

**THE PRACTICE OF SCHOOL SYSTEMS CONSULTATION BY THE
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST: A REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS AT A
SCHOOL FOR SPECIALISED EDUCATION**

by

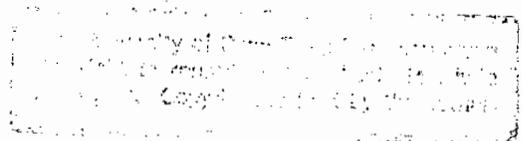
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ABSTRACT

Educational Psychology has been defined in the past as an interventionist profession, mainly focused on the alleviation of educational problems that interfere with the educational process. Currently a paradigm shift seems to herald new opportunities for the profession to develop whole school approaches and devote less of its time to individual case work. Educational psychologists world-wide foresee a broadening in the focus of their work to include a larger commitment to consultancy and school systems development. The benefits are seen in terms of the more efficient use of time, eliciting wider ranging change and the opportunity for offering a preventative approach to service delivery. School systems consultation represents such an approach.

This study explores the practice of school systems consultation using an action research approach. It is argued that action research methodology provides a framework to contain and guide the complex developments which emerge once the consultation gets under way. Central concepts in an action research approach such as **collaboration**, **participation** and **reflection** are analysed and reflected upon in terms of the opportunities and constraints they presented to school systems consultation as a service delivery option for the educational psychologist.

The role of the educational psychologist in South Africa has been conservative and the shift towards a more socially accountable one seems inevitable if such services are to be regarded as appropriate. The role of the educational psychologist as change agent in the transformation process in the South African education system is explored in this study.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Transforming Educational Psychology

Traditionally, Educational Psychology has been defined as an interventionist profession, mainly focused on one-to-one individual curative work (Sharratt, 1994; Jones and Frederickson, 1990; Donald, 1984; Gillham, 1978). Currently, psychological practice in education is diversifying to include health-promotive and preventative services. This points to a fundamental re-conceptualisation of psychological service delivery in South Africa (Engelbrecht, 1994).

Educational Psychology is standing at the cross-roads in terms of its roots and future perspectives. Its practice developed within the medical model of service delivery with the accompanying emphasis on the diagnosis and management of pathology (Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott & Witt, 1984). Research in this field adhered to the methods of the natural sciences with its philosophical basis in logical positivism which advocates the objectivity of experimental designs (Keeves, 1988). Currently there is a need to revisit the theoretical and methodological frameworks of Educational Psychology to ensure its relevance in the transformation of education and education support services in South Africa.

The implications of this reconstruction for Educational Psychology are two-fold:

- * Service delivery based in a theoretical framework which shifts the emphasis from a curative to a preventative focus.
- * A research paradigm that recognised the appropriateness of methodology which deals

with the subjectivity of people's realities.

This study addresses both these theoretical and methodological implications.

Locating this study

This study locates itself within the broader socio-political context of the Reconstruction and Development Programme for Education and Training in South Africa. Its area of focus is the transformation of Education Support Services within a unitary education system (Draft White Paper on Education and Training, 1994). The White Paper (1994:15) acknowledges the importance of a holistic and integrated approach to the transformation of Education Support Services in recognising that issues of "health, social, psychological, academic and vocational development are interrelated". In addition to perceiving these issues as interrelated, it is the contention of this study that a systemic approach is required if all stakeholders (parents, students, teachers and everyone employed within the education system) are to be seen as relevant clients of education support services.

This study illustrates that the educational psychologist whose approach is holistic and integrated, embodies a worker who is enabled to work within all sectors of the education system. The shift from direct to indirect service delivery by the educational psychologist places emphasis on service delivery which is health-promotive, preventative and developmental for recipients of such services (Gutkin and Conoley, 1990).

The emergence of this study

At a local university, Educational Psychology students were trained as school consultants which expanded the repertoire of service delivery options they had within their profession. The university staff approached schools to provide students with opportunities to practise consultation. In the case of the consultation on which this study is based, the request for

the service emerged from the school. The vice-principal of a school for specialised education approached the Educational Psychology Department of this university for an investigation into the staff problems experienced at his school. The referral issue was addressed by means of a systems analysis which strived to contextualise the nature of the difficulties at the school. The systems analysis was conducted within the form of a consultation service to the staff. The opportunity was offered to Masters students to consolidate their systems consultation skills within a school context where the need for the service had emerged from the school. Understanding the context from which a request for an investigation emerges is one of the practice issues which is considered further in Chapter Five.

The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study (described more fully in Chapter Two) is a systems approach. A systems approach is underpinned by a world-view which takes cognisance of the interdependence and interrelatedness of all phenomena. The field of Educational Psychology has incorporated systems approaches in its range of practice options and this has broadened the conceptualisation of what constitutes practice in educational settings. This development from a traditionally child-centred to system-centred practice opens up relatively unexplored avenues of psychological service delivery in such settings. Derived from the General Systems Theory of Von Bertalanffy, the language of this theory is very specific, the theory having evolved from the natural sciences. This necessitates that terms be defined in order for central points of the study to be understood.

Definition of key terms

The following concepts from systems theory are central. A brief description of each follows:

SYSTEM

an integrated whole with interdependent elements forming a collective entity whose properties cannot be reduced to those of its parts (Banathy, 1992)

SUBSYSTEM

a constellation within a system, having its own boundary and maintaining its own pattern of behaviour (Banathy, 1992)

PATTERN

an identifiable arrangement of relationships recognisable through a constellation of rules (Plas, 1986)

RULES

a rule is a specific version of a pattern found in social systems, including those of conduct and communication (Plas, 1986)

HOMEOSTASIS

the tendency of a system towards a steady state of equilibrium where there is coherence and balance internal to itself, and external to its environment; the state to which the system returns after any disturbance

FEEDBACK LOOPS

the notion of information exchange as a mutually affecting process between the various components of a system (Capra, 1993)

CONTEXT

the environment which is external but intricately linked to the maintenance of patterns within the system (Dowling, 1985)

CIRCULAR CAUSALITY

the behaviour of a subsystem is seen as affecting and being affected by the behaviour of other subsystems (Dowling, 1985)

PERTURBATION

crossing a set pattern of behaviours to disturb the homeostatic balance and causing ripple effects throughout the system

PUNCTUATION POINT

the juncture at which a sequence of events is interrupted to focus on the underlying patterns (Dowling, 1985)

DISCONTINUOUS CHANGE

sudden or spontaneous change that emerges from a particular set of conditions (Plas, 1986)

RECURSIVE THINKING

viewing an incident as the product of multidirectional feedback, emphasising non-linearity and mutuality of influence (Plas, 1986)

REFRAMING

changing negative conceptual connotations to a positive way of looking at the same situation (Dowling, 1985)

ABDUCTION

reasoning by analogy, highlighting the associative characteristics of seemingly unconnected phenomena, through the use of stories and metaphors (Plas, 1986)

METAPHORS

associating emergent properties of systems to those of machines, organisms, cultures, politics, etc. (Flood and Jackson, 1991)

The methodological framework

At the research level, this study does not acquiesce to the assumption that the positivist paradigm is the most appropriate paradigm within which to carry out research in the field of Educational Psychology. Historically, Educational Psychology has modelled its methodology on the empirical, experimental designs of the natural sciences (Chalmers, 1982). The research paradigm in this study is underpinned by constructivist epistemology with its emphasis on qualitative and interpretive approaches (Steier, 1991). A particular ethnomethodology, namely action research, is considered an appropriate method for addressing systems practice issues (Checkland, 1981). Frederickson (1990:138) notes the “tendency of educational psychologists to gravitate towards action research as a

framework for systems work. "Taylor (1985:163) describes her systems work with schools using an action research approach which she regards as "a useful operational model...(which) provides a framework to contain, and a structure to guide".

The aim of the study

The broad aim of this study is to reflect on the practice of school systems consultation by the educational psychologist in South Africa. It is devoted to an examination and recognition of the issues related to school systems consultation as an option for psychological service delivery in educational settings.

Two substantive issues pertaining to school systems consultation are reflected upon. Firstly, the opportunities and constraints of adopting an action research approach to consultation in schools are presented. Secondly, the issue of power within the context of this form of service delivery is discussed. These issues are reflected upon in terms of the challenges they present to educational psychology in its attempt to have an impact on the transformation of education and educational support systems in South Africa.

Significance of the research

From a systems perspective, educational psychologists can assist school staff to become more self-reflexive about the school culture within which they operate and which to an extent they have created. If a staff problem has been defined as influencing the effective running of the school, a systems approach raises the awareness of the staff of how patterns of behaviour, relationships, communication, etcetera which are considered problematic are being maintained in the system as a whole. Reframing the staff's patterns of interaction in a recursive mode frees staff from thinking about problems in a linear cause-and-effect way which often results in individuals or groups being scapegoated and marginalised. A systems analysis of staff relations in a school allows management staff to view their organisation as

a web rather than a pyramid; the responsibility for the effective running of the school could then be seen as a collaborative effort rather than a top-down burden.

At the intervention level, educational psychologists with group process skills can offer schools a consultation service which focuses on the influence that their interaction patterns have on the social, academic and psychological climate of the school. The relevance of this type of service should not be underestimated when one considers how the transformation process in education in South Africa could affect the balancing of relationships within schools. The current hierarchical and authoritarian nature of schooling will be challenged by the process of democratisation foreshadowed by the Reconstruction and Development Plan for Education and Training in South Africa. The educational psychologist utilising a systems perspective can facilitate this restructuring process within particular schools where such a need exists, as was the case in this study.

Educational psychologists working from within the systems framework do not seek quick-fix solutions within educational settings. Studying a system involves studying relationships, i.e. the principles upon which social organisation in the school are based. This holistic approach to working with schools is located within the systems world view that the whole is always more than the sum of the parts and that the properties of the parts can only be understood from the dynamics of the whole. From this perspective educational psychologists recognise that every person affiliated to a particular school is considered part of that system and that the system as a whole should benefit from such a consultation. Therefore the range of people benefiting from the psychologist's involvement ought to multiply considerably within a systems approach to consultation, and scarce professional resources are thus able to be distributed more equitably.

