribution as impartial, external agents in the process of

judging the whole course, but particularly marginal students. A content analysis of the terms used revealed the following positive aspects. Firstly, objectivity gained from lack of involvement with the student and the decision making process (n=11); ability to act as an external monitor of standards gained through their experience of comparable courses (n=9); the provision of supportive help and advice to the course team (n=7); acting as the final arbiters by accepting responsibility for the pass list (n=5); and finally, other aspects included acting as a pressure group for the course within the educational establishment and the moderation up or down of an individual or the cohorts' marks.

The language used supported the importance of this objective, impartial and arbitrator role. For example

H>9/1U>M "They are vital, I would not be without them. They give a dispassionate view from the intense emotional atmosphere which happens in school. They are objective and fair to the student."

C>9/2U>M "When there has been problems I can contact them on the telephone. They are excellent - objective."

L>5/3U<M "Personally I find them very helpful, they verify because you feel unsure of yourself. It is good when someone else agrees or disagrees with you. You may be too close, too subjective. Their monitoring is important."

In contrast to the consensus about the valued role of external examiners/moderators, there were differences in the problems highlighted by informants with different responsibilities. Three of the ten heads of schools spontaneously reported serious problems encountered with an individual or team of moderators.

These included the imposition of new and inconsistent marking criteria, moderators who displayed rigid and biased ideas about a particular educational route, or lack of understanding of current theoretical models of practice, or the detail of the validated course. The response of two was to intervene at a national level to secure changes in the panel of moderators. These criticisms highlight the importance of selection, preparation and monitoring of moderators (or external examiners), for they are vested with the responsibility and power, to set standards. Their use or abuse of this power needs to be carefully regulated rather than responsive to specific complaints.

The potential for conflict in the role and judgements of moderators/external examiners, particularly regarding raising or lowering the internal assessors' marks, was acknowledged directly and indirectly by both heads of schools and lecturers. There seemed to be two strategies (autonomy and delegation) for handling this conflict, with the choice seemingly dependent upon the experience and attitude of the head of school. These strategies are summarised in the following quotations.

H>4/1U> "Recently we had an erratic external and now I ask staff to cross and third mark so we make the decision here. I am not going to risk my students with new moderators, so it is our decision."

H>7/1U>M "We put in a recommendation and abide by their decision. Need to balance the needs of the individual with those of COT and CPSM."

The style of accepting responsibility for the judgements within the School, rather than delegating to an external authority,

parallels the position of supervisors who accept full, personal and direct responsibility for assigning a fail grade.

There were variations in the sense of accountability to, and approachability of, moderators/external examiners held by fieldwork organisers and lecturers. Three of the eight lecturers referred to instances when their judgements had been "overturned". This generated anger, disappointment and a perceived loss of credibility with the student group. In contrast, although (and maybe because) the moderators were unable to alter the grade awarded by a supervisor, the fieldwork organisers reported ad hoc consultation throughout the year as problems arose, in addition to providing a formal, end of year analysis of results.

8.6.4 Fieldwork settings: decision making and informing of the result

The extensive, formal (and informal) support mechanisms for academic staff provide an interesting contrast with those at the fieldwork setting. There were stark differences between the institutional, collective and anonymous procedures of the academic setting with the personal, face-to-face, direct judgements and notification of results at a final interview. This is the culmination of a regular process of weekly, formative meetings. If these sessions had been characterised by appropriate, honest feedback the final fail grade would not, and should not be a surprise to the student (Pope 1983, Green

1991). However, the difficulty of telling a student face to face that s/he had failed (Lankshear, 1990), particularly an unrealistic student who had "not heard" the feedback, was recognised as particularly problematical. The reinforcement of this recognised element of effective supervision (Barker 1986, Hickerson-Crist 1986, Ogier 1986, Wong & Wong 1987, Alsop 1991) was one of the immediate and long-term outcomes identified by the failure workshop participants.

There were some intriguing variations in the perceptions of responsibility for making the judgement between fieldwork organisers and supervisors. All seven organisers stated they were invited to participate in the decision making process by fieldwork supervisors. This participation ranged from consultation, to discussion, to

C>4/2U<M "They seem to want us to make the decision for them. It is more traumatic for them, particularly for inexperienced supervisors."

In contrast, only one of the five supervisors identified the fieldwork organiser as someone who contributed to the judgement. All stated they individually, or as a member of a team of fieldwork supervisors, were responsible for assigning a fail grade.

S>6/3U<M "Self, as the supervisor but with supervision from the Head Occupational Therapist, but ultimately it was me who said pass or fail."

The use of peers, either informally or as part of a split placement, with managers providing support and supervision, contradicts the assumptions expressed by academic informants (and

the author), that fieldwork supervisors are solely responsible for judging incompetence.

All supervisors had, and used, intra-professional support networks which provided "a fair and objective second opinion". The views of members of the inter-disciplinary team were also canvassed either directly or indirectly. This compares with the situation in nursing reported by Davenhall (1985)

"the current reluctance to allow full participation by other team members and the tacit exclusion of nurse managers and partial exclusion of teaching staff from the assessment situation."

However, with the introduction of Project 2000 this uni-disciplinary approach to practice assessment for student nurses has been challenged (Bradley, 1990).

8.6.5 Roles and relationship between fieldwork organisers and fieldwork supervisors when working with a borderline or unsatisfactory student.

The relationship between fieldwork organisers and supervisors, although central in normal circumstances, is crucial in the exceptional circumstances of working with a borderline or unsatisfactory student. The role of the fieldwork organiser would seem to parallel that of external examiner. Three aspects were examined. Firstly whether fieldwork organisers experienced a conflict of loyalties between providing support to the fieldwork supervisor and the student; their role in the judgement process, particularly whether they challenged the fieldwork supervisor's decision; and finally the strategy adopted

by fieldwork organisers to ensure both student and supervisor received a 'fair deal'.

Fieldwork organisers straddle the academic and professional components of the course. As one commented, she had access to the academic and professional environment, but without really belonging to either.

Their role may be compared with that of a moderator for both are influential, external agents who oversee the assessment process. However, fieldwork organisers may be perceived as less objective or impartial due to their association with their base and employer - the School. The most common roles identified by fieldwork organisers were firstly, to provide support for the supervisor and student, to act as an independent advisor ensuring that the "right decision had been made for the right reasons", and to provide advice and information on alternative supervisory strategies, school rules, regulations, procedures and documentation which would be required. For example,

C>5/2U> "Supportive and in an advisory capacity, to inform them of the procedures, remind them about the criteria and the student's level of training. Supporting them through because it is difficult. No one likes failing another human being and supervisors are more isolated than in college where we can easily knock on each others doors."

This quotation repeats two important themes. Firstly, the common but irrational association between failure on a task and failure as a person:

"We know that academic inadequacy robs a human of a sense of usefulness, of competency of acceptance, of power" (Ungerleider, 1985).

Secondly, the assumption held by academic staff that fieldwork supervisors make the judgement single-handed without access to support, verification or confirmation, an assumption which is challenged in this research.

Fieldwork organisers' reported challenging the process rather than the outcome to ensure the

C<2/2U< "decision making is well thought out and justified."

The importance of fieldwork organisers being approachable was noted, particularly because of the tendency to attribute the student's difficulty to their failure, which created an expectation of criticism from the School, represented by the fieldwork organiser. Following participation in a failure workshop one fieldwork organiser commented

C>4/2U<M "I had not realised that some supervisors have real difficulty initiating contact with us about a student who is giving them problems. I now see this as a real and legitimate problem for the supervisor."

This is juxtaposed with the supervisor's comment

"I really don't like ringing school about problems I am having with a student." "

Both illustrate differences in attribution of responsibility, and how a failure workshop can provide an opportunity to reduce this mismatch in perceptions.

The perceptions of fieldwork supervisors, as recipients of the service and support, were also explored. The transfer from diploma to degree courses in Higher Education establishments, with new expectations and conditions of employment, has put the role of the fieldwork organiser under examination, even threat,

for

"in tertiary education it (clinical experience) is not considered to be as valuable as the theoretical college-based learning" (Cracknell, 1990).

The question was designed to gain an understanding of the consumer's perspective, with an indication of customer satisfaction in a cost efficient, competitive market place between education providers.

There was unanimous agreement amongst all five fieldwork supervisors about their essential, supportive role when they were working with a marginal student. This support was needed (and provided) at an earlier stage because supervisors initiated contact prior to the usual, pre-arranged visit and was continued through additional visits or weekly telephone calls. The aspects of support valued by supervisors also parallel features of an external examiner or moderator's role. These included providing support fairly and impartially to both the supervisor and student, offering advice linked to appropriate expectations for the students' level of training and supervisory strategies, and providing an objective appraisal of the situation. For example

S>8/7U<I "She was extremely supportive. It was our first time and none of us had been on a failure day. We were thinking in terms of problems, she crystallised it into failure. She managed to put the failure into perspective, this was very valuable."

This external verification and confirmation of an unfamiliar scenario seemed to be particularly important as this quotation illustrates:

S>8/4U<I "She gave us the confidence to acknowledge there was a problem and that it wasn't us. This helped to relieve our guilt as she had looked at the situation and helped the student."

The corrosive impact of guilt upon a supervisors' personal and professional identity was a central theme of the first study (Ilott, 1988). The supportive and timely intervention of a fieldwork organiser may contribute to an alleviation of this sense of guilt.

At a time of national shortage of appropriate placements (Matson, 1985), two fieldwork organisers spontaneously stated their belief that they had maintained, and increased the number of placements, because of the School's reputation for supporting supervisors. The costs of working with a borderline or unsatisfactory student are high, whether expressed in monetary and emotional terms. However, these immediate costs of supporting a supervisor seem to be balanced by the long term benefits of maintaining a scarce resource. The sensitivity of fieldwork organisers to the impact a fail has upon the supervisors' confidence, including their need for recuperation and reluctance to accept the next student, were important hidden aspects of their role which were revealed in response to later questions. These obvious and hidden benefits would seem to endorse the continued need and role for fieldwork organisers (Alsop, 1991), particularly as they represent a key source of institutional support.

8.6.6 Responsibility for informing a student of the outcome of an academic assessment

Informing a student about the outcome of the assessment is the next important stage. One question investigated this responsibility related to failure on a specific assessment, the fieldwork placement or the whole course. It was intended to highlight differences in staff roles and responsibilities.

As expected, all ten course leaders acknowledged their responsibilities with all fail scenarios "at the crunch". However, in all instances their involvement extended beyond the formal, organisational boundaries and bureaucratic procedures. Their use of vivid examples and language seems to demonstrate the depth of response which called upon their skills, sensitivity and experience as a therapist.

H>2/1U>M "I think failure is devastating for the student. I therefore spend time with them considering their life options."

Four reported circumventing the impersonal procedures for notification by the academic registrar or examination board. This was done in various ways, for example, immediately telephoning the student to inform them of the results and being available for a number of personal meetings (both pre and post the examination board meeting) which could include the student's partner or family.

The role adopted by other staff seemed to vary with the circumstances and consequences of a fail grade. The contributions of a subject lecturer, personal tutor or fieldwork organiser

depended upon whether a first fail was attributed to poor study skills, negative life events, subject or placement specific problems or professional unsuitability, for example. The contribution of the personal tutor in supporting a borderline or unsatisfactory student in the academic or fieldwork setting was acknowledged by course leaders, fieldwork organisers and lecturers. All staff, except fieldwork supervisors, recognised the course leader's ultimate responsibility for informing students of termination of training.

8.6.7 Experience of the student invoking the School's appeals procedure following a fail in the academic and fieldwork setting.

A student challenging the judgement, through an appeal procedure may be considered as the final stage in the assessment process. During the last decade the majority of schools have transferred from the independent or health sector into Higher Education. This has provided students (and staff) with the additional safeguard of a local, independent appeals procedure. Although these varied slightly from School to School, there was agreement about the criteria for an appeal: procedural irregularities and undeclared extenuating circumstances.

However, the lack of familiarity with the grounds for appeal amongst fieldwork supervisors and organisers was concerning. This was admitted by four of the five supervisors and two of the seven fieldwork organisers. I also suspected supervisors were

unaware of the student's right to appeal. This ignorance deprives students of a right to natural justice and leaves the staff vulnerable, unaware of the need for, and the strategies to, protect themselves. A further undesirable consequence was noted by a fieldwork organiser.

C>8//3U< "If a supervisor only becomes aware of failure late in the placement, then in my experience a borderline student receives a pass grade because the supervisor is appalled and terrified by the appeals system."

The importance of the right to, and the implications of an appeal has been recognised in other professions and countries, particularly America where students are able to appeal using both the legal and educational systems (Pope 1983, Francis and Holmes 1983, Darragh et al 1986, Streifer 1987). The legal implications seemingly providing a stimulus for articles about marginal students (Poteet & Pollok 1981, Wood & Campbell 1985, Goclowski 1985 and Majorowicz 1986).

This question provoked a strong response, particularly from those with either direct or indirect experience of an appeal. They acknowledged their fear and the trauma of an appeal. For example

H>7/1U>M "Never, thank god. It has been threatened but the student didn't have grounds."

H>5/1U>M "I had three appeals in my first year. It was an induction of fire. It was like going to court and it was very heavily weighted in favour of the student ... it was a long and draining experience."

L>5/3U<M "Only at second hand. There were three appeals in the first two years I was here. I knew the students as a lecturer but I didn't give evidence. We are a small staff, so we were all aware of the pressures on the course leader. It was a pretty horrendous situation."

One course leader described an appeal which was complicated by personal and health factors

H>11/1U> "For me it was personally awful, the worst thing in my 25 year career."

The expressive language and metaphors used about appeals seem to parallel expressions about the whole subject of failure.

There was a clear distinction between the knowledge and experience of academic and fieldwork staff. None of the five supervisors had any experience of a student invoking the appeals procedure and only one was aware of the grounds for an appeal.

S>8/6U<M "We looked at the grounds for appeal at the time and wrote in our diaries everytime we gave her feedback."

Darragh et al (1986) outlines the supervisor's responsibilities as identifying deficient behaviour, recommending strategies for improvement, monitoring their implementation and documenting this process with the student. All supervisors need to be aware of these obligations. Documentation provides the evidence that the supervisor has fulfilled her responsibilities and made a fair, "expert evaluation of cumulative information" (Poteet & Pollok, 1981). This evidence of 'due process' also assures the supervisor that they have succeeded rather than failed as a supervisor.

In comparison, just over half the academic informants had direct experience of a student invoking the appeals procedure. These included 4 heads of school, 6 lecturers and 3 fieldwork organisers who had been involved with a total of 21 appeals. Although this total may seem quite high, it is important to place

the figure in the context of the total years of their experience, to gain a sense of proportion. However, two informants foresaw an increase in the likelihood of appeals with the increase in recruitment of mature, assertive students.

Fieldwork organisers particularly need to be conversant with the appeals procedure, both when dealing with individual supervisors, and as the organiser of fieldwork supervisors courses to ensure they are appropriately prepared for this responsibility. This could prevent the present abuses and misuses of the system, for example

C>12/1U> "One student, who had a sound case was dissuaded from appealing by another member of staff."

H>4/1U> "The thought of an appeal frightens the supervisor and they get cold feet. In one instance the student miraculously improved so much in the final week she passed the placement."

One fieldwork organiser presented the students' perspective on an appeal stating that they

C>12/1U> "are a hassle for the student. They say the system is against them. Occupational therapy is a small world, they soon become 'known' and are concerned that they will carry this with them, and it will effect their job prospects."

This perception was contradicted by statements made by two lecturers who advocated the students' right to complain

L<7/2U< "I am keen that the students know of their right to appeal. I think there should be a policy for students to present valid complaints against staff, so it can be done in a fair and professional way. We have a lot of sanctions over them. They have so little power particularly when there has been a miscarriage of justice."

The adverse effect of an appeal upon the cohort and others was

noted.

H>11/1U> "One appeal caused quite a lot of anguish amongst the students ... in another case they thought the decision was fair. However, there is a legacy of anger amongst some students and fieldwork supervisors."

The adversarial nature of the appeal system seems to encourage alliances, conflict and anxiety. For example,

C>9/2U>M "If I am involved I tell the student to take their appeal to the School direct. My alliance is with the placement so I try to keep my distance."

Others described the conflict between the roles of personal tutor and advocate for the student at an appeals panel. This seemed to exacerbate the tendency to adopt a therapeutic rather than educational relationship.

H>9/1U>M "We want to err on the side of the student. We need to be fair. It is their career and not wanting to spoil it for them."

L>9/3U> "It is a difficult time, very anxious for staff and the institution, more so because we advocate for the student. Sometimes I feel we have led a student to the point of an appeal, but this is ultimately not kind. We need to learn not to be therapeutic."

This question highlighted the increased emotional costs of failure when a student invokes their right to appeal. The additional financial costs are also important. These were stated by one head of school

H>4/1U> "We had a water-tight case but it took years to go through the formal appeal ... it cost us a little bomb. The student didn't have any insight, it was difficult. At the end the question has to be - are we being fair and is the student safe?"

The rights of the students need to be safeguarded but balanced with this long term perspective which recognises the consequences for registration. The assessment of competence is not merely to

relieve the teacher's or supervisor's "anxiety and insecurity" (Holt, 1970) it is a crucial part of the vocational certification process (Rowntree, 1987). Nevertheless, all parties need to be familiar with, and value the personal and professional safeguards which are inherent in the right to appeal.

8.7 Introduction to the costs of failure in terms of time, monies and distress for the fieldwork setting, staff, student and student group.

The final question in the section on failure within the institution provoked detailed, in-depth responses about personal and organisational costs. There was a remarkable degree of consensus within, and between the different staff groups, with variations seeming to be a matter of emphasis or awareness rather than disagreement. This degree of internal consistency enhances the trustworthiness of the results. The personal costs of failure, only tentatively hinted at by other authors (Meisenhelder 1982, Carpenito 1983, Goclowski 1985, Majorowicz 1986, Turkett 1987, Lankshear 1990 and Symanski 1991) are confirmed.

The focus of this question was the costs of failure expressed in terms of time, money and the distress experienced by the different parties. The counter-balancing benefits of failure were mentioned by some informants, but these will be discussed later. All public services are increasingly concerned with costs and accountability for the expenditure of tax-payers money. The introduction of the business ethic and a competitive

market has focused attention on the provision of efficient, effective and value for money services. The aim of this question was to identify the hidden and human costs of assigning a fail grade which need to be included in educational contracts. Costs are now critical for the survival of courses and Schools.

8.7.1 Time

The first section focused upon the informants' direct, personal experience of the time involved in a specific fail scenario. Although costs are difficult to quantify, particularly on reflection with the unreliability of memory, it is recognised that "time is money."

The majority of informants - 27 of 30 - spontaneously commented upon the high time demands. The words and phrases indicate the extent, for example, an inordinate amount of time, extensive, incredible, an awful lot of time, very high, huge, tremendous, very costly, it was very time consuming and enormous.

The tasks undertaken during this time varied between the four staff groups, reflecting their different roles and responsibilities. The heads of schools described confirming the fairness and objectivity of the decision making process, organising procedural arrangements particularly the documentation especially in an appeal, liaising with external bodies, helping staff and supporting the student.

H>2/1U>M "It takes a lot of time, in the sense of time and psychologically with all the thinking time, thinking

through all the issues. If it is a difficult student, being absolutely sure we are being fair because we are inflicting an emotionally devastating blow - all failure is. But we need to be objective in the decision making and not go over the top. It is my job to help staff with this."

In contrast, lecturers and supervisors seemed to have a more practical and emotional involvement with the student. Lecturers described the time involved in marking, remarking, double and triple marking; discussions about scripts and performance; providing extra tutorials and detailed feedback on extra, practice assignments; setting resit papers; discussion with colleagues including the fieldwork organiser and personal tutor, "interminable meetings"; counselling and supporting the student through their personal reactions, particularly anger and disappointment.

L>5/3U<M "It is enormously difficult, very time consuming at a practical, thinking and emotional level."

One lecturer calculated 25 hours of input over a fortnight period. The literature contains few references to time, either for ordinary or problematical students. For example, Davenhall (1985) notes 20 minutes for report giving meetings and Yerxa (1986) describes a range of 1.5 to 4 hours for those who display "particularly difficult problems".

This time and intensity was matched in the placement setting. Supervisors identified daily and weekly feedback sessions; the extra supervision and support provided via explaining, instructing, directing, questioning and checking the student's understanding and performance; support for selves gained through

peer support, both in and out of work, and from their head of department or supervisor; contacting the School and fieldwork organisers; and "the time, pain and sweat" involved in writing the weekly and final report. All these activities detracted from their primary role as clinicians by reducing the time available for treating patients. The constraints of time and the dual, often conflicting demands of the role of supervisor and clinician are acknowledged as a problem in usual circumstances but these are exacerbated with 'difficult students' (Maybury 1988, Ilott 1988, Alsop 1991, Green 1991). They responded to this extra pressure in a variety of ways, including

S>6/3U<M "I still had to work with the same case-load. I had to do the visits in the evening to catch up. This was very tiring."

S>8/4U<I "The normal clinical day was extended. It took longer to do the routine work because of all the time spent explaining, directing, instructing the student. Therefore the treatment took longer. At the end of the day the student would go at 4.00. but we would stay till 6.00. catching up, clearing up and report writing. It took longer to do the student's weekly report, we were careful about the wording, trying to find something positive to include and to be truthful."

In the National Health Service of the 1990s, with clinical directorates, service contracts and Trusts, it is questionable whether this high level of expenditure will be permissible in the future. In the present climate of accountability and cost-efficiency the actual costs and benefits for health providers are being investigated with the intention of charging education providers the costs of fieldwork placement (Walker & Cooper, 1993). They suggest the benefits from students contributing to the service, outweigh the costs in the final part of the

placement, and earlier with finalist students (Shalik 1987, Landsdowne 1992). However, this research indicates the high cost of supervising a marginal student at a politically sensitive time.

Finally, the tasks and time involvement of the fieldwork organiser were considered. They described extra visits which may involve considerable travel expenses to the placement to meet with the student and supervisor; discussion with academic colleagues to obtain a profile of the student's performance; arranging a retake placement, preparing the supervisor and student for the retake placement; following-up and supporting the supervisor; maintaining telephone contact and record keeping. These multiple concerns are clearly expressed in this response:

C>12/1U> "I hope that in the end the supervisor feels supported and has made the right decision. The student is reasonably whole for coping with the next placement. The supervisor at the retake placement feels comfortable and has the necessary information because this takes extra responsibility."

These details support the opening statements about the inordinate amount of time, and therefore money, a fail scenario involves for all staff.

8.7.2 Financial costs

The next element of the question directly addressed the monetary cost of failure. The interviews were conducted during the summer term 1991, just before the implementation of Working Paper 10. However, the impact of the reforms were apparent with potential

implications mentioned spontaneously by two heads of schools and two lecturers. Those heads of schools with responsibility for courses financed by sponsorship from Health and Local Authorities were familiar with the economic aspects, particularly the jeopardy to financial viability of the whole programme. For example,

H>11/1U> "For the whole course, it means that next time we are poorer because the fees are gone. Then do you raise the fees from the other sponsors - what do you do? The cost margins on these courses are very tight anyway. But you can't think of this, it has to be separate from failing the student, but I think about it afterwards and what effect it will have upon the next year. We couldn't afford to lose too many."

The financial realities of attrition, in terms of lost income, was a concern raised by six heads of school. This was starkly stated by one:

H>4/1U> "If a student leaves in the first year it leaves an empty place for years 2 and 3. This is the equivalent of a third of a staff salary. This is the way we are looking at it now."

The financial consequences of failure in the first year contrast with the consensus amongst informants that

"it is kinder for students to fail earlier rather than later in the course."

This quotation introduces the conflicts between accounts and personal costs, professional standards and financial viability, and the reputation of the education provider with the regional purchaser. Another head of school commented

H>2/1U>M "I am aware the course needs to be financially viable. I inform the staff about the income issue, not so they will alter their marks, but so they are aware of the consequences of their decisions. With more regional health authorities sponsoring students, the losses/failures will be viewed politically. This is

going to be a minefield."

This fear about output, rather than outcome measures as performance indicators (Kaufman, 1988) seems to be well founded with the current political and media enthusiasm for league tables of results (Tytler, 1991). This re-raises the dilemma about a causal theory of teaching, (Ericson and Ellett, 1987), perceptions of failure rates and the need to safeguard professional and academic standards.

L>6/2U<M "There is pressure not to fail students because of the loss of course fees. This is more prevalent now, but it hasn't stopped us failing students. If anything it has made us more determined to keep up the standards."

The implementation of Working Paper 10 must be monitored to ensure this delicate balance is not shifted. If failing a student becomes a politically unacceptable, or financially unviable option, then this would put vulnerable future patients at risk from incompetent and unsafe occupational therapists which could invoke long term costs with malpractice claims.

Other costs identified included "time is money", as a general phrase encompassing their time as employees and the students' loss of income from employment. One head of school costed her time in an appeal at one thousand pounds. Other costs were travel, subsistence expenses and the cost of other staff undertaking the supervisor or teachers' work commitments. The consequence of losing a precious and limited training place was also commented upon by a lecturer.

L>7/3U> "As a profession we cannot afford to lose people. This is why I think we bend over backwards, and why we shouldn't do this."

In 1990 1055 students commenced occupational therapy training in the United Kingdom (COT 1991). Wastage is particularly costly when the available training places are so few and the shortfall of occupational therapists so great (approximately 15-20% in Health and Local Authorities).

8.7.3 Personal costs and distress

The next section explored the "emotionally taxing" aspects (Meisenhelder, 1982) the stressors and distress experienced by assessors and other participants in the process. In this way the question acted as a bridge between the organisational focus of the second section and the personal experience of the final section. Although it was a leading question, containing the assumption that failure is distressing, this was not contradicted and the examples illustrate the spread and depth of distress.

The language and metaphors used were evocative, suggesting emotional trauma, thus giving supportive evidence for the hypotheses. An example from each staff group precedes the analysis.

S>6/3U<M "Very high at the time. I was tearing my hair out, not knowing what to do."

L>6/1U<M "Anguish when it is termination of training." .

C>12/1U> "I feel as though I have come through a mangle at the end of the day. I think it is getting better with practice, but this doesn't mean it is any easier."

H<10/1U>M "Awful. The power of changing and stopping someone's career."

There were interesting differences between staff about the degree of distress experienced. The fieldwork supervisors and lecturers seemed to experience the most distress, reporting predominantly negative aspects, whereas the heads of school and fieldwork organisers included positive outcomes in their replies. There was unanimity amongst the supervisors and lecturers about the anguish of a fail scenario, although the lecturers differentiated between a first and second fail resulting in termination of training.

L>8/2U<M "It doesn't feel the same."

This may be due to their experience of successful results, in comparison with fieldwork supervisors' more limited experience which was confined to a single fail.

The language used by lecturers and supervisors shared common terms, for example

S>8/6U<M "Definitely, costs in personal energy. I didn't want to see another student for months afterwards because it was so mentally exhausting."

L>9/3U> "Emotionally it is costly. It is certainly wearing. It was hard to hold on to your head as you try to be a human being, therapist and teacher."

The process of decision making involved

S>8/4U<I "A lot of soul searching. Is it a personality clash? Am I being objective? Am I picking on everything? I agonised about these things."

L<7/2U< "Much heart-searching. A lot of argument - should or shouldn't it happen."

The sense of guilt was noted by a supervisor and lecturer.

S>8/7U<I "The trauma of it was the worst bit. It was almost guilt because it is such a big responsibility for the profession and the student."

L>7/3U> "Sense of failure if you have put in a lot of effort to stop them failing the retake. We do not want students to fail - feel failures ourselves."

These quotations reflect core themes which permeate the present and previous research. The self-interrogation and feelings of guilt seem to increase when the student has demonstrated effort and responded to feedback. The attribution of failure to lack of ability, rather than effort, may have provoked a sympathetic response as

"perceived uncontrollability gives rise to sympathy, and sympathy in turn, promotes commitment to help" (Graham, 1984).

Other factors which seemed to evoke sadness were whether the student was liked or a personal student.

L>5/3U<M "As a personal tutor I knew she was struggling but I wanted her to succeed. It was distressing."

These feelings of distress and guilt may be related to gender. The majority of staff and students are female. Sex differences have been reported in responses to, and attributions about success and failure. For example, females often avoid tasks on which they might fail, express more anxiety about failure (Welch et al, 1986), anticipate less credit for success and more blame for a joint failure, with a work image of lesser effectiveness and greater anxiety (Heilman & Kram, 1983). The commitment to ensure success, as demonstrated by the extraordinary amount of time and assistance offered by lecturers and supervisors, with their expressions of anxiety and guilt, would seem to support connections between gender and failure.

The process of identification is another complicating factor which seemed to increase staff distress. This was noted by two supervisors

S>8/7U<I "I was aware of the hopes of the student, thinking about myself when I got my reports."

S>8/4U<I "It was difficult for my colleague because she had failed a placement. She had gone through it. It brought back bad memories for her. This increased her distress. It all came flooding back for her, she was going through what the student was going through."

A confounding factor referred to by academic informants was the stage of training. There was agreement that

L>6/2U<M "It is more difficult if it is a second or third year student because you feel as though the student ought to have gone early, if the student is going, but this doesn't always happen. It was horrific when a third year student failed."

Fieldwork organisers seemed to have a more balanced approach towards failure because they identified positive and negative outcomes. This may be linked to their greater actual and emotional distance, both from the direct responsibility for decision making and face-to-face contact with the student. Also, involvement in fail scenarios were considered as an integral and expected part of the role.

C<2/2U< "I expected failure to be part of the job. It was part of my interest, to assist students to grow into occupational therapists. This doesn't mean I am cool about it."

Failing a placement was viewed as positive learning experience by half the fieldwork organisers, for example

C<2/2U< "They are better occupational therapists because of repeating a placement. It is hard for the students and supervisors to see this overview. They get double the

time and I think this gives them a head start on their peers, they are richer for the resit. Often they are able to appreciate this in retrospect."

However, half also acknowledged an increase in distress and frustration when

C>8/3U< "If a supervisor has been unfair and I cannot help the student. This is the most difficult situation."

All fieldwork organisers agreed that failure scenarios were difficult, a challenge

C>5/2U> "I still find it distressing. If I didn't I would be burnt-out."

Although, half acknowledged they were "getting better with practice". Two, even seemed to relish the challenge

C>9/2U>M "The different student responses are stimulating for me. I love it when the unsortable gets sorted, the power and control, it is magic when I am able to sort things out."

C>4/3U>M "I am so used to it now that I can deal with it with my hands tied behind my back. I've got it right now. It did distress me the very first time."

This ability may have been apparent, as all five supervisors seemed to be surprised by the suggestion that fieldwork organisers might experience distress too. They responded with vague statements such as "probably" and "I don't know". Supervisors concentrated upon their quick response "she had to drop everything and come here", the extra visits and time required rather than their emotional distress. The fieldwork organiser's success in fulfilling their role and responsibilities (and the supervisor's expectations) are summarised in this statement:

S>6/3U<M "It must have been difficult for her to be supportive

and fair to both of us. But I didn't feel this at the time, but on reflection it must have been."

The staff perspective on the process of assigning a fail grade has revealed a high personal cost in terms of distress and stress.

8.7.4 Distress for the staff group

Perceptions of distress for the whole staff group were also examined. All heads of schools expressed concern about individual and group reactions to a specific fail.

H>3/1U>M "It is part of my job ... One member became extremely distressed and anxious when a student failed."

H>2/1U>M "There is lots of discussion ... staff can go on too much. It is a new area for them."

The particular difficulty encountered by new, inexperienced lecturers (echoing the results of Turner's 1991 study of role and cultural transitions) or supervisors was acknowledged by a head of school and fieldwork organiser.

H>5/1U>M "It is stressful, particularly when they have put in a lot of effort and time. There isn't a formal system of supervision for new staff. There is a lot of informal talking, seeking out, I try to create opportunities to talk about it, but these are often missed because we are so busy. This is unsatisfactory and I don't feel I am filling my role supporting the staff."

The timing of the exams and retake assessments just before the summer vacation and the autumn term respectively was reported as an institutional support by one head of school.

H>2/1U>M "It is good the decision making occurs at the end of the year when there is a break. Time out is important

... the retake students are not seen in the classroom setting. It is best to get it over and done with cleanly."

However, the assumption that any distress associated with loss is avoided or decreased by this institutional timing, was not shared by lecturers or students.

The no-win position of the head of school in the decision making process was acknowledged

H>4/1U> "I am in the middle. Whatever decision I make I know will offend half the staff group."

The positive outcomes of failure and alternative reactions to distress were raised spontaneously, for example

H>3/1U>M "Failure is part of the job. If the student's personality is unsuitable then the cost may be a negative one, becoming a benefit because the student isn't worth the effort. I may be moderately distressed because I have usually invested time in supporting the student, but need to reconcile failure with reality. I may feel sad if everything has been done to help and the staff have tried hard then there is no need for guilt. I may feel cross if we have tried hard but the student has not worked. Viewing this in an unbiased way then we become incidental to the student's problems."

Interestingly, the wisdom and rationality of these words were contradicted by the detailed descriptions of personal help given to students who were struggling.

8.7.5 Costs to others: students and the placement

A limitation of the study is the unidimensional focus on a complex and dynamic situation. Observations about the distress experienced by the student, the whole cohort and others within

the academic and clinical environment was included to acknowledge this multi-dimensional reality. This brief and biased exploration confirms the negative impact of failure upon the student's self-perceptions (Wilson 1972, Waters 1983, Stevens & Pihl 1987, Kim & Clifford 1988, McGimpsey 1988, Stabile 1989 and Glover-Dell 1990). However the reverberations within the academic and clinical environment were also significant, surprising and deserving of further study.

Two thirds commented upon the distressing nature of failure for the student, particularly if failure was a new experience. The costs were expressed in practical and emotional terms. These included extension to the length of the course with loss of income, loss of self-esteem and guilt, dismay and disappointment, grief, a waste of their time and money. Two mediating variables were suggested, these were the degree of insight and expectation of failure gained through self-evaluation and self-assessment and the stage of training, the later in the course being considered most damaging and wasteful.

Positive aspects of failure were noted by five informants who recognised that failure was a relief for some students and those L<7/2U< "Who manipulate the system so they will be failed."

The theme of positive outcomes, particularly the "learning and growing up which occurs" was highlighted here, and later as one of the main coping strategies.

The repercussions of individual failure upon the whole cohort was described as extensive and enduring by academic informants. The

adjectives and metaphors used by lecturers and fieldwork organisers were particularly evocative.

C>8/3U< "There was fear amongst the group. Their year was 'being peeled away' and who would be next?"

L>9/3U> "One group was very angry. We walked round in pairs for moral support. Why had we treated this person differently from other students in the University? They don't understand the criteria of professional unsuitability. Sometimes they just accept and don't seem to notice. Sometimes they are sad. Therefore there are extremes."

L<7/2U< "This is a hot potato. I don't believe there is enough emphasis on the importance of this. We have small year groups ... it creates a lot of anxiety and problems particularly when the circumstances are unclear and there are lots of rumours. I've been asked by students 'What do you have to do to stay on this course? What do you have to do to be asked to leave?' There is a knock on effect."

L>5/3U<M "It partly depends on the group, if they are close knit and it happens in year 3 they react badly. We underestimate the hole that is left and the effect, for example they put out an extra seat. We assume they are more anonymous than they are."

L>7/3U> "They can take a long time to get over it. They mention the student and invite them back to social occasions. They 'never let them go'."

In response to this question, heads of schools presented more distant, rational observations. Perhaps reflecting the protection afforded by their status and broader experience.

H>2/1U>M "I am not sure about the student group. It is difficult to evaluate this because failures occur at the end of the academic term. I think students have some awareness of weaker students, therefore it isn't a complete shock."

However, this timing does not prevent the cohort taking action. Six informants described meetings and petitions to challenge decisions and support peers who they felt had been treated unfairly. One head of school described her tactic of routinely

consulting with the year representative,

H>4/1U> "encouraging them to be assertive by engaging them as professional colleagues."

However, the cohort were also aware of the positive aspects:

H<10/1U>M "I think the students would have been more distressed if this student had passed, he was so weak it would have jeopardised the reputation of the course."

The statement reflects the ambivalence which is part of the balancing act between personal, institutional and professional consequences of failure. All these examples epitomise Horsfall's (1990) observation

"Students' greatest support during these clinical travails are their peers, however occasionally they may be a cause of worry and embarrassment. There is always one student in a large group who is 'difficult' in some way. Often the student's peers bear invisible burdens of responsibilities and resentment, feeling that they have to make up for his/her gaffes or omissions."

8.7.6 Costs for the fieldwork placement

A parallel process of reverberation was reported by fieldwork supervisors. The ripple effect of "the stress" seemed to be determined by working practices. These ranged from containment within a shared office in a community setting, to

S>8/4U<I "the student putting a taint on the whole department" in a large hospital. The supervisors reported widespread negative repercussions affecting patients, other students, departmental staff and colleagues. These included unfavourable comments from colleagues about reduction in case-loads, patients

who admitted they had not felt comfortable with or had confidence in the student.

S>8/4U<I "This was worrying, what if they didn't want to attend in case they were treated by the student? Is it fair to inflict the student on patients?"

The involvement of all grades of staff, with the consequent impact on departmental atmosphere, was noted by three supervisors.

S>8/7U<I "The helpers were upset and other disciplines knew. It put a dampers on the department, there was an atmosphere. Everything was down at that time."

Although the personal and institutional costs of failure are difficult to quantify, the preceding discussion has highlighted that failure is a painful and expensive option for all. The costs are both obvious and hidden, for example the inordinate amount of time required to ensure the quality, fairness and appropriateness of the decision. The spread and endurance of hidden costs for assessors, the cohort and departments were particularly revealing and deserve further investigation. Interestingly, the institutional rituals - the policies and procedures - did not seem to protect those assessors with direct responsibility from the costs of assigning a fail grade. However, these institutional mechanisms are important because they provide the context for scrutinizing the minutiae of an assessor's experience.

