notions beyond those of lists of skills and knowledge.

For this team competence was distinguished by two categories of components - the nature of the objectives and processes undertaken in individual cases and workers' capacities to perform in conditions of tension and contradiction, both in clients' circumstances and goals and from organisational and community demands on them (similar issues to those examined by Healy & Springall, 1988, and Donovan & Jackson, 1988). Technical demonstration of individual, segmented skills and knowledge were implied and occasionally designated by workers within the project, but were presented only as illustrations of possible means to achieving their critical process objectives. They were not of themselves perceived as core measures of competence in their child protection practice.
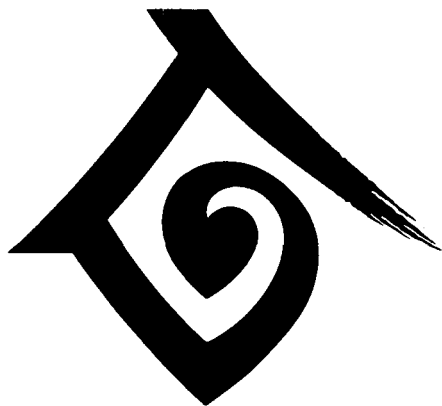
Competence was articulated as the capacity to selectively interpret and apply an array of diverse information and theories; the capacity to select, utilise and articulate a repertoire of skills for effecting change (rather than prescribed, codified responses); as maintaining a focus on enhancing long-term development and protection rather than only immediate cessation of abusive experiences for the child; and the capacity to operate within conditions of tension and contradiction.

Such themes indicate that in analysing competence it may be more productive to give more attention to examining ranges of variables of practice (performance conditions) and practice frameworks rather than focussing so emphatically on elements of skill and knowledge. ◆

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