In the transformation of education and education support services in South Africa, the implementation of a consultative model of psychological service delivery satisfies the principle of cost-effectiveness (Lazarus and Donald, 1994). Consultation services provided

by educational psychologists to educational institutions offer a feasible alternative for dealing with the supply-and-demand problem currently facing psychological service delivery. Consultation does not only provide an economic solution. It can ultimately be an empowering process whereby "the experts" demystify their roles by using a participatory framework. Shifting away from the traditional medical model of service delivery frees educational psychologists to be agents of change in a socially responsible way.

Two issues are emphasised in the literature about the pitfalls that may be present in systems consultation (Tingstrom, Little, & Stewart, 1990; Checkland, 1981; Frederickson, 1990). Firstly, there is the concern that there is confusion in the field of educational psychology as to what constitutes consultation per se. Secondly, there is the issue that research is needed to clarify the phenomena which occur within the process of consultation with schools and their effects on the consultative relationship itself. It is a broad aim of this research to contribute to a body of knowledge about the consultative practices of educational psychologists which might inform and guide (but not direct) other practitioners.

Outlines of further chapters

The next chapter presents the broader theoretical framework which supports this study, explaining and integrating what a systems approach to consultation entails within the field of educational psychology.

Chapter Three relates the appropriateness of a constructivist research framework for this study. Action research is presented as a methodology which is coherent with school systems consultation due to its collaborative, participatory and reflective praxis.

A descriptive overview of the consultation service delivered at a school for specialised education is provided in Chapter Four. The action research spiral encapsulates the

evolutionary process and serves as the framework within which the consultation service will be narrated.

Chapter Five raises two substantive issues related to school systems consultation as they emerged from this study. Firstly, the constraints and possibilities of an action research approach to service delivery are discussed. Secondly, the issue of power in the context of service delivery raises questions about the role of the school consultant as external change agent. Both issues are presented as challenges to educational psychologists operating as school systems consultants in the reconstruction and development of education and education support services in South Africa.

The final chapter offers comments on the implications for the practice of school systems consultation as a service delivery option for the educational psychologist in the South African context.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework explored in this chapter involves integrating school consultation with a systems approach. A systems approach promotes the idea of holistic service delivery which recognises that issues in education are interrelated, interdependent and contextualised.

Defining a systems approach

A systems approach embodies a philosophical framework, a theoretical orientation and a form of practice based on systems concepts.

As a philosophical framework, the concept of systems is used "not to refer to things in the world but to a particular way of organising our thoughts about the world" (Flood & Jackson, 1991:2). Systems thinking relates to an emerging worldview which challenges the linearity of "cause-and-effect" thinking in our predominantly mechanistic, positivist worldview. Thinking systemically therefore implies making a paradigm shift, a shift in our conceptual framework for understanding reality.

A systems framework is concerned with interdependence and interrelatedness within and among systems. Banathy (1992:191) defines a system as "a set of relationally arranged and interdependent components organised as a definable entity in a given environment. "Studying a system involves studying dynamic relationships, or the interconnectedness between the various parts of the system. Such observations of relationships among the parts results in descriptions of patterns. Patterns are defined as identifiable arrangements of relationships (Plas, 1986). Thinking in terms of patterns represents a paradigm shift from linear cause-and-effect thinking to relational thinking.

Linked to the construct of interdependent relationships, is the systemic notion of wholeness. Systems are viewed as integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller units. One cannot understand a system by dissecting it into its various parts - the decontextualised parts do not necessarily behave in the same way as they would do in context. The nature of the whole is both different from and comprises more than the mere sum of its parts because a mutual influence, or recursivity, exists between the parts of the system. In an interdependent way, change in any part of the system could lead to changes throughout. The notion of interdependent change is central to the evolutionary understanding of how change occurs in systems.

A systems perspective represents a shift away from the linear causality explicit in both inductive and deductive reasoning, the traditional bases of "scientific" research (Chalmers, 1982). A particular form of reasoning which is deemed well suited to systems thinking is abduction. Abductive reasoning is concerned with patterns and relationships. The portrayal of patterns and relationships is reflected in the use of relational language. The use of language is of fundamental importance when attempting to portray meaningful wholes and patterns. Plas (1986) advocates the Batesonian idea of the story as a descriptive device for portraying the patterns and relationships observed in systemic practice. The story is viewed as a vehicle that can convey the interconnectedness among the parts in a particular context.

The issue of the use of language in systems work has direct bearing on the style in which this study is written. A narrative writing style is used in an attempt to portray the extent to which the systems approach has been employed by the author beyond only the actual practice undertaken in the process of the consultation. A story meaningfully relates the connected parts in a particular context; this dissertation attempts to interrelate the various aspects of epistemology, paradigms and methodology adopted in this study.

The systems approach in education in South Africa is in its infancy, and still largely the domain of the ivory tower theorists. By implication educational psychologists in practice should expect that most people working in educational settings have had no exposure to a systems orientation. The onus therefore lies on such a practitioner to inform participants regarding the conceptual understanding upon which systems service delivery is based. Service delivery provides the opportunity to disseminate systems ideas and thus could have an empowering effect upon those within education settings. This type of capacity-building by the educational psychologist could have long-term salutogenic (health-promotive) implications for holistic development within educational settings. The educational psychologist's potential for the capacity-building of those who have been most neglected or are most vulnerable in a particular system is one of the practice issues discussed in Chapter Five, as it was an element that emerged strongly in this study.

The systems approach in Educational Psychology

On the international front, the trend within the profession of educational psychology has been to adopt a systems approach to service delivery in educational settings (Dowling & Osborne, 1985; Plas, 1986; Gillham, 1978). According to Burden (1981:43), the trend amongst some educational psychologists has been "to understand the unique way in which individual schools have a specific effect upon those (pupils and teachers) who interact within them". This does not imply that educational psychologists who seek to widen their perception of the contexts in which they work should abandon individual work with children (Burden, 1978). Even though the systems approach in educational psychology promotes preventative intervention, it does not do this at the expense of curative work. Burden (1981:42) argues that "educational psychologists need to become effective systems analysts if they are to play any really valuable role within schools". Stoker (1992) values the systems approach for the educational psychologist's ability to work at the institutional level to ensure meaningful long-term change. When schools are viewed systemically, dynamic tension is deemed healthy if the necessary feedback mechanisms are operating

effectively within the system. This means that the educational psychologist does not strive to achieve an ideal of the perfect school which is devoid of tension and conflict. Educational psychologists can potentially play a vital role in establishing healthy communication channels at school level; this in turn would reflexively have a salutogenic impact on individuals at all status levels within the system.

The systems perspective is not an entirely new idea in educational psychology, as stated by Burden (1994:8):

...there are those of us who were advocating systemic as opposed to linear cause-effect thinking about disturbing behaviour and learning failure some 20 years ago, but it has taken writers like Gregory Bateson, Fritjof Capra with his book the Tao of Physics, and in the field of educational psychology Jean Plas to bring home the full significance of such ideas.

Locally, Van der Hoorn and Adams (1994:92) describe the benefit that this shifting role of the educational psychologist holds in the transformation of education via psychological service delivery:

We have had, and are having the shift from psychometrician to systems analyst, from curative, individual interventions to preventative group or systems intervention and this has led to the services of educational psychologists being available to more recipients.

At times the perception of the future systems role of the educational psychologist is narrowly defined as centred in the management of schooling. Quoted by Pamela Sharrat (1994:5), Jones and Frederickson (1990:2) maintain that "...without real expertise - as

problem-solving consultant, as an inservice trainer, as a systems analyst, as a stress management advisor - educational psychologists have nothing of any quality to offer”.

The systems approach advocated in this study supports the position of Van der Hoorn and Adams (1994:100) who argue for an integrative, coherent framework within which to locate the transformation of education and education support services in South Africa:

Educational psychology provides a conceptual framework, a repertoire of practices, and an approach to research which focuses on

**not just students, but all people involved in the education process, for example, teachers and parents;*

**not just people, but organisations and contexts;*

**ameliorating difficulties, as well as creating and maintaining optimal conditions for growth and development. ”*

In speaking of the role that the educational psychologist needs to play in the restructuring of educational support services in South Africa, Donald (1990:42) sums up the underlying conceptual paradigm shift which is required:

Where educational psychology as a profession is concerned however, a primary need appears to be a radical shift in both perception and practice from a child deficit to a system deficit model

In relation to the above quotation, the idea of a "deficit" fits conceptually within a reductionist framework, indicating the importance of using and developing language congruent with systems thinking.

The systems metaphor adopted in this study

The paradigm shift from a child-centred to a systems-centred model implies that the educational psychologist needs to conceptualise issues differently. The conceptual framework informing this dissertation is based on the organic metaphor of systems which views organisations such as schools as open systems capable of change and adaptation. Flood and Jackson (1991:10) view the organic metaphor of systems as useful in practice when certain conditions prevail and for the following reasons:

- * When there is an open relationship with a changing environment.*
- * When there are needs to be satisfied in order to promote survival.*
- * To promote responsiveness and change.*
- * When the environment itself is complex, containing a variety of competitors and so on.*

Many South African schools can currently be described as turbulent environments. Schools have often been the political battleground for principles and values, and have often been the least prepared organisations to deal with the effects of the onslaught. Particularly now with the changes foreshadowed by the Reconstruction and Development Programme for Education and Training, the organic view of systems provides the educational psychologist with a framework for understanding, promoting and maintaining holistic development in schools. Schools are dynamic entities. The educational psychologist searches for points of impact - those nexuses of dynamics that, when sufficiently pressured, could transform the system's organisation.

As the service progressed at the school in this study, the consultants observed dynamics at the school which involved conflict of interests between subsystems. This pointed to the need to understand the issue of power within the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of South African schools. The consultants found themselves incorporating the language and

perceptions of the political metaphor of systems which views relationships between individuals and groups as "competitive and involving the pursuit of power"(Flood and Jackson, 1991:12). The usefulness of incorporating the political metaphor of systems for this study is two-fold:

- * it emphasises the key role of power in determining political outcomes;
- * it acknowledges the inherent nature of conflict in systems.