8.8 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ASSIGNING A FAIL GRADE

8.8.1 Extent of personal experience

The third and final section of the interview schedule focused upon the informants' personal, subjective experience of failing students. The interview was structured from outer to internal worlds, with the first two sections providing a sense of trust, which seemed to contribute to their openness and honesty, in response to some challenging questions. This section examines the hypothesis:

A range of academic and fieldwork staff may be involved in a fail scenario. These include the course leader, fieldwork supervisor, fieldwork organiser and lecturer. Their different roles, responsibilities and relationships with a student will result in different objective and subjective experiences of failure."

The first question invited informants to quantify their experience of working with borderline and unsatisfactory students to provide a personal baseline encompassing their whole career. Thus expanding the focus to other roles, academic and fieldwork settings and students from other professions. All had more than one, either direct or indirect experience with a borderline or unsatisfactory student. The range was from one clinical supervisor with experience of a student failing an observation and a full fieldwork placement. To a head of school with experience in several countries, in a variety of roles with different under-graduate and post-graduate groups, over three decades, resulting in an estimated 100 direct experiences of failure in an academic setting which had resulted in termination

of training. These extremes are atypical. The amount of experience seemed to be dependent upon, and determined by each informant's career. For this reason the results will be reported as trends within and between the different staff groups, rather than neat tables which would inevitably be imprecise.

8.8.2 Fieldwork supervisors' experience

The fieldwork supervisors were the group with the least experience. All the five informants' experience was confined to the fieldwork setting. However, all had more than one direct or indirect contact with a fail scenario. This incidence is surprising and may reflect the skewed nature of the self-selected sample. In addition to their primary experience of failing a student (which was the basis for volunteering to participate in this research), four had direct experience of a borderline student and one had indirect experience of an unsatisfactory student. This suggests there may be a hidden (and unexpected) reservoir of experience.

Two supervisors had been asked to comment upon the performance of students from other health care professions, with one remarking

S>8/6U<M "None of the nursing students fail. They are not as brave as us, they don't fail them."

The spontaneous use of the word 'brave' indicates the courage required. The "failure to fail" nursing students in the practice setting was noted by Davenhall (1985) and Lankshear (1990). Similar language was used to describe their refusal to

"tell a student face to face ... (as) an excuse for unprofessional cowardice" (Lankshear, 1990).

8.8.3 Academic staff experience

The three academic groups all had considerable experience of working with borderline and unsatisfactory students. This extended beyond their present role and institution, bringing a breadth of insight from a variety of perspectives. It is these insights which will be reported rather than numbers quantifying their experience, for these are vulnerable to the vagaries of time and memory. However, the numbers suggested some noteworthy trends for example, amongst all groups there was considerably more experience of working with borderline students. Lecturers and fieldwork organisers reported a ratio of 4 to 1 and 5 to 1 respectively on academic assessments, with 1 representing a second fail resulting in termination of training. These ratios may be reassuring to students who fail at the first attempt. They also affirm that failure is part of the learning process which can, and in the majority of instances does, lead to a successful outcome.

There were interesting differences between the academic staffs' experience of failure in the fieldwork setting. As expected, fieldwork organisers had the most extensive contact. The seven fieldwork organisers had a total experience of working with 33 borderline and 32 unsatisfactory students. This compared with the eight lecturers' experience of 10 borderline and 9

unsatisfactory students; and the ten heads of schools 6
borderline and 3 unsatisfactory students. These figures support
the assumption that fieldwork organisers have the most experience
of dealing with potential and actual fails on professional
practise. The relatively limited experience of heads of schools
is surprising, with only one third having supervised a borderline
or unsatisfactory student in a fieldwork placement.

One theme which emerged from the numbers and narrative was the
preference for failure to occur earlier rather than later in the
Course. The majority of first and second fails occurred in
year one, with less in year two and even fewer in the final year.
These observations reflect the attrition rates collated by the
College of Occupational Therapists. There was agreement about
the increase in staff distress paralleling the length of a
students' training. For example,

C<2/2U< "As a fieldwork supervisor I failed a third year
student. This was amazingly traumatic."

H>5/1U>M "The worst fail is in year 3."

H>9/1U>M "One nice, gentle person but with problems in
interpersonal skills failed in the third year. We did
not do him any good or any favours by allowing him to
get to that stage But we had responded to him
subjectively because he was such a nice person."

The dangers of subjectivity, particularly 'liking' are well
recognised, for example Gallagher (1983), Davenhall (1985),
Lankshear (1990) with Green (1991) condemning the special sort
of relationship which verges on the point of collusion. This
problem was commented upon by three course leaders in the context
of valuing the objective, counter-point position of moderators

or external examiners.

H>11/1U> "We don't look at the marks until the end of each year then we do an overview for the whole course. We usually mark each assessment separately to prevent a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is a nightmare if a student's marks are borderline. How are we going to solve this? Where do you put the final mark? This is where the moderators are important as objective outsiders who are able to view the whole years work."

Informants drew upon their breadth of experience in different roles and with different students. All the lecturers referred to their experience as fieldwork supervisors, their emotionally charged language reflecting an enduring effect. For example,

L>6/2U<M "I only failed one but I will never forget it. It was very traumatic because the school implied the fieldwork practice was to blame, not the student. This was how failures used to be treated. It was up to the supervisor to prove that the student had failed."

Two fieldwork organisers and lecturers had experience of failing nurses on placement and physiotherapists on 'top-up' degrees. Although they did not elaborate, similarities and differences in the process were noted, for example

L>5/3U<M "In lots of ways it was the same. The difference was needing more reassurance about their baseline expectations and how much allowance should be made for experience."

In comparison, the heads of schools drew upon broader academic experience as external examiners, national examiners or lecturers on multi-disciplinary post-graduate courses. The emotional distance inherent in the role of external assessor was commented upon by three heads of schools.

H>7/1U>M "I ratify others' results. This is easier because it is more distant. I can be more objective as the decision is made only on the evidence presented without

knowing the person."

H>3/1U>M "I have lots of experience from other posts, for example as a national examiner, an internal examiner and moderator. This means I have lots of comparisons and have much practice in setting overall standards. As an external examiner you can stand back, you are not concerned about how nice the student may be or their problems. It is impersonal, and it has to be, rather than dealing with the intricacies of the person. You are not failing people but a candidate with a number who couldn't get the facts straight."

Although memory is acknowledged as a fallible tool for quantifying experience, the vivid recall of particular instances provides a personal context for later responses, particularly the next question when informants were asked to compare this experience with the failure to fail.

8.9 FAILURE TO FAIL : Introduction

This question was designed to explore the differences and compare the process of assigning a fail grade or avoiding this outcome by "allowing a student to just pass by giving them the benefit of the doubt". Earlier research (Ilott, 1988) revealed the extraordinary measures employed by fieldwork supervisors to "pull a student through" including

"a lot of help, plenty of immediate feedback and extra written work, delaying a half-way report until the student had improved"

all to prevent failure.

During failure workshops, held in different parts of the United Kingdom between 1988 - 1993 and attended by 290 fieldwork

supervisors, approximately 25% admitted in a public forum that they had "allowed a student to just pass". This is an alarmingly high incidence of the failure to fail. This figure has been supplemented by examples of supervisors awarding a pass, but then writing a separate letter expressing concern that the student had been accepted for training, or refusing to employ a student who had just successfully completed her final placement in their department. These examples, which have caused consternation when reported at failure workshops are, I believe a gross abdication of responsibility. The bravery implicit in these public disclosures needs to be transferred into the courage required to assign a fail grade. The informant's experience, particularly their reasons for avoiding a fail grade were explored to understand this process.

8.9.1 Incidence and reasons for the failure to fail

There were interesting variations in the declared incidence, with 17 informants recalling a total of 22 students they should have failed. The majority in each groups admitted to an experience of giving a student "the benefit of the doubt" with fieldwork supervisors and lecturers being able, or willing, to describe these students almost as vividly as those they had failed.

Their comments illuminated the causes and consequences of this judgement. Three of the ten course leaders reported the difficulty in obtaining evidence related to attitude or

motivation.

H>4/1U> "There are odd students who qualify even though I do not think they should, but there is nothing in the system to prevent them. It is usually to do with attitude and motivation but there has been nothing to 'get them on'."

The assessment of affective components of learning and performance is acknowledged as being particularly problematic (Harden 1979b, Battles et al 1990). However, Holmes et al (1990) seem to have mastered this challenge by specifying objective definitions and criteria for "fitness and aptitude to practise medicine." The American legal system has also recognised that

"by virtue of their training, faculty members are uniquely qualified to observe and judge all aspects of their students' academic performance ... in cognitive and non-cognitive areas" (Goclowski, 1985),

In contrast three lecturers focused upon their inexperience and the problems of team decision making, particularly when they, as individuals disagreed with the collective outcome.

L>6/2U<M "I remember the name and exact circumstances. I was inexperienced as a teacher, insecure and lacking confidence in my decision so I didn't fight for what I believed in. Within three months I was setting finalist papers. This was an awesome responsibility and no one tells you how to do it. It is not discussed that marking is frightening and a great responsibility."

This lack of preparation for the assessor role echoes Turner's (1991) study. Interestingly, the desire to learn about and prepare for the eventuality of failure were key reasons for participating in different aspects of this study. This is also linked with experience which provides a reserve for comparison

or confidence. Two fieldwork supervisors commented about the importance of experience, in terms of number of students supervised and length of time as a supervisor. For example,

S>8/4U<I "My own inexperience as a supervisor, not having the confidence to say the student hadn't hit the mark."

A different aspect was highlighted by a lecturer

L>7/3U> "Yes, but they suffer for it when they fail in the second year, after I have pushed them through."

This sense of regret stemming from similar experiences was echoed by three others from the academic community. The benefit of this 'hindsight' is considerable for it contradicts the superficial and immediate benefits of "pulling a student through." This perspective was reinforced by two fieldwork organisers who expressed their frustration when

C>4/3U>M "Supervisors have pulled back from making the final decision. I go mad, I am very cross. I think they should stick to their decision. The student can't redeem themselves in the last week. They have been pressurised by the student via bullying or emotional blackmail."

These quotations given in response to the question about the incidence, reveal the complex, combination of reasons which lead to the failure to fail. These were pursued in a direct question which was intended to be challenging rather than critical or judgemental. It was an example of increasing depth of questioning (Merton et al, 1956). The answers were categorised into five themes. These were the conflict in values between educator and therapist (n=8), lack of evidence (n=6), the differences between professional suitability and academic ability (n=2), inexperience (n=4) and avoidance of failure (n=6).

8.9.2 Conflict in roles between educator and therapist

This was the most frequently expressed reason. It was expressed directly or tangentially by informants from all groups. The next quotation illustrates this theme and the complexity of causal factors.

C>4//2U<M "Partly being a therapist, if the student is well motivated am I just another hurdle in their way? Partly to avoid the hassle; and perhaps I don't know, am I able to make the judgement?"

The difficulty differentiating between ability and effort, particularly the desire to reward effort, as a reflection of the professional value of working from and emphasizing strengths, is apparent in a supervisor's reason.

S>8/6U<M "She had tried so hard in the second half of the placement. We recognised that she had worked very, very hard and had improved but still not up to the scratch for her stage of training, lacking the necessary personal skills. But we didn't want to 'knock her back' because she had tried and appreciated the feedback."

This desire to reward effort is also found in teachers. For example, Prawat et al (1983) report

"Teachers were proudest and most satisfied when students, especially low ability students, succeeded through effort."

However, this desire to praise effort, rather than respect a baseline of competence for the stage of training, needs to be resisted.

Surprisingly, considering their depth and breadth of experience, the conflict of values between therapist and educator was mentioned most frequently by heads of schools. The following quotation typifies the comments made by four informants:

H>5/1U>M "Giving them the benefit of the doubt particularly in the first year, thinking that with time they will probably make it, and they often do. We are very attentive in year one, it is often an indicator. But individually and collectively we are too generous."

This view also conflicts with the preference for assigning a fail grade at an earlier, easier stage rather than deferring this decision until the most difficult final year.

8.9.3 Lack of evidence

This theme, which represented the difficulty obtaining sufficient, appropriate evidence regarding professional unsuitability or academic weakness which would withstand the rigours of an appeal, was mentioned by six academic informants. It comprised several facets including a subjective suspicion which was unsupported by evidence, lack of documentation recording problems experienced in the academic or professional setting and students who consistently gain "a bare pass, those who just scrape through." For example,

L<7/2U< "Sometimes there just isn't any evidence, we know something is wrong but have nothing concrete. There has been problems but these had not been put on the students' profile and so what can you do?"

H<10/1U>M "The organisational structure didn't allow you to. It was the difference between the letter and the spirit of the law. The student just got through the academic side, they were OK but something was missing."

These examples contradict commonly held assumptions about the power of either academic staff, or the School to terminate training. These reasons hint at personal and institutional constraints which impact upon the outcome (and quality) of the

decision making process. However, this reason could be reduced with greater attention to documentation to provide evidence and demonstrate 'due process'.

A fieldwork organiser summarised the dilemmas and difficulties, none of which seem irresolvable if they are included in the preparation of supervisors and academic staff.

C>8/3U< "Supervisors allow themselves to get into difficult situations because they don't have clear guidelines about learning outcomes or provide honest feedback. They are being therapists. Then, towards the end of the placement when they realise that there is a real problem, they haven't got any evidence, because they have given good grades to encourage the student. The student has not improved, is not performing differently and they lack evidence on which to give a lower grade. The supervisors are then in a trap so the student is allowed to pass."

8.9.4 Professional suitability versus academic ability

This theme, which was raised by a head of school and lecturer, reflects the conflict between professional suitability and academic ability. For example,

L>7/3U> "There was a belief that the student would make a good occupational therapist because of their personality. This was seen as separate from their academic performance. But this was unfair to the student and the profession because both are equally necessary."

The tension between practical performance and academic ability mirrors the debate within a "hands-on profession" which has recently gained degree status, as evidenced by the debate in the letters column of the British Journal of Occupational Therapy (Croft 1991, Poller 1991, Rosen 1992). It is interesting to note the lack of research into "what makes a good occupational

therapist" and the broad definitions of competence to practise.

8.9.5 Inexperience

The lack of experience, particularly of fieldwork supervisors was commented upon both organisers and supervisors. For example,

C>5/2U> "We are more able, confident to fail than supervisors because of our experience. They tend to 'pass the buck'."

This category reflects both the low incidence and lack of specific preparation for academic and fieldwork assessors. Interestingly the failure workshops, by providing vicarious experience through sharing, seemed to increase confidence.

8.9.6 Avoidance of failure

Finally, and perhaps most disturbingly was the acknowledgement of "ducking the issue of failure". A fieldwork organiser described how a supervisor had

C>9/2U>M "gone off on health grounds rather than fail the student."

The issue of "passing the buck" was raised by two fieldwork organisers, two lecturers and indirectly by a supervisor.

S>8/5U<I "You find reasons to push them through, for example they've been ill or blaming yourself for not giving them enough time."

These statements reinforce the recurring theme of the avoidance of failure. They also parallel the content and language encountered in the literature, for example

"At the end of the first year we may have 'ducked out' passed the student with a huge question mark ... from our study, there is the impression of difficult decisions postponed by avoidance" (Brandon & Davies, 1979).

8.10 Comparing the experience of assigning a fail grade and allowing a student "to just pass"

The next element of the question asked informants to reflect upon and compare their experiences of failing with allowing a student to 'just pass'. The impression gained during failure workshop was that allowing a student to "just pass" was regretted more. Although the avoidance of failure was described as the easier immediate option, with the benefit of hindsight (particularly for those who had experienced both) the failure to fail provoked more guilt and shame. For they had

"backed off and failed to resolve the matter in their own minds, leaving themselves with misgivings (because they had left it to the next supervisor to discover and deal with" (Ford & Jones, 1987).

The majority of the informants (n=13) compared the experience of allowing a student to 'just pass' as more negative than assigning a fail grade. Only three expressed a different view. Two supervisors admitting it was

S>8/5U<I "easier to allow them to pass, it is less work and you don't want to put everyone through it."

A head of school cited an example where the student's training had been terminated due to rigid rules and procedures rather than 'real reasons'.

The explanations for the differences repeated earlier themes.

For example, the significance of the students' stage of training was mentioned by academic informants. There was unanimity regarding the need for a clear decision to be made earlier, rather than later in the course. Two lecturers provided contrasting reasons:

L>6/1U<M "It is more comfortable early in the course, not to let them pass because it is clear and it is more like a favour. It is too traumatic to fail in the final year."

L>7/3U> "When a student fails early in the course there is a lot of anger. If you have helped the student and pushed them through, but they still fail the resit it is the student who feels angry, guilty and responsible but the staff are absolved. If they fail early, from the staff viewpoint, the anger is more difficult to cope if the student leaves immediately or rejects help. Staff are unable to satisfy their own need to care for the student or compensate for their guilt. We are able to absolve ourself if they fail the resit."

The themes of stage of training and professional suitability versus academic ability were combined in this response from a head of school.

H>7/1U>M "It depends where it occurs in the course. If the student fails the first year examinations, it is better for them to do so definitely so they can do better on the resit. On the second fail the decision is made in the context of everything else and whether they would make a good occupational therapist."

This quotation hints at the benefits which may be gained from a first fail and which were stated by another head of school.

H>1/1U> "The resit is there for those who might just pass. They gain extra time to consolidate their knowledge, and by concentrating upon one paper - this leads to an amazing difference in the quality of the resit."

The positive value of a fail grade for the institution and profession were also noted.

H>1/1U> "We are not in the business of letting someone just pass. I am jealous of the reputation of the school for producing good therapist who are competent to treat patients. Occupational therapy is difficult enough without letting incompetent therapists qualify."

The benefits for the profession of "weeding poor students out early" were echoed by a supervisor.

S>8/4U<I "It seems strange but it feels better to have failed the student. It was the right decision and we felt right because we were not inflicting a below standard occupational therapist on other departments. Those who just passed - it felt OK, it was easier at the time, but I think there must be a poor department which is suffering now. There was an occupational therapist here who was not very good, she had problems throughout her career. She was a huge headache, we sweated blood about her. We used to say that if she was a student we would have failed her, but there was nothing we could do because she was qualified."

These examples of positive outcomes are based upon the clear connection between the judgement of competence and incompetence. They are included to combat the common negative associations which seem to contribute to the failure to fail.

This supervisor illustrates both the need for, and support gained from courage and conviction when assigning a fail grade, with the added value of this experience.

S>8/6U<M "It felt 100% right to fail the student. It would have felt worse if we had passed her. Failing the first student is the hardest. I will know next time that I can survive it. I'll have the courage not to let a poor student slip through the net."

Although the responsibility for assigning a fail grade lies with staff, it is important to remember the student's perception of their performance, particularly as some academic and fieldwork assessments require self appraisal and negotiation. The inability to self-evaluate and to practise within realistically

set boundaries of knowledge or skills (as demonstrated by over or under confidence), have been identified as two components of incompetence (Darragh et al 1986, Hausman et al 1990, Ilott 1992) Daines's study (1977) reveals the accuracy and realism of low-achieving students' private, self-estimates of their performance. One lecturer provided an interesting example of a student's public self-evaluation.

L>6/1U<M "I have only allowed one student to 'just pass'. The student replied that she thought she should have failed and I thought that she should have. It made me more determined not to be nice in future."

Similar examples have been given at failure workshops which have provoked discussions about respect, encompassing self-respect and respect given to and received from a student, all of which demand an honest, realistic appraisal of abilities.

Another reason for avoiding a fail grade was related to learning time and learning potential, particularly individual variations and the difficulty differentiating between these. Davenhall (1985) suggests that

"students need an opportunity to try, to practise, to fumble and fail sometimes as part of the learning process, without being judged while doing so."

This problem was mentioned by two heads of schools, two fieldwork organisers and a lecturer. The following quotations illustrate the dilemmas related to 'giving the benefit of the doubt.'

H>5/1U>M "I have mixed feelings. Irritation with myself for not dealing with the situation in a stronger way, feeling I should have been more objective, nipped the signs earlier and made a definite decision. But it is a balance which requires justifications. To allow a student to 'just pass' is often more painful and

troublesome because the problem remains, but sometimes they develop into sound therapists."

C>4/2U<M "There are some students who you allow through, forget and then they blossom. Those who don't are forever brought in front you. You need to remind yourself that some are OK and that you don't have a crystal ball."

This dilemma seems to be brought into sharper focus in schools with a small intake. One course leader commented

H<10/1U>M "Difficult, because it is easier to pass. It worries me a lot that I am guarding the standards, more so now that I am a course leader. The dilemma is increased because it is such a small course, I am nearer to the students. I have a desire to get them through at a personal level, but I feel a greater responsibility to the profession."

The significance of close relationships with a small cohort and the intimacy of the one-to-one supervisory relationship (with the parallel personal tutor-tutee relationship) are themes which appear to increase an assessor's vulnerability to stress or distress.

The needs of supervisors, regardless of the outcome of the assessment, were mentioned by two of the four fieldwork organisers with experience of a student 'just passing'. These comments seem to reinforce the importance of their role in providing support and clarification at all stages of the process, starting with assisting the supervisor to

C>12/1U> "Sit with the supervisor who can't see the situation for what it is, they need a third person to clarify what is and what will happen, to ask if they are being honest. It is not a favour to gentle a student through. I aim to be fair and see the situation from the outside. I will ask if they are happy to work with the student if they qualified next week. If their answer is no, then I ask them to do some deep soul searching."

Both fieldwork organisers noted this support helped to counter-balance the supervisors' reluctance to accept future students. One described her procedure for following-up both student and supervisor when a student 'had just passed'.

C>12/1U> "I am aware of the consequences of this outcome for the student's next placement. The student has weaknesses, they need to be honest about these and identify what aspects they need to practise. In this way the outcome may be viewed as positive. I also visit the supervisor to discuss their reasons for the pass grade, whether they received sufficient support or not, and whether with hindsight they would make the same decision."

This seems to be an example of good practice, particularly the follow-up action, thoroughness and non-judgementalism which deserves dissemination for it may prevent the failure to fail.

8.11 Introduction to differences in the process: borderline or unsatisfactory performance and the influence of the fieldwork organiser

The final component of this question related to two aspects of the process related to the role of lecturers, fieldwork organisers and supervisors. Firstly, lecturers and supervisors were asked to compare the experience of assigning a first fail and a second fail and secondly, supervisors and organisers were asked about the ability and power of fieldwork organisers to influence the supervisors' assessment.

8.11.1 Differences in judging borderline and unsatisfactory performance

In this context, definitions of unsatisfactory and borderline

are determined by the consequences. A borderline reflects a first fail which may be redeemed. Earlier sections have illustrated the costliness, as measured by the amount of time, attention and emotional energy invested by both student and staff to secure a pass grade on a second attempt. In contrast, the consequences of a second fail are determined by the examination regulations which normally demand the student withdraws from the course, their training programme is terminated. It is interesting to compare the language used to express the same outcome, withdrawal contains the connotation of non-existent student choice, whereas termination of training seems to convey a distant, impersonal imposition of the final decision.

There were distinct differences in perceptions between lecturers and fieldwork supervisors when dealing with unsatisfactory and borderline performance. All eight lecturers affirmed clear differences between a first and a second fail, with three describing positive aspects of a first fail. For example

L>6/2U<M "It is traumatic for the student, you are being cruel to be kind."

L>7/3U> "A fail can spur them on, to pull their socks up, it gives them a shock to sort themselves out."

In contrast, the supervisors (with much less experience of either category) emphasized the trauma of assigning a fail grade, regardless of the consequences. Only one of the five supervisors had experience of assigning a fail grade which resulted in termination of training. She stated

S>8/5U<I "I felt absolutely dreadful. I had felt down anyway but it was awful knowing this. It felt as though we

had taken a big decision with her future. It was horrendous."

She had been unaware on the consequences until the decision had been made, commenting

"I was glad to know after we had made the decision. If we had known before it might have swayed us. It was reassuring to know that we were not the only ones to identify problems and that we were not making a big mistake."

This example would seem to support the practice of allowing a student to start each placement with a "clean sheet, a clean record", rather than the supervisor receiving information from the School about the students' past achievements and problems. The previous study and opinions expressed at failure workshops have suggested a polarity of views, with one group requesting information to enable them to provide more assistance, and maybe, to gain reassurance from the answer to the question "Is history repeating itself?". While their opponents prefer

"a blank sheet approach, so I am only judging the student and am not being influenced by preconceived ideas",

to counter the possibility of a self-fulfilling prophecy and emphasising the student's responsibility to inform the supervisor, as part of the process of self-evaluation. Cohen & Blumberg (1991) describe this dilemma as "one of the unresolved controversies in education". They concluded a review in medical education with the recommendation

"Problems encountered in the student's mastery of academic content ... or procedural skills, attitudes and other personal qualities and interactive skills ... and personal health ... should be shared with subsequent faculty. Students must be central to the entire process ... (they) should be encouraged to initiate the process."

This recommendation would seem to balance the student's rights

and educational needs, with concern for competence avoiding the effect of unofficial 'grapevines'.

However, in an academic setting with formal or informal communication networks, lecturers are usually privy to this information. All commented upon a qualitative difference in their emotional response and coping strategies with a first and second fail. The latter was described as traumatic, difficult and disappointing. As a consequence the lecturers reported

L<7/2U< "taking even more care to ensure that my decision is valid"

asking colleagues to double and triple mark, or using external examiners to obtain confirmation and reassurance, while

L>5/3U<M "ensuring the assessment criteria is explicit and communicable to the student - so you do not move the goal posts as you are marking ... but at some point you have got to make the decision because it can become buck passing."

It is this final decision which is the most difficult, particularly when it ends a career goal. This termination of a personal career goal was highlighted as the most difficult factor by a fieldwork supervisor.

S>8/4U<I "If they were desperate to be an occupational therapist and this was the only thing they wanted then it would be really tough. Although it was his first placement I still felt as though I was being instrumental in stopping his career, but I had to view it from a professional point of view. He was struggling and his career would be long."

Adopting a wider and longer term perspective seemed to assist this supervisor in coping with the immediate trauma of having

"the student in tears in front of you"

and be able to differentiate between a first and a second fail.

8.11.2 Perceptions about the influence of the fieldwork organiser

The idea of a fieldwork organiser possessing the power to influence a supervisor's judgement was an unexpected aspect which emerged during the pilot interview with a fieldwork organiser. She acknowledged this power, but felt lecturers' exaggerated her influence for persuading supervisors to pass or fail particular students. This question revealed an interesting dichotomy of views between supervisors and organisers. There was unanimity amongst the fieldwork organisers about their power to influence supervisors, which they perceived as an important component of their role. In contrast, all the fieldwork supervisors stated the fieldwork organiser neither attempted or would have been able to influence their decision. One commented

S>6/3U<M "It was what I had been afraid of, but the school didn't attempt to change my mind."

These contradictory perceptions were surprising. They may be explained by their respective understandings of the role and responsibilities of a fieldwork organiser. The answers provided all focused upon their role in clarifying the situation, giving the supervisor permission or the confidence to assign a fail grade, providing advice on documentation, procedures and giving an objective viewpoint. The differences were related to the perceptions of power and the influence of this behaviour.

The following quotations illustrate the fieldwork organisers' actions and reasons:

C<2/2U< "It is an important part of my role ... to act as a sounding board, to get the supervisor to think concretely, asking them how they have made the decision and informing them of the consequences. It is traumatic, particularly if they are a young professional."

C>9/2U>M "Yes, a number of times. I ask them to make their criteria and expectations explicit, for example how many times do you expect to teach a student how to do an initial assessment - 20, 12, 6, 3? It is seductive which I why I try not to make the decision on one day. It involves a process of seeing the supervisor and student separately and together to try to glean the problems and reflect upon them, before I will say "does this seem like a fail?"

C>4/2U<M "Yes, the supervisor look to you to do it. They want to be helped, to do something about it. They are unsure and unhappy if you suggest there may be other factors influencing the student's performance."

C>4/3U>M "I think so, I can sway them one way or the other. It is usually me who points toward a fail."

C>5/2U> "Yes, you can with most supervisors, although some are adamant about their judgement. I influence them by asking them to expand either upon the students' strengths or weaknesses. I can also sway them by pointing out the benefits of failure for the student, particularly if they are sitting on the fence. I am really playing around with the information and giving it a different emphasis."

These give an insight into fieldwork organisers' strategies. All affirmed their power to influence fieldwork supervisors. It may be this perception which encourages lecturers to believe they can determine the outcome of a particular placement.

Four of the five supervisors were adamant their decision was final, with only one expressing any reserve

S>8/4U<I "In a sense her advice gave us a confidence boost. She said, if you feel this, what you are saying is, pointing us in the right direction. Your thinking is right and you are right. If she had said we were being unfair or harsh, we would have taken this on board."

Their reasons included

S>8/6U<M "It is my responsibility to assess the students' clinical skills."

S>8/7U<I "There were three of us and we were liaising closely, then she couldn't have influenced us."

S>8/5U<M "By the time we called in the fieldwork organiser we had already made the decision. I would like to think that she couldn't influence me."

The reasons presented by both supervisors and organisers reflect the importance of clarity of reasoning to improve the quality of, and therefore commitment to the decision. Also, the support gained from confirmation by colleagues and an understanding of the obligation to assess competence to practise.

It is also important to acknowledge instances when these themes do not coincide to give the appropriate outcome. Four of the seven fieldwork organisers spontaneously mentioned their frustration when their influence was ignored or overridden. For example

C>5/2U> "If they don't fail and I think they should, I feel disappointed. I question whether a student is able to retrieve their problems within a short time. When this happens I am careful about using the supervisor again. Some have a reputation for being sound, being able to sort out dodgy students. I am less likely to trust the judgement of others, and would only place 'safe' students with them."

Their frustration, anger and disappointment seem to be linked to the consequences of the failure to fail. They advocated the benefits for the student of receiving a fail grade.

C>4/3U>M "You are a long time qualified and another six weeks is neither here nor there. A basic grade told me recently that she had been grateful for the extra time gained from doing a retake placement."

The avoidance of failure does reflect upon the integrity of the supervisor and School. It is an onerous responsibility but the potential consequences are unacceptable. The assessment of academic and professional competence culminate in registration to practise as an occupational therapist by the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine.

The exploration of the informants' experience of both failure and the failure to fail (with this outcome being regretted on reflection) has revealed a complex, combination of personal and institutional factors which influence fine judgements. These included the conflict in values between educator and therapist, lack of appropriate evidence, the avoidance of failure, an assessor's inexperience and the difference between professional suitability and academic ability. All these factors are amenable to preventive action and could be balanced by both the personal and professional positive outcomes which stem from confronting, rather than avoiding failure.

8.12 A CRITERION FOR FAILURE : Introduction

The primary purpose of assessment is to protect the public from incompetent practitioners (Francis & Holmes, 1983). Although simple to state, it is difficult to do. The earlier discussion of competence highlighted the complexity of this multi-dimensional, ambiguous and relative concept. Yet licensure or registration with the CPSM demands a screening procedure which sets an absolute, minimal level of competence to ensure occupational therapists

"will possess enough knowledge and skill to perform important occupational activities safely and effectively" (Francis & Holmes, 1983).

However, clear and explicit definitions of this minimum level of competence have proved elusive for occupational therapy and other 'caring' professions. Such a criterion may be considered as crucial for determining the "contours and quality of the educational enterprise" and

"to temper the subjectivity of professional assessment and ferret out unacceptable bias" (Pope, 1983).

Much of the preceding discussion has focused upon individual and institutional mechanisms for enhancing the objectivity of the assessment process. However, I remain unconvinced either about the effectiveness or desirability of these mechanisms. The process of assessment, particularly in fieldwork would seem to be "a veritable minefield of controversy" (Morrell, 1980). In striving for reliable and valid measures of competence, the facets of intuition and judgement are devalued. I believe

qualitative, subjective evaluation (Blomquist, 1985) or "instinctive assessments" (Burgess, 1987) complement the reductionist, rational objective measures and are more holistic, recognising the subtle gestalt of a complex situation. Participants at failure workshops have frequently reported that intuition has provided the first indicator of a problem. Sensitivity to this "niggle, a worry which cannot be expressed in an objective way" (Green, 1991) would seem to be the first stage in the process, alerting assessors to the need to collect evidence of both competence and incompetence. For, irrespective of the debate about definitions (and there does seem to be an implicit consensus about the components of competence) the final assessment

"should be based upon the student's demonstrated competence. There should be no guesswork ... to help the supervisor handle the stress of being the final gatekeeper of the profession ... to ensure the student has a high standard of clinical practise and a fair assessment" (Warrender, 1990).

In this study the focus has been upon incompetence or a criterion for failure. The intention was to clarify and complement existing measures by identifying those aspects which were considered to be below the minimum level of competence. It was hoped this would assist the early and accurate identification of students who are unable to demonstrate the necessary competencies (Burrows, 1989). Also, implicit in this focus is the permission to consider fail as an acceptable outcome, thereby confronting the taboo and fear of failure.

The focused interviews provided a valuable opportunity for

obtaining individual and collective definitions of the constituents of incompetence. Informants were asked to identify their criteria for unsatisfactory and borderline performance and, whether there were any differences between academic and fieldwork settings. The influence of causal attributions (whether failure was ascribed to low ability, lack of effort or the difficulty of the task) were also investigated, particularly how they effected the process of decision making and the affective response of the assessors. These questions were intended to complement and extend the results of the content analysis of a criterion for failure obtained from the failure workshops, thereby providing further information for the hypothesis.

8.12.1 What is your criterion for failure - how do you decide a student is unsatisfactory?

The first question attempted to identify the standard by which failure is judged. Although this is an essential, and obvious prerequisite for further action, it was interesting to note how this question provoked short and indirect answers. As one fieldwork supervisor commented "this is a difficult question". The responses revealed reasons which were influenced by the assessor's role and setting. The criteria focused upon the objectives and report form in fieldwork, marking and answer guidelines in Schools and personal, transferrable skills which were applicable in both settings.

8.12.2 Objectives and report form

Informants from all staff groups referred to objective criteria based upon the placement objectives and the fieldwork assessment form or the answer and marking guidelines. Four of the five fieldwork supervisors described how they used the report form as a formative and summative assessment tool.

S>8/7U<I "We relied heavily upon the objectives and report form. We use this for the weekly feedback. It concentrates our thoughts - is the student doing this? So it was obvious, she had such little confidence. I don't think failure should come as a surprise, either at the half-way or final report stage. By using the weekly feedback we were able to spot problems in week 2, as week 1 is used for settling in."

S>8/4U<I "We have objectives for each stage of training which are clear and comprehensive. We review them weekly, have they been achieved and if not, the students don't progress to the next objective until they have. This provides a baseline for supervisors and students."

These examples illustrate aspects of good supervisory practices, particularly the communication of clear expectations through regular, specific feedback (Ford & Jones 1987, Bradley 1990, Nehring 1990, Warrender 1990) so the result is not a surprise (Pope, 1983).

However, it is interesting to compare the priority given to objectives by these informants with supervisors (n=145) attending seven failure workshops from 1989 to 1992. A content analysis of their responses (table 29) indicated the educational, departmental or personal objectives and report form were mentioned only 13 times, representing 4% of the total. This apparent difference in perception about the use of objectives or

Table 29

Results of Content Analysis of Criteria for Failure

Constituents of Competence		Frequency	Percentage
Behaviour	Reliability, misconduct, appearance, confidentiality	89	24%
Skills	Interpersonal, clinical, practical	47	13%
Personality	Traits, under or over confidence	34	9%
Knowledge	Application, learning, OT specific	29	8%
Attitude	Inappropriate with colleagues, client, OT	27	7%
Response to feedback	Lack of, inability to use	24	6%
Management	Self-evaluation, time management, prioritizing	24	6%
Safety	General, health and safety, going beyond knowledge	20	5%
Interest	Lack of motivation, apathy	17	5%
Miscellaneous	Comments from team, stage of training	14	4%
Implicit	Maturity, common-sense, treat or employ	14	4%
Objectives	Overall, departmental	13	4%
Personal/Cultural	Personal problems, cultural differences	12	3%

the report form as appropriate benchmarks for the non-attainment of the required standard, may be due to several factors. For example, it may reflect the different methods of collecting the information (interview versus syndicate work). Frequency of report does not necessarily equate with importance. Familiarity may also lead to these tools becoming implicit rather than explicit.

8.12.3 Marking and answer guidelines

These seemed to provide an equivalent safe, secure structure for academic staff. These were mentioned by 12 of the 25 academic staff as part of the criteria for failure. Unsurprisingly, considering their influence upon a lecturers' role, marking guidelines and examination rules or regulations were identified by all eight lecturers. For example,

L>9/3U> "Academically, it is easier because it is based on knowledge or skills. We have marking guidelines."

H1/1U< "The criteria is clear cut with marking guidelines for each assessment. The assessment is double marked and cross checked by external examiners."

These answers appear to maintain the facade of infallibility and objectivity of academic assessments. However this was challenged by riders added by some, for example four lecturers acknowledged the "spurious objectivity" (Stone, 1982) of their judgements. These went beyond the bounds of subject-specific knowledge and focused upon the student's potential to "be a good occupational therapist." It was this global factor which seemed to determine

the outcome. For example,

L>9/3U> "Would I want to employ them?" and if the answer is 'no', then I think the student should fail. This is subjective, it is the bottom line and I can't think of another. This is an overall criteria - would you like them to treat me or my family. This criteria brings it to a personal level, as a measure of incompetence."

L6/1U<M "The marking guidelines are flexible, for external consumption. I use my 'gut' reaction, based on experience and personal standards. This is subjective and there is nothing wrong with this. It is very nice when the second marker agrees with you. It is a double check if you don't like the student. If it is a second failure which would result in termination, I will ask myself whether the student will make a good occupational therapist. If the answer is no, then I do not try to find extra marks."

This express, but often implicit assessment criteria of employability and professional suitability were important for both academic and fieldwork staff. They were commonly expressed in the form of two questions "Would I employ her/him?" and "Would I allow her/him to treat myself or my parents?" and emerged at some stage in all the interviews. They were mentioned on 14 occasions (4% of the total) on the content analysis of the criteria for failure. These simple, but fundamental questions seem to epitomise "fitness for purpose" (Ball, 1986) from the perspective of the employer and consumer. Although this global definition of competence figures in the literature (Green, 1991), and has been used to validate assessment tools (Crocker et al, 1975), it still seems to be an implicit rather than explicit assessment construct (Rowntree, 1987).