This dissertation is further informed in its conceptualisation of schools as systems by the course that the author attended on The Theory of Living Systems by Fritjof Capra at Schumacher College in June 1993. Capra outlined the principles upon which living systems, such as schools, are based:

The complexity of human interaction within a particular context can be conceptualised according to the principle of **self-organisation** within a living system. Self-organisation within a system is based on three fundamental aspects, viz. the pattern, process and structure of self-organisation.

The **patterns** are the sets of beliefs, values, behaviours and relationships which are maintained in homeostatic balance within the system.

Process refers to the means by which such patterns are perpetuated in an autopoietic (self-making) way by the system as a whole.

Structure refers to the physical manifestation of patterns over time and space which the system presents as the way things must be, always have been and always will be.

(Unpublished lecture notes - Capra, 1993)

The more rigid the structure, the less likely it is that the system can develop to a different state. However, changes in the structure may not lead to shifts in the patterns or process of self-organisation. Any changes which may occur due to a disturbance in the homeostatic balance (caused by perturbations at any point in the system) are unpredictable in their outcome. Therefore the expectation of "improvement" as a result of a consultation cannot be guaranteed, although the expectation of change is reasonable.

If a pattern has existed for a long time, it may not require the same length of time to alter it; discontinuous change in a system can occur if the level of reflexivity is high enough for a ripple effect to challenge the existing boundaries. The reflexivity of a system is located within the nature of its feedback loops (information pathways), of which the consultants become an integral part. Consultants can provide the external change stimulus which provokes proactive development.

The systems analysis of an organisation such as a school can be based on the principles of self-organisation, viz. the pattern, process and structure whereby the ethos at the school is perpetuated. In their report to the school in this study, the consultants described a systems analysis based on the patterns of behaviours, relationships, communication styles and values which were characteristically maintained by the system (Appendix A).

The educational psychologist as consultant

The form of practice under investigation in this study is **school systems consultation**. Systems consultation refers to the application of systems concepts and principles in consultation with systems such as families and schools. Reasons for the appropriateness of adopting a systems consultative approach are outlined as follows by Wynne, McDaniel and Weber (1986:9-10):

1. The consultant does not prejudge the nature of the problem.
2. The consultant can advantageously take a meta position from which systemic relationships and patterns can be assessed.
3. Consultation facilitates the reframing of problems.
4. Consultation can readily give emphasis to health, strengths and positive resources.
5. Collaborative relationships between consultant and consultee can be readily established.
6. A consultant role provides a base for flexible shifts to alternative professional roles.

The consultants were drawn into the life of the system as their interaction was based on the premise that being co-opted by the system would provide them with the opportunity for its intense exploration. Consultation is seen as a participatory and formative process which can be accommodated within and is coherent with a systems approach. It is also regarded as a mainly preventative form of practice. From a systems understanding therefore, consultation aims at whole school development, with a salutogenic (health-promotive) emphasis. Schools are then developed as enabling environments promoting the growth of all those connected to them, namely, learners, teachers, administrators, other workers and parents.

As consultants, educational psychologists need to enable those in educational settings to effect and maintain change and growth within their own schools. Such capacity-building can only be ensured when participants own the process. Consultants facilitate ownership with a collaborative approach which engages participants actively in the change process. Such participatory practice goes a long way towards overturning the patterns of apathy and helplessness prevalent in so many South African schools. Cole and Siegel (1990) view collaborative consultation as a key skill for the psychologist in the role of change agent.

A systems approach allows consultants to understand that change and developmental processes are complex and dynamic, with a sometimes unpredictable interplay of factors. Awareness and sensitivity to this complexity guards against reductionistic problem-solving.

An approach to consultancy must necessarily be integrative and coherent, recognising that dynamics within schools are interdependent and interrelated. Without such a systems understanding, interventions may be seen as coming up against the proverbial brick wall.

From the systems perspective, the definition of consultation provided by Conoley and Conoley (1982:1) appears limited: "...a voluntary, non-supervisory relationship between professionals from differing fields established to aid one in his or her professional functioning".

This definition of consultation excludes many stakeholders in educational settings. The emphasis on "professionals" marginalises those who have been historically neglected and ignored in schools. A critical practice issue which emerged in this study was the crucial role played by non-professional staff in the dynamics of school life. Educational psychologists operating from a systems approach cannot fail to investigate dynamics across the whole spectrum of school life nor ignore the need for progressive empowering and capacity-building at different levels of the system (Donald & Lazarus, 1994:118). As consultants, educational psychologists would not merely fulfil their roles as system analysts, but need to perceive themselves as change agents in the South African education system. Capacity-building is a critical practice issue with which the educational psychologist needs to grapple.

In addition to assessment and intervention, consultation is classified by Reynolds, Gutkin, Elliott and Witt as one type of service delivery which educational psychologists provide, with "consultation ...viewed as a significant component of all school psychological service delivery systems" (1984:77). They warn that there is much confusion amongst school psychologists as to what constitutes consultation *per se*. A similar concern is expressed by Tingstrom, Little and Stewart (1990) who maintain that much empirical data is still needed in order to understand the phenomena occurring in the process of school consultation;

relatively unexplored areas such as locus of control and group dynamics are considered relevant and important to explore with respect to their effects on the consultation process.

Burden and Brown (1987) propose that educational psychologists are in a unique position to operate as school-focused consultants because they carry status and perceived power in schools, but are not in the supervisory capacity of inspectors. The form of consultancy which they propose is *spiral consultancy*, where the educational psychologist works in partnership with an external consultant who is detached from the actual school situation. External consultancy is a source of feedback to consultants about those dynamics which they need to take cognisance of within the relationship between the consultant and the school system. As a consultant, the educational psychologist is faced with the challenge of operating at a systems level to bring about desired organisational change in schools (Burden, Green & Pettersen, 1983).

In their proposed model for the development of education support services in South Africa, Lazarus and Donald (1994) view consultation as an option for indirect service delivery by educational psychologists which fulfils two principles in the restructuring process, viz. the principles of *holistic development* and *cost-effectiveness*. Consultation is seen as a model of service delivery which enhances quality whilst minimising expenditure through its cascading effect on the recipients of education support services.

Van der Hoorn and Adams (1994:111) suggest a specific role and function for the educational psychologist re consultation in the transformation of education support services in South Africa, which is that of "providing consultation services which empower parents and educators with knowledge and skills enabling them to enhance their own, their children's and their community's development".

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the paradigmatic issues related to the methodology adopted in this study. Since the aim of this study is a reflection on the process within school systems consultation, issues regarding the methods employed play a central role.

Research and practice in Educational Psychology

The question of methodology raises the issue of research versus practice in the field of Educational Psychology. Several position papers present arguments for changing educational psychology from an applications-only field to a more research-oriented field (Sharrat, 1994; Donald, 1991). The rationale behind these arguments is that educational psychologists have focused too narrowly on individually-oriented practice and made little or no attempt to influence educational policy and planning in South Africa. It is the contention of this study that research and practice cannot be divorced from each other in this way. What is needed in the transformation process in educational psychology is a coherent, integrated framework creating a dynamic tension between theoretically-informed practice and theory grounded in practice. Van der Hoorn (1994) advocates a “researcher-practitioner” role for the educational psychologist which contributes to the public good through both service delivery as well as informing future policy and practice. This dissertation is one of the research-practice studies on which Van der Hoorn (1994) reports to promote such researcher-practitioner roles.

As researcher-practitioners, it becomes essential that educational psychologists are explicit about the philosophy and principles on which they base their practice if they are striving to

influence policy decisions optimally. Clearly articulated value positions can challenge the short-sighted pragmatism which has pervaded educational psychology in South Africa and can encourage sustainable policy development. *Education Support Services in South Africa: policy proposals* (1994), represents a document with just such clear conceptual frameworks for transforming education support services.

The rest of this chapter describes a methodological framework for school systems consultation.

Methodological issues

The unsuspecting novice-researcher is at times tripped up by the question of whether his or her research is **qualitative** or **quantitative**. This dilemma points to the value that is placed on the respective types of research. There is a need to explicate the underlying philosophical assumptions inherent in the various research paradigms when validating one's choice of methodology.

The debate between qualitative and quantitative methodology highlights the polarisation between the two approaches. The historical roots of this dichotomy date back to the nineteenth century with the differentiation between the philosophies of positivism and idealism (Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, 1993; Keeves, 1988; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Positivism advocates the scientific method which made it possible to quantify natural laws; the result was a mechanistic world view to which the study of human behaviour was also subjected. Social constructivism, a particular form of idealism, advocates the understanding of the subjective realities of social systems, with the human mind seen as constructing what constitutes reality "out there". The philosophical disagreement about whether "truth" is objective or subjective accounts for the differentiation between positivist and constructivist research paradigms.

Quantitative methodology is underpinned by positivist attributes which hold empirical reality as truth. Qualitative methodology is underpinned by constructivist attributes which hold subjective reality as truth. The either-or debate often plays the quantitative and qualitative approaches off against each other, sometimes leading to light-hearted sparring between the "number-crunchers" and the "story-tellers" respectively. A systems perspective would value both approaches as far as either one is appropriate to the aim of the research, for example, utilising quantitative data when statistics are needed and utilising qualitative data when attempting to understand socially constructed phenomena (Dawes & Donald, 1994).

Constructivist epistemology

This study is grounded in qualitative methodology. Constructivist attributes are deemed as congruent with the systems approach adopted in this study. The epistemological foundation of systems thinking seems to correlate more readily with constructivist than positivist attributes. Plas (1986) postulates that, for systems thinkers, reality is born of the transaction between observer and observed. Therefore an objective reality is deemed as not available to us. The systems principle of recursion posits the belief of mutually influencing human interaction; likewise, the constructivist approach holds that observer neutrality is a myth. The observer has a particular frame of reference, and that frame influences the descriptions that result from the observation. Thus all researchers create their own territory within the research context, utilising their frames of reference as maps to guide their observations. Both the systems and the constructivist frameworks heed Korzybski's caveat that "...the map is not the territory" (Bateson, 1972:449, in Plas, 1986).

Another important overlap between the axioms of the systems and the constructivist approaches lies in their emphasis on the relativity of the context in which phenomena are observed. In their concern with unique and particular settings, micro-interpretative approaches are utilised and generalisations are mostly avoided. Reality is therefore

considered to be context-bound and human phenomena are regarded as truth to the degree that people agree they are so, i. e. consensual domains form the basis of verification.