8.12.4 Personal, transferrable skills

Interestingly, heads of schools, fieldwork organisers and supervisors gave priority to the constituents of professional unsuitability, particularly those linked to general, personal, transferrable skills. For example, the inability to learn or change was identified by 2 heads of schools, 2 fieldwork organisers and 6 fieldwork supervisors. An unprofessional attitude was noted by four heads of schools and fieldwork organisers. Poor interpersonal skills were identified by 1 head of school, 3 fieldwork organisers and 2 supervisors. Unsafe practices were included by 2 fieldwork organisers and 4 fieldwork supervisors. Unreliability was identified by 2 fieldwork organisers and supervisors.

These components of incompetence are clearly the inverse of competence, particularly those categories linked to professional values, ethics and codes of conduct. They also comprise the majority of constructs on the content analysis of the criteria for failure (table 29). It is these aspects which appear in the literature. For example, the ability to change and integrate theory with practise was noted by Towle (1954), Wong (1979) and Ford & Jones (1987). Unprofessional attitudes were defined by Brandon & Davies (1979) as lying, breaching confidentiality, causing unjustifiable offence to clients, unpunctuality, inadequate standards of attendance and record keeping. These were also noted by Curnock & Prins (1982), Wallis & Hutchings (1990) and Mitchell & Kampfe (1990).

Deficiencies in communication or interpersonal skills formed the largest category in Holmes et al (1990) and Battles et al (1990) studies. It was consistently mentioned in others for example, Howard (1979), Ford & Jones (1987) and Peloquin & Davidson (1993). The criterion of safety is prominent in nursing and physiotherapy literature: Caney (1983), Davenhall (1985), Beenhakker (1987) and Bradley (1990). Reliability and dependability were ranked as the most highly rated variable for internal medicine residents (Wigton 1980).

It is interesting to note the common feature of all these references, from different 'caring' professions and countries spanning several decades. Also, it would seem as though it is easier to say that some students have not reached the desired standard, rather than be explicit about what constitutes minimum competency. Perhaps this is because the

"practice of (occupational therapy) depends on a subtle blend of values, attitudes, knowledge and skills; and on the capacity for making flexible responses to an infinite variety of situations, many of which cannot be anticipated" (Brandon & Davies, 1979).

8.12.5 Role of the head of school and fieldwork organiser

The answers provided by heads of schools and fieldwork organisers seemed to diverge from the criteria, to general issues related to their particular roles in a fail scenario. For example, four heads of schools referred to principles and procedures, which ranged from the importance of fairness, clear evidence, written documentation and objective decision making, to exclude cultural

or racial prejudices and avoid guilt. For example,

H>2/1U>M "If the student is one who is disliked, has an awkward manner, been sarcastic or is a disabled student or has had personal problems or negative life events, then their failure can make staff feel guilty. But, if you have done everything which can be done without doing the work for the student or altering the standard required, then their failure can be made to feel clean and more comfortable. We do not want to produce second rate occupational therapists."

Three fieldwork organisers focused upon their role as catalysts, helping a supervisor to clarify and justify their decision, by encouraging specification of their criteria for a particular student. They described how they asked the supervisor to cite specific examples to support their intuitive unease, or general statements about inappropriate behaviour.

C>12/1U> "I inform the supervisor about the pitfalls and errors of fieldwork assessments. I always ask them to cite examples, be specific, give the number of times, their significance and when the mistakes occurred. If this is not forthcoming, I ask if they are making the decision on gut reactions or on the students' performance and whether it is a reasonable decision."

This section will conclude with a fieldwork organiser's criteria because it mirrors other definitions of competence (CPSM 1979, Ernest & Polatajko 1986).

C<2/2U< "They are competent to practise for their stage of training, their professionalism, the application of academic knowledge, whether they have the appropriate behaviour and attitudes. Do they understand the dynamics of the situation? Is their performance the same across different client groups, in rural and inner city areas. Are they potential OTs, are they holistic, able to problem solve and work interprofessionally."

During the process of this research I have been amazed (and reassured) by the degree of agreement about definitions of

incompetence, which have emerged from the literature or during failure workshops with a range of health care professionals in the United Kingdom and Sweden. Competence is such a complex, and relative construct it is probably impossible, (and undesirable) to specify, because

"whatever competence means today we can be sure its meaning will have changed by tomorrow" (Ogier & Barrett, 1985).

8.13 Differentiating between a student who is borderline and one who fails

If a criterion for failure is so hard to articulate (as evidenced by the informants' brief replies) is it possible to differentiate between pass and fail at the margins of competence? Many informants and failure workshop participants have contrasted the relative ease of identifying a clear fail with the difficulty of judging a marginal student. This question was intended to encourage informants to refine their criteria, by differentiating between a fail and a borderline grade. A quarter acknowledged this was another difficult question. Factors which influenced this process were related to the student's potential and their assessment profile

8.13.1 Potential to learn and be 'a good occupational therapist'

The belief in a student's potential either to learn or be a 'good occupational therapist' were criteria identified by informants

from each group. The potential to learn incorporated several facets including effort and consistency (n=9), performance impaired by extraordinary extenuating circumstances, evidence of improvement judged from their present performance and track record (n=8) and the ability to learn from their mistakes. This definition given by a supervisor contains a fundamental and clear differentiation,

S>8/4U<I "A borderline means the student has shown potential to improve, we think that they will get there in time and once something is learned that it will stick. With a failing student you have to constantly repeat the instructions, write step by step guidelines and even if you try different teaching methods, the student is still not picking it up. This seems a bit weak, subjective - the idea about improvement. Also, whether the written notes match what the student has actually done."

The last statement, which hints at unreliability and untrustworthiness, leads into the second facet of potential. Both these qualities are implicit in professionalism, expressed in codes of conduct, forming the essence of 'a good occupational therapist.' This example would seem to be the fieldwork equivalent of academic dishonesty, cheating and plagiarism. Behaviours which provoke a similar response to failure (Carmack 1984, Bailey 1990) for example

"The destructive behaviour pattern evident in students who routinely demonstrate unethical actions is likely to carry over from the classroom to the clinical setting. Student honesty and integrity are essential to safe, competent professional practise" (Bradshaw & Lowenstein, 1990).

The aspect of safety was made explicit by two supervisors and a course leader.

S>8/7U<I "If it came to it, it would be safety. This is the ultimate criteria. For example, can you safely leave

the student with the patients for 30 seconds? This is also linked to their stage of training, whether they failed on several sections of the assessment form."

The course leader added another dimension to this criterion:

H>11/1U>M "A major difficulty is attempting to differentiate between whether a student does not know or understand, or whether, because of poor exam technique they are unable to express their knowledge. A student may be good on paper but not really understand. Such a facade is dangerous because others will judge them as competent because of their presentational skills. Also, such a student does not know what they do not know and this is dangerous too."

The danger of practising beyond the boundaries of knowledge was one of the criteria for unsafe practice adopted by Darragh et al (1986). The study by Hausman et al 1990 also revealed "an association between increasing overconfidence and lower examination scores ($r=0.58$; $p=0.001$)" in a group of paediatric residents. The dangers of an

"overconfident resident (who) may ask few questions, choosing instead to act on his/her own decisions and may be noticed only if an error occurs" (Hausman et al, 1990).

are echoed in the course leader's quotation. She acknowledged the difficulty inherent in such fine judgements and the responsibility of making a mistake.

H>11/1U> "I feel more anguish and worry about this. It is the buck stops here bit."

8.13.2 Overall percentage marks for individuals and the cohort

The allocation of percentages for an individual and the cohort was a multi-faceted factor which comprised an individual's mark, the use of the full range of marks and the flexibility of the

pass grade. For example, an individuals' mark was the second most frequently mentioned criterion used to differentiate between borderline and fail. It was used by three lecturers and four course leaders, and is likely to be a reflection of their direct involvement in the marking. The end of year collation of grades, with the role of external examiners and examination board in determining the result, appear to be an objective, institutionally sanctioned procedure. However, there were some interesting examples of how this apparently mathematical, clear cut process was influenced by subjective factors, particularly past performance and staff expectations.

L>6/1U<M "In a small school you know the students well. You feel let down if one who you expect to pass, fails. If it is borderline, they get a pass. It has a lot to do with past performance and expectations."

H>4/1U> "The team plots marks up and down. They are influenced by implicit and explicit things, if the student has sought advice, worked hard if so, the temptation is to push them through. However, if they have been lazy, haven't bothered then."

H>7/1U>M "If a student has performed well on placement but poorly on academic work, we will be influenced by their effort, they are likely to a pass as a reward, this feels more in tune."

These comments highlight the importance of the implicit assessment construct of effort. This comprises interest, hard work and signs of improvement. The tendency to reward effort, rather than ability is paralleled by supervisors. However, the use of implicit constructs, with the dominance of effort over ability, would seem to represent inappropriate educational practices. Assessment outcomes should reflect clear expectations, criteria and

"refer to achievement, not to the degree of effort or striving" (Ford & Jones, 1987).

Another facet was the significance of the actual percentage grade awarded. This was mentioned by two lecturers, a fieldwork organiser and two heads of schools. There was agreement about the importance of utilising the full range of marks, rather than one or two percentage points below the pass level. This was explained by one head of school

H>1/1U> "If a student is borderline with 50% then the student needs to know more. If I feel the student will gain from redoing the assessment then the tutors and I will give a mark of 40%, because if 45% was given the student wouldn't think there was much difference, that they wouldn't need much effort to gain a pass mark. The intention is for the student to learn from the resit. We will help by providing extra tutorials and counselling."

It was as if the percentage grade had different functions. For example to give honest feedback, as an incentive to extra learning and as an apology for the fail grade. This was illustrated by a fieldwork organiser who commented

C>5/2U> "I try to advise that if a student does fail, to do so properly, not just 39% - to avoid this number. If they want to use 39% I ask if they are sure about failing the student then to use the full range of marks to reflect as appropriate."

The third factor revealed the 'flexibility' of the mark for individuals and the cohort. Two lecturers described two situations in which numbers had been important. These were the number of fail grades within the cohort and the "flexibility" of percentage grades. The most inexperienced lecturer noted the arbitrary manner of allocating percentages.

L<7/2U< "I was amazed when I went into teaching how the goal posts are moved, for example when the marks are raised

for the whole group if lots fail, so they pass. It is arbitrary."

This comment seems to be related to perceptions of fail rates as indicators of poor teaching rather than rigorous standards (Eble 1976, Airasian 1987, Darcy 1990).

The other lecturer admitted

L>6//2U<M "From experience with moderators and a borderline student, I now deduct more marks so the moderators do not interfere with my judgement."

Both seemed to feel anger towards systems which changed and by implication devalued their judgements. However, all these numerical examples give an interesting insight into the assessment process.

8.13.3 Performing at borderline level to achieve a fail grade

One fieldwork organiser described two examples where students had deliberately performed at a borderline level to obtain a fail grade.

C>9/2U>M "In our system there is only pass or fail. Two student, who were experiencing personal problems and had their own agendas, wanted to be failed. One felt it was OK to fail a placement rather than be labelled academically unsuitable. The other had never succeeded but a fail would have been untenable for her family. She was only interested in gaining paper qualifications and did not have any intentions of practising as an occupational therapist. They both wanted the system to fail them so they would be free to jettison occupational therapy and start the new life they really wanted. The second student did just enough to pass. This made the supervisor angry because she knew the student had the potential to do better."

These examples provide salutary reminders about the complexity of a fail scenario and the importance of understanding the students'

perspective.

Differentiating between a borderline fail and a borderline pass although difficult, seems to depend upon individual or collective perceptions about the student's potential and effort. The points made by two heads of schools suggest useful principles when making this fine judgement.

H>2/1U>M "Real failure is clear cut. It when they are on the boundary with clinical and academic marks. I think you should err on the side of caution, provide an opportunity to improve, particularly with 18 year olds as they grow."

H>4/1U> "The key words are fairness, parity with other students and reasonableness. We need to be satisfied that these have been applied to each student."

8.14 Different criteria in an academic or fieldwork setting

The third question was designed to probe any differences, beyond the obvious ones related to environments, expectations, personnel, means of collecting evidence and criteria. It was intended to challenge assumptions, by making the obvious, explicit. For

"vocational training might be thought to have the additional special problem in that criteria for assessing might appropriately be strictly educational in one instance and very much related to practise, in another. Not only might different sets of criteria be appropriate at different times, but those involved in making judgements might themselves not be entirely in agreement about the area in which sets of criteria should be located. The difficulty is aggravated by the fact that the basis for such judgement is rarely explicitly stated" (Howard, 1979).

This variation in criteria related to stage of training has been acknowledged in nursing (Bradley, 1990) and in occupational

therapy, with lecturers and supervisors having different expectations about the purpose of a level I placement (Neistadt & O'Reilly, 1988).

A majority, 16 from 30 informants acknowledged clear distinctions between academic and fieldwork criteria for failure, while 5 others believed the same criteria applied in both settings. The results will be presented in staff groups to illustrate these differences related to roles and responsibilities.

8.14.1 Fieldwork organisers

This group have responsibilities in both fieldwork and academic settings. All highlighted the difficulty of assessing competence to practise a profession which is struggling to delineate acceptable definitions, parameters of practice and professional identity (Mocellin 1988, Penn 1991). The comparatively easy assessment of "black and white academic subjects", with clear answer and marking guidelines was contrasted with the problems of assessing professionalism and the professional skills, which seem subjective, difficult to define. Failure in this setting

C>9/2U>M "is total, they feel a failure, who they are as a therapist. This seems more profound and disturbing. It is my safety, my appearance, my professionalism - it's you."

This quotation illustrates the interplay between personal and professional identity and the consequences of attributing failure to ability, an internal, uncontrollable and stable causal factor which can produce "feelings of shame or guilt and lowers self-

esteem" (Tollefson & Chen, 1988).

8.14.2 Fieldwork supervisors

All agreed that the primary responsibility for assessing professional suitability lay with fieldwork supervisors. Two provided clear descriptors of professional suitability and skills, adding the advantages and disadvantages of the clinical setting as an assessment milieu.

S>8/7U<I "There is the additional problem of the patient: their safety is our priority. In hospital they are more vulnerable because they have to be able to get information from the patients, obtain their cooperation and handle them safely. These are vital factors, which make placement harder and give it an added quality."

This statement reinforces the primacy of the patient and the 'real' clinical setting as the most appropriate, yet probably unsuitable learning atmosphere (Morgan & Knox, 1987) for the art and science of occupational therapy to become "visible" and be assessed. The second supervisor focused upon the forward transfer, application and adaptation of knowledge (Cox, 1987).

S>8/4U<I "One student was good in an academic sense, for example he would draw beautiful diagrams of muscles but he had no idea how they worked. He was unable to understand, apply or integrate this information. The placement highlighted this problem which had not been apparent in school. There needs to be a balance between academic and practical abilities."

This balance has always been important, but perhaps even more so now, with degree courses. Actual client contact is the major component of the work and source of job satisfaction (Modill et al, 1990). Practical competency is as important as academic

ability in any programme which leads to state registration.

8.14.3 Lecturers

Lecturers were also concerned about whether the student

L>7/3U> "would be an embarrassment to the profession because of their personal or thinking skills."

This criteria linked to professional reputation is similar to one suggested for social work

"The student must prove not only his own worth as a professional person, but his professions' worth as a profession" (Towle, 1954).

Aspects of professional behaviour were included by five of the eight lecturers, although two questioned the appropriateness of this criteria in an academic setting where the predominant role-set was student, which is of course, very different from professional! This dilemma may be viewed from the perspective of learning as a rite of passage (White, 1989) in which the occupational therapy student is expected to quickly become "enculturated" (Eisenhart et al, 1990), to demonstrate through appearance and behaviour the accepted, conventional requirement of professional suitability. It is noteworthy that these were also the most frequently mentioned aspects (n=89, 24%) on the content analysis of the criteria for failure.

Twelve academic informants, including all the lecturers commented upon the main difference in the assessment evidence. In an academic setting it was predominantly written, in contrast with observations and verbal in fieldwork. The assessments could be

read anonymously (using numbered rather than named scripts), re-read and reviewed again by moderators/external examiners acting as impartial arbitrators. This academic method fitting the different criteria

H<10/1U>M "It is sharper in an academic setting. There is more emphasis upon knowledge and thinking."

Another major difference was the organisational structures, processes and people, from examination boards to the reassurance derived from a normal distribution curve, which support lecturers in their academic criteria.

8.14.4 Heads of schools

All 10 endorsed different criteria for failure in an academic and fieldwork setting. They concentrated upon the difficulties associated with the assessment of competence in the fieldwork setting, producing a comprehensive list of problems. These included lack of consistent standards between placements, weaknesses in the interpretation, understanding and use of assessment forms. Supervisors' tendency to rely upon "gut feelings and definitions of competence", the influence of the 'halo effect' particularly with socially skilled and liked students. The increased subjectivity linked to the intimacy, immediacy and consistency of the one-to-one supervisory relationship. The unreliability and distortions of memory for observations of performance. Finally, intangible definitions of the abstract qualities of professionalism which included

integrity, confidentiality, ethical aspects and responsibility.

The cumulative effect of this list is disturbing. Established problems (Barker 1990, Alsop 1991) are here re-stated by elite members of the profession. An obvious question has highlighted many problems. The literature review indicated the national and international efforts to devise valid and reliable assessment measure of competence. Yet the problems remain, but apparently in the form of a hidden, taken-for-granted or insoluble problem which returns to centre stage when fine judgements about the margins of competence are required.

The majority of responses clearly separated knowledge and professional suitability as the key differences for criteria. However, this distinction is blurred by the difficulty of assessing competence to practise and the tendency to use criteria for professional behaviour in academic settings. By making the obvious, explicit, some expected problems and implicit criteria have emerged.

8.15 The influence of causal attributions

The following questions investigated the influence of causal attributions on both decision making and affective responses, particularly judgements about effort, ability and difficulty of the task. Attribution theory had provided a useful conceptual framework for understanding and explaining three of the results obtained from the previous study. These were firstly, the

inappropriate attribution of responsibility for failure led to intense and enduring feelings of guilt. Secondly, disinterest and lack of effort as components of an inappropriate attitude, which was the most frequently mentioned criteria for failure. This provoked a response of anger, irritation and embarrassment from the supervisors.

Although attribution theory provided the researcher with a useful conceptual framework for probing the informants' thinking, it is necessary to record their stilted response to these questions. It was as though the terms ability, effort and task difficulty were unclear and restrictive, confusing or constraining, rather helping them to focus and clarify their cognitive processes. This observation echoes Rapaport's (1984) questioning of whether people actually make causal attributions independent of attribution measurement procedures or set questions. However, the results will still be presented using these dimensions of causality.

8.15.1 Effort

In attributional terms, effort is identified as one the four causes of success or failure in achievement related situations. It is considered to be an internal, unstable and controllable causal factor (Tollefson & Chen, 1988).

Effort was acknowledged by 26 informants as influencing their criteria for failure. This was expressed as interest,

motivation, commitment to the profession, hospital or course, hard work, punctual submission of assignments, attendance and enthusiasm. Three fieldwork organisers commented upon the priority given to effort by supervisors.

C>9/2U>M "Fieldwork supervisors highly value motivation, interest and being a team member. For example, if the student is OK with academic work but not able to make small talk, the supervisor doesn't know what they can do and are not willing to trust them."

This example demonstrates how a relatively, insignificant behaviour is perceived with escalating effects and attributions, seemingly out of all proportion to the original trigger.

Six informants made similar, implicit links between disinterest and professional unsuitability. For example,

H>11/1U> "Yes, effort is double edged. If a borderline student has been inconsistent, sloppy and late, we ask 'How are they going to be as a therapist?' These give grounds for making the judgement."

This association is also noted about examples of academic dishonesty. Carmack (1984) reported

"Eleven subjects believe a relationship exists between academic dishonesty and subsequent professional dishonesty, especially when dishonesty, in contrast to ignorance, motivates plagiarism."

8.15.2 Effort and ability

A teacher's feedback is influenced by the interaction of causal attributions of effort expenditure with ability, an internal, stable and uncontrollable factor. For example,

"the greatest amount of punishment goes to those of high ability who fail because of lack of effort" (Prawat et al, 1983).

The interplay between effort expenditure and ability level was commented upon by informants from all groups, for example

H>3/1U>M "If the student is consistently poor, regardless of lots of effort this cancels out if they are working at the maximum of their ability and they would have to leave the course. If they have the ability and the work is poor, then they are not making an effort and would also fail."

This apparent equilibrium between effort and ability was recognised by six informants. However, some admitted a desire to tip the balance by allowing high effort to compensate for deficits in ability, or to penalise able students expending low effort.

S>8/4U<I "Effort is tremendously important. If they are working hard but still failing, there is the temptation to pay them for their effort by giving them the benefit of the doubt. It is easier and you want to do this, even though you know you still have to mark them on what they do and whether they are safe. If the student is unsafe, then it isn't good for them either. If they are lazy and are not bothering, then a fail gives them a kick up the backside."

This quotation also indicates the supervisor's affective response, particularly sympathy when effort exceeds ability and anger when ability is not matched by effort (Graham, 1984).

The dilemma of this disequilibrium between effort and ability was acknowledged by five others, two of whom added the dimension of stage of training but from conflicting perspectives.

H>2/1U>M "We are all influenced by effort and this impression. If they seek guidance they will be given extra support and marked more leniently. If they skim through, you know this and it has an influence. If they have low ability it depends on the year. If it is in years 2 and 3 they are more likely to be given support, because we should have weeded poor students out in year 1."

L>9/3U> "Yes, quite categorically. If they are mature, with lesser ability and high motivation but having

difficulty with study skills. I am influenced by their commitment, what they have given up and how difficult it is for them. I am influenced in a positive way, both for process and product, particularly in the first year when they need more support and nurturing. But not in the final year when it is more critical for the student to prove their competence."

The tendency to reward a first year student's motivation rather than skills was also reported by 35% of student nurse assessors (Bradley, 1990).

Another complication in the ability and effort equation is the subjective judgement of potential, and how this may be applied on a continuum of stringency, depending upon staff experience. This word was used by two heads of schools.

H>7/1U>M "Potential is also taken into consideration, particularly if the student is having problems. So many lack confidence, it is a question of tapping into their inner resources."

A judgement of potential is implicit in the next statement

C>5/2U> "If they have genuine enthusiasm and self-awareness about their ability and want to make good, then they are given the benefit of doubt and justifiably so. But this is happening less with experience. We are becoming harder on ourselves and students."

The recognition and valuing of potential is linked with one of the core, humanistic values of occupational therapy (Yerxa, 1983). These answers seem to reflect some of the conflicts which exist between the roles and values of a therapist and educator.

8.15.3 Task difficulty

Difficulty of the task seemed to evoke clear-cut replies,

particularly from academic informants. The majority, 8 of 12 stated this did not influence their criteria for failure. The main reason was summarised by a head of school

H>3/1U>M "Difficulty of the task has nothing to do with it. The criteria for the assessment should be a match between the task and marking guidelines. The course objectives should not be too simple or difficult but should tally with the stage of training and the demands of the task."

Biological sciences was given as an example of a difficult subject, which was objective and straightforward to mark, by two lecturers.

The second reason was the expectation that lecturers would be patient, providing extra tutorial help for students engaged upon difficult tasks. However, a disadvantage of this explanation are assumptions based upon a causal theory of teaching. Such references were made by a head of school and two lecturers.

L>6/1U<M "With hard stuff we are expected to help. This can be hard if the students refuse to accept help. I find it difficult to let go. It used to be our fault if a student failed. This is ingrained. Failing of students meant failure of the teacher."

In contrast, the four informants who acknowledged the influence of task difficulty on their criteria offered two reasons which were related to the process and outcome of assessments.

H>5/1U>M "This must influence because we can't always achieve. If it shows they have tackled the work in a logical, rational manner then some credit is given for the process."

L>7/3U> "If it is a hard examination we moderate up all the marks."

The final quotation again illustrates how numbers can influence

the criterion for pass and fails, particularly the 'flexibility' of percentage marks.

8.15.4 Fieldwork supervisors' use of attributions

Their views are presented separately where they differed in substance or emphasis from academic informants. All endorsed the influence of effort attributions upon their criteria. Two examples highlight the powerful influence upon their decision making process and affective response.

S>6/3U<M "It was nasty, she was trying to look as though she was trying. This was her problem, her inconsistencies. Sometimes she would work hard, at other times she was lazy and submit work late."

S>8/6U<M "She made no effort. We explained each week what she needed to do but she made no effort at all. If she had looked as though she was trying or asked for help, it would have been different. We could not understand why she wasn't doing what we had asked or explained to her. She lied, telling the School that we had not told her what we expected."

The student's lack of effort and disinterest reflected negatively upon the whole service.

"We, and the team kept making unfavourable comparisons with the first year student. Because she was disinterested in the people and any tasks it reflected badly upon occupational therapy and our position within the multi-disciplinary team."

This spread of damage has been reported elsewhere (Ilott 1988, Alsop 1991 and Green 1991). Although concerning, it can be balanced by the respect gained through the exercise of professional integrity through assigning a fail grade, rather than "unprofessional cowardice" (Lankshear, 1990).

The supervisors were also sensitive to the balance between rewarding ability and effort, with one highlighting supervisory strategies and the difference between teaching and learning.

S>8/7U<I "A student shouldn't pass just because they are very interested. They need to have the ability even if they are trying hard. But if they have the ability and are not trying, then it is the supervisor's responsibility to try to get them interested, otherwise you have failed them. But you can't spoon feed them. If they persistently don't try this should be brought up at the weekly feedback."

Effort was the primary component, with ability and task difficulty being included almost in passing. Ability was defined by the assessment form and matching expectations to their stage of training. The unpredictability and variability the clinical setting were recognised as contributing toward task difficulty

S>6/3U<M "Unpredictable things happen in a mental health team, this makes the task difficult. I don't expect the student to be able to deal with everything."

Effort, as a controllable, internal and unstable factor would seem to exert a strong influence on a criterion for failure. On the content analysis interest, defined as lack of motivation and apathy was mentioned 17 times representing 5% of the total. The interviews revealed a complex, delicate equation between effort and ability mediated by stage of training, potential and a desire to understand any extenuating circumstances. All indicate a judgement influenced by both objective and subjective factors.

8.15.5 Effect of causal attributions upon feelings and behaviour towards the student

The final question in the section on the criteria for failure

focused upon affective consequences, particularly the finding that effort attributions elicit stronger affective reactions, than attributions to ability (Raviv et al, 1983). The intention was to probe links between cognitions, affective responses and action, especially "that thoughts determine feelings" (Graham, 1984) and that

"affect plays an essential role, serving as the key link between thought (ie the attribution) and action" (Prawat et al, 1983).

Again, the replies were stilted, with only one head of school addressing task difficulty and four other informants including ability. The question may have been too direct, demanding a personal and emotional answer from informants' maintaining their professional persona.

The replies reiterated the primacy of effort, with 25 informants acknowledging the influence of effort attributions upon their feelings toward a student. The following adjectives convey some of these feelings: irritation (n=4), distress (n=2), exasperated (n=2), sympathy (n=2), anger (n=1) and resignation (n=1). Their expressions of irritation, exasperation and anger would seem to reflect

"an 'ought' emotion that often accompanies the belief that the target of anger is capable of changing behaviour" (Graham, 1984).

The emotive power was also related to the equation between ability level and effort expenditure. Five answered with an unambiguous "Yes", while others were more circumspect "You wouldn't be human if you didn't" and "It is likely too". Only

one fieldwork supervisor disagreed, providing the following explanation:

S>8/7U<I "It easily could be, you have to guard against this. It helps having a team of supervisors - we can let off steam with each other."

The connections between causal attribution, affect and action were clearly, if rather unexpectedly, stated by two heads of schools who made explicit links between effort and outcome.

H>1/1U> "They would be marked up or down. You wouldn't be human if you didn't. If the student seeks and appreciates the help given; whereas if they don't attend or put in any effort. If they show interest it is bound to influence you."

These views were echoed, but with a significantly, different outcome.

H>2/1U>M "It is likely to. If they sought help then you may give them a few extra marks. But they would still fail if they still didn't produce the quality - meet the standards."

The importance of giving or accepting help and acting upon staff guidance, seems to be an important mediating factor, being mentioned by six informants. The following example encompasses these aspects,

L>7/3U> "Yes, if the student makes the effort, so do you. You give them more support and tutorial guidance. If they are casual and don't ask for help, then we don't offer. It's being wanted, it feels great and therefore we help more."

This reciprocal interaction and relationship seems to stimulate other intrinsic and extrinsic needs (Jackson, 1987). The reward and enjoyment gained from working in partnership with interested students, was noted by informants from all groups. This contrasted with the anger and irritation experienced when

students' expended minimal effort. These responses illustrate the complexity of attributional dimensions and how

"a composite measure of teachers' sympathy, grading and willingness to help students decreased as the attribution for failure went from ability to strategy to effort" (Clifford, 1986b).

This finding matches two other mediating factors which were noted by academic informants as influencing their affective response. These were ability and stage of training. The interactions between high ability and low effort, or low ability and high effort in provoking either anger or sympathy, were consistent with other studies (for example, Prawat et al 1983 Graham 1984, Tollefson & Chen 1988). Students who skimmed through, meeting only the minimum requirements when staff valued effort, intellectual curiosity and making "full use of all their gifts" provoked annoyance and impatience. Whilst students whose "ambitions are beyond their abilities" evoked protectiveness, sympathy, distress and realism. For example,

L>5/3U<M "With ability you try to help but then you reach a point when you need to make a decision. If they are working very hard, you need to ask whether all the effort is worth it from their point of view. The struggle may be so difficult that they are not enjoying the course."

One lecturer introduced the impact of the students' stage of training, with consequent changes in her strategy and attributions of responsibility.

L>9/3U> "With a first year student I would be more supportive, give directions on how to improve, because I need/want to facilitate positive changes and success. In the third year I have to deal with my feelings of failure and their failure. It is a question of re-building, with different strategies and not answering the question for them."

This example may reflect the affective response reported by Prawat et al (1983)

"the highest level of guilt accompanied those situations in which a dramatic downward shift of student effort expenditure was depicted."

The responses provided by the fieldwork organisers reflected their roles as impartial advisors and arbitrators between supervisors and students. For example,

C>12/1U> "I provide feedback to the student about how they are appearing and what the possible consequences may be. For example, if they are looking as though they couldn't care less I ask them to consider how the supervisor will be influenced by these thoughts. It is annoying when you know they can do better than they are doing, but this is their choice."

Two restated the primacy of effort for supervisors

C>4/3U>M "If a student is "iffy" then it is their attitude and interest which counts most with the supervisors."

C>9/2U>M "Motivation is the key for supervisors. They are hurt if the student isn't interested. They can't understand why they aren't passionate about their speciality. This is particularly apparent in new Seniors."

These comments illustrate the importance of interest, effort and motivation. It is as though a deficiency in these areas is perceived as a threat, a personal and professional devaluation of a supervisor's commitment.

There are many ways of coping with perceived or actual threats. A direct, confrontational strategy was described by a very experienced academic.

H>3/1U>M "I am honest. If I am feeling irritated by lack of effort I say to them that I have the impression that they are not really bothered. I ask if I am right and if so, why? I wait for them to tell me what the problem is. I ask rather than make assumptions, I put them under pressure."

This example of transforming attributions into explicit feelings, and then action, seems an appropriate strategy for confronting failure, irrespective of cause.

8.15.6 Conclusion to criteria for failure

In many ways, this conclusion is as inconclusive as the search for neat, specific definitions and assessment tools for either competence or incompetence. Both the initial, open questions which probed the informant's personal reflections and the latter, structured questions based upon the public theory of causal attributions, failed to provide answers to these "difficult questions." However, there were some common explicit and implicit assessment constructs which seem to match the constituents of competence. More importantly, these constructs are shared by the global community of occupational therapists (and, interestingly by other 'caring' professions). For example, two failure workshops held in Sweden in 1993 and attended by 50 academic and fieldwork staff, produced the same criteria. Difficult students exhibit inappropriate behaviour or attitudes, fail to recognise their limitations and take unnecessary risks, are unmotivated to learn and have poor interpersonal communication skills. It seems as though the opportunity to reflect and clarify personal criteria, to share and appreciate the commonalities, is sufficient to support assessors as they judge competence.

8.16 FEELINGS AND FAILURE : Introduction

Failure is an emotionally charged word and action which provokes a complex constellation of emotions which seem to be influenced by the range of circumstances and consequences of the fail. Many of these are negative including guilt, anxiety, distress, personal failure and exhaustion which have an enduring, debilitating effect, extending beyond work. It is therefore essential to explore the affective aspects of assigning a fail grade. A focus upon this hidden side of teaching complements current interest in teacher thinking (Kremer-Hayon, 1986a), feelings (Koehler, 1988), the practice (Fish et al, 1989) and social psychological processes of supervisors (Green, 1991). All are dynamically interdependent. The discomfort anticipated and associated with judging incompetence may contribute to the failure to fail. Different aspects of this study would seem to suggest a common pattern of feelings experienced at different stages of a fail scenario. The recognition and understanding of these, as usual or predictable feelings may give staff the assurance gained from a sense of universality (Yalom, 1985). For example,

"Other people have felt the same desolation caused by having to fail a student - not just me" (Fieldwork supervisor 1991).

The literature contains a few, tantalisingly similar statements about the emotional costs (and even less about the benefits) but these tend to be abbreviated, embedded in the ground rather than forming the figure of attention (Meisenhelder 1982, Carpenito

1983, Brozenec et al 1987, Lankshear 1990, Symanski 1991), as such language and depth of emotion would seem to deserve. The focused interviews provided an opportunity to place this hidden world of feelings at the forefront. This was achieved through two questions. The first intended to identify feelings associated with failure along a temporal continuum. The second testing the hypothesis stemming from Meisenhelder's (1982) statement:

"One of the most emotionally taxing responsibilities facing an instructor today is to assign a failing clinical grade"

and whether there were any differences in perception related to the informants varied roles and responsibilities. The range and depth of emotions were conveyed through language and metaphor which were congruent with, and supported by their non-verbal communication. For example,

S>6/3U<M "I felt terrible, quite bad, anxious. I agonised all week-end. Was I doing the right thing? Was I being too hard? I was impossible to live with."

This emphasis upon language and metaphor was also congruent with the research approach with the hermeneutic circle, for the

"working hypothesis thus invites us to proceed from metaphor to text at the level of 'sense' and the explanation of 'sense', then from text to metaphor at the level of the reference of a work to the world and to a self, that is, at the level of interpretation proper" (Ricoeur, 1981).

Their 'text' was understood, explained and here interpreted by the author and each reader.

8.16.1 Feelings associated with a fail scenario along a temporal continuum : before the student is informed - during the decision making process

Anticipatory anxiety was the predominant feeling experienced by all those (with only one exception), who held direct responsibility for making the judgement. They described how this apprehension was tinged with other emotions such as anger (n=2), distress (n=4), self-doubt (n=5), sadness (n=4), concern (n=3) and courage (n=3).

The different fears which seemed to generate this "extreme anxiety" and a "great deal of trepidation" were associated with their different roles. For example, two of the eight lecturers highlighted the stress and powerlessness, stimulated by the secrecy attached to prior knowledge of examination results.

L>7/3U> "It is an awful time knowing that they are going to go. Distress is a good word. It is a secret and you can't do anything about it."

In contrast, two of the five supervisors commented about the students' pre-knowledge of their results, gained from the weekly formative assessments. One supervisor described how a student refused to complete the placement because

S>8/6U<M "She said she was very, very upset and felt that she couldn't continue with the last week. This made us feel bad and angry. When she did return four weeks later to receive her report she was very hostile. It was horrible for us 'dragging things up' that had happened ages before. This left a lot of unfinished business."

The feelings of anger and sadness seemed to be related to their understanding of the student and their causal attributions

(Graham, 1984). Two lecturers acknowledged feeling anger towards able students who had failed due to lack of effort, or when they perceived an organisational "miscarriage of justice". Feelings of sadness and concern were expressed for "liked students" who lacked the ability to complete the course. A head of school provided a vivid example

H>4/1U> "I had a sleeplessness night. I felt warmly towards her but she couldn't cope. It was a kindness, I could have kept her for selfish reasons. It was devastating for me."

Sadness was sometimes tinged with self-recriminations about their responsibility for admissions. This example combines and confuses the professional value of potential for change, with a fallible selection process.

L<7/2U< "I worry about how they got in. This is partly my responsibility. I might have given them the benefit of the doubt at interview because I expect people to change."

The unpredictability of the students' response and their own ability to conduct (and survive) the final report giving meeting was a major source of anxiety for three fieldwork supervisors.

S>8/4U<I "I was extremely anxious. I was very, very conscious that anything could happen. He could respond in any way, angry, breakdown, make accusations."

This element of performance anxiety, although from a different base, was shared by three of the seven fieldwork organisers.

C<2/2U< "I am anxious about how I will perform, that I will pick up the right vibes. I usually feel more insecure if I am called in early and am the first one to tell the student, to use the word failure."

Only one of the thirty informants, a fieldwork organiser, admitted to positive emotions when first contacted.

C>9/2U>M "My heart sinks when I see a note calling me out, but the fantasy is worse than the reality. When the problem is black and white it is very simple. It is the grey ones which are more difficult and give me palpitations. But they do not hold a terror for me now because I have changed the way I think. I am now able to think positively and to see failure as a positive life experience. Failure energizes me, it is a real issue which doesn't deplete me, I have to use all my skills."

This statement would seem to reflect a rational, rather than catastrophic response to failure (Ellis, 1962) which helps to place the event in perspective, as part of life and learning.

Two strategies for coping with anticipatory anxiety were reported. These were confirming with colleagues the results or course of action and thorough preparation for the report giving meeting.

S>8/4U<I "I needed to make sure that I had all the facts right, that I had a quiet time to prepare"

C>5/2U> "I check out all the facts and procedures. I remind myself of their previous results, who visited and what they had been told. I gain as much information, both factual and intuitive. I am concerned to get everything right for all. I go on 'red alert' when it is starting to happen."

Although the heads of schools acknowledged their feelings, their responses focused upon strategies, related to their coordinating role. This seemed to alleviate any conflict between concern for a student and professional standards. The most important strategy, was again confirming the judgement and ensuring personal agreement with the outcome.

H>3/1U>M "I will go back over their material, reconsider and make sure that I agree with the decision and believe it is the right one."

Their responsibility to undertake this "unpleasant task" was acknowledged by half this group, for example

H>2/1U>M "It's not good, a pleasant task but it is part of being head of department, the part that I don't enjoy. I don't like it. It is important for the profession that failure is seen to be done well and effectively. I prefer high to low standards."

Three commented upon their initial, and in one case continued discomfort with this aspect of their role.

H>9/1U>M "At first I was very apprehensive. I had to use my professional facade but I don't want to be hard. I want to be clear and firm, to leave the student with their self-esteem to end on a positive note. It is my job and to do it as clearly as I can."

One head of school clearly summarised these conflicting roles and responsibilities

H>11/1U> "There are three parts of me all with different, conflicting perceptions of failure. As me, I feel dreadful because of my relationship with the student; as a therapist I wish, wonder why and what else we could have done to ensure success; and as an educator I know it is the right thing to do, that we must maintain standards. There is a real conflict between these three parts and feelings which varies with each student but I wouldn't ever like to be totally detached from these feelings."

This quotation illustrates the complex, constellation of emotions the anticipation of a fail scenario evokes in the ultra elite of the profession. As such, it is also a salutary reminder of the importance of feelings and, why this crucial judgement may be avoided by occupational therapists with much less experience.

8.16.2 During the final report giving meeting

The emotions experienced when the student is informed of the

outcome of the academic or fieldwork assessment demonstrate an interesting combination of relief and anxiety, with a cognitive focus upon managing the present and assisting the student to plan for the future. The tension between relief, because the students knew their results, and anxiety linked to the unpredictability of their response, both of individuals and the whole cohort, was clearly expressed by one lecturer.

L>6/1U<M "Once the results are posted - this is built up as a big thing - it doesn't seem so bad. You can alleviate the tension on a face-to-face basis. The next teaching slot is not liked by tutors. You go into the office, shut the door and put the 'do not disturb' notice up."

One third drew strength from their attending or counselling skills, by concentrating upon the student's needs and feelings during the final meeting. Two lecturers highlighted their strategies, which were influenced by the context of the relationship and the consequences of the fail grade.

L>7/3U> "Relief because they know. It depends upon the students' reaction. If they are relieved then it is easy because they are realistic and they are kind to you. If it is a surprise then I am supportive. If they are angry then I feel angry and defensive."

L>9/3U> "I am always conscious for them not to feel a failure or to have failed. To put it into context, where the difficulty is and what can be done to remediate it. It is not always as black and white as it should be. Depending upon my relationship with the student whether you can be honest or not. I want to leave them and myself with dignity, to do a good job and not be judgemental or punitive."

Three fieldwork supervisors described their feelings of anger, which seemed to be provoked by a range of student (and personal reactions), from hostility to distress and disbelief.

S>8/5U<I "I was nervous because of my own feelings of self-

blame. The student, even though she was tearful and upset asked questions about every point. I felt angry because she seemed to be putting herself and us through it unnecessarily."

Silence and hostility elicited a similar response.

S>8/6U<M "It was awful, horrible. I wouldn't want to go through that experience again."

Their statements conveyed a powerful mix of conflicting emotions.

S>8/7U<I "Very apprehensive and also sorry for her."

It seems unsurprising that such emotional turbulence causes exhaustion and a desire to avoid similar situations.

The responses and strategies adopted by academic staff where fail grades are relatively more frequent are examined as they may provide useful guidelines for fieldwork settings. The roles of lecturers and fieldwork organisers seem to contain some protective mechanisms, particularly the confirmation gained from agreement with, and support from colleagues.

L>5/3U<M "There are always two people, the course leader and the personal tutor, so you are rarely on your own."

The role of two fieldwork organisers did not usually extend to participation in the final report giving session. The others described responses and actions which were congruent with their role

C>4/3U>M "as an arbitrator and to make sure that everyone has really heard what has been said."

The effort involved in active listening and

C>12/1U> "pulling out the strands and undercurrents of what is being said"

was acknowledged, as were the conflicting emotions experienced by one fieldwork organiser

C<2//2U< "It is funny mixture of feelings. I wish it wasn't happening but also want to make it as positive as possible. Positive and negative are all mixed up."

New staff, who lack experience or strategies, seem to be particularly vulnerable as the following example illustrates.

L>6/2U<M "I was challenged on my written feedback. I was backed into a corner and bullied by the student. I was too inexperienced. I didn't know students would go for you or how to handle the situation ... I meant my comments to be helpful and was hurt when she described them as derogatory. I now ask students what they mean and whether they are only seeking praise. It was a hard lesson but one that I have never forgotten."

The term 'bullying' seems incongruous with the image of occupational therapy students. However, it is one which has recurred, particularly amongst supervisors. Student responses to failure of displaced anger (Meisenhelder, 1982) resentment and annoyance (Wilson, 1972), open rejection (Lawrence, 1985) and controlled rage (Ungerleider, 1985) have been described. Supervisors have responded assertively, giving detailed explanations and justifications for the decision.

The heads of schools responses illustrated their ultimate responsibility for informing the student of the outcome, balanced with concern for the individual. This was expressed through acknowledging their present distress, with their future potential by attempting to place the fail within a longer, life span perspective. Three noted the value of experience for improving their coping abilities.

H>1/1U> "I feel better about this than I used to. Now I know I can handle the situation, how to guide from negative to a positive, to a programme of action and what they have learnt during their period of training and the failure. If the student has a plan at the end of the interview,

or will do one and return, I feel as though I have been helpful, that I have done my job."

The development of systems for notifying students, use of counselling skills and experience of working in mental health seemed to be particularly valued when dealing with a student's distress or frustration. The following example of good practice illustrates these aspects.

H>4/1U> "I am very calm. I have my feelings beforehand. I have a system. They are given their results in an envelope to take away and open. Enclosed is a note saying they have failed, that they must be very upset and when they feel ready, I will be waiting, please come and see me. Sometimes I wait five minutes or a day or they do not appear at all. It finishes me off if they march off and we never hear from them again. At the start I say they must be feeling very angry and this is all right. This usually leads to tears or fury. I allow this, this isn't the moment to discuss what went wrong, they need time to settle into what is happening. I ask the student to write notes about what they want to talk about and do, so they can come back the next day to discuss these. Most do come back, then we talk about the future. It is now the worst thing and they don't think anything good can come from it, but they are also relieved. I can offer them three options: referral to the careers service, the procedure for appeal if they still wish to be an occupational therapist or what other future plans they may have for which I can provide a reference. Also, how they will tell other people. I then write to them two weeks later asking if there is anything I can do to help, about 50% do so. A fail is bad news. It is healthy for the students to have permission to be angry. I feel better and so does the student."

This system seems to be sensitive to the feelings and needs of both parties, recognising the importance of closure to reduce the distress of 'unfinished business'.

The heads of schools were the only group who raised wider organisational or political aspects. For example, three referred to the students' right of appeal. The dilemmas and loneliness of

their position were summarised by one.

H>2/1U>M "I don't like doing it, particularly if there are other political things going on. For example, if they want to appeal and Higher Education establishment is unlikely to support me. I don't share this with staff, I can get preoccupied with it. They don't always see these problems."

The responsibility for ensuring each student is treated fairly and correctly according to institutional procedures would seem to place an additional stressor upon heads of schools during the process.

8.16.3 Afterwards

When the student had left the feelings experienced were different, although there were some shared, common themes within and between groups. For example, a sense of relief was noted by seven of the thirty informants, but predominantly by fieldwork supervisors (n=3) and lecturers (n=2), those with the primary responsibility for judging incompetence. The relief expressed by supervisors may be felt in the following quotations, which also illustrate the pervasive effect of failure upon their whole working role.

S>6/3U<M "Relieved, I was so glad that it was all over. We could get back to normality and peace of work rather than spending all the time with the student."

S>8/7U<I "Guilt and relief that it was all over, she was leaving the department and we didn't have to struggle any more."

The emotional spread within departments was noted by two supervisors. In one instance,

S>8/5U<I "the department was flat, deflated"

and in the other, there was relief

S>8/4U<I "It was nice to have a break from students. This took the strain away so we could enjoy working with the patients again. We could chat and get it out of our system."

These quotations reiterate the cost of failure, in terms of time and emotional energy, which distracts and detracts from their primary role.

This sense of relief, whether personal or departmental, was tinged with regret and guilt for three of the five supervisors. Guilt seemed to stem from self-doubt, identification with the student, a sense of personal failure from failing to ensure a successful outcome - "we had failed to get him through" and fears for their or the department's reputation. The destructive self interrogation reported in earlier studies (Ilott, 1992) was repeated by one supervisor.

S>8/5U<I "Blaming self, looking back - could I have done that better or more? Given more support? Given more time? It wasn't until someone else said that I had done everything - you did that."

This was linked to identification with the student

"I kept putting myself in her shoes, thinking about how I might have felt. For example, her father collected her and my father would have done the same."

This quotation illustrates the danger of loss of emotional distance due to affective empathy (Maslach, 1982). However, this danger would seem to be implicit in the contradictory roles - assessor and counsellor which supervisors (and lecturers in the role of personal tutor) are expected to fulfil (COT 1984).

Pride in fulfilling their responsibility for assessing

competence to practise was noted by two supervisors.

S>8/4U<I "We never had any doubts afterwards. The more we thought about the student the more we agreed that we couldn't possibly have let him through."

This sense of relief and reassurance, gained from making the right decision, was also noted by four lecturers although, there were variations related to feelings of responsibility and peer support. Three acknowledged feelings of being or letting a student down through their avoidance of clear communication about fail outcomes. For example

L>7/3U> "Sometimes students are unrealistic believing that they will not or cannot fail. I could kick myself for not spelling it out clearly that they will fail and for telling them that they can do it when you know they can't."

The need for personal and collegiate peer support was noted by informants from all groups. A lecturer highlighted one aspect which may be considered to be peculiar to the academic setting.

L>6/1U<M "Support from colleagues is very important. You hope they are going to back you up. It is difficult facing the student group afterwards. You are their corporate enemy and they protect each other."

Fieldwork organisers and course leaders described similar forward, positive planning strategies. This reflects their responsibility for organising an additional, fieldwork placement if it is a first fail.

C<2/1U< "I try to be proactive and positive with the student. I am motivated to try to help them get through."

Three of the seven organisers placed a strong emphasis upon highlighting the student's strengths and making definite arrangements for their next placement. However, this sense of

positive action and feelings did not extend to all situations, particularly those which were

C>5/2U> "messy and unpleasant because of personality and relationship difficulties"

or where she identified and empathised with the student

C<2/2U< "A friend failed her retake examinations and had to leave. Because of this devastating experience I want students to stay."

This comment, made by an inexperienced academic reflects the problematical transition from "evaluated to evaluator" (Kremer-Hayon, 1986b).

In contrast, all the heads of schools seemed to accept the inevitability of the outcome, through their endorsement of the right decision and, by placing the students' distress within a long term perspective. Their power and responsibility is neatly summarised in this statement:

H>3/1U>M "Once the student has left I am too busy with something else. I occasionally worry but there is little one can do. If I have disagreed with the decision or feel that a student has been victimised then I will, and have, felt badly about it. But as a head of school I have the power to stop victimisation, therefore I don't feel guilty. In a way this is a relief. As a national examiner I was a member of team and therefore had less influence if I disagreed with a decision."

The wisdom gained from considerable experience, was expressed by one head of school whose ability to place failure within a long term perspective, would seem to provide an emotional safety net.

H>1/1U> "I ask them what they think this failure will mean to them in 10 years time. This long term perspective is useful to put the failure into proportion."

Although it is tempting to conclude this section with a positive

statement (a pervasive theme which may be related to the values of occupational therapy) it seems inappropriate to devalue their emotional trauma by doing so. Instead, a quotation from an experienced fieldwork organiser will be used to inter-connect the emotionally demanding nature of a fail scenario, with recognition of the needs of those undertaking this onerous responsibility.

C>5/3U> "I learn from every one about what to do and what to avoid. It is emotionally draining and I need a lot of support."

It also highlights the learning and emotional support which can be gained from sharing or listening to others' experience, one of the key long term outcomes from attending a failure workshop.

8.17 Is failure your most onerous responsibility?

This question directly investigated the hypotheses that academic staff and fieldwork supervisors perceive the assignment of a fail grade as their most onerous responsibility. This hypothesis was generated from the first study and the literature review. However, the comments made during the focused interviews seemed to support the null hypothesis, with only ten informants agreeing with this statement. The majority identified more stressful aspects of their role. Although representatives from each group cited a range of more stressful responsibilities they seem to share themes of control and accountability.

The following table indicates the number of people from each group who agreed or disagreed with the hypothesis.

Table 30 Number of informants who agreed and disagreed with the statement that assigning a fail grade was their most onerous responsibility.

Role	Agree	Disagree
Course leader	1	8
Lecturer	3	2
Fieldwork organiser	3	3
Fieldwork supervisor	3	2
TOTAL	10	15

Although this question was not included in the pilot interviews, reducing the sample size, the trend would seem to suggest those with direct assessment responsibilities agree with the statement. The results from each staff group will be presented separately to highlight reasons related to roles and relationship with the student.

8.17.1 Fieldwork supervisors

Four of the five supervisors identified either the process or outcome of assigning a fail grade as their most difficult responsibility. The consequences and circumstances of the fail seemed to be influential. For example

S>8/7U<I "When failing involves deciding upon their future, so it is a big decision for the individual and the profession. It is also upsetting for me and the department."

S>6/3U<M "For me it was very, very difficult to go through the process. It was clear she would fail because she wouldn't change ... it was like hitting my head against a brick wall. Pointing out problems and suggesting how to change was so difficult without being threatening or

authoritarian."

She continued to describe how this students' refusal or inability to respond to feedback, undermined her confidence with the next student, illustrating a rippling negative effect.

The supervisor who disagreed identified other responsibilities which were equally onerous, but which were beyond her control, for example when the student experiences a bereavement or decides to withdraw from training while on placement.

8.17.2 Lecturers

Although all acknowledged difficulties associated with the whole process of failure, only three agreed with the hypothesis. Two particular problems were highlighted. These were stage of training and self-questioning or doubt. A lecturer who had been involved with a finalist student described the trauma.

L>6/1U<M "Depends on the stage of training. If it is early and they fail, and will continue to fail - you want to do so because it is a relief. If it continues to the final year, it was the most difficult thing I have ever done. It calls upon something different from within you, making you look closely at yourself and question whether more could have been done at an earlier stage."

Self-questioning and doubt, because of the degree of honesty required, was the most onerous aspect identified by one lecturer

L>9/3U> "I mustn't have taught them well enough. Why did they fail and was I part of the reason? I feel some responsibility. Did I tell them enough? Deal with the subject appropriately? Was I their role model and wasn't I good enough?"

This degree of self-interrogation seems to indicate a belief in a

causal theory of teaching which denies the student's role as an active partner in the learning process. This perspective was described by another lecturer who disagreed with the hypothesis stating

L<7/2U< "I am able to recognise that I do not have sole responsibility. I don't take myself so seriously that all decisions are mine, this isn't rational. It depends upon the circumstances for the student and how they feel about themselves, if they are willing to explore topics."

8.17.3 Fieldwork organisers

The seven fieldwork organisers were evenly split between those who agreed absolutely and those who identified other aspects of their role as more onerous. These included problems associated with securing sufficient quality fieldwork placements and, knowingly allocating a student to a poor placement because it is all that is available and then listening to their complaints and disillusionment. Dealing with last minute cancellations. Coping with disagreements with supervisors and advising when they are not offering an appropriate standard of supervision. These difficulties seem to be linked to varying degrees of unpredictability, limited choice or control and giving negative feedback to colleagues.

8.17.4 Heads of Schools

Only one head of school agreed with the statement commenting,

H>7/1U>M "Yes, on the whole we are so busy. Judging lovely people is a constant source of tension."

The most frequently identified onerous responsibility, mentioned by four course leaders related to staff issues, for example

H>1/1U> "disciplining a staff member was the worst."

Other problems included time management, coping with family responsibilities and all the current changes within higher education; the stress associated with validation and moderation events; securing further intakes; students' personal problems and risky decisions which require solo rather than consultative processes. All these seem to be linked to their position and accountability towards statutory and other bodies. These concerns seemed to override assigning a fail grade, which three clearly linked with the role of teacher, rather than manager.

For example,

H>1/1U> "If everything is as good as it can be and everything has been done which could be done - then failure still happens in the best run of establishments. You can't let it get you down. You can't fall to pieces because you have to counsel the rest of the staff who are upset by the failure."

8.17.5 Conclusion to feelings and failure

The focus upon the affective aspects of failure has highlighted the trauma, particularly the anxiety, guilt, distress and self-doubt which seems to pervade those with direct responsibility, whether in an academic or fieldwork setting. These common feelings seem to follow a pattern with anticipatory anxiety tinged with anger, distress, self-doubt, sadness or concern

experienced before the decision is made, with a combination of relief and anxiety experienced during the final interview, and relief tinged with regret, guilt, reassurance or pride experienced after the event. However, all depend upon the circumstances and consequences of the fail grade.

Three themes were also evident. Firstly, the desire to transform the immediate, negative experience into a longer term, positive outcome. This may reflect a professional value and practice of focusing upon strengths or abilities to minimise dysfunction. Secondly, although failure was difficult, it was not considered to be the most onerous responsibility, particularly for heads of schools and fieldwork organisers, who were required to confront problems over which they were able to exert less choice and control. Finally, some factors linked to differences were identified as exacerbating the trauma. These included the student's stage of training and staff inexperience, increasing their vulnerability to identification.

8.18 DILEMMAS DUE TO DIFFERENCES : Introduction

The difficulties associated with assigning a fail grade are undoubted, but the dilemma is whether these are increased or decreased according to differing characteristics of the students. The previous study had suggested the stage of training had an effect upon the decision making process. However, this observation had not been commented upon in the literature and seemed worthy of further investigation.

Informants were asked to consider seven discrete, (although in reality they are overlapping) categories containing obvious differences and comment upon whether they impacted upon their experience. They were selected to represent current, major differences in occupational therapy students at the time of data collection in 1991. These were

- gender
- diploma or degree course
- first, second, third or final year of training
- 2, 3 or 4 year educational programme
- academic or fieldwork setting
- school leaver or mature student
- personal student/tutee

A category specifying ethnic background was omitted because there are not any figures collected nationally related to the recruitment or retention of people from different ethnic groups in the United Kingdom and, from personal experience, there are few who would fit into this category. The seven categories were intended to probe perceptions related to the individual: gender and age; to the academic route: degree or diploma course, two year accelerated diploma, three year full time diploma or degree

course, four year part-time diploma and full-time degree course; to the setting for the failure whether academic or fieldwork; the nature and intimacy of the relationship whether one-to-one supervision on placement or a personal tutee; and finally, the stage of training.

8.18.1 Aspects of the individual: gender and age

The categories of sex and age illustrate the overlapping nature of the categories. Although the results from each section will be reported separately to highlight the differences, areas of inter-relationship will be included where appropriate.

In the United Kingdom occupational therapy is a female dominated profession. For example, in 1988 there were only 126 male registered occupational therapists (Parish et al, 1990) and between 1985 - 1988 262 male students commenced training from a total of 3440 students, a percentage of 7.6% (Dent-Brown, 1990). These figures are presented to place the informants' experience into context.

The following table indicates the number of staff from the four groups who experienced failure in the same or different way when dealing with a female and male student.

Table 31 Number of staff who experience failure in same or different way with a male and female student

	Same - no difference	Differences between male and female students
Heads of Schools	8	2
Lecturers	4	4
Fieldwork Organisers	6	1
Fieldwork Supervisors	3	- (2 without experience)
TOTAL	21	7

The majority, 21 from 28 denied there were any differences. All informants except one, were female. The male lecturer strongly agreed with the statement, highlighting the impact of sexuality.

L>8/2U<M "As a man there is so much sexuality which effects the male-female issue. If I am attracted to a female student it is more difficult to be objective and fail her. Sometimes a student may play temptress to help her pass. If I am suspicious a male student is gay then I may be less objective."

Although some informants felt unable to differentiate due to their lack of experience with male students, there were some interesting variations amongst those who did. For example, two lecturers and heads of schools felt male students were more likely to be unsuitable or unable to cope. Another lecturer thought men received positive discrimination and were more likely to "be given the benefit of the doubt." There seemed to be a greater sense of sadness (expressed by two lecturers) when a male student's training was terminated because

L>7/3U> "We need men in the profession and for the atmosphere for the whole group."

An association between gender and age was mentioned by three

heads of schools and a fieldwork organiser. Male students tended to be mature learners which influenced their behaviour, reactions and relationship within the cohort and with staff. For example,

C>4/3U>M "Men think, because supervisors are female and usually younger, that they don't understand them. This is sometimes true, some look for problems with male students."

H>4/1U> "Males are usually mature. They say 'but I have a wife and kids to support. I'll be unemployable and you can't do this to me. This is usually their first statement."

H>5/1U>M "Most of the male students are mature. They are not equal to the other students because they are in the minority, are more vocal and assertive. They need more reasoned arguments, so failure is slightly different, unless they are young men and then they are the same as young females."

These statements seem to contain sex role stereotypes uttered by both female staff and male students.

The disconcerting effect of 'masculine' behaviour and 'feminine' behaviour was noted by two lecturers.

L>5/3U<M "Some are more aggressive and act out, they tend to blame and I find this behaviour personally difficult to deal with because I do not like conflict."

L>8/1U>M "When a male student who failed cried I was shocked and surprised. This behaviour didn't match my own life and family experience where failure provokes anger rather than grief."

These comments illustrate some subtle, and not so subtle sex-role stereotypes. These are acknowledged, rather than pursued for such inter and intra personal dynamics may influence the process and outcome of failure.

Differences related to age was the second facet of individual differences. The following table indicates the number of staff

from each group who experienced failure in the same or different way when dealing with school leavers and mature students.

Table 32 Number of staff who experience a fail in the same or a different way when it involves a mature student

	Same - no difference	Differences between school leavers and mature learners
Heads of Schools	1	9
Lecturers	1	3
Fieldwork Organisers	2	4
Fieldwork Supervisors	3	2
TOTAL	7	23

A majority, 23 from 30 acknowledged differences in dealing with mature students who had failed an academic or fieldwork component. The main reason, given by 10 informants, was the recognition of the investment and personal sacrifices for the student and their family.

H>1/1U> "It is more difficult with mature students because they have given up so much more and invested a lot. It is more tragic for them."

Their decision to become an occupational therapist was perceived as well thought out, demonstrating a strong and well informed commitment.

C>12/1U> "School leavers see it as a 'nice job' or think 'I can do that' or are guided into the career by others. Mature learners are more discerning in their choice of profession."

School leavers were considered to have more time and potential to change their career choice, whereas mature students

L>9/3U> "They have a greater investment, it is a last ditch effort, they won't stop. Failure becomes more difficult to cope with."

They were expected to possess the confidence and study skills in contrast to

L<7/3U< "Mature students tend to be more able all round, some have problems academically, but these are usually picked up early because of their anxiety so you can go through strategies to help."

However, any lack of study skills was balanced by mature students' expenditure of effort upon the task rather than

"experimenting with the joys of leaving home"

for

L>7/3U> "They are very motivated and enthusiastic. The staff respond to this."

Unfortunately, this commitment seemed to lead to even greater personal hurt and self-blame, perhaps caused by ability rather than effort attributions (Graham, 1984). When they fail

H>3/1U>M "They are more disappointed and take longer to adjust" because they

C>5/2U> "Have higher expectations of themselves. They have difficulties working with and taking criticism from young supervisors, particularly if the criticisms are related to inter-personal skills."

These reasons explain the added difficulty of failing a mature learner. They seem to fit within the framework of attribution theory, for effort expressed in investment, sacrifice and enthusiasm, combined with an informed choice and commitment to the profession are internal, controllable factors which are valued by teachers (Prawat et al 1983, Graham 1984, Tollefson & Chen 1988).

In addition, one lecturer and two supervisors acknowledged personal reasons for experiencing difficulties with older students.

L>5/3U<M "I would find it more difficult to fail a student of a similar age or older than me. Mature students often have a greater level of insight about their abilities but don't necessarily deal with it any better."

The next quotation illustrates the complex interaction of multiple factors:

S>8/7U<I "I prefer mature students because of their life skills. It is probably harder because they have come to it late and it involves a lot of effort. They are keen and hard working. So it would be harder if they were doing so and still failing. However, they have more skills and may be more able to argue with you to try to change your mind."

Although a minority of informants dissented from this view, this unexpected result has been given emphasis. Within higher education access initiatives have gained momentum within the last decade. In 1990, for the first time the number of mature students enrolling upon higher education courses outnumbered 18 year-olds (O'Leary, 1992). The differences brought by non-traditional and non-standard entrants are a cause for celebration. However this section suggests some differences may cause concern and would benefit from further study.

The seven who disagreed did so either because they did not perceive any differences, or they highlighted the school leaver's distress. Those who disagreed (one course leader, two fieldwork organisers, one lecturer and three fieldwork supervisors) did so for two reasons. Firstly, dismissing chronological age

as a sign of maturity

S>6/3U<M "It depends upon the personality of the student, maturity isn't dependent upon age."

Secondly, noting the influence of age upon the quality of their relationships

L>8/2U<M "Mature students may be more fossilised and less likely to change or develop. This leads to increased certainty if a fail grade is necessary. It is more linked to the quality of the relationship rather than age."

A statement from a fieldwork organiser seems to cut through all these differences.

L>8/1U>M "If the student only sees themselves as an occupational therapist, then it is this desire rather than their age which makes failure more difficult to accept."

In contrast, only two informants (both heads of schools) rated a school leaver's distress as more difficult, either because of their immaturity and vulnerability, or parental reactions to failure. The increase of self esteem with age, "more noticeably after adolescence" and "independence of self concept facets" has been noted by Dell & Valine (1990) and Boekaerts (1991).

H>9/1U>M "Eighteen year-olds have much less confidence and are very hurt because they are so vulnerable."

H>5/1U>M "For eighteen year-olds the pressure is from others. Parents can be troublesome but the student's perceptions can be wrong, the parents don't react in the dragon way they expect. It is a shock for them because they have done well at school and do not understand learning troughs and plateaus."

This preliminary investigation of individual factors has revealed some fascinating differences and similarities which seem to impact upon the process and outcome of a fail scenario.

8.18.2 Differences related to the educational route

During the last decade there has been an expansion in the number and variety of educational routes which lead to state registration. These include three year full-time diploma courses, two year full-time diploma courses for graduates, four year part-time diploma courses for support workers and three and four year full-time degree courses. Since 1990 all full-time diploma courses in the United Kingdom have been revalidated as degree courses. The diversity of educational routes and rapid development of degree courses has created tensions as well as excitement within the profession. These have focused upon the maintenance of professional standards, an undesirable emphasis upon academic preparation for a practical career and ensuring a comparable level of competence as required by purchasers (CPSM 1988, Devlin 1989, Barnitt 1991, Poller 1991).

The questions related to qualification and route were intended to ascertain whether perceptions of failure would be influenced by these major differences. However, it is important to acknowledge these structural differences also relate to individual variables of age, sex and cultural background. For example, schools offering a part-time diploma recruit a statistically significant higher percentage of men (13.5%) who are also likely to be mature students (Dent-Brown, 1990) and one of the two accelerated courses attracted 25% of students from different ethnic groups (Ellis, 1989).

The following table indicates the number of staff from each sub-

group who experienced failure in the same or different way when dealing with students' studying a diploma or degree course.

Table 33 Number of staff experiencing failure of a diploma or degree student as the same or different

	Diploma or Degree		
	Same	Different	None or limited experience
Heads of Schools	2	3	5
Lecturers	3	2	3
Fieldwork Organisers	2	3	2
Fieldwork Supervisors	1	-	4
TOTAL	8	8	14

Fourteen of the thirty informants admitted to limited or no experience of assessing degree students. This is related to the timing of the interviews (March-July 1991) and number of degree programmes. For example, only one degree course in England, Scotland and Ulster had been operating long enough to allow a single cohort to qualify. Of the other Schools, 7 commenced their degree programme in September 1990 with the remaining 5 full-time courses due to start in September 1991.

Five informants with experience of degree students identified two main differences. These were the expectations held by both students and staff and how the degree had been planned to allow weak students to "be weeded out at the end of the first year". Degree students were expected to be more questioning, challenging, articulate and demonstrate a clear professional identity.

H>2/1U>M "The subtle differences associated with teaching, level of expectation and thinking will show through during their career."

These higher expectations were also reported by a fieldwork organiser.

C>8/3U< "I think the supervisors' attitudes will be different. From the comments I have heard they are expecting more from degree students so maybe they will be more likely to fail them."

Two informants' described the students' high expectations

H>5/1U>M "They are more anxious about their assessments and fails, linked to their degree classification. They are working out how sound they are now, and likely to be in the future."

Interestingly, these high expectations were contradicted by a supervisor with experience

S>8/4U<I "None yet. The first year students on the degree are very raw."

These changed expectations also extended to staff's perceptions of their role.

L>7/3U> "The degree will be an indication of our abilities to run degree courses at that standard. I hope we will maintain our professional standards and that it will not stop us failing students. We need to be confident enough to fail, particularly if our competitors cast aspirations."

This quotation places personal expectations within the wider context of purchaser-provider relationships, with contracting and institutional reputations.

At least two Schools had used the opportunity of designing a degree course to strengthen their regulations for termination at the end of the first year. For example,

C>9/2U>M "The pattern of placements will mean failure will be confronted earlier and any retrieval placement must be

successfully completed before they enter year two."

H>4/1U> "We wanted to be able to weed out poor students early so the regulations for the first year academic assessments are tough."

The importance of similarities rather than differences was highlighted by a lecturer and supervisor

C>8/7U<I "On placement we are assessing their practical abilities, as a potential occupational therapist, doing the job."

These statements may reassure those colleagues who have reservations about degree programmes.

The second structural difference was related to the educational route. The next table indicates the numbers starting on each route in September 1990.

Table 34 Intake of students starting courses in September 1990 in the UK

Type of course	Total number of students	Percentage
2 year diploma	41	4%
3 year diploma	504	48%
3 year degree	456	43%
4 year degree	30	3%
4 year part-time diploma	24	2%
Total	1,055	

The following table illustrates the number from each staff group who experienced failing students in the same or a different way.

Table 35 Number of staff noting similarities and differences linked to two, three and four year Courses.

	Same	Different	None or limited experience
Heads of Schools	4		2
2 year		2	
3 year		-	
4 year		3	
Lecturers			3
2 year		2	
3 year		-	
4 year		3	
Fieldwork Organisers			5
2 year		-	
3 year		-	
4 year		2	
Fieldwork Supervisors			3
2 year		1	
3 year		-	
4 year		1	
TOTALS	4	14	13

Many informants lacked experience of students from accelerated or part-time courses. This is a predictable result as they form a minority (6%) of the student population. Nevertheless, more were willing to speculate about differences, or drew upon their experience from other roles.

The differences experienced (and assumed) with graduates studying the two year programme were commented upon by five informants. They focused upon stereotypes, the disadvantages of an accelerated pace of learning and an incidence of scapegoating. Academic stereotypes and high expectations were voiced by a

lecturer and a fieldwork supervisor.

L>7/3U> "We had higher expectations of the graduates but these proved to be unfounded, they just scraped through."

S>8/4U<I "It could cause conflict and difficulties if the student was very academic but not practical."

Two informants expressed concern about the pace which may hinder integration of learning and the process of professional socialisation (Wallis & Hutchings, 1990).

H>5/1U>M "The students have to develop and show their potential quickly. This may be a problem."

An incidence of scapegoating a student undertaking a two year course was described by the head and a lecturer from the same School. The reasons seemed to be related to unrealistically high expectations. A case of the label of a degree obscuring an individual.

The difficulties of, and reluctance to fail part-time students were noted by 6 of the 9 informants who identified differences. The reasons were linked to the fear and consequences of failure for the student as person and employee.

L>6/2U<M "As a line manager I had a support worker who was doing a part-time course. There will be more pressure from the employers upon the student and course staff."

Three informants including two heads of schools expressed concern about the attitude of employers with "students returning to work as failures." A supervisor, who was also a mentor for a part-time student summarised the dilemmas

S>8/7U<I "It would be harder on a part-time course because of their background and hopes. They are likely to be older with less chance of another career. But it would still have to be done, although I think it would be

less likely because they have the interpersonal skills."

Most of these fears were expressed by staff lacking experience. The author (a course leader for a part-time course) offers observations based upon six fails (academic and fieldwork) during the last three years, with one resulting in termination of training. Employers do invest considerable monies and time assisting support workers to gain a professional qualification, but their primary concern is with the outcome - a safe, competent occupational therapist who will join their workforce.

8.18.3 Differences between failure in fieldwork and academic settings

There are many obvious differences between the assessment of academic ability and professional competence. This question was designed to investigate whether, despite these differences the process was similar and if there were any particularly problematic aspects for each environment. Only two informants (a lecturer and fieldwork organiser) identified similarities rather than differences

C>4/2U<M "It's the same, only the context is different."

Six (three heads of schools and three fieldwork supervisors) were unable to comment due to lack of experience of failure in the other setting. The remaining 22 informants emphasised the added difficulty of failure in fieldwork.

The advantages of failure in an academic setting were noted for

both staff and students. Advantages for staff included a "clean" process due to objective criteria, the support gained from group decision making, access to annual profiles of performance and being

H>11/1U> "shielded by the system of cross marking and moderation."

A fieldwork organiser noted the advantages for a student

C>9/2U>M "With an academic failure students can say they misread the question or didn't revise. They are always able to find excuses. This is not so on placement where they are being assessed as a person."

This seems to be an example of making excuses in negotiating reality for it reflects

"the process of shifting causal attributions for negative personal outcomes, from sources that are relatively more central to the person's sense of self, to sources that are relatively less central, thereby resulting in perceived benefits to the person's image and sense of control" (Snyder & Higgins, 1988).

The difficulties associated with the process and outcome of fieldwork assessment were acknowledged by informants from each of the four groups. These was differentiated into several themes including subjectivity due to

C>12/1U> "the indefinable concept of competence to practise" and professional unsuitability which lead to unclear expectations, performance criteria and "woolly decision making". Secondly, the lack of standardisation between supervisors making failure more personal and

L>5/3U<M "in some senses it is more real."

A third theme was the intimate nature of the supervisor-student relationship based upon working together for 6-12 weeks with

H>11/1U> "the added dynamic, there is only the student and supervisor, their relationship. The student is a person they are making a judgement about. This causes much more angst. The supervisor is very exposed, they have nowhere to hide."

Hickerson Crist (1986) describes being "awestruck" at the level of need for a nurturing relationship between supervisor and student. The costs in a fail scenario are clear.

"Empathy makes it more agonising ... the teacher's experience can be as painful as the student's" (Meisenhelder, 1982).

The complexity of the clinical setting, with multiple often unpredictable or uncontrollable factors were noted, for example

C<2/2U< "the student doesn't necessarily know what is expected of them, they don't understand, lack confidence. In the clinical setting it is an unknown situation. There are many variables which cannot be controlled, particularly on a resit placement."

Two different aspects related to the School were noted. Firstly,

S>8/7U<M "It is harder on placement because you are on your own and you don't have the authority of an academic institution behind you ... and where you know all the rules and regulations. We do our best but we are less familiar with the processes."

Secondly, an historical ethos of poor support and lack of permission for supervisors to fail students.

An interesting facet of academic failure which impacted upon the fieldwork setting was described by one fieldwork organiser.

C>8/3U< "If the student receives the result of an academic assessment whilst on placement which means their training has been terminated, then this is hard for the student and supervisor. The supervisor has become involved, particularly if the student is doing well. The supervisor feels more guilty because they think they should have noticed the students' poor areas. They are also angry with the School for failing the student and sending them away."

This system of notification and timing of placements would seem to be insensitive, time wasting and energy depleting. An example of organisational factors taking precedence over individual needs.

8.18.4 Differences with a personal student/tutee

The previous section noted the difficulties associated with the intimate supervisory relationship. The personal tutor-tutee relationship in an academic setting seems to offer similar perspectives and problems. Perceptions of differences or similarities when a fail involved a personal tutee were examined. The following table indicates the number of academic staff who experienced failure in the same or different way when dealing with a personal tutee.

Table 36 Similarities and differences when a personal tutee fails

	Same	Different	No experience
Heads of Schools	2	4	3
Lecturers	-	6	2
Fieldwork Organisers	3	2	1
TOTAL	5	12	6

The five who emphasized similarities provided one explanation. Their knowledge was not determined by the personal tutor role but by two other factors. These were the small size of the School where all students were well known and, their role which

influenced the closeness of the relationship. For example, a head of school commented

H>2/1U>M "I get to know those who fail much better. I monitor their progress and am able to see them grow with time. I get more involved and give more energy to them."

Three fieldwork organisers' observed

C>12/1U> "I feel when I have worked with them on placements that I know all students well."

All twelve informants who acknowledged differences focused upon the dilemmas and difficulties associated with the conflict between academic and pastoral roles. This parallels the experience of supervisors who are expected to fulfil the contradictory roles of assessor and counsellor.

This role conflict seemed to be exacerbated for heads of schools, although influenced by the stage in the assessment process.

H>3/1U>M "When marking, it is silly to try to guess. Tend to overcompensate, reassess and find extenuating circumstances for a hard worker. If a sloppy worker, I try to remove the personality and look only at the work and what it stands for. It is marginally more difficult. If at the stage of passing on the information, when the decision has been made, it is easier to talk because you know the student. If they are disappointed, it can be more difficult to maintain an emotional distance."

This example reflects the complex interaction of attributional and affective aspects upon a relationship. It also contains factors mentioned by other heads of schools, particularly the subjective impact of knowing a students' strengths, weaknesses

H>5/1U>M "the total life they are leading."

One described her guilt and self-interrogation when a personal tutee failed and then appealed

H>11/1U> "It made it slightly worse. I felt more guilt. What else could or should I have done and noticed? Could I have given more?"