It is argued, therefore, that it is the perception of both the systems and the constructivist frameworks that human reality is dynamic. It is an assumption of a reality where complete stability is never achieved. Therefore the process within the construction of that reality forms the basis of data analysis. Such process-oriented research is exploratory by nature and dependent on grounded theory, i. e. the understanding of phenomena which is grounded in the reality of actual practice.

This study advocates social constructivism as an appropriate philosophical basis in which its methodology can be embedded. This paradigm posits the belief that all taken-for-granted realities are socially constructed (Steier, 1991). It challenges the view that human subjects have an ahistorical and universal nature. Human beings are seen to be actively constructing and being constructed by the meanings embedded in their particular contexts. Thus the individual subject is seen as both reflecting and constructing the social forces around him or herself.

The consultants explored the active construction of meaning among staff members at the school for specialised education as part of their systems analysis. This implied that the social forces, which the principal and the vice-principal perceived as negatively influencing the overall running of the school, were perceived as being actively shaped and maintained by the staff members themselves. The emphasis in the research is thus on the agentic roles, that is, the recursive functions, played by staff members in shaping their social reality at school. The patterns which underpin their interactions with one another are seen as socially constructed phenomena. Reciprocally, the social forces governing human interactions are contextualised in a historical framework.

The contexts in which schools find themselves in South Africa cannot be ignored in research which attempts to reflect upon social processes. The policy of apartheid has shaped the ethos of schools. Staff selection had taken place on racial grounds in the school for specialised education where the consultation took place. The social constructivist paradigm places the relativity of the context centrally in its praxis, making it an appropriate framework for research which aims to reflect social phenomena. Research which is that context-dependent derives its value from the micro-processes it is able to portray more cogently than is possible with positivist designs. Paradoxically, therein also lies its weakness; there is a problem with relating a micro analysis on to a macro level of interpretation. Micro-processes in a particular setting such as a school are essentially idiopathic; therefore they are not generalisable to other contexts, however similar.

Because the social constructivist paradigm places the active construction of meaning and the relativity of the context as central to its epistemological foundation, it serves as an appropriate theoretical framework within which to embed school systems consultation as a research vehicle.

Methodologically, research in the constructivist paradigm is directed to careful observation leading to the understanding and elucidation of meanings in particular contexts. A systems approach requires a methodology which is abductive in analysing the patterning of social activity and discourse in particular settings. Tyler (1992) asserts that the systems view needs to consider a phenomenological approach in order to take distinctly human phenomena into account. Cohen and Manion (1980:24) state that "Unlike positivistic approaches, which ignore or presume its subjects' interpretations of situations, ethogenic approaches concentrate upon the ways in which a person construes his social world. "Similarly, the methodological approach in this study places the relativity of the context and the interactional framework of human relationships more centrally in its praxis.

Qualitative methodology is grounded on the idea of the reciprocal agentic roles between researcher and researched. A full account of how the process of research involved the interaction between researcher and researched needs to be given. The assumption underlying such methodology is that there is no such thing as observer neutrality and therefore no pretence at objectivity should be attempted. The researcher him/herself has to be located within a socio-political context. In this study the researcher was a young woman, historically classified as "Coloured" operating within a system which was dominated at management level by White, middle-aged males. This is mentioned as an example of how the variables of who conducts the analysis will in some way bring their own socially constructed realities to bear on the system under analysis, which is in turn informed by a set of socially constructed assumptions.

The next section will outline the particular methodology which was practised in the consultation process, viz. action research. General principles and characteristics of action research will be summarised to expound the basis from which data was collected. The methods by which the consultants sought to forge a metacognitive overview among the staff concerning their interactions with one another will also be outlined.

Action Research

Grundy and Kemmis in Flanagan, Breen and Walker (1984:3-4) define action research in education as:

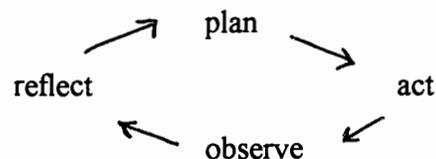
...a family of activities in curriculum development, professional development, school improvement programs, and systems planning and policy development. These activities have in common the identification of strategies of planned action which are implemented and then systematically submitted to observation, reflection and change. Participants in the action being considered are integrally involved in all of these activities.

Within this methodology, the people undertaking the project are both practitioners and researchers within the microcosm they invest themselves. Any plans of action they envisage must be thought through on an informed basis. Action-based experience provides new knowledge which needs to be taken into account for the next cycle of interaction between researcher and researched. Plans are thus revised and strategies adapted in order to act in a process-oriented way. According to Dovey and De Jong (1990), this grounded process can be illustrated as follows:

theoretically-informed action ←----→ *action-informed theory*

The rationale for implementing an action research method could be to change existing practice for reasons of improvement or to try out an interesting idea in practice (Kemmis & Taggart, 1982). The idea of intervention does not primarily drive such research even though actual conditions within a particular context are under review. For this specific reason action research was viewed as an appropriate methodology to employ in school systems consultation where the consultants initially had a contract for a systems analysis, and did not have *a priori* assumptions that intervention would be desirable or indeed inevitable.

Once the commitment of all those involved had been negotiated, a spiral of



began (Kemmis and Taggart, 1982).

In action research the researcher directs the participants and is in turn directed in his/her own practice by them. The researcher becomes a participant in the action, and this process of interaction itself becomes a subject of research (Checkland, 1981). Participants are first-order action researchers who act on their existing practices of which the outcomes are reflected upon by all involved in the project; second-order action research is the spiral which the project researcher uses to track his/her own process in the interaction between researcher and participants (Walker, 1991). Therein lies the dilemma about when the project researcher is guided by

(a) reflections of observations of others' practice

AND/OR

(b) reflections of observations of own practice.

The systems perspective views this dilemma in terms of an isomorphic relationship, that is, recognising the interconnectedness rather than the distinctions between these various levels of reflections.

From a study of the research literature on action research, Cohen and Manion (1980:174) identify aspects about the use of the method which gained particular significance in this study:

...action research is usually (though not inevitably) collaborative - teams of researchers and practitioners work together on a project; it is participatory - team members themselves take part directly or indirectly in implementing the research; and it is self-evaluative - modifications are continually evaluated within the ongoing situation...(emphases added)

Action research therefore presupposes adherence to collaborative, participatory and reflective methods (the methods that the consultants employed in this regard are described later in this chapter). The significance of these aspects of action research for the study are outlined below. These serve as antecedents to the reflection in Chapter Five which considers the issues raised by utilising action research methodology in this study.

Action research is considered above all to be a **collaborative** endeavour. The action researcher does not start with *a priori* assumptions that change is either necessary or indeed the primary aim of the consultation service. The issue of collaboration is highlighted in this study both in terms of the opportunities afforded to all parties, as well as the difficulties that this method generated.

An advantage of action research is that it combines research and application. This encourages a **participatory** process to which both consultants and consultees contribute. An experiential approach which involves participants actively ensures that the service is tailored to the needs of the participants and remains relevant to the developments within the system. Participants need to be actively engaged in the enquiry process to ensure that their perspectives are elicited. The sense of ownership which the participants have of the project is vital for the long-term impact on development in the system.

Within action research, **reflection** is viewed as essential in developing contextualised service delivery. The consultants used reflection actively and purposefully as part of their method of working both within the school system and within the consultancy team framework. Of particular note in school systems consultation is the utilisation of external consultancy, termed by Burden (1981) as "spiral consultancy". It is grounded on the premise that the consultant should not work alone, but needs the sounding-board provided by the external consultant in order to stay meta to the system. This is particularly important in long-term service delivery where consultants themselves become enmeshed in the dynamics of a particular school system. In this study, the consultants concluded their service to the school without the benefit of an external consulting team. The

implications of this will be considered in terms of the possible effects this had on the terminating phase of the consultation service.

The study found action research as methodology to be appropriate to its needs for several important reasons. The researcher-practitioner strives for service delivery which is contextually relevant and theoretically informed. Action research embodies a principled approach which encompasses these strivings. Its participatory framework provides the opportunity for researcher and participants to benefit and grow from their interaction. Action research could become the vehicle whereby educational psychologists in the role of **change agents** in the South African education system can empower those who have been historically neglected or are most vulnerable. Focusing on whole school development extends service delivery to include previously marginalised sectors of school systems, such as the cleaning staff. This study illustrates the important **capacity-building** function that the educational psychologist can perform at *all* levels of the school system. Capacity-building is viewed as a key policy issue in the NEPI reports which deal with the transformation of the South African education system. Action research, through its participatory framework, presents the educational psychologist with the methodology through which capacity-building within the education system can be facilitated.

This chapter on methodology concludes with a section on the strategies used for data collection, which in itself was considered by the consultants to complement the aims and principles of action research.

How data was collected

The strategies used to collect data were of a collaborative, participatory and capacity-building nature. From the systems perspective, the manner in which the data was collected was in itself a form of intervention even though intervention *per se* may not have been the

purpose of the study. The consultants kept comprehensive *field notes* which formed the basis of their data analysis.

Data was collected via a number of activities and strategies.

Participatory strategies included:

- * *ice-breaker games* between subsystems experiencing difficulty with communication
- * *buzz group discussions* as an informal way of generating talk between members within the various subsystems
- * *fish-bowl discussions* where two subsystems form an inner and outer circle with each circle being given a limited time in which to respond to the other.

Collaborative strategies included:

- * *interviews* with the vice-principal about developments in the school
- * *interviews* with the principal to observe protocol and elicit his expectations and perceptions
- * a working *contract* between the consultants and management which was adapted to suit the changing needs of the system
- * a team of *external consultants* who indirectly observed the consultation process and reflected on the worker-team's interaction with the school system (Nichols, Parffrey & Burden, 1989).

Capacity-building strategies included:

- * the *power game* (Dovey & Mathabe, 1987) with members of a subsystem role-playing the "elite" and the "rabble" to elicit power dynamics
- * *feedback* from the consultants and the various subsystems in terms of the patterns of interaction which were observed

- * *homework tasks* for subsystems to develop team and negotiation skills
- * *a report* to the school which documented a systems analysis and some recommendations.