The invidious position of course leaders, who are also personal tutors is obvious. Three had declared themselves ineligible for this role, to maintain their objectivity and fairness, especially where the personal tutor role encompassed being an advocate for the student.

The descriptions given by eight lecturers and fieldwork organisers also reflected this role conflict. The advantages and disadvantages of knowing a personal student well, seemed to create the dilemma. Two lecturers added the rider 'it depended' upon their relationship with, and effort expenditure of the student. The disadvantages of a close personal tutor-tutee relationship seemed to outweigh the advantages, with informants identifying more negative (n=9) than positive factors (n=3). The disadvantages included becoming too involved (n=3) and therefore, influenced by knowledge of their personal problems (n=3) and, feeling personally responsible (n=3).

L>7/3U> "I have lost 2 from 6 of my personal students. It feels personal, I feel responsible for them, as though I have failed them somehow. It is worse if they leave without asking for help or support. It is my responsibility to have known, done or helped more."

This also reflects the anxiety about allocating insufficient time for their pastoral role. The advantages were the reverse of these problems and included understanding the student's problems which made any action easier, being able to anticipate difficulties because of their knowledge and

L>9/3U> "Easier, because you know them better, able to express

clearly the reasons for failure and alternatives. You have got an honest relationship with them so you are able to give dignity for all."

This section extends the theme of personal trauma during a fail scenario. The sense of guilt, personal responsibility and self-interrogation seems to be exacerbated by the intimacy of the pastoral relationship which seems to mirror the 'nurturing' supervisory relationship. The intrinsic conflict between educator and therapist roles or values, adds complexity to this relationship in both academic and fieldwork settings. It seems inevitable that the "delicate balance" (Daines, 1977) between the roles of teacher, assessor and counsellor should become even more strained, because

"it seems rather hypocritical and dishonest for a supervisor to engage a (student) in collaborative work and interpersonal effort and then to 'fail' that (student) if these efforts don't pan out productively" (Boydell, 1986).

Again, it would be interesting to pursue the students' perspective on this dilemma

8.18.5 Stage of training

The final difference related to fails occurring in the first, second, third or fourth year of the Course. The increasing difficulty, related to increased time on the course, was a theme which emerged during both studies.

A majority, 26 of 30 informants identified a final year fail as the most difficult. The two exceptions were related to very specific circumstances and responses. The following table

indicates the number of staff from each group who experienced differences due to the year of training.

Table 37 Number of staff identifying the most difficult year in which to award a fail grade

	Year			
	1	2	3	4
Heads of Schools	-	-	8	2
Lecturers	-	-	7	-
Fieldwork Organisers	2	-	5	-
Fieldwork Supervisors	-	-	4	-
TOTAL	2	-	24	2

The final year (of a three or four year Course) was clearly rated as the most difficult stage at which to assign a fail grade.

The benefits of a first year fail were noted by eight informants.

The language and metaphors are interesting, for example

H<10/1U>M "the first year should be a sifting time."

L>9/3U> "weeding out should occur in the first year."

These seem to illustrate the process of differentiation at an early stage when the student is young, open to alternatives or while there is still time to learn. Similar metaphors appear in the literature, for example Low (1992) advocates the

"weeding out (of) incompetent practitioners from our own ranks."

Action at this stage (year one) was welcomed as a relief and as a

L>8/1U>M "kindness to save further pain for the student and staff."

Two fieldwork organisers identified a first year fail as the most difficult, giving personal and structural reasons.

C>4/2U<M "Failure in the first year is more difficult because of our inability to crystal ball gaze. I feel very strongly if they are thrown out. It seems unfair, they should be given another chance."

C>12/1U> "The first placement is quite difficult, because of how the course is structured. It focuses upon them as a therapist, they fail on interpersonal factors. It is them as a individual and how they relate. There are few terminations in the second year. It involves those who have scraped through the first placement and problems with attitude and professionalism have been repeated. A final year fail is easier because you can point out the positives. The reasons are clear. They have not been able to put all the parts together at the same time as would be expected from a basic grade therapist. With more support and time they can learn how to do this, they have proved they have the skills but just need extra time to be able to juggle them all at once. There are more fails in year 3 each year. It is the less academic student who struggle to put theory into practice but we know they will be competent therapists."

This example highlights the importance of understanding the curricula context and criteria for each stage of training. Also, failure is perceived as a positive part of the learning process, which respects different paces, to accomplish the sophisticated skills of clinical reasoning (Cohn 1989, Fleming 1991, Day 1993) because

"Clinical reasoning is based on our knowledge of procedures, interactions with patients, and interpretation and analysis of the evolving situation. It is a complex process dependent upon years of experience" (Cohn, 1989).

This definition of clinical reasoning parallels global definitions of competence.

A second year fail evoked a positive response from five informants. It was described as less bad and easier because

H>5/1U>M "they have been given the benefit of the doubt in year one but haven't developed. This is understood by the student and whether they are right for OT because they experienced the workload and role from placement. They have had time to develop as an individual, they realise on their own that they are not going to succeed despite all their efforts."

Thus giving reassurance, gained from confirmation and repetition of earlier problems.

The last year of a Course was rated by 26 of 28 informants as the most difficult stage at which to assign a fail grade. The strength of their distress, anger and guilt are conveyed in their expressive language.

H>2/1U>M "It is morally unethical to allow a student to reach that stage."

H>3/1U>M "If the student had a history of struggling then it is a disgrace to the training School. They should have been weeded out earlier."

L>6/1U<M "It was very traumatic, the worst thing that has happened to me in teaching."

L>7/3U> "It is unforgivable because we shouldn't have let them get that far."

C>4/3U>M "What have we done? They should have gone earlier. It is our fault, we are all to blame. Nobody has an excuse or can be excused."

S>6/3U<M "I felt extremely sorry for her."

C<2/2U< "There is something deep and fundamentally difficult about failing on the last placement. It cost me dear in emotional upheaval. She was accusatory, she had a lot on from School. She had made the decision to do the bare minimum, she was different and couldn't find the ability to pull herself up. Everyone expected her to scrape through because she was due to qualify in a few weeks. It would have been much easier to do this but I would have been justified in failing her at any time because she was unreliable. She was accusatory, she tried emotional blackmail. It was very tough but School was helpful and supportive. I am shaking, emotional, just talking about it now."

All express the depth, range and reasons for their distress. Academic staff identified three main reasons which are encompassed in this statement

L>7/3U> "It is kinder to do it earlier and this is why some slip through because staff feel they should have done something earlier. We had not done our duty. The third year is the worst, they have invested so much to fail at the last hurdle. You wonder how they got to the third year. It doesn't seem fair."

The most frequently mentioned reason given by 10 informants, comprised individual and collective self-blame, guilt and responsibility for allowing a student to reach their final year. This was increased if the student had a history of marginal performance. There was much self-interrogation, because it was perceived as a failure of individuals and the system.

C>4/2U<M "Third year is awful, why did they get this far? You look at yourself and the team - what have we done wrong and how can we learn from this?"

L>8/2U<M "The question is how has the student got this far? Am I doing the work for someone who should have done this earlier."

The words 'cost and waste' formed the second (n=5) most frequently mentioned reason. The costs ranged from financial to emotional and involved the student, their family and the institution.

L>8/1U>M "It is very difficult because a fail may effect their job, mortgage and marriage."

The totality of the waste of three years of time and investment, to fail at the final hurdle was clear. These factors blurred into the third reason, mentioned by three informants. This was

S>6/3U<M "the drastic implications for the student because they have nearly completed their training."

when their career aspirations, which had become a virtual reality with some students having obtained employment, were terminated.

Another reason mentioned by a fieldwork organiser restated the theme of the effects of failure upon the whole cohort.

S>9/2U>M "It unsettles the whole year, making them confront failure. It is still possible in year 3. They get angry with School. If the fail involves a friend they are quiet, but if it is a student who they have had their doubts about then they are ambivalent."

Interestingly, supervisors offered some pragmatic variations on a final year fail, placing a students' closeness to qualification into sharp focus. For example,

S>8/7U<I "It shouldn't be different. It may be tougher because they have done more of the course. But if you allow them to pass, then they will soon be qualified staff and you need to ask whether you would want them to treat your parents. So it should not be any different."

Two contradicted the expectation that students should pass their final year placements.

S>8/5U<I "You may feel a third year student should know better by now, particularly as they have passed the academic parts of the course. You may expect a third year to do better, but it is a new placement for them, at whatever stage they are."

It seems obvious to state that the final year is expected to make different, higher cognitive and professional demands. This is the basis of academic 'levels' which underpin the standard of Diploma or Degree courses. A student on a final placement is expected to perform the roles of an entry grade therapist (Cohn & Frum, 1988). Perhaps, some fails should be also expected if students reach a plateau or peak, at year or level 2.

Two supervisors and a fieldwork organiser noted the impact of the student's successful record on their confidence, especially when making the final judgement. For example

S>8/4U< "It would be more difficult nearer the end because others would have thought the student was OK and why don't we. Are we being too critical? How come they have got this far without anyone else noticing? Are we their last stumbling block? Are we being fair? They must be pretty bad for you to fail them at this stage."

A fieldwork organiser described the extra pressure a retake placement places upon a supervisor.

C>8/3U<M "It is even more difficult. The student may see the extra placement as a rubber stamping exercise, particularly if they have passed all the academic assessments. The supervisor is in a state of doubt, trying to find evidence to pass the student. They are angry - how could the student have got this far? The student's career depends upon their decision. However, they do grasp the nettle, although they are angry and feel pressurised by the responsibility."

The trauma of a final year fail would seem to provide a pressing reason for making a difficult, but necessary judgement at an earlier, easier and less wasteful stage of the educational programme. These costs and dilemmas were neatly summarised by Brandon & Davies (1979)

"there is an impression of difficult decisions postponed by avoidance, which are then all the harder to take at a later stage because of the investment of time by student and teachers, and of scarce resources by course and placement agency ... once the decision is postponed to the second year, the pressure towards granting an automatic pass becomes almost irresistible."

8.18.6 Conclusion to the dilemmas due to differences

The extra dilemmas due to individual or structural differences,

add to the complex constellation of factors which influence a failure scenario. The focus upon differences produced some unexpected outcomes and confirmed emergent trends. For example, the added difficulty of failing mature students, particularly those studying part-time courses; the painful, but parallel conflict and role strain experienced by supervisors and personal tutors when acting as assessor and counsellor; and the trauma of failing a finalist student.

It is disturbing to note how easily the whole process and outcome of assessing academic ability and professional competence can be subverted by internal or external factors; but even more disturbing is the circular, cumulative effect of failure to fail for all concerned.

8.19 FAILURE - WHO OR WHAT IS TO BLAME? : Introduction

The themes of guilt, blame and responsibility, expressed directly or indirectly through self-interrogation and sense of personal failure, have permeated this and other studies. As experts, assessors too, can feel "nervous, insecure and defensive" (Ungerleider, 1985). This can lead to the "avoidance of failure for longer than helpful" (Howard, 1979) or completely as when "a damned good supervisor has pulled him through" (Brandon & Davies, 1979). Green (1991) noted that many supervisors had difficulty recommending a fail grade, and of those who did "many reported feelings of anxiety or guilt."

It therefore seemed appropriate to include a question which directly probed the informants' perceptions of responsibility for failure. Particularly whether guilt was related to the adoption of a causal theory of teaching (Ericson & Ellett 1987). This recognises a rather simplistic cause and effect relationship, with teachers accepting sole responsibility and accountability for learning outcomes. This seems to be widely accepted, being implicit or explicit. An academic and fieldwork example will illustrate these forms.

"Periodic assessment of trainees also allows educators to determine the success of their teaching" (McLeod & Harden, 1985).

"When persistent difficulties occur, possibly manifested in such behaviours as lack of self-determination ... strategies to help mobilise the individual need to be considered. Strategies which might liberate the apparently unmotivated student" (Burrows, 1989).

These statements seem to perpetuate an attitude of ownership, or investment by the teacher or School, to guarantee success for all students (Ford & Jones, 1987). However, this is based on many fallacies, from the infallibility of selection processes to a simple causal link between teacher quality and student results. Strauss & Sawyer (1986) using an educational production model report a 1% increase in teacher quality results in a "modest" mean student achievement of 0.5-0.8%.

Interestingly, almost in contradiction of their earlier comments, the informants acknowledged a complex combination of reasons for failure. For example

H>1/1U> "You can't say one person is at fault. For example, it could be the staff for selecting the student, referees for omitting health problems (uncontrolled epilepsy and

anorexia nervosa). Sometimes it is the government for inadequate finances so they have to work, live in poor accommodation, on a poor diet. They may be ill. There are a host of reasons and the student is just one of them. The reasons are complex. It is too simplistic to say there is only one person or cause."

The content analysis of all their responses reiterated this complex, combination of causal factors. It reflects

"persistent failure in schools can emanate from myriad causes. Intellectual, cultural and experiential deprivation, social and personal conflicts, behavioural deficits and learning disability ... aetiology is often difficult to determine" (Stevens & Pihl, 1987).

The following table indicates the major categories, which includes all the partners in the learning process. The informant's reasons will be presented for each 'cause' of failure.

Table 38 Content analysis: rank ordering of responsibility for failure

	Individual or institutional causes	Frequency: recording unit
1.	The student	45
2.	The School	25
3.	Fieldwork	18
4.	Combination of factors	12
5.	Government policies	3
6.	Parents	1
6.	Referees	1

8.19.1 The student

Students were identified as the individuals possessing most responsibility for their own failure, because "at the bottom line it is the student". A range of reasons were given including lack of effort, lack of ability, unknown or extenuating negative life events, poor study skills, homesickness, poor attendance, over-ambitious beyond their capabilities, immaturity, an active social life, marital stress, non achievement of placement objectives, dislike of subject and placement speciality, wrong career choice, poor relationship with peers and staff and lack of honesty with self. This comprehensive list of reasons reflects the causes of voluntary and involuntary attrition reported in other studies, Wilson (1972), Fontana et al (1986), Paterson (1988), Stabile (1989) and Gupta (1991), for example.

Academic staff noted one exception which was related to the number of fails.

H>11/1U> "At the bottom line, it is not mine, it is the student. I don't feel guilty if they have failed unless we have done the job badly for the whole group. It is only one who fails, not 25. I still feel bad but I am clear that it is not my fault. They have failed, they have had their chances and choices the same as the cohort who have passed. Therefore it is not our fault. If I didn't believe this I would resign now."

The conviction and doubts contained in this quotation were shared by three other informants. The decisive factor seemed to be a small number of fails.

L>6/1U<M "I want to say the student with the proviso that it's me if I haven't made it clear what I wanted them to do. For example, with one subject there were 9 fails. This is a lot of students. Between 1 and 3 I can cope with this. With more I question is it me, was I clear?"

Both quotations reflect an understanding of the teacher's responsibility (as a facilitator rather than imparter of knowledge) in the learning process (Guilbert 1979, Marson 1987).

8.19.2 School

This category, which encompassed recruitment, staff, the institution and inappropriate or inadequate preparation for fieldwork, was the second most frequently mentioned source of responsibility. The reasons related to staff included lack of support for marginal students, non-identification of problems at an early stage, teaching and assessment methods and failure to ensure students are

S>8/6U<M "familiar with the basics."

Institutional factors included a poor standard of teaching, negative learning environment, timetabling difficulties, mismatches between teaching and learning styles, victimisation of individuals and selection criteria.

S>8/7U<I "I sometimes have a niggle about the selection criteria. How did they get on the course? Who let them in? Because they are raising their hopes falsely and wasting their time."

Interestingly, one course leader acknowledged

H>2/1U>M "Each year I take one 'at risk' student on the course. I recognise that others may not be initially competent. I wasn't."

This quotation introduces the conflict between educational and therapy values which will be considered later. This tendency has also been reported in social work

"It has frequently been suggested that a certain number of

weaker or more doubtful students are selected with a view, often implicit, to their being helped to overcome these weaknesses during the course. Such students cause the staff acute dilemmas if they become marginal or threatened failures. Indeed staff are greatly reluctant to fail them" (Howard, 1979).

8.19.3 Fieldwork placement

This was the third most frequently reported reason for failure. It comprised a supervisor's disinterest in student supervision demonstrated through lack of support and advice, absence of placement objectives, programme or feedback and failure to handle marginal students in an appropriate way

CK2/2U< "I would like to think that in 100% of cases it is the student who is responsible, however an individual is connected with the supervisor and fieldwork organiser. It may depend upon how they handle failure. Can they decide about a fail grade early or do they inform the student two weeks before the end so the student hasn't got time to change. We are all responsible for early identification of problems and response."

The last reason was the much quoted, but little researched, 'personality clash'. One fieldwork organiser was adamant there was no such thing, the term representing projection, a defence mechanism to avoid accepting shared responsibility.

The majority of these causes are related to poor supervisory strategies. The reinforcement of effective supervisory strategies was one of the long term outcomes from attending a failure workshop.

8.19.4 Combination of causes

A complex combination of causes was the fourth most frequently mentioned reason for failure. This reason is illustrated in the following quotation:

L>8/1U>M "There is not one over-riding factor. It is a combination of the educational environment, competent teachers, relationships with peers and staff, the support and resources available, the student's prior knowledge and skills, their current abilities, their living conditions and family demands. Responsibility is shared by the institution and the individual. The staff should be alert to potential problems and the student has a responsibility to attend the course."

This again highlights the interaction of academic and pastoral roles but from a perspective which emphasizes responsibilities rather than the conflict.

8.19.5 Miscellaneous

The final small set of reasons are amalgamated under a miscellaneous heading. These included an insufficient income to cover the cost of living, serious omissions in references particularly about health and parents for

C>4/2U<M "producing little madams."

8.19.6 Conclusion to the review of causes

This review has revealed a complex combination of trends and specific reasons for failure. Unfortunately, these rational

reasons do not seem to be reflected in the language and metaphors used to describe their experience. This may be because

"We are constantly at work internally, remoulding our past to fit our present. Which is why I do not trust inter-temporal comparisons" (Powell, 1993).

and this question demanded a cognitive, general reply rather than affective reflections upon specific fail scenarios.

It is interesting to speculate whether this multiple causality involving individual, institutional and societal factors facilitates a process of avoidance through a collective, diffusion of responsibility rather than individual accountability. That is, until it is almost too late - when the students have reached their final year - an event shrouded in individual and institutional guilt and self-blame.

8.20 REACTIONS OF OTHERS : Introduction

The reaction, or rather non-reaction of academic and fieldwork colleagues was the stimulus for my interest in the subject of failure. As a fieldwork supervisor and lecturer I had assigned a fail grade, sometimes knowing the judgement would result in the termination of a career goal. Although the responsibility was awesome, equally perturbing was the way in which some colleagues seemed to minimise the enormity of the task and trauma. Their reaction seemed to be one of acceptance, almost to the point of denial. Failure seemed to be a taken for granted part of the role, which should be completed without

extra fuss or feeling. This reaction effectively denied and devalued my experience. The research has affirmed my response (but hopefully not in a self-fulfilling way!), giving both assurance of a sense of universality and revealed the perils of ignoring part of the 'taken for granted' world of assessors.

The reactions and interactions of the participants in the process of failure seemed worthy of special study. These include the staff and their families, with the student and their parents or partners. The reason for the inclusion of colleagues will be apparent from the first paragraph. The first study illustrated how the stress of assigning a fail grade was not contained within the work setting, but crossed the home-work interface with detrimental effects for personal relationships. The unpredictability of a student's reaction was identified as one the most important stressors contributing to anticipatory anxiety, along with the unexpected reactions of their parents or partners during the process, but especially at the end. The reactions and non-reactions of relevant others are examined in this section.

8.20.1 Reaction of colleagues

For each group the overwhelming reaction from colleagues was supportive. Support was named by 25 informants. For example,

H>11/1U> "We are close knit team, small and have gelled well. They are all very supportive towards me when I am dealing with difficult situations. I need this and am very grateful. This is mutual support."

Support seemed to be a generic term, with some specific facets including confirmation, listening and offering advice, for example

H>7/1U>M "Very supportive when I am looking for confirmation that I am doing the right thing."

L>8/2U<M "Saying, well she was failing anyway."

L<7/2U< "A friendly ear to vent my feelings."

S>8/4U<I "Some went out of their way to give me extra feedback on what the student had done well and badly."

Three lecturers added provisos about the level and type of peer support offered. These seemed to be influenced by the lecturers' relationship with and trust in their colleagues, and whether the student was liked or disliked.

L>6/1U<M "The support is mixed. Some people give the impression 'they all passed my assessment'. I want to smack them in the face when they say this. They are blaming you as a teacher, when you are vulnerable and therefore feel worse."

L>5/3U<M "It depends on whether the course team feels sympathetic toward the student or whether they feel the fail is deserved."

A similar 'mixed' response from colleagues was reported by Carmack (1984) with half the nursing instructors receiving support, but this was "limited to those I trust" and depended upon whether the student was "bright and well liked."

The importance of mutual awareness and monitoring so support can be offered, rather than requested was noted by two lecturers.

L>7/3U> "Support and say 'she was failing anyway.' They need to notice you are upset and need time, automatically. We are aware of what failure means and we are sympathetic, but because we haven't addressed the topic well to acknowledged the degree of stress without having to ask for support."

Different roles also influenced the reaction of colleagues. The most prominent, identified by four head of schools and two lecturers was the management role of the course leader.

H>13/1U<M "It is perceived as part of my role"

and the

L>8/1U>M "Staff are glad to hand over the responsibility to management."

H>4/1U> "The group will have decided and I am left to do the dreaded deed."

The course leader's role for managing

H>9/1U>M "the rite of passage as the student leaves the School"

and as budgetary controller was noted.

L>6/2U<M "It is 'lip-service' support from the manager. They have a glazed look in their eyes, you can see the pounds signs, calculating the costs of your action."

An unexpected environmental factor was the influence of the size of the School, either on the level of support or communication systems. High levels of mutual support crossing hierarchies and shared knowledge seemed to be a feature of small schools.

C<13/1U<M "Everyone knew, it was a smaller department and there were weekly meetings."

However, three heads of schools identified disadvantages including

H>2/1U>M "Biased and unfair judgements. If teachers' feel responsible or that the head of department is going to blame them. Then there are other staff who will lean over backwards to get a student through."

Also, gossiping about a student so

H>7/1U>M "they get a bad name in no time."

This process was verified by a fieldwork organiser

C>4/2U<M "There is a lot of informal chat eg 'she is dreadful'."

One supervisor described the reaction of the multi-disciplinary team.

S>8/6U<M "In general they were supportive. There was a bit of leg pulling, for example 'what an ogre you must be'. They recognised that she wasn't very good, they compared her with other students. I think if we had passed her they would have asked why."

The importance of support, from the agency and team was noted by Green (1991), although it was often absent.

"Many reported lack of support from colleagues, managers and tutors when it came to make the decision ... feelings intensified by the idea of being isolated."

The preponderance of support amongst occupational therapy colleagues is reassuring.

8.20.2 Reactions of partners and family

Partners and relatives are an important source of support. The following table indicates the number of staff from each group who described sharing their experience with family and friends.

Table 39 Number of staff reporting the availability and use of personal sources of support

	Family		Partner		Friends
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Heads of Schools	2	2	3	4	1
Lecturers	1	-	5	1	-
Fieldwork organisers	-	-	5	3	-
Fieldwork supervisors	-	-	3	1	1

Their comments suggest the use of these sources depended upon several factors including availability, appropriateness, needs of the talker and tolerance of the listener. For example, four heads of schools who lived alone spoke of a judicious use of friends and family who

H>5/1U>M "would know when I am having a crisis"
from their non-verbal communication.

H>2/1U>M "I would tell my relative to lower my blood pressure or a colleague whom I respect. I take their advice, they are older than me and are not occupational therapists. I am my own support because of my isolation. It is my judgement in the end. I need time to simmer and not to make instant judgements."

The reactions of partners and family to work problems spanned a continuum from understanding to disinterest. Informants reported taking failure home in a general or specific way, which in turn seemed to influence the reaction. For example,

L>7/3U> "Only in a very general way. I say 'I've had a bloody awful day. I have failed a student, she has gone and I feel ...'"

This contrasts with a fieldwork supervisor describing her single experience.

S>6/3U<M "At work I had to remain in control, professional but I could and would crack up at home. I live with colleagues so they knew what I was talking about. They were quite concerned because they could see my distress. They were relieved when the placement ended and I got back to normal."

This quotation also illustrates links between role expectations and personal and professional identity.

The reactions of partners included being willing to listen, tolerating indirect expressions of stress,

S>8/6U<M "I occasionally stomp round to work it off."

S>8/7U<I "I do take it home but indirectly via a headache or bad mood"

being helpful and empathetic because of their own work in education and offering advice or rational feedback.

L>5/3U<M "Sometimes he is unsympathetic about me bringing work home. He will ask 'Is no one ever supposed to fail your course? If they don't then the course will lack standing."

Two described their partner's negative reactions.

C<2/2U< "I gain my support at work. When, as a supervisor I failed a finalist student I had only been married a short time. I went on and on about it. It nearly led to a divorce."

G>5/2U> "He is supportive up to a point, but if there has been lots of trauma he will ask 'How much can you bring home before it affects our child?' I don't like him telling me this, but with hindsight I know it is true. If I have had a hard time I do not like taking extra criticism."

The majority, from the most to the least experienced, took a failure scenario into their home and families either directly or indirectly. Their distress provoked or evoked a variety of reactions. It would be inappropriate to judge the quality of support offered. However, what is important is the potential for burnout arising from the emotional exhaustion and sense of failure which seem to accompany assigning a fail grade and which crosses the home-work interface (Maslach, 1982).

8.20.3 Range of students' reactions

The unpredictability of the students reaction when receiving the fail grade was one of the main causes of anticipatory anxiety.

The final interview, whether conducted in an academic or professional setting is a private, confidential interaction. The study provided an opportunity to vicariously enter this sanctum and gain information about how students do react when confronted with a fail grade.

Informants described encountering the whole gamut of emotional reactions depending upon the "person and the reason". This diversity would seem to fit with the results of other studies, for the meaning of a grade (both for the giver and receiver) depends upon

"a series of constantly shifting personal and situational frames of reference" (Pollio et al, 1988).

A fail grade may be considered "as a unidimensional symbol having multidimensional meanings" (Pollio et al, 1989) which they suggest are

"comprised of four major components, social meaning, trait meaning, personal meaning and procedural meaning."

These meanings are likely to influence a students' reaction. Wilson (1972) reported "three common reactions to failure - equanimity, resentment or guilt." These reactions would seem to be understood from the broader, yet individual framework of personal and social meanings, rather than attributional theory, which predicts shame from lack of ability and guilt from lack of effort (Hunter & Barker, 1987).

All the reactions observed by informants will be reported to counter the fears associated with unknown and unpredictable reactions. Tears (n=15) and anger (n=14) were the two most

frequent reactions. Tears were anticipated, but anger was an unexpected and for the least experienced, the most difficult reaction. For example,

S>8/5U<I "I have only dealt with one. She was tearful and then fighting. Aggression was the most difficult, she was very verbally aggressive and I hadn't bargained for this I only imagined she would be tearful and upset, not verbal abuse. But it was reassuring because I thought, if she can talk to me like that, then I have made the right decision."

Although tears and anger were the most frequently used terms all words describing the student's reaction will be reported (with the number of times). Their power, even if used only once, do convey the emotional tone of the interaction. The first cluster, and most frequently reported reactions, were acceptance (n=2), which included seeking advice (n=2), agreement with the decision and relief (n=4)

C>8/3U< "relief to get the report and get away from a placement which has been hell for the student"
and "it's God's will".

These reactions are noteworthy because they contradict the commonly held assumption that students' react negatively. Acceptance is a positive reaction which respects the personal meaning and seems to parallel equanimity, the most frequently reported reaction by Wilson (1972). It may also reflect a realistic appraisal of self efficacy. Boekaerts (1991) comments

"a person's self efficacy determines how much effort he is willing to expend and how long he will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experience."

The second cluster was "devastated and inconsolable" (n=5). This is perhaps a more predictable reaction. Glover-Dell described

her reaction as "I felt sick, totally and utterly horrified" (1990). Comments from two fieldwork organisers were interesting reflecting the effectiveness or otherwise, of feedback.

C>4/3U>M "Most are devastated even though they may be expecting it."

C>8/3U< "Devastation and disappointment because they have not expected to fail. They continue to attend the department in the hope they will pass, regardless of all the feedback to the contrary."

The third group of reactions included subdued (n=1), no reaction (n=1), bewilderment (n=1), disappointed (n=2) and impassive (n=1). A fieldwork supervisor's comments links the reaction of disappointment with a student's denial of feedback.

S>8/7U<I "Even though she wasn't surprised, she was still disappointed, but then she was always unrealistic. But we should have been able to get her to be realistic at least."

The final cluster demonstrated an active rather than passive reaction, for example bolting/running away (n=2), threatening to use the appeals systems (n=2) and

L>8/2U<M "Attempting emotional blackmail with their questions am I sure, have I been fair, will I explain myself."

Three described a sequence of immediate or delayed reactions, perhaps reflecting shifting personal and situational meanings (Pollio et al 1988).

H<10/1U>M "He was sad, but very angry later."

L>6/1U<M "The best is when they arrive in tears, accept the fail and leave smiling. This is how they respond the majority of times. They are grateful for advice so they can avoid a second fail."

S>8/6U<M "Initially she was very tearful, she broke down. This was OK because I could handle this. But when she came

back four weeks later she was angry, hostile, blaming us and trying to offload the responsibility onto us by saying 'I've never had any problems on other placements. This made us feel ogres.'

These reactions and interactions are a reminder of assessors' needs, their feelings of worth and effectiveness.

In response to the enquiry about student reactions, one fieldwork organiser outlined her strategies.

C>4/2U<M "If they are angry then I can sympathise because this is a legitimate response and we can move forward. If they are disappointed, I can relate to this and try to show the positives."

The themes of loss as a (conceptual framework for understanding reactions of students and staff) and the conflict in roles or needs between therapist and educator, emerged and re-emerged in responses to this question. Two examples will illustrate these themes

C<2/2U< "I expect the following so they are not difficult. Tears, bewilderment anger. It is like the grief process."

This statement echoes Green's (1991) observation

"Some spoke of the act of failing and ensuing feelings as almost an act of grieving and process of one of bereavement."

The second, powerful and poignant quotation provides one of the most difficult examples I encountered.

H>11/1U> "One was awful because I was aware of her health problems. It was the worst thing I have done in my life. I expected and accepted her anger. At the actual moment the difficulty was how to handle her distress because of my clinical knowledge. Another student did not react at all. This was easier to handle because we had predicted this response. It had been one of her problems. As a therapist I wanted her to express her feelings."

8.20.4 The most difficult student reaction

The second part of the question probed their most disliked and difficult student reaction. Three described all reactions as difficult, because they involved strong emotions and

H>7/1U>M "Any action I take will be wrong because I am the bringer of doom at this stage."

Again, a gamut of reactions were identified. These were clustered into four categories, these were denial, anger, sadness and miscellaneous. Denial was the most frequently reported. It incorporated no response (n=2), silence (n=2), indifference (n=1), flippancy (n=1), learnt helplessness (n=1) and denial (n=2).

Denial, in some form was mentioned most frequently by fieldwork organisers. The reasons were it demonstrated an absence of responsibility because others are blamed, was associated with the belief that

C>8/3U< "there is nothing I can do."

Also, a lack of insight due to their refusal to 'hear' any negative or contradictory feedback because

C>12/1U> "I find it abnormal when their career is on the line. It is rare, they are usually upset. It is weird and I feed this back to the student."

This non-reaction effectively devalues the belief in the healing potential of emotional expression and also denies the educator an opportunity to exercise 'their therapeutic use of self' (Mosey, 1986).

H>11/1U> "Complete lack of response, avoiding eye contact and no reaction. As therapists we want people to express

their feelings and we fail when they don't."

Denial was the most difficult response for the 11 fieldwork supervisors interviewed in the first study. This result was treated with caution because of the unrepresentativeness of the sample, with the majority working in mental health settings and acknowledging their expertise in dealing with anger or distress.

Failure is a real threat to their self-esteem. A student may feel "temporary and expendable ... isolated and impotent" (Prout, 1987).

especially upon fieldwork placement, when these adjectives represent reality. The association of failure of performance and as a person is destructive. This linkage seems to be even more difficult to separate when assessing professional suitability. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising if a defensive strategy, based on fear, envy, resentment, self-hatred (Rowntree 1987), anger, hurt, blame and confusion (Claxton 1984a) are utilised to neutralise this threat to self-concept. Claxton describes the

"convoluted process of attribution and rationalisation."

The passive reaction of

"devaluing the evaluations to the point where they no longer matter very much ... distort and degrades the assessment so it does not become a source of esteem" (Rowntree, 1987).

These results would suggest denial is an effective defensive and an attacking strategy. However, if denial is re-labelled as shock (Kubler-Ross, 1969) or existential plight (Weisman, 1979) it may also be understood as the first stage or phase of a reaction to a loss.

Anger was the second most difficult reaction. It incorporated

anger and hostility (n=4), verbal aggression (n=1), bullying (n=1) and threats to invoke legal action (n=1). This seemed to be due to a dislike of conflict, confrontation or anger, particularly when unexpected.

H<13/1U>M "I did not expect her to try to bully me. As a supervisor I expected to be respected, not dismissed. She was always questioning me, demanding reasons. She tried to bully me not to fail her."

One lecturer described the spread of anger from the individual to the cohort.

L>6/2U<M "It is more difficult when the group is together. The whole group give you the cold shoulder. You've got to face them. It is no joke. Once the finalist wrote a letter complaining about all of us, they were angry."

Another incorporated parental anger:

L8/1U>M "It is difficult if the student's anger is supported by parental anger, for example 'why have you let this happen to my child?'"

Anger was also viewed as a positive reaction for it spurred students into action and

C>5/2U> "Anger shows there is work to be done about why they are angry. You become a parent, a therapist to help them address it."

This reaction was also reported by Glover-Dell (1990)

"I was furious: angry at the system ... angry for letting myself down ... Angry that there seemed to be nothing to gain from the experience."

Sadness, with loss of self-esteem was the third most difficult reaction.

H<10/1U>M "Disappointment, real grief because they can't understand. I hate to see them crumpling."

This category incorporated disappointment (n=1), tears (n=1), grief (n=2) and

H<13/1U<M "If their self-worth is devastated, very distressed and unable to think of anything positive."

These reactions evoked feelings of helplessness and failure for not guiding the student to a positive outcome (another illustration of the conflict in roles between educator and therapist).

The fourth and final category contained a miscellaneous collection of reactions which included accusations of unfairness or misjudgement (n=2),

L<7/2U< "Their belief that they have been treated unfairly. If I agree with them then I am in the nasty position of defending what I disagree with. This reflects my anxiety about the arbitrary nature of marking and that sometimes cock-ups do occur."

Surprise (n=1)

C>8/3U< "The student only knows when I arrive. It is sad and the most difficult because I feel helpless. I am only there to provide the hankies. This has only happened once."

Niceness (n=1), manipulation (n=1) and inconsistency (n=1)

S>6/3U<M "Tears and you don't understand me. Then accusatory how could you, you are being unfair."

The range of difficult reactions focusing upon permutations of denial, anger and sadness may be considered as a natural reaction to a loss. The variations may reflect Shneidman's approach to loss (1980). He believes individuals tend to die, as they live, especially as they have previously reacted to periods of threat, stress, failure, challenge, shock and loss. The reactions also parallel those reported on being made redundant (Hogg 1991a, Finn 1992).

"In the end, there is no instant panacea for the pain of

losing one's job. However, understanding the emotions and knowing that thousands of others are going through a similar experience can help a great deal" (Hogg, 1991b).

A theme threading through all reactions was the informants sense of helplessness during the interaction, with the student's reaction undermining their ability to exercise skills, and therefore indirectly, their confidence as both an educator and therapist.

8.20.5 Reaction of relevant others: parents, peers and patients

Relevant others included the students' parents or partner, other students, either the whole cohort or an individual student on placement and patients. All are all part of the human environment and resources which may support or sabotage staff during the process of assigning a fail grade.

It is appropriate to consider the reaction (and influence) of parents or partners, including their motivation and role, throughout the educational process and not just at the end. For example, the role of parents in career choice with Rozier et al (1992) reported 16% of occupational therapy students had been influenced by family members. Informants in this and other studies (Meisenhelder 1982, Carpenito 1983) have commented upon how school-leavers (especially daughters) may be fulfilling parental career goals rather than their own. Failure effectively ends parental expectations, but at the cost of disappointment and maybe, disapproval. Kim & Clifford (1988) in their theory of

constructive failure postulate that

"self-initiated goals produce more constructive responses to failure than imposed goals."

This study would suggest this does not seem to apply to parents, particularly fathers of daughters.

It was assumed course leaders would have most contact with parents or partners because of their responsibility for dealing with complaints and external bodies. This was confirmed, but by lecturers and fieldwork organisers, rather than heads of schools. Nine of the ten course leaders were able to recall contact with parents, but only two considered this to be part of the failure process, the others discouraged contact

H>2/1U>M "because I do not think it is part of my role in higher education. The students are independent, adults and I am not responsible to their parents."

H>3/1U>M "I know from elsewhere that they - irate dads who think their daughter is a gift to occupational therapy - can cause absolute mayhem."

Six recalled contacts with fathers and one each with a brother, mother and husband. The contacts seemed to focus upon parental anger and disbelief, as they challenged the fairness and appropriateness of the fail grade.

H>3/1U>M "The father was difficult to reason with. He was very cross, believing his daughter had been victimised. He did not understand or accept what I was saying. I asked him to telephone me again when he had calmed down. The student had told him that she had worked hard, but then she told me that she had not worked hard enough."

In contrast, one commented

H>9/1U>M "If they want to come I would never stop them, particularly at the beginning. It is important for them too. One husband arrived in a formal suit. I

became Ms . I listened to the pair for three hours. It is part of the process for them, and if the student wishes. It is their right."

This illustrates Meisenhelder's (1982) suggestion of family involvement "to assist them through the grieving process."

However, the opposite may also apply

H>4/1U> "Only one husband. His attitude was 'I told you so'. He hadn't supported her so he was pleased. I didn't enjoy this."

Informants from the other staff groups reported much less experience of coping with the reaction of parents or partners. There were only two fieldwork organisers and three lecturers with experience. All these had been angry fathers. This ranged from a father challenging a lecturers' written feedback

L>6/1U<M "It was awful, he telephoned, put me on the spot. My feelings was - why should I deal with this? I was only doing my job."

to attending an appeal hearing where the father

L>9/3U> "was vociferous. They often don't know about OT or the course, therefore the context is challenging. I needed to remain calm and think on my feet. This is difficult."

A fieldwork organiser described two incidents where fathers had contacted her to influence the choice of placement.

C>9/2U>M "One said I mustn't send his daughter to a particular placement because she would not be able to afford it. She was on holiday in Africa. Now, I do not speak to parents. I have a set patter, explaining that my relationship is with the student and my responsibility is for their training."

Only one of the five supervisors had had indirect contact with a father:

S>8/5U<I "The fieldwork organiser said he had been in touch with

the School. He was angry and blaming us."

The predominant reaction of parents, especially fathers and partners seems to be negative, their anger and blame creating an additional pressure upon assessors. Pollio et al (1991) suggest parental reactions to grades may be viewed as an emotional response, expressing their needs and values. They report that parents value grades, second only to the student considering they are also addressed to them. Although teachers are unable to control parental reactions they recommend ensuring the fairness, concern and rigour with which they are awarded. An additional recommendation to minimise the pressure upon assessors could be an agreed policy, with clear boundaries and responsibilities for dealing with parental reactions.

The effect of failure upon peers including the whole cohort, a colleague on placement or the next student was investigated. Lecturers and supervisors seemed to be particularly sensitive to the reactions of other students. The effect upon the whole cohort (with the lecturer having to confront their collective anger) was described earlier. More subtle is the effect upon another student, at the same placement, at the same time. For example,

S>8/7U<I "She was in a difficult position. The student who failed was her friend. She was a good student and had already received her report. I felt for her."

However, there was a stronger effect upon the next student, as may be judged from the supervisors' expectations, fears and reactions. For example, none welcomed another student.

S>6/3U<M "I didn't want a student ever again."

S>8/5U<I "I did not dare to have the next student."

This reaction repeats the first study and Maybury's (1988) observation that supervisors

"wondered if they were fit to supervise students again, or indeed if they wanted to!"

Four of the five supervisors required a break, to rest and recuperate. This lasted from months to a year, before they were willing, or wanted to be asked to have another student. Their apprehensions and actions with the next student illustrate the debilitating nature of their experience.

S>6/3U<M "I was quite apprehensive. I didn't want the stress if this placement went wrong. I was a bit worried, and when it was not going right because of her lack of confidence. I was over worrying, that it would go disastrously wrong. It was a pleasant surprise when we talked about the problem, when she changed and got better."

S>8/5U<I "We were very careful and wary with the next one. We were frightened of doing the wrong thing. This is difficult to explain but I didn't want to go through it all again. The fieldwork organiser knew I only wanted a student who was going to pass."

S>8/6U<M "The next student was on an elective placement from another School so she didn't know the other student. She had chosen to come here, her attitude was different. It was such a relief when she was an excellent student. She worked as a basic grade because she was so good. Maybe we gave her more positive feedback. This was wonderful for us. If she had not been good we would have been tearing our hair out. I don't know how we would have coped."

These quotations illustrate the wide ranging and enduring repercussions for some supervisors. They also highlight the important role of the fieldwork organiser in recognising a supervisors' need for a period of recuperation, before selecting a capable student, who would not be influenced by the

supervisor's reputation, to enable the supervisor to regain their confidence. The 'grapevine' is recognised as a effective communication system amongst students.

"It becomes a dreadful occupational hazard to have been known to fail a student" (Green, 1991).

Competent supervisors are a scarce and precious resource and we need

"clinical supervisors who are excited and enthusiastic ... and who enjoy being challenged" (Matson, 1985).

Their needs for support and nurturing, when exercising the highest responsibility should not be underestimated or devalued, if their confidence and enthusiasm are to be rekindled, for both seem to be seriously eroded by failing a student.

Although last, patients are arguably the most important 'relevant others' who exert an indirect influence, interact with and react to students. The constraints of time and dual demands of the roles of supervisor and clinician are enduring themes in the literature on supervision. This was summarised by Alsop (1991)

"Supervisors are concerned with students causing unnecessary risk and the legal implication, being a threat to goodwill with the multi-disciplinary team, have excessive demands upon their time with heavy case-loads - so the pressures are considerable before supervisory responsibilities are taken into account."

This dilemma is brought into sharp focus if the supervisor judges the student to be unsafe, unreliable or untrustworthy to treat their patients. Their primary responsibility and legal obligation is to ensure patients receive safe, effective treatment. These mirror the concerns identified by Wood (1986b)

during a survey of 197 nurse instructors about the legal implications of a student who was "academically, but not clinically sound."

These situations place enormous pressures upon the supervisor as both clinician and "expert in clinical performance assessment" (Friedman & Mennin, 1991) for they are required to

"differentiate the effects of systematic error from those of random error and their influence on the performance outcome ... make decisions consistent with a standard external criterion ... understand the interplay of generic and context specific abilities ... evaluate the quality of the behaviour and its appropriateness in the given context"

which really is another global definition of competence. This also acknowledges student factors, including the impact of anxiety upon an individual student's performance (Davis 1986, Mitchell & Kampfe 1990, Moss & McManus 1992), particularly the "fear of making a dangerous mistake" (Kleehammer et al, 1990). Also, common problems for the cohort. For example Edelstein & Ruder (1990) review the literature on 'alarmingly high' rate of omissions and errors amongst medical students during interviews and physical examinations.

An intrinsic part of the health and social care industries of the 1990s is consumerism, a concern for customer satisfaction both with the quality of service delivery, the competence of individual physicians and students (Henkin et al, 1990). It was therefore appropriate to include a question about the patient's perceptions of marginal students. Three supervisors reported some negative reactions, either during or when the student had

left the placement. For example,

S>6/3U<I "Yes, some commented she was hesitant, quiet and was only an observer in the group. They teased her, they had her sussed out - that she didn't know how to cope with people and that she couldn't take the informality of the group."

S>8/7U<I "They made comments when she just sat there and did not participate like 'you had a funny one last week'. They were aware she was different from other students."

S>8/4U<I "Afterwards they commented. A number said they hadn't felt confident with the student. Were they worrying about whether he was going to treat them?"

While recognising the limitations of patient evaluations, particularly their

"failure to discriminate ... student behaviour is generally good and the spread is truly narrow, making patient evaluation useful only for the extremes" (Henkin et al, 1990).

These patients do seem to have discriminated appropriately at the extremes.

8.20.6 Conclusion to the reaction of others

The reactions of others, whether parents, partners, peers or patients seem to exacerbate the problem by introducing additional, often angry and blaming interactions into a complex, emotive scenario. This review has highlighted the range of relevant others with either direct or indirect involvement. A spread which extends the impact of a fail beyond immediate, obvious boundaries.

This section has highlighted the value of confronting failure. The discussion has presented a balance of costs and benefits. All assessors need to be prepared for these implications and

ramifications, for it is the unpredictable and unexpected facets which seem to provoke the most distress. Perhaps most importantly, the need to understand the meaning of the fail from the student's perspective, rather than assume it will be negative.

8.21 NEEDS: PERCEIVED NEEDS DURING THE PROCESS OF FAILURE: Introduction

Health care professionals are notorious for focusing upon the needs of service users rather than their own, because

"to disclose personal problems was to invite the accusation of undesirable weakness from others and their rigid, internalised role-model which state(s) that carers have to be strong" (Aveline, 1986).

This imbalance seems to start with a selection process which values altruism (Rozier et al, 1992) for members of the profession are required to be

"altruistic, dedicated, hard working and unselfish with regard for and devotion to the needs, interest and welfare of others" (Shah & Cooper, 1992).

This unselfishness would seem to extend into education for although there has been considerable research into the effect of failure upon the individual and institution, there is little which gives priority to the perspective of the assessor.

The phases of awareness, acceptance and action to meet personal needs were examined in this section of the focused interview. Informants were invited to identify their needs throughout the

process (before, during and after). Only two, both heads of schools, initial reaction to this question was

H<13/1U<M "I don't know."

H>3/1U>M "I haven't a clue. I don't stop and analyse them. I've been an independent operator in education for so long that I do not expect, or look for collateral support."

However, both went on to describe support required from colleagues and a partner,

H>3/1U>M "He is supportive, he can detect without being told and we talk it through."

This was reassuring, for if some of the ultra elite are able to acknowledge their needs for support, maybe this will contradict and change the introductory quotations.

The results from each of the staff groups will be reported separately to emphasize the subtle differences in needs which seem to be related to their different roles and responsibilities.

8.21.1 Perceived needs of heads of schools

These seemed to cluster around three themes. Firstly, confirmation of the decision and preparation for the termination interview, secondly, receiving support from the staff team and finally, other idiosyncratic needs to enable them to fulfil their management role. Six described the process of confirmation and preparation. This included gathering accurate information about the failure and the student's overall performance from documentation and staff, checking the fairness of and confirming agreement with the decision, seeking clarification and

investigating any doubts, to obtain all the facts.

H>9/1U>M "I will check and clarify, to investigate any doubts I may have. To explore thoroughly so I am not muddled, to unravel all the parts."

Time was also important to reflect, rehearse and think about all the emotional responses, to secure the involvement and availability of relevant colleagues and

H>5/1U>M "To make sure there is no room for error, misunderstandings, being unclear or saying different things to different people."

The need for staff support was identified by half the informants (n=5). This took a variety of forms including obtaining agreement that the right decision had been made and would be implemented by all. Time to discuss the decision, reasons for the fail and ways to avoid repetition of any problems. Support from the examination board in giving clear, logical outcomes for each student. Whether the need for staff support was met seemed to be related to a variety of complex inter and intra personal dynamics. It would be inappropriate to speculate on such limited evidence, however the following example would seem to suggest a fear of alienation as the staff are communicating their passive disagreement.

H>2/1U>M "I feel isolated if I sense doubt from the staff, for example they may object to the way the failure happens and I am highly sensitive to staff. If the staff are totally against the action I feel very isolated, but this would not stop me if I felt I was making the right decision. I would be alone and I would not enjoy it. It is important to feel that I have support from the staff. Some do not say anything, others do not say anything negative, and some will make a sly remark or recall the incident several months later."

The third cluster of needs seemed to be idiosyncratic, reflecting

each individual's needs and strategies. These included sharing with long-standing, trusted colleagues, a quiet time for reflection upon the decision and action,

H>4/1U> "To be left alone to do it well. I can't be overloaded with the distress of other staff. I need to do it right. I've learnt that I can only do one thing properly."

H>11/1U> "To make sure I've got my feet on the ground and reiterate that I don't own the student, and that, as course leader it is not my fault and it is my job to maintain standards."

These quotations illustrate the competing demands and conflict of interests for heads of schools within the context of their needs for ability utilisation and achievement (Jackson, 1987).

Four made explicit reference to their age or length of experience. This seemed to be a source of strength.

H>11/1U> "I draw upon the coping skills I have learned over 25 years in the health service."

H>7/1U>M "I think in a way that as I get older I carry more without sharing, but I still need to."

The final quotation draws together some themes especially, an understanding of the positive aspects of failure which had been gained from experience.

H>1/1U> "My needs, based upon years of experience are different from those at the beginning. I am now able to take a long term perspective on the failure. I allow the student to do their own failing. After all, if they have responsibility for their own learning, they also have responsibility for their own failure. I am able to distance myself a little bit with this long term view. I also consider the effects for the profession of letting them pass, therefore the effects upon patient care."

8.21.2 Perceived needs of lecturers

Their primary need was for practical, emotional and enduring support from colleagues. The words described the type of support needed and indirectly their perceived needs, for example sympathy, understanding, time to listen before the fail, to assist with the process of confirmation and afterwards to affirm the outcome and their reactions.

L<7/2U< "To have frank discussions with colleagues for support and constructive criticism. A friendly ear to scream and yell into if I feel the decision is unfair."

Most lecturers focused upon their needs throughout the whole process rather than at each stage. Two described their needs before the fail interview. These were related to time

L>9/3U> "to consider how I am going to deal with it, sort out potential responses from the student and what my feelings and how I will react. This rehearsal is more difficult if their responses are unpredictable"

and time to prepare papers and the room, to create a safe environment.

L>8/1U>M "To set up the appropriate situation so there will not be any interruptions or distractions; and the seating for the discussion according to whether the meeting will be confrontational or empowering, for example."

The practicalities came to the fore during the interview in a way which combined the needs of the student and their own. These included a quiet, comfortable, uncluttered venue, adequate time, the availability of other sources of support for the student and

L>5/3U<M "to gain support from colleagues during so it becomes a collaborative interaction with either the staff or student."

This need for support continued afterwards, both immediately and for a longer time. Immediate support comprised either

L>7/3U> "a chance to discuss, confirm that you are right"

or

L>6/1U<M "to get out, to get away and forget it."

The need for long term sensitivity (from staff and students) combined with appropriate causal attribution was noted by one lecturer.

L>6/2U<M "I don't want it brought up again a year later by the students eg 'we must get it right because you failed so many last year'; or to be reminded by staff. It might be my paranoia about how things are said flippantly. But they do not realise how much it has affected you."

This final sentence is telling for it reflects the enduring trauma, the need for self protection and reassurance when assigning a fail grade.

8.21.3 Perceived needs of fieldwork organisers

They reported two primary needs, firstly and most importantly, support from academic and clinical colleagues and their partner. Secondly, information and time to gather background details about the student and to check the examination rules and regulations. The understanding of peers and the head of school was identified by all fieldwork organisers. Peer support combined emotional and practical elements, for example

C<2/2U< "Working in a small, cohesive school we sit and share in an unstructured way. I need advice from other staff who know the student well, how to handle them. This is nice so I don't use the wrong tack with the student."

C>12/1U> "For colleagues and family to understand. I need to share how lousy I feel and then it is OK. I need them to accept that they may have to cover my School commitments at short notice; because students are my first priority."

Fieldwork organisers were the only staff group who specified their need for support from the head of school, being noted by three of the seven informants. This was multifaceted, incorporating personal and procedural advice, reassurance and guidance. This parallels Symanski's (1991) recommendation that the advice and support of programme directors should be sought.

C>9/2U>M "For the head of school to let me be neurotic sometimes. To remind me to stop, collect the facts, calm down and not rush out immediately. Sometimes it is better to delay so the supervisor has to hold and contain the situation. I am learning when and how to respond quickly."

C>5/2U> "Support and guidance from the course leader at all stages. To check examination policies and procedures. This checking and sharing of responsibility is important so you don't get side-tracked."

One differentiated between the type of support needed with a termination and resit placement.

C>4/2U<M "With a termination I need the reassurance of the head of school that we are united; with a retake I need her, and the cooperation of supervisors in negotiating another placement."

Only one outlined her needs throughout the whole process. These seem clearly related to her role.

C>8/3U< "Before, I need as much warning as possible. If it is a surprise I feel inadequate because I have not been allowed to do my job ie to provide support and suggest alternative ways of enabling the student to succeed. The period up to and including giving the report I gain as much information from everyone - tutors, student and supervisor - so I am able to give the right

advice to the student. I do not want to raise false hopes. It is important to be realistic and so help the student face the future. Afterwards I need time, a holiday, space to get away from work."

8.21.4 Perceived needs of fieldwork supervisors

These were also related to support either from peers, their line manager and the School. Two supervisors described their need for S>6/3U<M "managerial support for supervision and to discuss our definition of competence so we know we were doing the right thing and that we should stick to our judgement; as a shoulder to cry upon."

Both Green (1991) and Alsop (1991) affirm the importance of management support for accepting students, including 'supervision for supervisors'. This organisational and line management support is essential with marginal students.

The need for peer support was identified by four of the five supervisors. The fifth was working single-handed and relied upon support from her line manager, multi-disciplinary team and friends at home. Support was defined as reassurance and confirmation, offered by those who were familiar with the situation. This seems to be the equivalent of 'double marking', shows a concern with due process, reduces the risk of subjectivity or a personality clash (Meisenhelder, 1982) and

"demonstrates to the student that there is a genuine interest in giving a fair evaluation" (Brozenec et al, 1987).

It is important to contradict fears

S>8/4U<I "that I was not just nit-picking, being a nasty person or being over critical; but that I was being rational."

Support from the School and fieldwork organiser was highlighted by three supervisors. This included

S>6/3U<M "being told that we were doing everything that we could do and following the correct procedures."

An immediate response was valued by one.

S>8/7U<I "The fieldwork organiser was wonderful. She visited us immediately and was available if and when we needed her."

One supervisor described her needs at each stage of the process and how some had been met at a failure workshop.

S>8/5U<I "Before, I need support from the other supervisors and the School. During the report giving meeting the rest of the department helped by covering my case-load. Afterwards, it was the failure workshop. I did not realise how useful it was to be able to talk with others and get it out of my system. I gave my all, all my feelings because I was the only one in our group who had been through it. It provided a release mechanism. I hadn't realised the effect it had had upon me because I was still hyped up about it several months later at the failure workshop. I was good to share my feelings."

8.21.5 Conclusion to needs

All informants clearly expressed their needs for support which was obtained from a variety of sources including peers, management, the School and partners. Support encompassed understanding, confirmation and affirmation of their judgement. Practical pragmatic aspects related to gathering information and clarifying examination regulations to ensure they fulfilled their responsibilities in an appropriate, sensitive way. Finally, permission to be distressed. All these aspects seem to suggest an immediate and retrospective reflection upon both the

process and outcome. Reflection, including confrontation by self and others, seemed to provide the challenge and support which underpins learning and professional development (Day, 1993).

This awareness and acceptance of personal needs, particularly for self-protection and reassurance, encouraged reflection, action and coping strategies which they felt able to commend to others.

8.22 COPING STRATEGIES : Introduction

Towards the end of the focused interview informants were invited to describe their coping mechanisms for dealing with this occupational stressor. Teachers' identified the need for research into

"how to cope with problem students - those with personal characteristics that make them unusually time-consuming, difficult or frustrating to teach."

as most needed and useful (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1988). The results of this American research seem to be supported in a Maltese study, where 36% of teachers regarded the failure to teach unmotivated students as the most negative factor - a source of occupational frustration (Farrugia, 1986). Although it is important to place both studies within their own, very different contexts, they do reinforce the immediate and enduring debilitating effects which are reported in this study.

The interviews provided an valuable opportunity for gaining their collective wisdom about good practice. Therefore the coping strategies they used for themselves, with the student and fieldwork supervisors and also strategies they would recommend to others, were examined. The results will be reported in sections related to strategies commended for self and others. The intention is to highlight the potential range of problem or emotion focused and organisational options which have been used by staff with different roles and relationships with the student. This is because

"staff must take deliberate action to attenuate the negative effects on their own morale" (Symanski, 1991).

8.22.1 Strategies for students

Heads of schools and lecturers provided the most detailed descriptions of strategies they used with students. This may have been related to their responsibility for conducting an exit interview or assisting a student prepare for a retake assessment.

The mechanisms seemed to combine problem and emotion focused strategies. Firstly, and most frequently was listening (n4), allowing time (n=5) for the student

H>1/1U> "to talk and be honest about themselves"

to express their feelings (n=4)

H>3/1U>M "to storm or weep ... it can be a tear-jerker for all concerned"

to review the consequences and benefits of this whole learning experience (n=5) and begin to consider future possibilities (n=3)

H>3/1U>M "to give support about a retake or if it is termination, to explore other options that are open to them."

This supportive, counsellor role was acknowledged by two thirds (n=20) of informants. Although the focus of listening varied, a common theme seemed to be encouraging the student to accept the rational, reality of the fail at a cognitive and emotional level, to minimise feelings of worthlessness and maximise the potential for future action. This seemed to be a reciprocal process, analogous to analytic holding for they seemed to demonstrate the capacity

"to tolerate being genuinely in touch with what the other person is feeling, even to the extent of feeling those feelings oneself" (Casement, 1985).

For example,

H>2/1U>M "Failure is devastating but it is not the end of the world. It feels awful, an enormous blow. I encourage the student to talk this through."

The second set of strategies were related to practical aspects, to other sources of help including providing supportive references (n=2), referral to student services for counselling and careers advice (n=2) and the provision of credits - a formal record of achievement from the higher education establishment. One head of school described the process of encouraging family support.

H>2/1U>M "I ask if they have discussed it with their families, how it is viewed by them and whether they are blaming."

A supportive, problem focused approach was also used with students undertaking a resit assessment.

L>5/3U<M "To take one step at a time, to make sure they go to

the right subject tutor for advice. Sometimes they are reluctant because they see themselves as failures and are not worth the time."

H<13/1U<M "To ask them to consider how they will approach the re-sit, what they will require in terms of coaching so appropriate help can be given."

This forward planning approach was endorsed by a fieldwork organiser.

C<2/2U< "The only thing to do is to look forward. On their first day back in School I see the student to sort out the retake placement. I am practical with them because they get their emotional support from elsewhere."

These approaches seem to reflect causal attributions for fail based upon inappropriate strategies, rather than low effort or ability. Therefore, they give instrumental not gratuitous help (Graham, 1984) suggesting a strategy - methods and techniques to develop their skills (Clifford, 1986b) rather than responding with anger and criticism (Tollefson & Chen, 1988).

A key word for many informants was 'positive' - the need to

H>3/1U>M "try to find something positives, even if they are going on holiday. It should not finish without identifying the benefits - what they have gained and learned - so it is not a destructive experience. If it is, then it weighs on my conscience and I feel guilt."

This illustrates the inter-dependence of a positive outcome for both staff and student, which may also reflect the professional value of realistic optimism (Yerxa, 1983). A lecturer highlighted the value of failure as part of life and learning.

L<7/2U< "I discuss with the student that we all experience failure, that life is not full of successes. There are positive spin-offs, for example gaining increased insight into how patients' feel and becoming a more rounded person; but this depends upon how failure is dealt with and the outcome."

All these emotional and problem focused strategies used with students seem to reflect management principles of 'breaking the bad news' (Finn, 1993) which although derived from the problems of 'discipline, poor performance and redundancy', seem appropriate. The examples demonstrate 'the five As': anticipation and planning, a clear, unambiguous announcement of the result, expecting an angry response, acceptance because the outcome is non negotiable and the action of forward planning.

8.22.2 Strategies for, and used with fieldwork supervisor

Fieldwork organisers, because of their involvement with and sensitivity toward supervisors, were asked to share their strategies. Those of support and immediate attention have already been reported. In this section they emphasized the importance of maintaining open, honest channels of communication. For example,

C<2/2U< "To reassure the supervisor that a retake placement is not an easy option, that the School does not want a poor student to slide through. That it is OK to make the decision and they are clear what will happen next. It doesn't mean they are incompetent supervisors and we will not trust them with students again."

The themes of personal or departmental reputation and a common concern for professional standards recur in this quotation.

Another described a process of making and collating detailed documentation about all communications regarding a fail.

C>5/2U> "To keep open communication. To keep a record of everything. I keep rough notes and of telephone conversations with the student or supervisor. I write down the phrases used, who initiates and the reason for

the contact, the date. Also, who has been informed and when so there are not any surprises for the student."

This is an example of good practice, not just of documentation as an assessor's best defence (Neubauer, 1990) but also because justice seems to have been done for the student, educational system and the public (Pope, 1983).

8.22.3 Strategies for self

Finally, informants were invited to focus upon their strategies for meeting their, rather than others, needs. Implicit in this question is a belief in the importance of a balance in awareness and satisfaction of personal needs to contradict the tendency for health care workers to adopt "the martyr syndrome" which involves "all give and no take" (Hodkin, 1987). This section is intended to fulfil a dual purpose. Firstly, to provide role models who demonstrate awareness and valuing of their own needs and feelings. Secondly, to summarise a selection of strategies which hopefully will be of interest, and use to others entering the field of failure in different roles.

The strategies used by heads of schools seemed to focus upon personal and procedural aspects, suggesting an equilibrium between personal and professional needs and roles. For example, H>3/1U>M "To assure myself of the justice and facts of the situation so I am able to demonstrate these to the student."

Half (n=5) described attention to procedural aspects, as a means of confirming the judgement or their action, including

H>2/1U>M "gathering clear, logical details about the fail, to listen to all the facts ... not to make an instant decision even if I am under pressure to do so, to allow time to view the situation from a different angle."

H<13/1U<M "To use moderators and others for reassurance and affirmation that we have made the right decision."

H>5/1U>M "To make sure everything is well documented - all the formal and informal contacts which have a bearing upon the failure. To ensure the participation of the right people at meetings with the student, that all outcomes are followed up in writing with an acceptance proforma to be signed by the student. These are all lessons we learned from an appeal and we are still learning."

The value of a system for dealing with failure was advocated by one

H>4/1U> "To have a system, a strategy this has taken 90% of the stress out of it. I would advise others to get, write down their system about how to do it."

A clear system secures fair and equal treatment for students and protection for staff, giving organisational and personal satisfaction. This was affirmed by another who commented

H>11/1U> "The first one was the worst, but now I am familiar with the processes and procedures. I recognise the stresses, how I feel and that I will need to unload."

In contrast, personal coping strategies focused upon talking and listening. The need to share feelings and thoughts with a trusted person, was mentioned by four course leaders.

H>7/1U>M "Talking to someone, a good listener to help put it into perspective, to think and reflect. What could you have done better in other circumstances? But I need to have confidence in myself or it would destroy self."

Other strategies and defence mechanisms included distraction

H>7/1U>M "I immerse myself in something else to reduce my distress."

H>11/1U> "I read myself the riot act, to stop being too

emotional and to look at the practicalities. Also avoidance, I treat myself. I am fairly robust but not hardened."

and a stiff drink.

A third strategy, noted by two informants, involved placing the fail within a long term individual and professional perspective

H>1/1U> "I try to reinforce my responsibility for guarding professional standards to counterbalance the emotional pull toward the student."

This seems to pull together rationality for the student with recognition of the rationale for assessment of competence to practise.

The main coping strategy reported by lecturers was talking. It was mentioned by six of the eight lecturers. For example,

L>6/2U<M "To discuss the failure and my feelings openly, with someone I trust who I know will be empathetic and will respect confidentiality. I need this support before and after a fail, so I don't bottle up my feelings of anxiety and disappointment, even though I know it is not my fault."

Other benefits included

L>9/2U>M "to get it off my chest, not to unload it onto another but to reflect upon it. Then I can put failure in it's rightful place, in a box on the shelf so it is away, but can be taken down if needed for future experience."

This is an interesting metaphor for closure, for it permits feelings and learning, both which seem to be dismissed or devalued when closure is based upon denial.

Another benefit of sharing was the introduction of an objective, impartial perspective which seemed to be particularly important where the boundaries between therapist and educator were in

danger of being breached. A hazard for all informants, but particularly lecturers and supervisors.

L>5/3U<M "To talk it through to help me be more objective. Because of my clinical experience with adolescents, who were not very different from students. The teacher and therapist conflict is a biggy for me."

The dilemmas and conflict between the roles of educator and therapist were clearly stated, if not really acknowledged

L>7/3U> "If the student is preparing for the retake then I 'do'. I offer reassurance that they will get through. I say this even though I don't think they will. I offer something eg feedback about why they failed to help them pass the retake. When they fail for the second I will sit with the student, discuss it and their future, ask them to reflect upon what they have gained. I try to turn towards the positive from something which is so negative, so that the course becomes worthwhile and not a total waste of time. I have been able to do this in most situations. This is the best way for me and the student."

The language and lack of honesty seems to give an insight into their unstated and perhaps unrecognised personal needs. This may be attributed to several factors, for example the reluctance of teachers to directly tell students that they are low in ability, offering well-intentioned but gratuitous help (Graham, 1984). It may also reflect the influence of a fundamental tenet of occupational therapy - the link between action or doing to achieve change, adaptation or mastery.

"Occupational therapy sometimes has been described as the art and science of making 'doing' (performance) possible. Much of the value of occupational therapy is related to the doing and performing potential inherent in occupations" (Reed & Sanderson, 1983).

Strategies linked to procedures and documentation were noted by two lecturers. The importance of understanding and complying with assessment regulations, was noted for the protection of both

students and staff.

L>5/3U<M "To make sure all the procedures are right, knowing what should be done and what I am going to say is right rather than just ad-libbing; because the students are vulnerable, they hang on your every word."

L>6/1U<M "Not to lay yourself open. To have clear expectations and be certain that it is a fail so you can justify it. To be very careful about feedback- how it is phrased and to keep a written record on the student's file. It is the same procedure for dealing with difficult clients - you need to record all your moves."

These are essential if the student exercises their right of appeal, particularly on the grounds of procedural irregularities. The importance of good documented evidence to reduce subjectivity and assist accurate recall of critical incidents, behaviour, progress and feedback, to demonstrate 'due process' is well documented in the American literature (Meisenhelder 1982, Carpenito 1983, Darragh et al 1986 and Brozenec et al 1987).

Two lectures identified the strategy of travel between work and home as a decompression routine (Maslach, 1982) and the use of lectures for "self preservation" because

L>6/1U<M "It is hurtful when the other students say it is you. You've got to go and teach them again. I know what they are thinking. I get into automatic teaching mode. It is safer to lecture, you are less likely to be criticised or attacked."

This statement repeats the effects of the cohorts' reaction and an assessor's need for self protection.

The fieldwork organisers were the only group to describe strategies intended to meet the needs of supervisors, students and themselves. Fulfilling their role as independent

counsellors to each of the participants seemed to be their main strategy. There were exceptions, for example two fieldwork organisers' initial reaction was

C<2/2U< "I don't know, I just sort of cope."

Only one identified personal coping strategies

C>8/3U< "I use travel to unwind. My home life is very busy so the family takes over when I get home."

The coping strategy identified by five of the seven fieldwork organisers revolved around maintaining open, honest channels of communication between the student, supervisor and themselves. The importance of "designated channels of communication and a close relationship" between fieldwork and School staff was emphasized by Alsop (1991). The organisers' described their role as an

C>12/1U> "independent observer, I am not there to take sides."

C>5/2U> "Counsellor to try to get them to talk to each other properly. They are usually not talking or listening to each other."

This demanded being non-judgemental, an

C>12/1U> "active listener and reflector, I've learnt how to read the undercurrents, to be forthright and honest."

They described a range of verbal and non verbal tactics which they had learned to employ to encourage open communication including

C>9/2U>M "I don't write anything down during the meeting, only when I am in the car I put my notes on the dictaphone."

C>8/3U< "Opening phrases like 'there seems to be a problem, what we seem to be talking about' and then to pull back because they are desperate to talk"

observational skills, the use of humour to defuse a situation,

C>9/2U>M "changing posture to reflect and reiterate the problems, for example adopting a relaxed posture when it is quiet and calm to anchoring important statements with gestures, eye contact and asking them to repeat what they have heard, monitoring the latent and linguistic content, the choice of vocabulary. These are the tricks from a life times work. I am using all my skills as an occupational therapist."

These examples demonstrate the application of a core skill, the conscious use of self (Mosey, 1986) to enhance rather than interfere with the educator role.

The importance of documentation was also highlighted by a fieldwork organiser.

C>4/2U<M "I always provide a summary of the meeting and send a copy to all the relevant people. I ensure the student has the same information, that they have formulated their own learning contract identifying their strengths, weaknesses and objectives. This means the student has a say and is not manipulated."

Such good practice supports all the participants and reflects the professional value of empowerment.

The final statement provides an appropriate conclusion because it combines a personal strategy with the professional wisdom gained from experience.

C>4/3U>M "The student and supervisor want you to listen, and give them the right answer, but there isn't one. I only float a word or idea and they expand upon it. I can't give a right answer. At first I needed to give them the right answer."

The strategy of open communication and direct confrontation were also advocated by three of the five supervisors. This was poignantly expressed by one

S>8/6U<M "Confronting it is better than letting it bubble up inside. It is better if the fail is out in the open, to be honest with the student in a constructive way.

If it is left to fester it will come out in different, less constructive ways. But you need courage to confront it."

A student is unlikely to be insensitive to such a negative appraisal, even if only expressed via non-verbal leakage, for Kagan & Albertson (1987) suggest students

"are hypersensitive to any criticism of their performance."

The support gained from discussions, sharing and off-loading feelings with colleagues, family and School staff was the most frequently mentioned strategy being noted by four supervisors. The added difficulty of assigning a fail grade when working single handed was commented upon by one supervisor

S>8/4U<I "I would not recommend failing someone if you were working on your own. It would be difficult proving their incompetence to yourself and others. You need someone to question you, act as a sounding board, check out concerns about whether you are right or dislike the student and are being unfair. It is too easy to justify this to yourself."

The value of others was a tactic commended by Pope (1983) who noted

"Courts comment approvingly when supervisory observations are documented by written anecdotal comments and buttressed by additional observations by other competent evaluators."

Two supervisors outlined their strategies, which would seem appropriate for single-handed situations. These were the careful and precise use of the assessment form and departmental objectives to maintain objectivity and, using their reserve of past experience for comparison of expectations to give confidence about making a rational judgement.

Other helpful strategies included attending a failure workshop,

thought stopping (about the student when at home) and recalling the situation

S>8/4U<I "will not last forever because the placement has a set date on which to finish"

and perhaps most importantly

S>8/4U<I "I know what it is like to work with a poor occupational therapist. This was in my mind and I did not want another department to go through that."

This strategy is a timely reminder of the long term consequences of the failure to fail. It would also seem to combat the

"the tendency to become immersed in visions of doom for a failing student ... not responsible for personal lives of students" (Symanski, 1991).

8.22.4 Conclusion to coping mechanisms

A range of problem and emotion focused, rather than organisational strategies were described. One of the most common was seeking social support. This comprised talking and listening, with an honest expression and confrontation of the feelings and reasons for a fail. This seemed to fulfil a dual purpose for all concerned, as a means of accepting the reality and then preparing for the future. The procedural or problem focused strategies were supplementary, concentrating upon correct procedures and information to ensure the student received fair treatment. These also functioned to protect staff from organisational or personal recriminations of procedural irregularities.

All reinforce the emotional importance of leaving rituals (Purves, 1992) to recognise the losses which are inherent in separation (Yalom, 1985) which is the inevitable consequence of a second fail with termination of training. Interestingly, organisational strategies especially the 'pass list' and retakes before the next academic year, seem to deny the impact of loss. This may contribute to the conflict between educator and therapist values and roles experienced by occupational therapists.

8.23 CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE ROLES AND VALUES OF AN EDUCATOR AND THERAPIST : Introduction

An examination of potential and actual conflicts between the values and roles of an educator and therapist was one of the concluding questions for the interview. This retrieval from subjective experiences, to a cognitive consideration of philosophical aspects may be labelled a 'therapy tactic', indicating closure of the interview with its intimate relationship and disclosures.

Although it is appropriate to commence this section with definitions, it is necessary to acknowledge these are likely to be controversial and contentious. It was for this reason the terms in the question were undefined, the author assuming a shared understanding of common roles and underpinning values. The responses provided by the majority of informants were appropriate and expected. However, two supervisors and one fieldwork organiser offered unexpected answers which seemed to suggest different definitions, particularly regarding the values of occupational therapy.

Values are perceptions of desirable behaviour related to one's professional identity and activities. They are conceptualised as perceptions about what is intrinsically good and desirable which are operationalised as a set of humanistic values (DePoy & Merrill, 1988). It is this operational definition which is expressed in roles and which seem to stimulate role strain.

Two authors are noted for their contribution for making explicit the assumptions and values which underpin occupational therapy. Reed & Sanderson (1983) proposed six assumptions which include: a person is a biopsychosocial and spiritual being who is viewed as a unified whole; the person is an open system energy unit capable of interacting with and changing the environment, with a capacity for thought and sensation, a unique pattern of needs and holding responsibilities linked to occupational positions and roles. The reader may reflect upon how these assumptions have permeated this topic and method. For example, the interest in informants' language and use of metaphor reflects the assumption

"language, verbal or non-verbal, is the principal means by which another person can learn about a person's imagery, abstraction, perceptions, feelings and emotions" (Reed & Sanderson, 1983).

These assumptions were developed by the second author, Yerxa (1983, 1991) who advocated that "occupational therapy is grounded in humanistic values." These audacious values (Yerxa, 1983) seem to have been accepted by and within the profession, as evidenced by the number of citations DePoy & Merrill (1988), Mayers (1990) and Thorner (1991) for example. Some values are generic, being shared with other 'caring' professions, thereby permitting interdisciplinary team work (Reed & Sanderson, 1983). The following is an example of a generic value

"Occupational therapy provides therapeutic interaction to human beings not to muscles, synapses or superegos" (Yerxa, 1991).

Values linked to occupational behaviour may be considered as

profession specific, for example

"Occupational therapy is concerned with how occupation enables persons to achieve competence and economic self-sufficiency and to contribute to themselves and others" (Yerxa, 1991).

These values form the foundation for the professions' culture and identity. They are also the guiding constructs for the development of professional competence (Gilfoyle, 1984) giving a connection with this study, for incompetence should result in a fail grade.

It was this responsibility for judging incompetence which I believed would cause the conflict between therapist and educator values and roles. The main function of a teacher has been described as "teacher-as-judge". Assessment, from the teachers' perspective

"differentiates children on the basis of their intellectual - and often social - skills in preparation for the social and occupational roles which the teacher perceives they will eventually play" (Hoyle, 1969).

Failure is inherent in the judgement process (Geary, 1988) an expected outcome, albeit for a minority of students. I postulated that both the process and outcome would provide potential points for conflict.

H<13/1U<M "As therapists we are not judgemental. We don't give patients pass or fails. We value them, recognise their intrinsic worth and focus upon their strengths to compensate for disabilities."

Jarvis (1983) offers a broader definition of education

"any planned series of incidents, having a humanistic basis, directed towards the participants learning and understanding."

The humanistic values provide a point of similarity, one which

was noted as a point of complementarity and conflict by informants. Jarvis (1983) describes two facets of this humanistic base

"it is concerned about the welfare and humanity of the participants and it is humane."