The dissertation will now shift in focus from the general to the particular, focusing in the next chapter on the details of the consultation service delivered at a school for specialised education. This will serve as the background against which issues related to school systems consultation will be discussed. These issues evolved in practice and were not preselected for analysis. The notion of evaluating predetermined variables for data analysis is located in a positivist, not a constructivist, research design.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRESENT STUDY

THE PRACTICE OF CONSULTATION AT A SCHOOL FOR SPECIALISED EDUCATION

This chapter provides a descriptive overview of the consultation service delivered at a school for specialised education. The narrative writing style describes the unfolding process within this instance of school systems consultation.

The form of consultation used in the present study

The underlying principle which informed the type of consultation used in this study was that of salutogenic rather than pathogenic service delivery. This meant that the consultants used a broad-based, systemic approach involving the whole school, rather than an individual-curative approach. The consultation service rendered to the school occurred within a participatory framework in order to demystify the roles of the consultants as "experts" who had to solve their problems for them. The responsibility for enhancing the system's growth was thus shared by consultants and consultees alike in a collaborative manner. The consultants sought to empower participants to enhance the growth and development of their system by themselves. This was aimed at ensuring that the service had a long-term developmental influence on the school system. The form of consultation offered aimed at being developmental and formative for the system as a whole, rather than pathologising and scapegoating particular subsystems or individuals.

The consultants used a method rather than a model of consultation in delivering this service to the school. Instead of applying an existing model of consultation, an

interactionist framework (action research) was adopted, with the consultants using their reflection of the consultation process to decide where to **punctuate** the system next. The action research spiral (PLAN-ACT-OBSERVE-REFLECT) encapsulates this particular process and serves as the framework within which the practice of consultation in this study will be related.

What follows now are the details of the study.

THE CONSULTATION SPIRAL IN ACTION

The emergence of the case

The request for a systems analysis emerged from the school. The vice-principal of this educational institution had been trained in systems work and was aware of tertiary lecturers training students in school systems consultation. He approached staff members of a local university in July 1993 for a systems analysis of his school. A decision was made to explore the viability of a joint service-and-research project.

The first meeting

A lecturer and four students interested in this project met with the vice-principal in his office. At this introductory meeting, the vice-principal provided information about the context of the school and the referral issue. According to the vice-principal, the school catered for mentally handicapped (IQ 30-50) children with an age range of 3 - 21 years. There were 240 children in the school, of whom approximately 10% lived in the hostel. The vice-principal defined the referral issue as a problem in the hostel of the school. The lack of a superintendent, conflict between staff members and difficulties between the hostel and the school were raised as issues. Several structural changes had been attempted to solve the problems in the hostel, such as clarifying job descriptions. At the end of this

meeting, the tertiary staff and students committed themselves to providing a consultation service to the school and to research systems consultation in a specialised education setting.

Deciding about roles and responsibilities for the consultation team

The same people met at the university about a week later to decide on team compositions. A form of spiral consultancy was adopted, with some members working directly with the school and others acting as external consultants to this worker-team. The vice-principal, a fellow student and the author offered to form the on-site worker-team that would work directly with the school. The two consultants decided on their researcher-practitioner roles, using this service delivery as the basis for the minor dissertation for their Masters Degrees. The vice-principal requested that the confidentiality of his school be protected by not mentioning the name of the school in research reports. The other members became external consultants who were not in direct contact with the school and had the task of helping the worker-team reflect on dynamics unfolding within the consultation process.

At this meeting the issue of contracting was discussed. The vice-principal said that he had done some work with the hostel and school staff to this effect. The meeting decided that the worker-team would have to clarify what the expectations of staff were at the school regarding this service. A verbal contract was agreed upon to address the referral problem via a systems analysis report and feedback to the school by end November 1993. A further contract for systems intervention could then be negotiated. A future meeting was scheduled between the worker-team and the external consultants at which the status of the project would be established and to plan for the next phase.

Joining the system

Joining is defined in systems practice as the consultants' attempts to engage with the system and to be accepted as a credible source of help (Minuchin, 1974). The consultants had the task of making themselves known and accepted by the school as a whole. The vice-principal facilitated their entry into the system, introducing them to the different staff subsystems on separate occasions.

The first point of contact for the consultants was with the principal. The vice-principal introduced the consultants to the principal so that they could explain their roles and how they worked. In this interview, they explained that they needed openness and co-operation from the school to conduct the systems analysis as a means of addressing the referral problem. The vice-principal advised that professional appearance and demeanour were more likely to cultivate respect and trust in the consultants. The aim of the service was clarified at this meeting as an "analysis of the school and how it operates". The principal further defined this verbal contract to include an assessment of how the management of the school could be improved. The management of the school was defined as the principal, vice-principal and the senior Head of Department.

At this stage the consultants observed the principal's personal interest in his staff's perception of his management style. What was also noted was the way professionalism and hierarchical status had been emphasised by management.

After being introduced to the principal, two Heads of Departments (HODs) were given the responsibility of showing the consultants around the different sections of the school. The consultants conducted interviews with these HODs about their expectations of this service. From these interviews the consultants learnt about the historical background of the school and how that could possibly be influencing the problems that they were experiencing. Problems highlighted by the HODs included the authoritarian management style, unclear job descriptions and unqualified teachers. The principal's expectation of needing to know where management was going *wrong* was reiterated by the HODs.

At this point the consultants felt that their next step would be to meet with the rest of the staff. In conducting the systems analysis, the consultants also wanted to assess whether the pattern of negativity they had encountered thus far would manifest itself within the rest of the system.

The acting-principal introduced the consultants to the teachers at a staff meeting. (The vice-principal had recently become the acting-principal as the principal had gone on leave in the last term of school.)The consultants clarified what their roles entailed and what the aim of the service to the school was. When asked, the teachers were not particularly forthcoming about their expectations of the consultation service, and they were asked to think about what they expected of the service.

After meeting the teachers, the consultants reflected on the lack of openness that they had observed within this subsystem. They queried whether their style had been too directive and distant with the teachers, perhaps too intent on portraying the status roles advised by the vice-principal. The consultants resolved to create a non-threatening atmosphere to build trust at the next session with the teachers. For the ensuing phase of the systems analysis, the consultants decided to conduct needs analyses with the different subsystems. This would serve as the vehicle through which the consultants could systemically analyse the patterns of behaviours, beliefs, values and relationships that were maintaining various dynamics, such as the referral problem, in the system.

By this stage, the consultants' perception of the structure of the staff system with which they worked was informed both by meetings with the vice-principal/acting principal as well as observations made during the consultation. The hierarchical structure was characteristic of state schools with the pyramid below indicating the various staff levels (Figure 1).

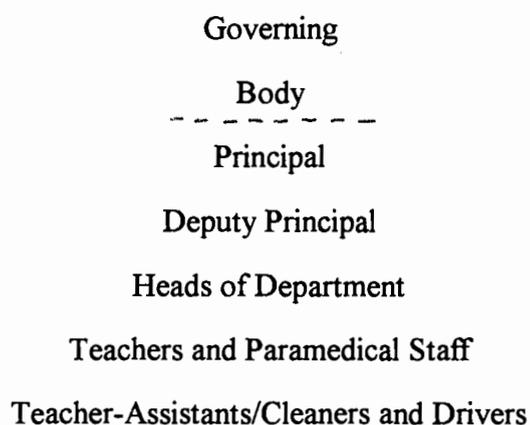


Figure 1

The subsystem structure within the school for specialised education which was of particular importance to the service, and within which boundaries the consultants were currently working, is outlined below (Figure 2).

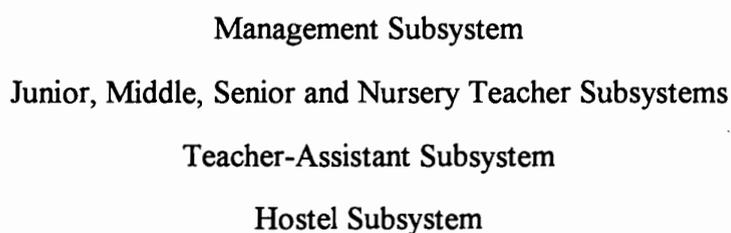


Figure 2

Clarifying expectations

For the next two sessions the consultants focused on engaging the subsystems below management level so as not to be perceived as management's "buddies". At this stage the consultants were working within the subsystem boundaries, i. e. working separately with the teacher and teacher-assistant subsystems. Needs assessments were conducted with

these subsystems on separate occasions. The same questions were posed to teachers and teacher-assistants about their expectations for their school. By focusing on their expectations rather than their problems, the consultants aimed to perturb the pattern of negativity observed at the school.

The acting-principal joined in with the teacher subsystem but did not attend the session with the teacher-assistant subsystem. The teachers were given fifteen minutes to write down what they wanted their school to be like. The questions were presented on a poster. The consultants assured them that their answers would be treated confidentially. This exercise was followed by discussions in small groups where they could choose to share aspects of whatever they had written. In the report-back plenary, the teachers were noticeably more relaxed and interactive than on a previous occasion when the principal had been present. They expressed surprise that many of their concerns for the school were shared by others. Their concerns centred mainly around conflicting relationships at school, with the principal as their main "scapegoat".

The consultants observed the more relaxed atmosphere after the teachers had been given a chance to discuss in smaller groups before conducting a plenary session. They planned to follow the same strategy to encourage openness from the teacher-assistants when conducting the needs assessment with them.

The teacher-assistants initially appeared guarded in their first interaction with the consultants. After the introductions, the consultants explained the nature of the work that they were doing. They used the same procedure as with the teachers to assess the assistants' expectations for the school. This time, however, there was confusion about what the questions on the poster meant. Some people had difficulty understanding certain words. Most of the teacher-assistants were Afrikaans-speaking, and the questions were posed in English. It was very apparent at the plenary session that the teacher-assistants were unhappy with their jobs.

The consultants reflected on how easily the teacher-assistants had connected with them as opposed to the initial distanced relationship they had experienced with the teachers. The consultants observed the cohesiveness of this group in terms of their concerns and low status in the school. By this stage the consultants had formed a picture of a disengaged system where the boundaries between the subsystems were rigid, resulting in distrust and misperception of one another's intentions. The relationship between the management and the teacher-assistant subsystems was perceived to be the most distant.