These aspects would also seem to contribute to another facet of this conflict which occurs when the boundary between education and therapy is breached. Although reported in the social work literature (Towle 1954, Howard 1979 and Ford & Jones 1987) the temptation 'to treat students' was an unexpected theme which emerged in all three parts of this study. If a fail scenario is an occupational stressor, a retreat into the familiar and satisfying 'therapist role' may represent a self-protective mechanism, which involves 'doing' rather than freezing or flight responses (Shipley, 1990).

Readers are invited to consider these definitions, with their complementarity and conflict, as they review the responses from each staff group.

8.23.1 Heads of Schools

The ten heads of schools were split, with six experiencing conflicts, four disagreeing and one saying the roles and values were the same.

H>1/1U> "The values are the same, we want to help individuals fulfil their potential in all avenues of life. I have always thought of a teacher as a counsellor and an occupational therapist as a teacher."

Interestingly, fieldwork organisers and supervisors were split

in a similar way, whereas all the lecturers agreed, acknowledging a conflict in roles and values.

The reasons given by the four who did not experience any conflict focused upon the shared principles and processes. For example,

H>2/1U>M "As a therapist you make judgements, which have an impact on clients' lives, but standards can be more clearly met. Also, there are the same fights with administrators about power, money and control."

H>3/1U>M "The way we deal with failure is the same as if we were dealing with a client's problems ie looking for the positives, showing you understand even though the circumstances are difficult."

The six who reported a conflict identified two causes. Firstly, making judgements and being judgemental and secondly, the inappropriate use of therapy skills on students. The need to exercise judgement seemed to conflict with closely held professional and personal values for two course leaders.

H>7/1U>M "The tension is always there although I think I handle it differently with experience. Sitting in judgement conflicts with a deeply held philosophy of life, for example about unconditional positive regard, which is very difficult."

H>5/1U>M "They can complement, for example when the educator is a facilitator. But it is a hindrance when giving extra time, the benefit of the doubt to enable them to reach or demonstrate their potential. We forget, and need to remind ourselves that they have to be competent occupational therapists, because if they were working single handed or in an emergency they could be dealing with our relatives."

Both informants refer indirectly to the work of the humanistic psychologist, Carl Rogers' (1961, 1983) whose influence crosses the boundaries between education and therapy.

This boundary was the second cause of conflict

H>4/1U> "I had to make it explicit at a staff meeting with the statement that we are not here to be a students' therapist. We are in education, not to treat them. There is a conflict. If I didn't remind myself and others, then we would fall into this trap constantly."

The importance of this separation is endorsed by Towle (1954), Howard (1979) and Ford & Jones (1987) because it respects teachers' or supervisors' institutionally sanctioned roles (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1988) and their contract of employment.

Some related this temptation to two factors, firstly inexperience in education and then clinical experience. Four heads of schools noted this conflict, when they or others, join the academic community.

H>11/1U> "Yes, because they are similar but also dissimilar. I got this into perspective after about eighteen months in education. I needed to think out the situation, switch and cue into educational attitudes. There was a transition. It was about making judgements, interpretations, deciding how far counselling should go, balancing educational need and if they are going to make satisfactory therapists. The differences are fundamental, we need to keep in bounds, recognise they are there and pull back as therapists."

This transition in roles was also noted by Towle (1954) amongst

"staff (who have) not extricated themselves from practice and found their feet as educators."

One course leader made the observation that new lecturers with mental health experience, seemed to have the most conflict and difficulty establishing appropriate boundaries between education and therapy. To a certain extent this observation was confirmed by lecturers.

8.23.2 Lecturers

All lecturers acknowledged a degree of conflict. This was verified by two heads of schools who used meetings to remind staff about appropriate boundaries.

H>1/1U> "When I was inexperienced, and other new staff want to use their therapy skills a little more. At staff meetings, maybe twice a year, I remind staff that they are not here to treat the student, we are teachers not therapists. If deeper, personal issues are brought to their personal tutor they should be referred on. New staff with psychiatry experience seem to experience the most conflict with this."

This strategy is recommended by Ford & Jones (1987)

"The supervisor should avoid the temptation to 'casework' the student ... by offering a therapeutic or counselling relationship, even if this is needed ... listen, relate to circumstances of patients, encourage to seek therapeutic help, and if it is interfering, insist the student takes time out."

Three lecturers' acknowledged this temptation, the importance of experience and ways psychological boundaries were maintained.

L>6/1U<M "there is the temptation to treat them, this is awful and we should not do it. We deal with it as a joke and pull them up when they do it. It is easy to slip into. This has changed with experience, the longer I have been out of the clinical field."

The transition period for newly appointed lecturers was noted as the time for most conflict by three, although a fourth added a personal proviso linked to the process of professional socialisation (Wallis & Hutchings, 1990).

L>9/3U> "It is very difficult not to be therapeutic. Being a teacher and therapist are not poles apart. I take a Rogerian stance - learning must be meaningful, there are gains in confidence as the person learns and becomes. Learning becomes part of you as a person, embracing and why therapists are certain beings, because their training inculcates values and attitudes. Therefore conflict is inevitable, it is

still as intense as when I started in education but I have learnt to deal with it; through being more aware, so my involvement is intellectualised. I feel and stand back and give an academic argument to support my feelings."

Two different areas of clinical experience - learning difficulties and adolescent psychiatry were noted as increasing vulnerability to this conflict, but for different reasons.

L>6/1U<M "I worked with people with learning difficulties where I had been in a 'mother' role. When I started lecturing I continued this role. I wasn't warned or informed about this."

L>5/3U<M "As a therapist I worked with adolescents in a client-centred way and I do the same as a lecturer. The values about the quality of the relationship, respect and responsibility are compatible. I am careful about objectivity. If I am tempted to take a student on as a therapist I know this isn't appropriate and I have not got the time. I had to 'harden up'."

This compatibility and complementarity was noted by three other lecturers who believed in modelling client-centred care as part of the educational process.

L<7/2U< "Feelings are part of education. There is conflict in School about this. Some say vehemently that we are not here to be therapists to students. My retort would be that we can't train students to work with others without encouraging some degree of insight into why they have entered a caring profession and who they are. I believe in 'the wounded helper'. We need to recognise that we are as vulnerable as our clients, to be able to identify our own needs and limits and to be able to say 'no', that feelings of distress, anxiety and failure are all normal."

Although the boundaries between therapy and education may be blurred or confused on occasions (Howard 1979), a clear distinction is given by Towle (1954). This will be given in full because it also contains references to ethical behaviour, a fundamental component of competence.

"Professional education can be a means of growth, this has disposed some educators to regard education as therapy. Social work education has established that teachers cannot be both professional mentor and psychotherapist ... education is not the equivalent of therapy, either in methods or goals ... education is neither primarily intellectual nor chiefly a process by which the emotions are matured. It is a process which aims to integrate the emotions and the intellect for professional use ... must also impart and instill moral and ethical values. These are taught explicitly ... and through a relationship which conveys understanding, respect and judgements which hold the learner accountable to realistic demands and to the ethical demands of the profession."

A final quotation reflects the function and value of a long term perspective as a mediating factor for assessors.

L>7/3U> "Because we are professional we have to fail, although it is difficult. We wouldn't want to fail a patient or allow them to fail whereas we should positively fail a student. It is my belief that we must fail. I am stronger from the experience of visiting departments which I was embarrassed by. Earlier I didn't realise the implications of not failing."

8.23.3 Fieldwork organisers

There was a split with three agreeing and three disagreeing about a conflict of values and roles. Overall, their responses were more abbreviated. Perhaps their role, as an independent arbitrator bridging the gap and tensions between each setting, creates less opportunity or need for role conflict.

For those who acknowledged a conflict, it was an occasional occurrence, happening in both the academic and fieldwork setting. The examples related to their dual responsibilities, for example

C>5/2U> "when there seems to be too much personal involvement or value judgements being made within the staff team, I will reflect upon the group dynamics."

One associated failure in education with failure to cure.

C>8/3U< "When failure happens, with students or patients it is difficult because I take it personally. It seems to be linked with the medical model. We are not trained to deal with failure or the incurable. Hope is maintained until the last day by the student and supervisor as if they are looking for some magical cure."

The three organisers who denied any conflict did so because of their strategy for dismissing or dealing with the problems. This included "making an executive decision" by withdrawing a student who was having personal problems. She observed

C>9/2U>M "supervisors will soldier on, when their priority is the department and patients, not persevering with the student."

Finally, one experienced the roles as distinct from the beginning, but admitted a greater conflict between "educator and mother roles."

8.23.4 Fieldwork supervisors

This group were also split in their response with two misunderstanding the question, two agreeing and one denying any conflict. The two who misunderstood the question focused upon the student's performance and their supervisory role, rather than conflicts. Those supervisors who acknowledged a conflict did so for two reasons associated with values and practice.

S>8/5U<I "As a therapist I try to bring out the best qualities and overlook the weaker points. I tend to do this as a supervisor too, so there is a big conflict. I like to think we are bringing their best qualities to the fore."

The second supervisor acknowledged a greater conflict

S>8/4U<I "if I am working in psychotherapy with emotions."

In contrast the final supervisor was surprised by the question and resolute in her reply.

S>8/6U<M "No, I do not think of a student in that role. I've never thought of that possibility before. We are not here to be therapists to students. They should seek help from elsewhere. I have a very different role with students."

8.23.5 Conclusion to conflicts

This examination of perceived conflicts between the roles and values of an educator and therapist has revealed a majority (18 from 30) experienced a range of difficulties. Influential factors were role transition and clinical experience. The apparent lack of preparation (commented upon by Turner 1991) for L>6/1U<M "different and difficult teaching skills" seem to hinder containment (Casement, 1985) and allow an inappropriate blurring of boundaries particularly

L>8/1U>M "in the early days. I was therapeutic, thinking of ways to improve the students' situation and forgetting their responsibilities. I was providing too many safety nets and doing too much for the student."

It is interesting to speculate whether this well intentioned, intuitive (and in other situations and relationships, appropriate) response to distress and self-disclosure (Yalom, 1985) particularly from a personal tutee, is an underlying factor which exacerbates an assessor's stress. Also, whether these conflicts are experienced by other 'caring' professions which espouse humanistic values as the foundation for practise.

8.24 FAILURE - ARE POSITIVE OUTCOMES POSSIBLE : Introduction

The penultimate question served three purposes. Firstly, as a source of negative evidence to challenge the hypotheses about the stress of assigning a fail grade. Secondly, to obtain positive evidence to contradict pervasive assumptions and finally, to conclude the interview on a positive note. These reasons reflect earlier results and my desire to ensure an appropriate closure for interviews possessing a counselling, rather than research emphasis. This statement gives due attention to my conflict as a researcher and therapist which was provoked by the depth of the informants' disclosures.

Failure seems to be a taboo subject, the word and deed are avoided because of its surround of negativity. The most negative association being failure on a prescribed task and failure as a person. However, positive outcomes were revealed in the first study when, in response to an indirect question ten of the eleven interviewees were able to identify a positive outcome, both for the student and themselves. This question was designed to follow-up this result by investigating the range of positive outcomes, to provide reassurance and evidence to contradict the pervasive negative assumptions.

The results reveal a spread of positive outcomes for the student, School, self (the informant), staff (academic and fieldwork) and the profession, with considerable agreement between the four staff groups. The following table summarises

these similarities and differences, with the reasons presented in the following sections.

Table 40 Frequency of positive outcomes for the student, School, self (informant), staff (academic and fieldwork) and the profession identified by each staff group.

	Student	School	Self	Staff	Profession
Heads of Schools	8	5	3	1	-
Lecturers	6	6	5	-	1
Fieldwork organisers	6	-	2	2	1
Fieldwork supervisors	2	-	6	-	1
TOTAL	22	11	16	3	3

Lecturers and supervisors, the staff with direct involvement in the decision making process were able to identify personal positive outcomes from making, rather than evading the judgement. This supports the earlier responses which revealed retrospective regret and guilt, arising from "allowing a student to just pass." The greater awareness of academic staff to positive student outcomes in comparison with supervisors, may be related to their greater experience and from the student's follow-up contact with the School. The differences between academic staff, with fieldwork organiser's omitting positive outcomes for the School, may be linked to their role in promoting understanding of academic and professional standards in the both settings. A final comment is one of surprise about the paucity of positive outcomes for the profession. It is the one which is most

prominent in the literature (Brandon & Davies 1979, Morrell 1980, Moeller 1984, Bradley 1990, Low 1992), because

"the priority of an assessment report is neither to protect the welfare of the student, nor the image of the teacher, but for the future recipients of the service" (Ford & Jones, 1987).

This seemingly implicit construct, linked to licensure and protection of the public, is a more effective coping mechanism if it is explicit.

8.24.1 Positive outcomes for the student

A majority of informants (n=22) identified positive outcomes for the student. The reasons were clustered into three themes. Firstly, extra time for consolidation of learning, satisfaction with career change and finally, relief at the end of stress and struggle. These illustrate a mixture of immediate, short term and long term benefits. However, it is important to acknowledge these themes reflect the perceptions of those who assign, rather than receive the fail grade. This limitation is inherent in a unidimensional approach to a multidimensional event, where the perceptions of all participants are equally pertinent.

The most frequently mentioned positive outcome was extra time for consolidation of personal, academic and professional learning. Variations on this theme were noted by fourteen informants and included

H>2/1U>M "Suddenly seeing a student growing. I think this is related to how and what I feedback which had an impact upon the way the student accepted the failure. This is very rewarding."

The stimulus to extra effort

L>6/1U<M "Pulled themselves up, evaluated their commitment and turned round, so they worked harder as individuals and the group."

Four fieldwork organisers highlighted the value of extra time for improving competency.

C>12/1U> "It is amazing how they mature and overtake their peers who have passed first time. They become more confident and competent. It is lovely when they come back and say 'I needed to fail' because it helped me confirm my commitment to occupational therapy. In my experience, these students make better therapists and supervisors in comparison with those for whom everything is a doddle."

This long term benefit for service users was reiterated by a supervisor.

S>8/6U<M "There have got to be positives for the student. She had extra time and another placement. She hopefully learnt and would be a safer therapist and therefore this is positive for clients. We said this at the time but I don't think she heard it."

Failure, as a stimulus for a more satisfying career change was viewed as a positive outcome by eight informants. For example,

H>1/1U> "To see an individual in and loving a new career. Some keep in touch, writing for references and saying they are really happy."

This longer term insight, which was noted by three heads of schools, may be an advantage of their role.

H>4/1U> "A surprising number of students come back and say 'I am happy'. We get hugs, cards with an up-date on their lives, from 50% within a year.

The obvious question is of course, what happens to the other 50% who do not initiate contact?

The final theme, mentioned by five informants was linked to relief. A fail grade representing the end to stressful

struggling to succeed or fulfil parental, rather than a personal career goal. The immediate physical expression of this relief was vividly described by a fieldwork organiser.

C>8/3U< "It was her resit placement. She was anxious, fearful and silent. She had been really hard work, we tried everything. The supervisors had no option but to fail her. Within thirty minutes she had changed. It was as though a huge weight had been lifted from her shoulders. Her father thought occupational therapy would be a nice career for her. Six months later she wrote to thank us, saying she was much happier."

Contrary to expectations, some students want to receive a fail grade. Similar examples were provided by four others,

L>8/2U<M "The student manipulated the circumstances so she would be failed."

C>5/2U> "The fail empowered her to do what she wanted to do rather than what her parents wanted for her. This led to a career change and greater satisfaction."

Such cases illustrate the diversity of personal meanings and family motivational factors which may complicate a fail scenario.

"the variety of reactions to 'failure' ... (which) suggest this emotive label with its emphasis on the institutional interpretation of a student's performance cannot justly be attached to a number of these students" (Wilson, 1972).

This would suggest the importance of gaining an understanding of a student's perspective, not just their self-evaluation but also the connotative meaning, the broader implications of the symbol 'fail grade', with its emotional tone and social value (Pollio et al, 1989).

8.24.2 Positive outcomes for self

Personal, positive outcomes were identified by 16 of the 30 informants. They were stated most frequently by those with

direct responsibility, lecturers and fieldwork supervisors, and related to both the process and outcome. This quotation captures the diversity of reasons and sense of satisfaction.

L>8/1U>M "There is excitement when they pass the retake assessment. You have contributed to their developing more skills, being better prepared; you have seen them develop and progress. Also, when the moderators confirm the marks and that the system has been fair - this is important for my personal integrity."

Another important outcome, identified by a lecturer and four supervisors, was recognition of their strength and courage which would fortify them in the future.

L>6/1U<M "The experience with a finalist student has made me strong, to weed out others earlier. I know that I am able to fail and handle the pressure."

S>8/4U<I "I don't think I will go through the same agonising next time. I will be clearer from the outset if there is a problem. I now have the confidence to say there is a problem. I have been through and survived it."

A fail stimulated three supervisors to reappraise their role.

S>8/5U<I "I reassessed myself as a supervisor. I blamed myself so I reviewed how I and the placement could be improved for future students. It is part of life's experiences so it must do you good in the end."

S>8/7U<I "It made us step back, we are more aware of the possibility of failure. We are now monitoring students in a more rounded way. We have more confidence because even though it was unpleasant, we did it."

Adopting the role of reflective practitioner and survivor seemed to stimulate a sense of control and confidence (a positive outcome for the supervisor and future students) particularly as the experience had reinforced effective supervisory strategies, in a similar way to attending a failure workshop.

Two lecturers and fieldwork organisers expressed satisfaction

with their self-awareness and skills when dealing with a fail scenario. For example,

L<7/2U< "On the whole I am reasonably pleased with how I handle it with my colleagues and support the student. Also, with the insight into my motivation and prejudices."

C>9/2U>M "Failure is such a live issue, a forum for change and it is very powerful for the good of all. It provides an opportunity to use all my professional skills."

8.24.3 Positive outcomes for the School

A range of benefits were identified by 5 heads of schools and 6 lecturers. These were clustered around four themes which were enhancing the integrity of the School, the removal of destructive elements, increasing effort within the cohort and staff team and finally, stimulating changes in the curriculum. The most positive outcome, identified by six informants was the enhancement of the credibility of the School through the demonstrable concern with upholding standards. This was perceived to be valuable for students, staff, supervisors and the 'outside world'. For example,

H>9/1U>M "Students know that we take the criteria seriously."

L>6/2U<M "It may be stressful but it was good for students and staff. Everyone is working better, there is more stimulation because there isn't any complacency."

L>7/5U> "It strengthened the credibility of the School with supervisors. It indicates that the School is not frightened to face up to failure."

H>11/1U> "The occasional failure is not a bad thing. It is the concept of the bottom line, a level of competence and a failure says this to the outside world. I would be anxious about a course which didn't fail students. It reinforces the courses' credibility as a validated programme."

One course leader described a review of the reasons for a fail which had resulted in changes to the content and sequence of the curriculum and to teaching and assessment methods. All considerable changes for the School.

The relief experienced following the termination of

H>3/1U>M "a destructive element ... a generally tiresome student ... or one who has been a thorn in the flesh"

crosses the categories for School and staff (academic and fieldwork). These subjective elements, often seem to be denied (as inappropriate for the role set) but the language used in this (and other quotations) reflect a strength of feeling and relief. Two fieldwork organisers identified benefits for fieldwork supervisors, as staff

C>8/3U< "Supervisors are more willing to be honest and objective, not letting a student pass just because s/he is nice."

C>4/3U>M "There are lots of positives for supervisors. They know that they can survive a fail, they have learnt to differentiate between competence and incompetence, to be more critical."

These observed positive outcomes, are similar to those reported by the supervisors.

8.24.4 Positive outcomes for occupational therapy

The final category is more general and enduring. Although mentioned by only three of thirty informants, this is the most important reason for assigning a fail grade. The rationale of assessment is related to registration to practise, which protects the public by ensuring they are treated by a practitioner with at

least minimum competency (Low, 1992).

C>12/1U> "As a profession we do not fail people lightly. We try hard to help the student find their OT niche but we have to accept that this is sometimes not an option. The benefits are not to be lumbered with unsuitable staff."

8.24.5 Only negative outcomes

All these examples would seem to suggest an equilibrium between positive and negative aspects of failure is possible. However, it is important to acknowledge that there was one lecturer who was unable to identify any positive outcomes. Her response will be recorded in full in the final paragraph to give balance and because it encapsulates some fundamental (if presented in a catastrophic way) dilemmas associated with assigning a fail grade.

L>9/3U> "How do you measure positively? It is never for the student, although it may be in retrospect for example, being able to take time out or they realise they have made the wrong career choice, but there are no immediate positive outcomes. What about those students who still want to be occupational therapists? There are not any benefits with funding. The higher education establishment may view the school as a failure. I can only think of one positive - there is less marking - but this is flippant. The numbers are small anyway so it doesn't make a significant impact on workload. If a batch left then there wouldn't be a job next year because there would not be sufficient income to run the School. Also, the question of whether you have failed as a teacher or as a School is just as valid. In the future this could lead to the sack. This sounds dreadful."

8.24.6 Conclusion to positive outcomes

When asked directly 29 of 30 informants were able to identify positive outcomes for the student (n=22), themselves (n=16), the School (n=11), academic or fieldwork staff (n=3) and the profession (n=3). This contradicts the prevalent negative assumptions about failure. Although some positive outcomes were immediate and obvious for example,

L>8/1U>M "It was as if a great burden had been lifted from the student's shoulders. She wanted to leave but felt she was letting people down. She had been living a lie, keeping up a front. When she failed it was a tremendous relief. She needed the decision to be made for her."

The majority became clearer when viewed from a longer time perspective. This reinforces the coping strategy of placing a fail within a temporal and professional perspective. The latter, although probably implicit, may be more effective as an explicit statement. The fair, accurate assessment of competence to practise is essential for the integrity of the practitioner and profession. The clients may be "vulnerable people in an area of vital need" (Duffy, 1987) who have implicit trust in the judgement and action of the professional. Everyone concerned with education, whether purchaser, provider or consumer must fulfil their responsibilities. The potentially negative long term outcomes of dangerous practice and costly litigation should outweigh the immediate trauma, which is, as noted by several informants, survivable.

9. CONCLUSION

This study has given priority and value to the assessors' perspective during the process of assigning a fail grade. Failure seems to be a taken-for-granted and taboo aspect of this role for both academic and fieldwork staff. It proved to be a multi-dimensional subject which evoked a range of positive and negative reactions amongst those with the responsibility for differentiating between competence and incompetence. The detailed, descriptive analysis of their understanding provided a rich text, the interpretation revealing some expected and unexpected themes. These will be summarised here, using the hypotheses as a structure for the diverse results. This will be preceded by a critique of the methodology to allow the reader to judge the trustworthiness of both the results and ensuing recommendations.

Hermeneutics underpinned the whole study for the intention was to both make sense of an individual's experience and give reference to the collective experience. This encompassed self understanding, explanations and multiple interpretations of a complex reality, through a parallel process of being close, yet distant from the text, along

"a unique hermeneutical arc and to integrate the opposed attitudes of explanation and understanding within an overall conception of reading as the recovery of meaning" (Ricoeur, 1981).

The meaning of assigning a fail grade was sought through a principal and two supplementary methods. The most substantial

source were focused interviews with 30 academic and fieldwork staff reflecting different roles, responsibilities and relationships with occupational therapy students. This method was preceded by two questionnaire surveys the results of which contributed to the focus for the interviews. The results of the first survey indicated 64% (n=72) of trained, experienced fieldwork supervisors ranked 'failing a student' as their first or second most problematical responsibility. The second survey comprised the immediate and follow up evaluations of five 'failure workshops' attended by 101 supervisors. These supported the value of confronting and challenging assumptions to increase both confidence and skills in dealing with a student not achieving the required standard of competency. Other sources included an eclectic literature review and anecdotal comparison with other 'caring professions'.

All data, from a single metaphor to the whole text contributed to the totality which

"requires an art of deciphering which tends to unfold the several layers of meaning" (Ricoeur, 1981).

The reciprocal relationship between construing the details and the whole is a process of judgement, particularly about what is important or unimportant. These judgements will be made explicit to highlight the limitations of the research design and methodology.

9.1 Limitations of the study

Firstly, it is necessary to place this study within the context

of the paucity of research from an assessor's perspective. It should be considered as a preliminary, profession specific study which deserves verification and further investigation from other viewpoints, whether professions or methods. This study has only partly fulfilled other researchers' recommendations. For example, Alsop (1991) noted the need to define 'difficult students' and a criterion for failure, to examine the risk factors for supervisors and identify counteracting strategies because

"some supervisors may be awarding some students a 'pass' grade for clinical education, when these students ought to be failed."

This complements Green's (1991) recommendation that attention should be given to the degree of guidance and support given during the process of assessment, especially with fails. In contrast, Symanski (1991) states

"There is a need for research that documents the effects encounters with failing students has on the morale of faculty members and turnover, as well as the effect on groups of students."

A limitation has been a uni-dimensional focus upon a complex, emotive scenario which has multiple, shifting meanings for the different participants. The most obvious omission is the student's perspective. Their reaction, either of individuals or the cohort, has been reported but not explored. However, their immediate perceptions and delayed reactions to a fail grade, to assessor and institutional strategies to minimise trauma, with their appraisals of competency and positive outcomes, are all equally pertinent. The second omission relates to the

purchasers of education at a local, regional or national level. The societal context with the purchasers' priority with value for money and outputs as a performance indicator have been recognised, primarily as a threat

"in the full consciousness of the urgent need to ensure that in the current utilitarian climate there is no diminution of professional education (which equips students to become professional (and reflective) practitioners in a range of professional contexts), in favour of on-the-job training (which offers a reductionist approach by dealing with basic skills, basic competence and providing a survival kit for the present working context only)" (Fish et al, 1989).

This may reflect my concern with professional protectionism and survival. This bias providing the reason for stressing the importance of a professional consensus about a minimum level of competence, to protect the public from intentional or unintentional abuses committed by incompetent practitioners. The final omission is the institutional perspective for assumptions were made about structures and rituals which seemed designed to minimise the losses inherent in endings.

The incremental research design, with progressive focusing upon specific facets of failure, seems to have contributed to the coherence and convergence of findings from all methods and sources. Ricoeur (1981) suggests

"if validation proceeds in a cumulative fashion through the mutual reinforcement of criteria which taken in isolation would not be decisive, but whose convergence makes them plausible and, in the best cases, probable and even convincing."

While recognising the weaknesses of parts, I believe it is the whole which gives the study strength. At one stage I was concerned because the results seemed truistic, but this

obviousness adds to their credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). It is the sum of these parts which is new, illuminating a taken-for-granted aspect of an assessor's role which will hopefully help reduce the incidence of failure to fail. However, this belief may reflect a self-fulfilling prophecy, with the ends proving and justifying the means! The depth of detail and reflexive analysis (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989) are presented to enable the reader to challenge my interpretations, to parallel the process of peer examination and audit.

The deficiencies in the detail of each method were acknowledged at the appropriate places in the dissertation. These related primarily to the lack of piloting or checks on reliability and validity during the development of the questionnaires. Self completion questionnaires, particularly those completed one year after attending a failure workshop, are subject to the vagaries of memory and socially desirable responses. These limitations also applied to the focused interviews which were dynamic, social encounters with peer and elite colleagues. Although the structure encouraged specificity, range and depth about particular fail scenarios, it is perhaps unwise to "trust inter-temporal comparisons" because of the tendency to remould the past to fit the present (Powell, 1993). The differences in the form and context of each method invites multiple readings or interpretations (Ricoeur, 1981). Also, the responses given during the interviews and written on the questionnaires may reflect spontaneity or a socially desirable reaction, rather than their importance. However, the convergence of the results would

seem to support their salience and plausibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

An important limitation of each method was the size and nature of the self-selected sample, with the lack of biographical details either within the study or at a national level. Therefore only conjectures may be made about their representativeness and also the applicability of the findings. The focused interviews were conducted with 25 academic and 5 fieldwork staff, with such a small number in each role it would be inappropriate to give undue weight to differences, although it was possible to identify common themes and make comparisons between the four staff groups. The second weakness was the self-selected nature of two of the three samples. The 30 informants 'volunteered' to participate in a focused interview and the 101 supervisors paid to attend the failure workshops. Both samples were interested in the topic, wished to share their experiences and learn and, as such they may be an atypical group of occupational therapists. In contrast, the 113 fieldwork supervisors who completed the supervisory problems ranking questionnaire were an opportunity sample. They were the only sample to contain assessors who ranked other supervisory problems as more difficult than 'failing a student' and were therefore the only source of negative evidence.

These weaknesses in both strategy and detail need to be taken into consideration when reading the results. They also need to be placed within the framework of hermeneutics and my aim of pursuing a taboo subject in a sensitive, yet systematic manner.

Although a preliminary study, producing tentative results which require verification, they are still wide ranging. These are summarised to allow the reader to assess their "fittingness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) with their experience thus matching

"the key hypothesis of hermeneutic philosophy is that interpretation is an open process which no single vision can conclude" (Ricoeur, 1981).

9.2 Summary of results

The detailed and diverse findings are presented as statements under the guiding hypotheses. This is to provide a clear, integrative structure. The results are supported by the spontaneous, unsolicited statements given in response to the final 'any other comments' question of the focused interviews. All, except one lecturer used the opportunity to reinforce points related to their subjective experiences and learning (n=16), the effect upon students (n=12), the evasion or confrontation of the topic of failure (n=12) and the wider, professional or societal implications (n=6).

9.2.1 The first hypothesis stated

"Academic staff and fieldwork supervisors perceive the assignment of a fail grade as their most onerous responsibility."

This produced divergent results from different slices of the data. Although it was supported in the literature review and supervisory problem ranking questionnaire, the focused interviews provided other more onerous responsibilities, suggesting

individual and institutional factors which seemed to exacerbate or minimise the trauma.

1. All sources confirmed assigning a fail grade was an occupational stressor for both academic and fieldwork staff.

C>4/3U>M "It feels like going to the dentist when you are going out to a failing student. I worry, think about it."

2. Two thirds of an opportunity sample of 113 trained and experienced fieldwork supervisors ranked 'failing a student' as their first (45% n=51) or second (18% n=21) most problematical responsibility.

3. The majority of informants (n=15) disagreed with this statement citing a range of more stressful responsibilities related to lack of control or accountability.

4. Staff with direct responsibility for the decision making - lecturers and supervisors - seemed to experience the most stress.

S>8/5U<I "I never thought it would have such a dramatic effect upon so many people."

5. Academic staff perceptions of difficulty were influenced by whether it was a first or second fail, which resulted in termination of training. The 'learning value' from extra time and practice gained from a retrieval assessment or placement were also recognised. In contrast, supervisors emphasized the trauma, irrespective of the consequences.

6. Inexperienced staff seemed to feel the most distress.

Inexperience comprised newly qualified staff who were more likely to identify with the student. New academic staff or supervisors also lack a reservoir of experience for comparison, particularly about unlikely student reactions, a baseline of competence and strategies for 'surviving'. Supervisors had limited educational experience, a smaller number of students and lesser familiarity with examination procedures. Actual or vicarious experience, obtained through sharing and reflection seemed to give confidence, especially about establishing appropriate boundaries.

S>8/5U<I "It was worse because I kept putting myself in the student's position, this made it more heart rendering. I think I suffered more because of this identification."

H>9/1U>M "It is distressing, uncomfortable to do. I had a baptism of fire so I am not afraid of it now."

S>8/4U<I "It was a really useful learning experience and I won't be afraid of failure in the future."

L>6/1U<M "I feel more confident about failing students with experience."

7. Some student factors seemed to increase the distress. For example, a final year fail was the most traumatic, creating individual and collective blame. A personal student who is well known and liked, or a hard working, motivated student who expends much effort but lacks the ability, or a mature student (particularly if sponsored by an employer on a part-time course) who has made considerable sacrifices to pursue a second chance. A male student because of the loss to a female dominated profession. Finally, a student who is really committed to occupational therapy and cannot accept

alternative career options.

8. Institutional factors also seemed to support or undermine assessors. The system of impartial, independent and objective colleagues (external examiners or fieldwork organisers) who confirm the fairness of the process and the appropriateness of the outcome, was valued. This formal system was complemented by informal peer support and verification of judgements in both academic and fieldwork settings. Other institutional factors seemed to sabotage, for example, the small size of schools where students were well known, leading to like or dislike, or informal assessments of professional suitability. The results of retrieval assessments given on placements, with avoidance rituals like 'pass lists' and timing of retrieval processes reducing opportunities for closure of relationships.
9. The distress extended to others in the immediate environment and endures. This included a demoralising effect upon the occupational therapy team, the threat to respect and relationships with multi-disciplinary colleagues. The anger, disappointment and sadness of other students on placement and the cohort about the loss of a peer, enhancing fears of failure. The strength of parental reaction, particularly angry fathers or partners, seems to both surprise and exacerbate the immediate stress. Both lecturers and supervisors were sensitive to the enduring effects arising from critical reminders from colleagues or

students and, expressed in a supervisors' reluctance to accept another student until they had had a period of recuperation.

10. Assigning a fail grade is difficult but when compared with 'allowing a student to just pass' the majority of informants (n=13) agreed this was worse. Only three disagreed, including two supervisors' who acknowledged it was easier to give a pass grade.

9.2.2 The second hypothesis stated

A range of academic and fieldwork staff may be involved in a fail scenario. These include the course leader, fieldwork supervisor, fieldwork organiser and lecturer. Their different roles, responsibilities and relationship with the student will result in different objective and subjective experiences of failure.

This hypothesis was explored during the focused interviews. Although the number of informants from each staff group was limited, some interesting patterns emerged between the groups. An expected, obvious difference related to the assessment of academic ability and professional suitability. An unexpected commonality was the parallel, pastoral relationship between supervisor and student with personal tutor and personal tutee. Regardless of role and responsibility, several factors seemed to influence the relationship and the assessors' response. These included the circumstances and consequences of the fail grade, the effect of causal attributions especially the balance between effort and ability and, the degree of honesty in the relationship with the student. The following statements summarise the

differences between each staff group.

1. Heads of Schools were aware of and monitored all marginal students. They used formal and informal mechanisms for informing the student of the outcome in a way which balanced their management, educational and pastoral roles, expressing a concern to ensure a 'positive' ending. This power and responsibility was recognised by academic staff but omitted by supervisors. Despite their extensive experience, six reported a conflict between educator and therapist roles and values. They described a more distant, overseeing involvement, concentrating upon verifying the fairness of the process and agreement with the result, ensuring compliance with examination and appeals procedures, supporting staff, liaising with external bodies, establishing an autonomous or delegatory relationship with external examiners and dealing with parental or institutional reactions. Representatives from this group discussed the repercussions of failure, particularly the loss of income and potential damage to reputation if they were used as a performance indicator. Nevertheless, their priority was maintaining professional standards. This seemed to be simultaneously a source of stress and support: stress if the judgement was not endorsed by the staff team and support from the long term, professional perspective which placed the immediate trauma in proportion.

H>1/1U< "You shouldn't ever underestimate the degree of hurt at the time for the student. This is why I am nice to them and don't get angry. There is no

simple, exclusive reason for failure. From my contact with other educators from other courses, I believe OTs handle failure better. Most of the others don't have any contact at all with the students who fail."

H>7/1U>M "Failure seems disastrous for everybody, but in the long term it can be positive for individual development. The failure changes hue with time. I don't think any learning is wasted. If they leave the course they take skills and attitudes which have a broader application, this can only be positive."

H>9/1U>M "It is my job now. Because it is the end of their career I feel sympathy - empathy, but this is the last resort and everything else will have been explored first."

H>4/1U> "In the past we have taken risks with non-traditional students, but with Working Paper 10 this will be discouraged because we will be judged on how many we get through."

H>5/1U>M "How to make something which seems so negative, into a positive outcome by helping the individual to look for something else, because the student needs to go forward."

2. The fieldwork organisers had a similar, overseeing role which involved acting as an impartial catalyst to maintain communication between supervisor, student and school, confirming the quality of the decision making, providing support, reassurance and advice to both supervisor and student and, monitoring fieldwork results. This group had the most experience of fieldwork fails and were likely to be the first to use the word. They were especially sensitive to the problems of assessment but seemed to overestimate their power (rather than influence), to alter a supervisors' judgement, expressing frustration with avoidance of failure. They adopted a positive attitude highlighting the value of

extra time to integrate skills, resulting in a more competent therapist with careful planning for the retrieval placement. Representatives from this group were the only ones to identify their need for support from the head of school.

C>12/1U> "It is never easy from whatever perspective because of the consequences of the decision. Every situation is individual, there shouldn't be a prescription only trends, not a recipe for dealing with failure."

C>5/2U> "I feel a failure, I've let them down by admitting them. It makes you question yourself and your judgement. No one likes to fail, it is an unpleasant experience. The criteria isn't watertight. Some play a game, they want to fail. I am always learning about failure."

3. In contrast the supervisors had the least experience and this was limited to the fieldwork setting. This, together with the difficulty of assessing competence, giving negative formative and summative feedback and, balancing the responsibilities of supervisor with clinician, all added to their stress. It was a costly experience, effecting the department, team, their personal life and reducing their confidence as a supervisor. They lacked experience or knowledge of the institutional support systems including external examiners, appeal criteria and monitoring mechanisms. They emphasized the importance of immediate, accessible support provided by fieldwork organisers, colleagues and managers. This served the dual function of confirming their judgement and giving emotional support. Interestingly, this distress was balanced by a pragmatic

approach to a final year fail and positive personal outcomes from fulfilling their professional obligation.

S>6/3U<M "It is important to be open and for others to learn from experience. I didn't want to do it but it was a professional responsibility and it is alright to fail a student if they are unsuitable."

S>8/6U<M "The value of liaison between the school and supervisor because she tried to drive a wedge between us. Failure is like a loss, so I was aware of the feelings that it would evoke."

S>8/4U<I "It is important for the professions' good name, to improve our image. We have got to be more 'cut and thrust' about it."

4. The lecturers were the second staff group with the most direct involvement in the decision making process, even though institutional systems seemed to distance and diffuse this responsibility. However, these mechanisms did not counter the distress related to the conflict between educator and therapist roles, the trauma associated with a personal tutee fail, coping with the anger of the cohort, containing 'secret' results, the subjectivity of assessment and criticisms stemming from a causal theory of teaching. They were also aware of their role in maintaining professional standards, balancing internal and external pressures.

L>6/2U<M "Pressure comes from unexpected places, money will be calculated on output, not input in the future. This will be horrific for the manager who will be expected to set standards and control the budget. You have to have you own standards, which I trust. I can offer help to the students but at the end of the day it is up to them to accept it."

L>5/3U<M "Really, my own feelings are more important than practicalities and procedures. The feelings students and staff are left with eg low self

esteem. Grading for assessments is difficult, these judgements cause high anxiety."

L>7/3U> "There have been occasions when students have got through because they are academically sound and the criteria for professional unsuitability is less tangible."

Regardless of the assessor's role, responsibility and relationship with the student, the common features of this occupational stressor, whether in the fieldwork or academic setting, were striking. The results presented under the next hypothesis consider another, deeper layer of meaning which may help to understand and explain these patterns.

9.2.3 The third hypothesis stated

The stress of making the judgement that an occupational therapy student has not achieved the required standard of academic or professional competence is exacerbated by the avoidance of the subject of failure within professional and educational milieux.

There was a convergence between all sources of data that failure, as a word and deed, is avoided by both individuals and institutions. Although this denial would seem to add to the dread, fear and negative stereotypes, all aspects revealed other factors which also exacerbate the stress. This hypothesis will be used to summarise these underlying themes.

1. Although the word usually appears in course documentation, discussions tended to be reactive, in response to student or task specific situations, especially a fieldwork fail. These were protracted occurring at informal meetings and examination boards when the outcome would be ratified.

H>11/1U>M "I wonder if it is like a stone that you should put down quickly because of all the worms underneath. We need more overt discussion within the profession. We don't wish to communicate our failures or explore the topic. I think we should be more open about it in general, it is important to talk about it, particularly appeals. It seems implicit that it is not nice to talk about these, like the smelly bits of the body. It is logical, failure is built into a course as death is built into life, and we don't wish to talk about that either. It has been therapeutic to talk about it."

2. Incidences of the failure to fail were reported in the literature, by informants (n=17) and supervisors (25% n=70) attending failure workshops. Specific examples of 'giving the student the benefit of the doubt' caused considerable frustration, particularly for fieldwork organisers. A combination of internal and external reasons were given. These included difficulty obtaining evidence related to attitudes or attributes, an assessor's inexperience, the conflict in values between educator and therapist with the desire to reward effort and potential, the tension between practical ability and academic inability and finally, "pushing them through" to avoid a fail grade.
3. One of the fundamental pressures was the conflict in roles and values between educator and therapist. The establishment of appropriate boundaries seemed to a problematical part of the transition process for new academic staff. This conflict was multi-faceted incorporating a temptation to 'treat' students, the problems associated with making judgements, being judgemental and setting limits rather than

valuing potential and abilities, a desire to secure positive outcomes and, providing extraordinary assistance to ensure success including 'leading' the student to appeal. Some experienced staff had achieved a resolution through recognition of personal and professional needs while allowing a therapeutic use of self but within appropriate boundaries.

4. Another internal pressure was the feelings associated with the whole process of failure. A range of negative reactions were reported from all sources. These included sense of failure, guilt, blame, self-interrogation, doubt, fear of failure and anxiety associated with the unknown. This was exacerbated by the irrational belief that they were failing a person, rather than their failure to achieve the required standard on a set task. However, there seemed to be a common pattern of affective responses, which when shared, gave reassurance. This included anticipatory anxiety tinged with anger, distress, self-doubt, sadness or concern before the student was informed of the fail grade. There was a combination of relief and anxiety during the termination interview. This relief continued when the student had left, but was tinged with regret, guilt, assurance or pride depending upon the circumstances and consequences.

C>5/2U> "I feel emotionally drained - wrung out at the end of the week."

H<10/1U> "Failures are not something to be proud of. I feel a responsibility to get the students through

if they have been selected. You don't want it to happen because it is so distressing for all concerned."

5. These internal pressures were fuelled by subtle, but powerful, external pressures. The ramifications of a causal theory of teaching impinged upon individuals and institutions. This belief seemed to stimulate the extraordinary degree of assistance provided, the assessor's sense of failure engendering guilt and the fear that fails would damage the reputation of the individual, department or school. There was a growing concern about outputs, as a performance or quality indicator in contracts, which could influence both judgements and financial viability. A mediating factor for academic staff was the number of fails, with a few (1-3) being acceptable, reflecting a normal distribution, but more were subject to scrutiny and change.

H>4/1U> "With Working Paper 10 we will be penalised financially if we fail too many or if we don't attract enough students. But how can you predict this?"

6. Institutional practices and ethos were also influential. An historical ethos or present investment in students suggested fails were 'not allowed' and a supervisors' judgement would be challenged. Systems of ratification of results by anonymous examination boards, pass lists and the timing of retrieval assessments seemed to be designed to both depersonalise assessor and student and, distance them from the losses inherent in failure. These systems seemed to be ineffective for those with the direct responsibility

for decision making.

H>3/1U>M "Failure and success can't be denied, it will occur and how you use it is an interesting question. Institutions have pass lists, fails are excluded. This is a formalised ritual to avoid failure. They say it gives the student time to adjust when they can't find their name."

7. Assigning a fail grade was costly for all concerned, whether calculated in time, money or distress.

H>5/1U>M "How can you help fieldwork supervisors? These poor individuals have to do it on their own out there. It is so time consuming."

8. The paucity of discussion masked two important aspects. Firstly, the assessors' interest in, desire to learn and prepare for a fail scenario. Also, it denies the opportunity to challenge negative stereotypes or acknowledge the positive outcomes for students, the assessor, School and profession.

L>7/3U> "I think we should address the issue better - the time to do it is now."

There would appear to be a complex combination of internal and external factors which influence this occupational stressor, impacting upon the quality of decision making and the incidence of failure.

9.2.4 The fourth hypothesis stated

Training courses which are designed to confront the topic of failure, by providing an opportunity to reflect upon the personal and professional consequences of working with borderline or unsatisfactory students, will be appraised by the participants, as contributing toward an increase in confidence on immediate and follow-up course evaluations.

The results obtained from the immediate and follow-up evaluations from the five failure workshops held at Derby supported their value. They contained a contradictory recommendation: the topic be included in fieldwork supervisors' courses because it is relevant for all, not just those who choose to attend a specific workshop. The problems of transition experienced by occupational therapist entering education would suggest such preparation is also pertinent for them. The subject of failure, presented by and for academic and fieldwork assessors, has the potential to bridge the gap between these components of the curriculum by focusing upon the shared goal of 'fitness for purpose'.

1. On the immediate evaluation, a brief questionnaire completed by 101 supervisors, the parts and whole programme were positively rated. For example, 94% agreed that the workshop had met their needs, their expectations (96%) and achieved the objectives (91%).
2. Two follow-up, postal evaluations were used to assess the forward transfer of learning into their supervisory role. The response rates were 42% (n=26 for the four month and 60% (n=37) for the one year survey. Both affirmed their perceptions of value. There was an increase in experience of borderline students, from 1 at four months to 11 at one year, which may have reflected their confidence to confront failure at the half-way stage of a placement.
3. The results revealed three multi-faceted themes which permeated the reasons for attending the failure workshops,

the immediate and both follow-up evaluations. All combined personal and professional learning gained from reflection upon actual or vicarious experiences. The first theme was understanding affective responses which incorporated the feelings associated with the process, the spread of stress and sources of support for supervisors and students. Secondly, reinforcement of supervisory strategies particularly giving honest, regular and documented feedback, clarification of the differences between teaching and learning with a criterion for failure, understanding the complementarity of objective and subjective elements of assessment, increased knowledge of School examination rules and appeals procedures and, finally recognition of positive outcomes. The third theme related to the obligation to maintain future standards of practise and placing the immediate personal trauma within a longer term, professional perspective.

S>8/7U<I "The failure workshop and support from the fieldwork organiser exorcised the ghost of failure. The failure day would have been more useful before the fail, rather than three months afterwards. I think it should be included in fieldwork supervisors' courses so you are armed to meet the problems."

The success of these, and other failure workshops held in different parts of the United Kingdom and Sweden with multi-disciplinary colleagues, seem to be based upon simple formula. The opportunity to discuss a taken-for-granted and taboo aspect of an assessor's role increases awareness, acceptance and gives permission to take appropriate action.

9.2.5 The fifth and final hypothesis stated

An instrument which identifies a student's knowledge, skills and/or attitude as unsatisfactory will complement existing measures of 'competence to practise', and assist in the differentiation of pass, borderline and fail grades in the clinical situation.

Although this hypothesis was modified during the research process it was achieved in an indirect way. The aim of developing an instrument was abandoned for two reasons. Firstly, the review of the constituents of competence revealed it to be an ambiguous, relative and multidimensional construct which contributed to the difficulty of devising valid and reliable measures. Secondly, regardless of the problems (and limitations) of compiling lists of specific competencies, there was a surprising degree of consensus about the global, constituents of incompetence. This agreement was apparent in all the sources of data, and more interestingly, was shared with other 'caring' professions. The opportunity to consider, clarify and compare criteria seemed to be sufficient to help assessors differentiate between a pass, borderline and unsatisfactory performance. Discussion of this topic also highlighted assessment principles which should underpin decision making in both academic and fieldwork settings.

1. Incompetence comprised a diverse array of implicit and explicit assessment constructs. A criterion for failure illuminated the concept of competence.
2. The most frequently mentioned aspects related to general, personal and transferrable skills rather than profession

specific knowledge. Failure workshops participants identified unprofessional behaviour (24%) (unreliability, misconduct, inappropriate appearance and breaches of confidentiality), poor interpersonal, clinical and practical skills (13%), over or underconfidence leading to risk or ineffectiveness (9%), an inability or unwillingness to apply and integrate knowledge (8%) and, an inappropriate attitude to clients, colleagues and occupational therapy (7%). In contrast informants during the focused interviews identified the fieldwork objectives and report form, marking and answer guidelines and professional unsuitability. This included inability to learn and change, an unprofessional attitude, poor interpersonal skills, unsafe practices and unreliability.

3. The extra problems associated with fieldwork assessments were acknowledged by academic staff. These included the unpredictable clinical milieu with the potential risk to patients, the intimate, subjective supervisory relationship, the difficulty of giving negative formative and summative feedback 'face-to-face', with observation as the primary method for assessing the intangible concepts of professional competence and suitability.
4. An additional difficulty was differentiating between a borderline pass and a borderline fail. Factors which influenced this judgement were the student's potential to learn, to be 'a good occupational therapist' and the overall

percentage marks for the individual or cohort.

5. The use and misuse of implicit assessment constructs was concerning. This ranged from the infrequent, explicit use of safety to the frequent, implicit use of effort, interest or hard work. The temptation to reward effort, rather than ensuring a baseline of ability and penalise an able student expending minimal effort, was acknowledged by academic and fieldwork assessors.
6. A common implicit assessment construct which appeared in all sources took the form of two questions: 'Would I employ her?' and 'Would I want her to treat me or my family?' The answers to these questions, based upon positive evidence of competence or incompetence, would seem to contribute to the quality of fine judgements.

The five hypotheses provided a general framework for investigating the minutiae of a fail scenario. They gave a coherent structure for understanding, explaining and interpreting the multi-dimensional complexity of an assessor's perspective. Although each part has added new knowledge, it is the totality which is original, distinctive and gives the text durable relevance.

9.3 Recommendations

Throughout the research there has been an dual emphasis upon understanding and utility. It is therefore appropriate to

conclude with a set of recommendations. These are presented in sections mirroring those in the introduction, to link but not close, the circle.

9.3.1 Personal recommendations

The mission to confront failure will be continued by sharing the findings with uni and multi-disciplinary colleagues. In this way the themes of utility and positive outcomes are extended through action and role modelling the personal gains of exploring a fascinating topic.

Further research is required to challenge, verify and develop the findings of this preliminary study. Other approaches, methods and samples may reveal divergent or convergent themes. Other facets of failure, assessment and competence also deserve investigation. For example, the impact of individual differences particularly gender, age and ethnicity upon both the relationship and outcome. The establishment and maintenance of appropriate role boundaries whether educator, therapist, parental or sexual. Although the student perspective has been omitted certain facets have been suggested including the effect upon the cohort, the personal tutor-tutee relationship, awareness of the tension between educator and therapist roles or values, their perceptions and reactions to 'positive' endings and outcomes.

9.3.2 Professional recommendations

Competence has the potential to bridge the gap between the

practical and academic components of the curriculum. This could be pursued in several ways for example, research into future components and measures of competence to match the needs of changing health and social care systems. A concentration upon personal, general transferrable skills, professional and ethical behaviour would also have a multi-disciplinary relevance. The section on professional unsuitability in the COT Guidelines on Regulations for Occupational Therapy Pre-Registration Courses (1993) and contained in Appendix 9 could provide an appropriate foundation.

The inclusion of failure in joint, initial and ongoing training for academic and fieldwork assessors would affirm the concern for a minimum standard of competence. This could be extended to students to reinforce the rational, reality of failure as part of life and learning. A focus upon the causal attribution of strategies, rather than ability, effort or task difficulty would also complement the adaptation frame of reference (Fine, 1991).

Fails or the failure to fail are expensive for individuals, Schools and the profession. The Schools have a prime responsibility to ensure only explicit assessment constructs are used because

"students want to know what the teacher's expectations are, they want to feel they have been evaluated fairly with respect to these expectations, and they want a final grade to give an accurate and unbiased reflection of how well they have met the expectations" (Eble, 1976).

An explicit approach to other aspects may also make them less problematic. For example, the differentiation between teaching

and learning, the intrinsic subjectivity of small schools, an 'acceptable' number of passes and fails, the demystification of appeals with a strategy for supporting assessors and dealing with parental responses.

9.3.3 Societal recommendations

The concept of registration to safeguard the public from incompetent practitioners is pivotal. However, it is subject to challenge from a government (and society) which is seeking to impose the values of efficiency, enterprise and profit upon professional service, judgement and responsibility (Fish et al, 1989). A review of the concept of initial and ongoing competence or "fitness for purpose" (Yorkshire Health 1993) would be timely, particularly if it reflected recent national and international changes. For example, the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications, the assessment of fieldwork supervisors and the implementation of the European Community Directive on the Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Diplomas 89/48. Ethical behaviour is required from all workers in health and social care regardless of their educational 'level'. The latter two changes have the added difficulty of judging the competence of qualified staff. Adshead et al (1984) observed

"Failure in a professional examination has a substantial impact on an established doctor. Therefore, loss of self-esteem is added to any educational difficulties."

The second recommendation relates to the need for Schools and the professional bodies (College of Occupational Therapists and Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine) to monitor

the effect of the educational changes upon both attrition rates and outcomes. The economic and institutional pressures, arising from Working Paper 10 and degree courses respectively, must not be allowed to jeopardise the quality of the outcome - a safe, competent occupational therapist.

9.3.4 Recommendations for individual assessors

This research has highlighted the internal, personal and professional pressures which may sabotage the judgement that a student has not yet reached the required standard of competence. The emotionally debilitating effects of this new, unpredictable scenario, particularly for lecturers and supervisors should not be underestimated. The process of giving negative formative and summative feedback, which conflicts with fundamental values of enhancing or valuing individual ability, has an immediate and enduring effect upon an assessor's confidence. It is easy to understand why the word 'fail' and the act of assigning a fail grade with the related occupational stress, are avoided. However, preparation can reduce the fear; supervisory strategies and social support can ameliorate the process; and pride can accompany an appropriate outcome. These should be available to assessors to assist them confront the challenge, for assigning a fail grade really does represent a

"higher form of caring, responsibility and accountability to the student, the client and the profession" (Carpenito, 1983).

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COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS
Definition of categories for student losses

H	HEALTH	Withdrawal of student on medical grounds, either physical or psychiatric. Prolonged ill health which prevents the student from completing the course and/or performing duties as an occupational therapist.
A	ACADEMIC	Academically, student unable to cope with the course - demonstrates inability to learn by failure of internal or professional assessment.
C	CLINICAL	Student unsuited to clinical work - unable to function at expected level, shows difficulty with relationships, unreliability and/or insensitivity to patients. Unsuitability to profession becomes apparent during clinical practice.
W	WRONG CAREER CHOICE	Student decides (with or without staff encouragement) that occupational therapy is the wrong career choice, maybe from insufficient or misleading careers advice. Includes students deciding to change to another career and those who merely decide they are not suited to occupational therapy.
P	PERSONAL DOMESTIC	Pregnancy; home circumstances changing - death, divorce, moving; family problems - parents, spouses, children, boyfriends; cultural problems; unhappiness; homesickness of student not otherwise regarded as immature.
I	IMMATUR- ITY	General immaturity causing problems in coping with course on the whole. Usually reflected in one or more of the other categories. Student may be unable to cope with the amount of work on the course, gives up easily, may have loss of motivation and/or attendance. Homesickness due to immaturity and being away from home.
T	TRANS- FERRED	Student has transferred to another occupational therapy training school.
D	DEFERRED	Student had temporarily withdrawn from training but is expected to recommence in due course; student is repeating a year.
O	OTHER	Should be specified; includes death from whatever cause.

COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

ATTRITION RATES AND REASONS

Reasons for withdrawal during the first, second and third year
with the intakes for 1989/90, 1988/89 and 1987/8

YEAR ONE (1989/1990)

Type of course	Start	H	A	CW	WC	P	1	0	TOT	%
2yr Dip.	28	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	7.1
3yr Dip.	841	6	17	-	24	8	3	3	61	7.3
3yr Deg.	96	-	-	-	8	1	2	-	11	11.5
4yr Deg.	29	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	2	6.9
4yr PT Dip.	82	-	1	-	-	3	-	-	4	4.9
TOTAL	1076	7	20	-	32	13	5	3	80	7.4

YEAR TWO (1988/1989)

Type of course	Start	H	A	CW	WC	P	1	0	TOT	%
2yr Dip.	16	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	12.5
3yr Dip.	704	1	19	1	9	4	2	1	37	5.3
3yr Deg.	85	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	2	2.4
4yr Deg.	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.0
4yr PT Dip.	48	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	4	8.3
TOTAL	881	1	24	3	10	4	2	1	45	5.1

YEAR THREE (1987/1988)

Type of course	Start	H	A	CW	WC	P	1	0	TOT	%
2yr Dip.	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.0
3yr Dip.	666	2	6	2	3	1	-	1	15	2.3
3yr Deg.	65	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0.0
4yr Deg.	30	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3.3
4yr PT Dip.	69	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1.4
TOTAL	830	2	6	3	3	1	0	1	17	2.0

The COT categories for student losses are:

health (H)	academic (A)
clinical (C)	wrong career choice (W)
personal/domestic (P)	immaturity (I)
transferred (T)	deferred (D)
other (O)	

These categories are defined in appendix 1.

Dip.	-	Diploma
Deg.	-	Degree
Yr.	-	Year
PT	-	Part-time

DERBY SCHOOL OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Proficiency Profile

The student is UNABLE to:

The student is ABLE to:

1. Personal SkillsFAIL PASS CREDIT

Integrate and Co-operate _____

Integrate and Co-operate

Take Initiative _____

Take Initiative

Appear Professional _____

Appear Professional

Behave Professionally _____

Behave Professionally

React Suitably to Pressure* _____

React Suitably to Pressure*

Demonstrate Confidence _____

Demonstrate Confidence

2. Professional and Practical Skills

Apply Theoretical Knowledge _____

Apply Theoretical Knowledge

Demonstrate Practical Ability _____

Demonstate Practical Ability

Select and Analyse Treatment Media* _____

Select and Analyse Treatment Media*

Teach Effectively _____

Teach Effectively

Demonstrate Sensitivity to Patients/Clients Needs _____

Demonstrate Sensitivity to Patients/Clients Needs

Establish Rapport with Patients/Clients _____

Establish Rapport with Patients/Clients

Work with Individuals _____

Work with Individuals

Work with Groups _____

Work with Groups

Assess Patients/Clients _____

Assess Patients/Clients

Implement Treatment Programmes _____

Implement Treatment Programmes

3. Communication Skills

Report Verbally _____

Report Verbally

Report in Writing _____

Report in Writing

Contribute to Discussion _____

Contribute to Discussion

The student is UNABLE to:

The student is ABLE to:

4. Management Skills

FAIL PASS CREDIT

Demonstrate Management of
Self

Demonstrate Management of
Self

Organise Patient/Client
Programmes*

Organise Patient/Client
Programmes*

Demonstrate Management
Skills within Department

Demonstrate Management
Skills within Department

Demonstrate Sense of
Responsibility

Demonstrate Sense of
Responsibility

DERBY SCHOOL OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Proficiency Profile Guidelines for Clinical Supervisors

The points marked with an * are attributes to be included in an evaluation of a student on a final clinical placement in a speciality. They may be considered at the Clinical Supervisors discretion for a first placement where appropriate.

Section I

Personal Skills

Comments:

1. Ability to integrate and co-operate with:

Occupational Therapy Staff - Is the student:

- at ease with you?
- appropriately warm and friendly?
- able to accept your guidance and direction?
- able to express own ideas to you?
- able to respond to different personalities?

Patients/Clients - Does the student:

- initiate conversation with patients/clients?
- demonstrate a sensitive approach to them?
- maintain a friendly but objective attitude?
- work effectively with them?

Do:

- patients/clients accept the student? * Take direction from him/her?

Other Disciplines - Do the students:

- know their roles and skills?
- establish a friendly professional contact with them?

Is the student

- viewed positively by them?

Other Students

- understand their roles?
- establish and maintain a friendly relationship with them?

2. Initiative - Does the student:

- seek out information?
- become involved without prompting?
- assume responsibility for tasks within his/her

- capacity?
 - contribute his/her own ideas and act upon them when appropriate?
 - assume responsibility for learning?
 - notice what needs to be done?
 - cope with the unexpected?
3. Professional appearance - Is the student's:
- dress appropriate for the area of work?
 - grooming good?
 - expression alert and interested?
4. Professional behaviour - Does the student:
- have an understanding of himself/herself in relation to others?
 - act appropriately towards patients/clients and staff?
 - have a professional relationship with patients/clients and staff?
 - demonstrate professional ethics in confidentiality?
 - show thoughtfulness and consideration towards others?
 - choose the correct degree of involvement with patients/clients and staff?
 - show the ability to be objective in dealing with people?
5. Reaction to Pressure* - Is the student:
- * - mature in coping with his/her own emotions?
 - * - able to cope with demanding patients in stressful situations?
 - * - able to show the ability to see problems in perspective?
6. Student's confidence in himself/herself as a therapist - Does the student:
- approach others with ease?
 - express himself/herself with confidence?
 - accept his/her role as a therapist?
 - recognise himself/herself as a therapist?
 - demonstrate confidence by questioning when necessary?

Section II

Professional and Practical Skills

1. Use of theoretical knowledge - Is the student/s:
- knowledge of theory sound?
 - able to use it effectively in treatment?
 - making every effort to develop it?

2. Practical ability in using techniques - Is the student:
 - competent in the use of practical techniques or
 - able to learn and use new skills?
 - able to adapt known skills?
 - able to break down activities?
 - quick to understand the technical aspects of equipment?
 - methodical and clear in demonstration?

3. Ability to select and analyse treatment media* - Does the student:
 - * - obtain all necessary preliminary information?
 - * - select media appropriate to the needs of the patients/clients?
 - * - take into account the patients/clients abilities/limitations in the selection?

Can the student:

 - * - discuss and justify his/her choice?
 - * - evaluate his/her treatment?
 - * - modify his/her selection in the light of evaluation?

4. Ability to teach - Is the student:
 - clear and interesting in presentation?
 - sensitive to the patients'/clients' needs and reactions?
 - able to vary his/her speed and approach?

Does the student:

 - break down his/her task effectively?
 - present instructions at the patients'/clients' level?
 - instill confidence?

5. Awareness of sensitivity to patients'/clients' needs - Does the student:
 - have a sensitive objective attitude towards the patient/client?
 - use his/her powers of observation and communication?
 - then identify the patients'/clients' needs?
 - see beyond the patients'/clients' obvious needs?
 - show empathy?

6. Rapport with patients/clients - Is the student:
 - friendly, sincere and concerned?
 - confident and sensitive in his/her approach?
 - easily approached by patients/clients

Do patients/clients:

 - know the student's name?
 - ask for the student?
 - like the student?

- respect the student?

7. Ability to work with individuals - Is the student:

- interested in the patient as a whole?
- secure in a one to one relationship?
- convincing in the approach he/she adopts?

Does the student:

- gain his/her active co-operation?
- sustain this?
- * - adapt his/her approach and treatment?

8. Ability to work with groups - Does the student:

- * - understand the basic theory of group dynamics?
- recognise the need of the individuals in the group?
- * - cope with interactions within the group?
- * - cope with his/her reactions to the group?

Is the student:

- confident in his/her handling of the group?
- aware of the limitations of the group?

9. Ability to assess patients/clients - Does the student:

- obtain preliminary information?
- have a true picture of the patient/client from observation, data and discussion?
- gain the patients'/clients' co-operation?
- * - recognise his/her needs and problems?
- * - identify which requires to be assessed?
- * - plan adequately?
- * - evaluate and recognise where he/she could be more effective?

10. Ability to implement treatment programmes - Does the student:

- identify correctly the aims of the treatment?
- select appropriate skills or media?
- plan and prepare treatment adequately?
- apply treatment and methods effectively?
- use interpersonal skills?
- * - evaluate the need for change?
- * - change or modify the treatment as required?

Section III

Communication

1. Verbal reporting - Does the student:

- speak with appropriate assurance
- express himself/herself clearly and effectively?

- use medical terminology correctly?
- prepare himself/herself in advance if necessary?
- need to be prompted?

2. Written reporting - Is the student's

- presentation good, legible, concise, in logical sequence, well set out?
- meaning clear?
- terminology correct?
- grammar and spelling acceptable?

3. Ability to contribute to discussion - Is the student:

- * - confident in his/her contribution?
- at ease with others?
- * - able to contribute original ideas?
- sensitive to the reactions of others?
- able to elicit information from others?

Section IV

Management

1. Management of self (time, meeting deadlines, etc.) - Is the student:

- punctual for all commitments?
- able to make effective use of non-programmed time?
- able to meet deadlines?

2. Organisation of patient/client programmes* - Does the student:

- * - take into account the patients/clients numbers selection and availability?
- * - take into account practical considerations?
- * - carry out treatment within the given time?
- * - leave time to record and discuss?

3. Management within the Department (equipment, records, etc.) - Is the student reliable:

- about the organisation and use of equipment?
- about the care of stock?
- in handling the cash?
- in allocated practical tasks?
- in keeping records?

4. Sense of responsibility - Can the student:

- be depended upon to work efficiently?
- * - cope appropriately with any situation?
- observe safety precautions?
- carry out the responsibilities delegated to him/her?

1. CLINICAL SUPERVISOR - STUDENT RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE
SURVEY: March 1988

I am interested in your perception of the concerns and the difficulties you experience in the tasks and relationships of the clinical supervisor with the student.

The following areas of concern/difficulty have been suggested. Could you rank order the statements, with 1 representing the most difficult and 6 representing the least difficult. If there are any other areas which you consider to be more important, please add and rank order them as appropriate.

Rank order

1. The amount of time involved in the tasks of preparation, programme planning, supervision and feedback, for example.
2. Providing a balanced programme which is relevant to the student's level of training.
3. The mismatch between the student's and supervisor's evaluation of the student's ability and performance.
4. The constant awareness/threat of the assessment - report form.
5. Failing the student.
6. Other - please specify.

GENERAL DETAILS

1. How long have you been a clinical supervisor?
2. Have you attended a basic supervisor's course? Yes No
 attended an intermediate supervisors course? Yes No
 undertaken any other training which is relevant? Yes No
 If so, please specify
3. What is the average length of student placement with you?
4. How many students are you responsible for at one time?

If you are interested in pursuing this subject further and are willing to be interviewed, please append your name and tele no.

Thank you

2. FIELDWORK SUPERVISOR - STUDENT RELATIONSHIP: March 1993

I am interested in your perception of the concerns and the difficulties you experience in the tasks and relationships of the fieldwork supervisor with the student.

The following areas of concern/difficulty have been suggested. Could you rank order the statements, with 1 representing the most difficult and 6 representing the least difficult. If there are any other areas which you consider to be more important, please add and rank order them as appropriate.

Rank order

1. The amount of time involved in the tasks of preparation, programme planning, supervision and feedback, for example.
2. Providing a balanced programme which is relevant to the student's level of training.
3. The mismatch between the student's and supervisor's evaluation of the student's ability and performance.
4. The constant awareness/threat of the assessment - report form.
5. Failing the student.
6. Other - please specify.

Please briefly state the reason/s for your selection of the first rank (most difficult) statement.

GENERAL DETAILS

1. How long have you been a supervisor?

0 - 4 years	5 - 9 years	10+ years
-------------	-------------	-----------
2. Have you:

attended a level 1/2 - basic supervisor's course?	Yes	No
attended a level 3/4 or intermediate supervisors course?	Yes	No
undertaken any other training which is relevant?	Yes	No

If so, please specify
3. What is the average length of placement?

1-2 weeks	3-6 weeks	7-12 weeks	other
-----------	-----------	------------	-------
4. How many students are you responsible for at one time?

1	2	3	other
---	---	---	-------
5. Did you complete a similar questionnaire at the fieldwork supervisors' day in March 1988

Yes	No
-----	----

5. What were your main reasons for choosing to participate in a workshop on failure?

6. Did the workshop meet:	your expectations	Yes	No
	your needs	Yes	No
	the objectives	Yes	No

Comments:

7. How could the workshop be improved - what else would have been useful?

8. Has the workshop influenced/affected your feelings or thoughts about the topic of failure:

Yes	No	If so, in what way?
-----	----	---------------------

9. Any other comments?

10. If you are willing to be contacted for a follow-up evaluation of the workshop, please append your name and address:

Thank you
28.9.90.

FAILURE WORKSHOP: FOUR MONTH FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

1. Since the failure workshop held in ... have you been involved with a student who was

borderline?	Yes	No
who failed the practise?	Yes	No
have you ever failed a student?	Yes	No

2. If so, in what way/s did the workshop influence your
 - behaviour
 - feelings
 - thoughts

3. How have you used the information gained and the experience shared at the workshop?

4. On reflection what are the three most important points you learnt/appreciated from the workshop?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

5. Please number in rank order, with 1 representing the most helpful element of the workshop and 8 the least helpful element:
 - the opportunity to share experiences with colleagues
 - a workshop directly addressing the topic of failure
 - discussion of the professional importance of the responsibility of assessing clinical competence and failing students

- consideration of the strategies for dealing with a borderline or failed student
 - recognition of the personal consequences and trauma of the clinical supervisor
 - discussion of the objective and subjective aspects of assessment
 - opportunity to follow-up information using the bibliography
 - other
6. How would you describe the impact of the workshop on your practise as a clinical supervisor?
7. Any other comments?
8. Please append your name and address if you would like to receive a copy of the paper entitled "Failure - the clinical supervisor's perspective"

Thank you
Irene Ilott

FAILURE WORKSHOP: ONE YEAR FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION

1. Since attending the failure workshop held in ... have you been involved with

a student who was borderline?	Yes	No
who failed the practise?	Yes	No
Have you ever failed a student?	Yes	No

2. If so, in what way/s did the workshop influence your

behaviour

feelings

thoughts

3. Please rate the value of the topics covered during the day, to your practise as a supervisor during the last year as

highly valuable	valuable	of little value	of no value
-----------------	----------	-----------------	-------------

i criteria for failure

ii objective and subjective aspects of assessment

iii strategies for coping with failing a student

iv roles and responsibilities of the school, supervisor, student and fieldwork organiser

v consequences of failure on clinical practice

Comments:

4. Please rate how the workshop has influenced your awareness and confidence regarding the subject of failure during the last year:

decrease	no change	increase	large increase
----------	-----------	----------	----------------

i awareness of the personal consequences and trauma for supervisor

- ii understanding of the professional importance and responsibility of assigning a fail grade
- iii confidence in identifying borderline and unsatisfactory students
- iv awareness of the positive aspects of failure for all concerned
- v confidence in own ability to take appropriate action, including seeking advice and support

5. Reviewing the day from a distance of one year, how do you rate the overall worth of participating in a failure workshop?

highly valuable	valuable	of little value	of no value
-----------------	----------	-----------------	-------------

Comments:

6. On reflection what are the three most important points you learnt/appreciated from the workshop and have applied in your practise as a supervisor:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

7. Do you think the topic of failure should be covered as part of the sequential approach to clinical supervisor training?

Yes No

Comments:

8. Any other comments?

Thank you for your cooperation
Irene Ilott

2.1 FAILURE IN THE INSTITUTION (Academic staff)

1. Approximate number of fails each year within the institution:

	academic/fieldwork			
year 1:	2:	3:	4:	
2. How many of these would you be directly involved with as a lecturer/fieldwork organiser?
3. Who makes the judgement that a student will
fail - a specific assessment
fieldwork placement
the course - resulting in termination of training
4. Who informs the student of these decisions?
5. How are failure rates monitored
by whom, how, when,
frequency, what are consequences of any review?
6. How would you describe the role of external examiners/moderators and their borderline and unsatisfactory students and fieldwork supervisors?
7. What terms are used to describe failure: eg. referral/deferral/termination of training?
8. Is the topic of failure discussed within the institution?
9. What is your experience of the Appeals procedure in the academic and fieldwork settings?
10. Which member/s of staff have most contact with a student who fails - either an academic or professional component of, or the whole course?

11. What are the costs of failure in terms of:

time

monies

distress for staff, the student and student group

2.1 FAILURE IN FIELDWORK

1. What is your direct and indirect experience of borderline or unsatisfactory students in the fieldwork setting?

Borderline

Unsatisfactory

Direct

Indirect

Direct

Indirect

2. In the fieldwork setting who is responsible for making the judgement that the student will fail?

Does anyone else contribute to this judgement, if yes, who?

3. Who informs the student that s/he has failed the placement?

4. How are failure rates on fieldwork practice monitored?

by whom,

how,

when,

what are the consequences of any review,

5. How would you describe the role and your relationship with the fieldwork organiser when you are supervising a borderline or unsatisfactory student?

6. Have you had any contact with moderators or external examiners when you are supervising/have supervised a borderline or unsatisfactory student?

7. Have you any experience of the student invoking the School's appeals procedure?

8. Which member/s of staff have the most contact with a student who is failing?

9. What terms/words are used to describe failure, on the assessment form and during discussions?
10. In your experience as a supervisor is the topic of failure discussed amongst fieldwork supervisors or with School staff, for example?
11. What are the costs of failure in terms of:
 - time, monies,
 - distress for the supervisor, student, fieldwork setting and the fieldwork organiser?

3. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF FAILURE

1. What is your experience of borderline and unsatisfactory students?

	Academic setting	Fieldwork setting
	borderline	fail
	borderline	fail

Number

OT or other students/professionals

2. With the "benefit of hindsight" how many could/should you have failed?

What stopped you failing these student?

In retrospect - how would you compare the experience of failing a student and allowing a student "to just pass"?

Can the fieldwork organiser influence your judgement regarding a borderline or unsatisfactory student?

What are the differences between failing a student on a first clinical placement and on a second placement, or one which will result in termination of training?

As a fieldwork organiser can you/do you influence a clinical supervisors' judgement regarding a borderline or unsatisfactory student?

3. What is your criteria for failure - how do you decide a student is unsatisfactory?
4. How do you differentiate between a student who is borderline and one who fails?
5. Is the criteria different in an academic or fieldwork setting? If so, in what way/s?
6. Is your criteria influenced by your judgement of the students' effort/interest or ability or the difficulty of the task?
7. How does this effect your feelings and behaviour (eg feedback given) towards the student?
8. How do you feel when you are involved in assigning a fail grade - the fail scenario?
 - before the student is informed of the decision
 - during the feedback/exit interview/end of placement interview
 - after when the student has left
9. Would you agree that assigning a fail grade and conducting an exit interview/when it results in termination of training, is the most onerous responsibility for a course leader/lecturer/fieldwork organiser/supervisor?
10. Do you experience any difference, and if so, how and reasons, in failing a:-
 - male or female student first/second/third year
 - degree/diploma students 2, 3, or 4 year courses
 - in an academic or clinical settings
 - 18 year olds - mature students a personal student
11. Who do you consider is responsible for students' failure, for what reason/s?

12. When you are involved in a fail scenario how do your colleagues react?
own family or partner? student's response?
clients' react? effect upon next student?
which reaction from a student do you find most difficult?
student's relatives' or partners' reaction?
13. What are your needs during a fail scenario - before, during and after, are these met, if so how?
14. What coping strategies do you use, for yourself, the student and fieldwork supervisors?
Commend/recommend to others?
15. Do you perceive/experience any conflict between the roles and values of a therapist and lecturer/supervisor?
16. Have you experienced any positive outcomes in a fail scenario, if so, what are they, and for whom?
17. What made you volunteer to be interviewed about failure?
18. Any other comments?

Thank-you very much, Irene Ilott
April 1991

COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

Guidelines on Regulations and Procedures for
Occupational Therapy Pre-Registration Courses

Section B

2. Professional Unsuitability

2.3 Assessment of unprofessional behaviour or professional misconduct shall be related to the Code of Professional Conduct published by the College of Occupational Therapists. The following constitute examples (not an exhaustive list) of behaviour deemed to be evidence of unprofessional behaviour or professional misconduct:

- 2.3.1 conduct that could bring into disrepute the profession of occupational therapy and its allied professions and/or is prejudicial to the best interests of patients and clients;
- 2.3.2 theft, deliberate falsification of facts or records, as in lying, cheating, fraud or attempting to defame colleagues and/or patient or client;
- 2.3.3 breaches of confidentiality, misuse of confidential material relating to a patient or client;
- 2.3.4 assault and violent behaviour, or serious acts of insubordination;
- 2.3.5 conduct that demonstrates inappropriate emotional involvement with patients or clients;
- 2.3.6 serious negligence which causes unacceptable loss, damage, or puts staff or visitors at risk;
- 2.3.7 misuse of equipment or materials or deliberate damage to the educational setting or the fieldwork education placement;
- 2.3.8 incapacity for work due to alcohol or the influence of illegal drugs;
- 2.3.9 involvement in offences concerning the illegal use, or possession, of drugs;
- 2.3.10 lack of application to work due to poor motivation or to ill health or both of these things.

March 1993