The consultants were concerned about the extent to which they might have become "stuck" in the detached patterns of the system and sought external consultation to reflect on this process concern. The feedback given to the consultants revolved around the need to provide feedback to the system about pattern maintenance. This would serve as a means of getting "unstuck" from a content level in order to notice how they were already provoking change in the system. The consultants decided to interview the acting-principal to track changes in the system.

Stock-taking

The consultants interviewed the acting-principal at the end of the school year as agreed upon in the verbal contract. In addition to reviewing the contract, the consultants aimed to assess the changes that the acting-principal perceived in the system since the commencement of the consultation. His impressions of how the system favourably perceived the consultants were discussed as well as the new needs that had developed within the system. The acting-principal related how he had become aware that the bus drivers were an isolated subsystem at the school, and that he was working on meeting some of their needs. The problems in the hostel had been sorted out with the appointment of a suitable matron. The emotional outbursts amongst the nursery staff were now the "real problem". He acknowledged that there were difficulties in dealing with the teacher-

assistants. Their job description (the dual roles of teaching and cleaning) was a source of tension at the school. The acting-principal felt that the end-of-year staff outing was a major achievement for staff relations. He indicated, however, that he still felt a need for the consultants to continue to open up lines of communication between the subsystems.

The acting-principal indicated to the consultants that their work needed to continue beyond merely understanding the dynamics within the system. The consultants observed how the original referral issue, namely, problems in the hostel, had been solved by the acting-principal without the consultants' direct involvement. Upon reflection, the consultants planned similarly not to intervene directly in the nursery subsystem. This decision was based on the systems principle that an isomorphic pattern of sorting out issues in the hostel would possibly be repeated in the nursery. The consultants planned to re-negotiate their contract to include an intervention phase with the school for the following year.

Re-joining the system

When the consultants negotiated re-entry into the system at the beginning of the new school year, it was without the benefit of an external consulting team since the logistics of arranging meeting times had become problematic. The consultants aimed to complete the systems analysis within the first term and a written contract was signed to this effect between themselves, the principal and the vice-principal. They specified that they would provide feedback in the form of discussion to all the subsystems that they had worked with the previous year. The contract further specified that the consultants would engage in an intervention with a focus group from within the school system. The selection of the focus group would be based on the consultants' analysis of the nodal point that typified maintenance patterns in the system. The management staff indicated that they needed an outline of what the consultants proposed to do. The amended contract was faxed to the school (Appendix B).

A new formality was perceived in the relationship between the management of the school and the consultants. Negotiations were pragmatic, focusing on the days that the consultants were available and the times that staff were available. The consultants felt that management was no longer regarding the service as a priority and that they were merely being accommodated. They planned to visit the school without informing management in order to directly observe any changes that had occurred since the principal's return. An underlying adversarial relationship emerged between management and the consultants. This was reinforced by the consultants' observation that the vice-principal had withdrawn overt support for the consultation service by letting the principal control and manage the process.

The consultants conducted informal interviews with members of the different subsystems to assess changes in the system. This unscheduled visit to the school was a means of re-joining with the various subsystems. The main question that was posed to available staff was "What has happened since we were here last year?" One consultant spoke to teacher-assistants, mainly, since the teachers had already left that afternoon. Some structural changes were evident for the bus drivers, namely, bus shelters and lighter duties. The conflict between teacher-assistants and management staff seemed to have escalated. The teacher-assistants complained about the teaching-and-cleaning aspect of their job, citing that another special school distinguished between cleaning and teacher-assistant staff. One of the HODs now acted as mediator between management and teacher-assistants.

The consultants reflected about the persistence of the old communication and interaction patterns between the subsystems despite the structural changes that had occurred: some changes had been instituted by the school; others resulted from changes in staff composition. The next phase in the consultation service involved providing feedback to the subsystems in terms of their interaction patterns with one another as observed the previous year. The consultants planned to assess changes in, and to encourage a more open pattern of, interaction between the various subsystems.

Feedback

Feedback was given on different occasions to combinations of subsystems in terms of their relationship patterns with each other. The feedback was part of the reflective methodology used by the consultants to encourage metacognition in the system. It also served as an intervention technique to open lines of communication between the subsystems as requested by the acting-principal the previous year.

A feedback session was arranged for the teachers and management staff. The consultants related to them that their main concerns had been the tense atmosphere at school, lack of co-operation amongst teachers and an unsupportive principal. The consultants asked the subsystems to relate to each other how things had changed since the previous year. The fishbowl technique (described in Chapter 2) was used to establish a non-threatening communication pathway. The teachers generally felt that they were tired of the negativity that had pervaded the school in the past, and wanted to pursue positive thinking. The nursery staff described the changes that had occurred there “like a dream come true”; one of their teachers had taken study leave for the year and this had relieved much of the tension they experienced the previous year. The teachers still felt that the pressures from the type of work that they did interfered with good relations at school. The physical isolation between various sections of the school entrenched division among them. There was still a sense of insecurity amongst the teachers about their different levels of qualifications. This would at times lead to misperceptions of colleagues’ intentions. One teacher commented that it was “such a relief to hear all of this”.

The consultants noted that the teachers did not risk commenting on their relationships with management staff who were present.

The principal commented that his perception of what was happening at the school differed from the teachers'. He seemed perturbed that in the previous year teachers had perceived so many negatives at the school, especially in terms of how he related to them. In his own words, "my open-door policy is in sy hel" (translated as "my open door policy is wrecked"). The principal spoke to his deputy about his misperception that if no-one complained, there was no problem! The vice-principal responded that there was no need for despondency because they were a committed staff that was willing "to meet each other halfway".

The consultants noted that the vice-principal appeared to be an effective bouncing bag for the principal to work through some vulnerable emotions! The principal and the vice-principal appeared to have an effective collegial working relationship. A more positive outlook on the management-teacher relationship was detected.

The feedback session involving the management and teacher-assistant subsystems followed next where the consultants assessed changes in their interaction patterns. An ice-breaker activity (described in Chapter 2) was used to literally "break the ice" between these subsystems! The use of humour helped initially to reduce the power differential and to encourage a sense of camaraderie. The consultants related the teacher-assistants' concerns in the form of a role-play, "gossiping" in their presence about the issues at school which had made them unhappy the previous year. Using the fishbowl exercise, the teacher-assistants were asked how they managed and kept going at the school despite their many complaints. Their responses reflected the joy of working with the children. The management staff, including the HOD who acted as mediator between these subsystems, were then asked to hold a discussion about the teacher-assistants' concerns as raised in the role-play, using the following leads given by the consultants:

"Management, discuss what you CAN do,
what you can TRY to do,

what you CANNOT do. ”

The management staff responded that what they *could* do was to listen, that they were aware of the financial difficulties experienced by the teacher-assistants and that the teacher-assistants could help with decisions about the school’s budget.

What management was willing to *try* included negotiating with the teacher-assistants as well as with the governing body about the re-allocation of funds, possibly employing fewer assistants earning higher wages.

What management *could not do* included making promises about better salaries or lessening their work-load as teacher-assistants. Tempers flared when the principal said that he was already conceding school holidays, which the teacher-assistants insisted was part of their contract. The tension escalated between the subsystems over what constituted “non-negotiables”, such as salary scales, nature of duties and working hours of teacher-assistants.

The consultants reflected that they had perhaps disempowered the teacher-assistant subsystem in this session by not taking cognisance of their readiness or willingness to interface with management at this stage. They had observed how, as management attacked, the teacher-assistants withdrew. The teacher-assistants did not appear to have the communication skills to negotiate with management. A very different style of interaction had been observed between the teachers and management where the teachers had been able to put their views across. Issues of race, culture and class (which were not raised previously) were being denied by management as factors which influenced and maintained the difficulties between themselves and the teacher-assistant subsystem. For the consultants, the maintenance cycles connected with authoritarian management style and power relations in the school system were highlighted.

On the basis of these observations, the consultants selected the teacher-assistant subsystem as the focus group for their intervention in the school system. Whilst taking cognisance of the interdependence of power dynamics in an authoritarian system, the consultants planned to develop team-building and negotiation skills within the teacher-assistant subsystem. The rationale for this capacity-building of the teacher-assistants was to enable them to get their needs met in the system as they had hitherto been either unsuccessful or unwilling to do. The consultants informed management of their decision to utilise the teacher-assistant subsystem as their focus group.

Promoting development in the system

The consultants selected the teacher-assistant subsystem as a focus group for the last two consultation sessions.

The first session was opened by asking about how they were feeling. Most people complained that the day before had been rough. They consulted one another about whether they ought to tell the consultants about it. Apparently they had been treated like children the day before; the principal watched them like “bandiete” (prisoners). The logbook had been checked to see whether anyone was clocking in falsely.

The consultants continued by instituting the *power game* (described in the previous chapter). The *rabble* was initially compliant. The game quickly disintegrated into a real-life scenario with members of the *elite* imitating the behaviour of real power figures at school. The *rabble* became aggressive towards the *elite*, refusing to do a second round of tasks. Loud vocalisations depicted a heightened emotional state. The *rabble* elected to give up their jobs rather than to continue working under such conditions. The *power game* came to an abrupt halt.

The consultants remarked to the teacher-assistants that the representative that acted as go-between between the *elite* and the *rabble* illustrated the differences between choosing someone from within their ranks as a representative versus having an outsider representing them. A discussion about their representation at management level ensued. Within their own school situation, the HOD acting as mediator between themselves and management apparently dealt with routine, bureaucratic issues in meetings with them; she could not “speak from the heart” because their issues were not her issues. There was resistance when the consultants suggested the idea of co-representation at management meetings. They had tried that before and the principal had stormed out of such meetings. (The consultants admitted to each other afterwards how they had struggled with their anger and frustration when the teacher-assistants used their habitual refrain: “Nothing makes any difference at this school”). One consultant interjected that the contract with the school was about how the management style needed to be more effective. This meant that the consultants were therefore in a position to advise the principal on how to run things differently.

Towards the end of this session, the principal checked when the consultants would be finished so that the assistants could return to their classes. An impromptu secret ballot revealed that fourteen out of fifteen teacher-assistants were willing to sacrifice their jobs if conditions did not improve at the school.

The consultants set a homework task that the assistants needed to complete during the next two weeks before meeting with them again.

The task entailed

- (1) choosing a representative as a spokesperson for the teacher-assistants;
- (2) scheduling a meeting with the mediator to discuss co-representation at management level;
- (3) scheduling a meeting for the representative and the mediator to meet with management.

This task was based on their complaint that the mediator was not able to bring their views across to management. But she also had the authority which made management listen to her. Choosing their own “rep” meant that someone could assist the mediator in the negotiation process.

The *power game* was used to encourage and develop reflexivity about power dynamics in staff relations. One consultant related to the other that she thought that the suicidal tendency to throw up their jobs could be just another form of avoidance. The consultants reflected upon the historical discrimination issues that have contributed to the patterns of helplessness and victimisation displayed by this subsystem.

The consultants had become task-oriented in their attempts to develop team-building and negotiation skills with the aim of empowering this subsystem to get its voice heard in the system. The vague statement in the contract of "engaging in an intervention with a selected group" (Appendix B) had become concretised in this process. Neither management nor the consultants had been aware of the form that the intervention would eventually take. The collaborative approach between the consultants and management was no longer in force, as the consultants were now taking the leading decisions in the intervention phase.

The last session

The consultants planned to get feedback from the teacher-assistants about the homework task that had been set for them in the previous session.

The session was opened by asking the group about what had happened in the previous two weeks. They had not attempted the task that the consultants had set for them. One teacher-assistant said that their hopes for changes for themselves at school were pinned on the April elections. The teacher-assistants insisted that “dinge moet verander in die nuwe Suid

Afrika” (translated as “things must change in the new South Africa”). The consultants continued the group discussion by exploring the political metaphor (i. e. the expectation of change after an election) with which the teacher-assistants seemed familiar. The consultants pointed out that the teacher-assistants’ sense of helplessness was being compounded by their belief that only outsiders could make a difference to their work situation. Someone angrily retaliated that the principal thought he was the ultimate authority. When reflecting upon it, the consultants felt that the teacher-assistants became very angry with them at this stage and dismissed their efforts with an attitude of “See, we told you nothing changes at this school”. A different opinion was voiced that the principal was that way with others as well, not only with the teacher-assistants. Someone tried to understand the principal’s behaviour by admitting that “hy sit met die gemors van twee skole” (translated as “he inherited the problems of two schools”), indicating that the principal was having to sort out the problems that came with the amalgamation of two schools.

They were asked to whom they thought the principal really listened. According to the teacher-assistants, the vice-principal had a strong influence on the principal. For them, the vice-principal was also an approachable person, but they had never thought of communicating directly with him.

One teacher-assistant that had impressed the consultants with her leadership skills brought the session to a close on a hopeful note. She acknowledged that they had power as a team rather than as individuals and that communication needed to be set up between themselves and management. In her own words -

“Ons is n span. Ons kan saamstaan. Ons moet voorstel wat ons wil he. ”

(Translated as “ We are a team. We can stick together. We should suggest what we want.”)

She was elected as the teacher-assistants' representative at management level at the close of the session, which also marked the end of the consultation service to the school. The principal and vice-principal joined the session to express the appreciation of the school for the service the consultants had rendered to them.

The consultants reflected later that the teacher-assistants had been frustrated by the fact that the consultants had not given them what they wanted, namely, to intercede directly on their behalf at management level. What had been promising was that proactive development had emerged from within this subsystem with the election of their own representative, a person who had focused on a solution, not the problems.

At the end of the first school term the consultants submitted a report (Appendix A) to the school detailing the systems analysis and their recommendations for improved management style. In a separate letter the consultants invited comment, suggested that the report be made available for all staff members and availed themselves for clarification. No response was forthcoming from the school.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

The stated aim of this study is a reflection on the practice of school systems consultation. The author uses the second-order reflection in the action research spiral, described in Chapter Three, to reflect upon the consultants' own process within this study (Walker, 1991).

Two substantive issues are reflected upon from the many possible ones which emerged within the process of school systems consultation. Firstly, the opportunities and constraints connected with collaboration, participation and reflection within an action research approach to school systems consultation are presented. Secondly, the issue of power in the context of school systems consultation is reflected upon with particular reference to the role of the consultant as external change agent in school systems.

What follows now is a discussion of these issues.

THE ISSUE OF COLLABORATION WITHIN AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

Advantages of collaboration with the vice-principal

Consultants are urged to pay particular attention to *cultivating the host culture* (Georgiades and Phillimore, 1975; quoted in Burden, 1981), which emphasises the importance of spending enough time building effective collaborative relationships with those in power positions within the school. The consultants frequent meetings with the

vice/acting-principal were probably an important influence on the development of collegiality between him and the consultants.

Burden (1981) emphasises the importance of having a team member from within the school who has high status. The consultants' association with someone of high status and positive influence at the school (the vice-principal who was then acting-principal) probably afforded them the respect, trust and credibility they received from the staff. The vice-principal was perceived by the rest of the school as an approachable and understanding person. It was apparent that the vice-principal was an influential person at his school as he was the one who had approached the local university about school systems consultation on behalf of his school.

Utilising the acting-principal as a **mole** had definitely facilitated the consultants' entry into the school system. He provided the consultants with information about the system which would otherwise not have been available to them as outsiders. He also provided the consultants with further insights about ongoing changes that were occurring within the system. In this way, he was the mole that guided the consultants about important changes within the school.

During the period that the principal took leave, the acting-principal implemented important structural changes which positively influenced the running of the school. It seemed likely that the consultation service and the principal being on leave afforded the acting-principal the opportunities to further his own covert agenda at the school.

As much as the collaborative association between the consultants and the vice/acting-principal proved to be advantageous to the consultation relationship, certain constraints developed as a result thereof.

Collusion with the vice-principal

The close association that developed between the consultants and the vice/acting-principal led to a paradoxical consultation relationship.

As their association developed with the vice/acting-principal, the consultants felt the need to guard against **collusion** with him, when they became aware of the extent to which they were being directed by his perceptions and definitions of problems. The consultants decided not to be guided by his expectation that they ought to investigate the nursery. As acting-principal he seemed to have his own covert agenda of how the consultants could assist him to "fix" the problems at the school while the principal was on leave. As a result of their decision not to collude with him, the working relationship between the consultants and the acting-principal became more distant. This may have affected his level of interest and the stake that he felt he had been given in the project initially.

The consultants became aware that the acting-principal framed the school's problems from a managerial rather than a systemic perspective. The linear causality apparent in the acting-principal reasoning was in conflict with the consultants' systemic understanding of how the system operated. The collegial relationship was placed under strain by the difference in perceptions. The consultants found themselves in a predicament, systemically analysing the acting-principal as part of the system, but also expecting him to provide feedback on and direction to the consultation process. There is a fine balance between "cultivating the host culture" and collusion which is inherent in systems practice and the need for clear boundaries becomes apparent.

Neglect of the principal

Dowling (1985) emphasises the need to respect existing hierarchies in a school system to ensure the effectiveness of service delivery. The consultants' close association with the

vice-principal led to their neglect of the principal. This ultimately resulted in the consultation service being given low priority status at the school. The consultants' close association with the vice-principal led to minimal contact with the principal. It was the vice/acting-principal with whom the consultants met to strategise entry into the school system, relying on him to guide their coupling with the school. The consultants never met with the principal without the vice-principal being present. For the duration of the service, the vice-principal remained the consultants' point of contact with the school. The consultants had initially formed a strong ally in the vice-principal, on whom the principal initially depended completely to "supervise" the consultation service. The consultants in turn depended too much on the symbiotic relationship that existed between the vice-principal and the principal, and thus neglected to form a strong alliance between themselves and the principal. Burden (1981) emphasises the importance of making an alliance with the principal if change is to be brought about in schools. The consultants' neglect in this regard ultimately influenced the status the service was allotted at the school, especially when the principal returned from leave the following year, not having been kept abreast of developments in the consultation service. These repercussions are discussed more fully under the section on power.

Collaboration in the contracting process

The isomorphic relationship between the opportunities and constraints within a collaborative contracting process is outlined below.

Flexibility

An action research approach ensures that the contracting process remains flexible in order to take into consideration the evolvment of phenomena within the school system (Taylor, 1985). The contract was adapted as further dynamics emerged within the school. However, management and the consultants had different perceptions of what it was that the consultants had to focus on. The initial referral problem of the hostel was solved with the

appointment of a suitable matron. The consultants did not unilaterally accept the acting-principal's perception that the problems experienced in the nursery should become the next focus for the consultants. How the consultants perceived their contract with the school apparently differed from his. For the consultants, crisis management had not been part of their contract, although it appeared that this was an expectation of the acting-principal. The consultants felt it was up to them to decide where best to punctuate the system next.

Partnership

The collaborative approach advocated by action research implies delivering a service through partnership with the school. In this regard the contracting process with the school needs to be illuminated in terms of the decision-making processes it embodied. It would also be significant to look at who was involved in the contracting process, and who was not.

The leading role played by the vice-principal

The vice-principal initially played a major role in the agreements that were made between the school and the consultants. It can be noted how the vice-principal's perception of the problem, namely, hostilities amongst staff in the hostel, was accepted by the consultants as the referral issue. The vice-principal might have been led to expect that the consultants would work only with his definition of the problem. The consultants curtailed the leading role which the vice-principal played and this reduced their own influence in the system.

How the service was framed in the school system

Ideally the contracting process involves the ratification of the consultants' objectives and methods with all participants. According to the vice-principal, he had clarified to the staff what they could expect in terms of a systems analysis being conducted at the school. However, the consultants never had a clear idea of what the vice-principal had led the staff to expect. This groundwork which the vice-principal had conducted became suspect when

the consultants ultimately perceived the linearity in the vice-principal's perception of systems work.

The staff' expectations

The consultants had outlined to the principal what they needed from the school in order to conduct an effective systems analysis. What they had failed to do was to spend enough time getting from staff what they needed and wanted from the consultation service, and what the consultants were able and not able to offer. The consultants did not indicate adequately to the subsystems how the service was delimited, that is, what they could and could not expect from the service. A case in point would be the expectations that the teacher-assistants harboured.

Overly high expectations

It became apparent early on in the service that the teacher-assistants thought that the consultants were conducting a service which was aimed at improving their work conditions. The consultants felt that this subsystem had categorised them in the roles of trade unionists whose sole purpose should be to intervene on their behalf at management level. This expectation frustrated the consultants, who were uninformed about labour legislation and therefore not in a position to deal with such needs. The assistants obviously could not insist that the consultants intervene for them at management level, but in conducting the systems analysis it was difficult for the consultants to ignore acting on what seemed to be the most pressing and critical need of this particular subsystem.

Management's expectations

It must be borne in mind that the contracting process had been conducted mainly at management level. The expectations of management were focused on determining how their management style could be improved. The consultants, using an action research approach, were proceeding according to where their analysis indicated the school's greatest

need was. Unfortunately, this did not correspond with management's unstated expectation that the area of investigation should remain at management level.

Overt and covert agreements

The overt verbal contract between the consultants and the vice-principal initially had a clear problem-solving focus - to analyse the problems occurring in the hostel. When the consultants met with the principal, this verbal agreement became less focused - to analyse where management could be improved. The principal appeared to have had a covert agenda, which entailed that the consultants investigate the staff's perception of his role at the school. This was not overtly stated.

It could be said that a covert understanding existed between the consultants and the vice-principal that the consultation service was his domain, not the principal's. The consultants believed that the vice-principal was the one with whom they should collaborate as he was knowledgeable about systems practice. This can be detected in the number of meetings that the consultants held with the vice-principal, as opposed to the number of times they met with the principal. Other than the one meeting where the principal had described what his expectations were, the consultants never met with him to discuss his perceptions, concerns and expectations of the service as it progressed.

The decisions made between management and the consultants remained covert in relation to the rest of the school. The other subsystems were not informed about management's expectations. These subsystems, in turn, did not make use of the opportunity to focus attention on their own expectations of the service. It could possibly have been interpreted that the service was done entirely on management's behalf.

Conflicting expectations

The contract in a systems analysis needs to formulate the criteria against which the expectations of those involved can be assessed (Burden, 1981). The main pitfall in the first

half of the consultation service was the fact that no written contract was drawn up. As a result different parties had different expectations about what the service would entail. In the end, no-one was clear that what the service had set out to achieve (as far as the different parties understood it) had indeed been accomplished. The second half of the service started out with a written contract between management and the consultants. But at this point the contract felt more like management's checking up and curbing the consultants' activities, rather than a mutually agreed upon set of objectives and procedures for the completion of the systems analysis.

THE ISSUE OF A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH WITHIN ACTION RESEARCH

Access to staff

The consultants made a verbal agreement with the principal that they would be given access to all staff members. The consultants realised that, in order to understand the system as a whole, they would need to make contact with the various subsystems, individually as well as jointly, to observe their transactions. To conduct a systems analysis where the objective was to "analyse the school and how it operates", the consultants had to take into account the impact of all stakeholders on the patterns which influenced staff functioning.

Involvement of staff

To ensure that all levels of staff became involved, the consultants conducted introductory sessions with all the subsystems. The bus drivers could not attend these initial sessions and the consultants neglected to involve them at other times that would have fitted their schedules better. Therefore this subsystem remained a grey area for the consultants in terms of their needs, perceptions and impact at the school. In a certain way this neglect did

have a proactive impact on development in the system: in his feedback session with the consultants at the end of that year, the acting-principal admitted that he then realised that the bus drivers were a neglected subsystem at the school and that he intended to focus on them specifically in order to meet some of their needs.

Besides endeavouring to ensure that all levels of staff became involved and could participate in the service, the consultants felt that the way in which they structured sessions with the subsystems needed to be interactive and experiential.

An experiential approach

The joining manoeuvres were thus aimed at building trust and encouraging openness so that staff could participate fully without fear of reprisals. As it turned out, someone from management staff, either the principal or vice-principal, was always present when the consultants conducted sessions with the teacher subsystem. Management clearly identified with this particular subsystem. The consultants noted that the teachers as a subsystem remained fairly distant from them throughout the service and did not risk commenting publicly on their relationship with the management subsystem, although they had done so on the confidential questionnaire conducted at the start of the service. This indicated that the consultants needed to have taken cognisance of the conditions which threatened people and mitigated against getting a true reflection of what people were thinking and feeling about those who "managed" them, no matter how "healthily" the relationship was depicted.

Reaching out

By demonstrating a participatory approach, the consultants may have built the capacity of management to reach out to those who felt that their needs at school were neglected and ignored. The consultants noted that management seemed surprised about the opportunity that was granted to the teacher-assistant subsystem to air their perceptions of the school. It

was very telling how management had joined in with the teachers, but not with the teacher-assistants. The consultants had to specifically request management to be present at a session when the transaction patterns between the subsystems were being explored. It was also significant how management allotted a specific duration for the teacher-assistants' time with the consultants. What was significant in management's perception of who was considered "staff" was reflected in a statement made by the acting-principal in his feedback session with the consultants when he declared that the end-of-year staff outing was "a real achievement " for staff relations - and the consultants realised that he had not included the teacher-assistants in his perception of "staff relations".

Perhaps the consultants' decision to select the teacher-assistant subsystem as their focus group tended to bridge the gap perceived between management and teacher-assistants. By including and involving a neglected subsystem, the service was sending a clear message to management that the school system needed linking between the workers and management. In the new year, management had set up a tenuous link with the teacher-assistant subsystem by appointing a Head of Department to act as mediator between the subsystems.

THE ISSUE OF REFLECTION WITHIN AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

Reflection helped the consultants to remain aware of their socially constructed perceptions and how those perceptions were influencing the ways in which they were responding to dynamics in the school system.

External consultancy

External consultancy was the means through which the consultants were afforded a measure of "subjective objectivity" (Burden and Brown, 1987) about the dynamics

evolving between themselves and the school system. Needless to say, the external consultants focused mainly on the consultants' relationship with the vice-principal. It was their opinion that the uneasy power relationship between the consultants and the vice-principal was undermining the consultants' autonomy and mobility. This feedback to the consultants influenced their decision to create a more distanced relationship between themselves and the vice/acting principal, which affected the consultation relationship dramatically. It can be noted how potently external consultancy appeared to affect the consultants' decisions when the consultants themselves are still at trainee level.

In the final meeting at the end of that year the external consultants recommended that the consultants think about the effects of spanning a service over a long school holiday. The external consultants felt that the consultants needed to be rethink the power the acting-principal would have to continue implementing changes when the principal returned from leave and to take heed of the transition in management that would take place shortly. It was soon apparent in the new year that the consultation service was not the principal's priority and that management seemed to be indulging the consultants by "allowing" them to complete their services to the school. This further distanced the relationship between management and the consultants. The extent to which this disengaged relationship influenced the consultants' choice of the teacher-assistants as a focus group could not reflected upon as external consultancy had terminated. The consultants may have become more concerned with working according to their own needs and political agendas than providing a service that was in accord with the expectations of the school. Short-sighted pragmatism, that is, mainly wanting to get a job done, may also have left a bitter taste in the mouth of those who feel that the consultants had short-changed them.

Feedback as a form of reflection

An action research approach holds as axiomatic that insights gained would be reflected back to the stakeholders (McNiff, 1988). The consultants utilised feedback sessions to

communicate the patterns that they had observed back to the subsystems in order to facilitate partnership. The subsystems which were experiencing serious communication problems were management and teacher-assistants. The consultants believed they had empowered both subsystems to start talking to each other about issues which had soured their relations for years. Although matters had not been resolved, both sides were now aware of each other's needs and expectations. The consultants felt that through their feedback, they had given these subsystems the beginnings of a process of negotiation where they could begin to meet each other half-way, in much the same way as the management and teacher subsystems were able to do.

THE ISSUE OF POWER WITHIN SCHOOL SYSTEMS CONSULTATION

The consultants initially perceived schools as open systems, capable of change and adaptation once they received feedback from external change agents such as consultants. Before long it became apparent that this organic metaphor needed to be augmented by the political metaphor of systems (Flood & Jackson, 1991). The dynamics which the consultants experienced pointed to the need to understand the issue of power inherent in the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of South African schools (De Jong, 1995). The role of the consultant as external change agent will be discussed with particular reference to the issue of promoting capacity-building at all levels of the school system.

From an organic to a political metaphor of school systems

Schools were initially perceived by the consultants as organic systems, capable of change and adaptation when given sufficient input from an external source such as the school consultant. Although the metaphor of the school as an open system was not discarded, the consultants gradually found themselves including the language and perceptions of the political metaphor of systems. What the consultants were observing in this school system

were political processes involving conflict and the pursuit of power between subsystems. The main conflicts seemed to occur in the relationships between the management subsystem and the other subsystems. The main stressor for the teachers was based on the uneasy relationship they had with the principal. It was within the relationship between management and the teacher-assistant subsystem that conflict of interests became most obvious. The tension between these subsystems highlighted the cogency of the inclusion of the political metaphor of systems to balance the "open systems" metaphor with its emphasis on homeostatic balance.

The consultant as external change agent

Although the consultants did not have *a priori* assumptions that the primary task of the service was to effect change in the system, it was understood that the system would not remain static. Even though intervention was not the primary objective of the service, the notion of discontinuous change (sudden or spontaneous change) always remained a possibility. Systems consultation is based on the premise that the school should as a whole benefit from the service. The consultants needed to punctuate the system at a juncture that would allow a ripple-effect of growth and development to spread throughout the system. This juncture seemed best served by the nodal point presented by the heightened tension between the management and teacher-assistant subsystems, which typified power issues in the system. As change agents, the school consultants geared themselves towards developing and extending the openings which would spur on the process of growth in the system. The external change agents therefore had a political agenda which the school system needed to have ratified and sanctioned.

It was apparent that the various subsystems were at varying levels of "readiness" in their capacities for change (De Jong, 1995). Even individuals within those subsystems were at differing states of readiness. For example, the fact that management had asked for the service, seemed to indicate that they felt the need for change in the system. But perhaps the

vice-principal was more ready to effect change than the principal; in the end, it was at the pace with which the principal was comfortable that change was effected, albeit at a much slower pace than was possible under the acting-principal's rule. It is clear that change will be possible only when there is at least an openness to the possibility for change by the actual people involved.

The advantage of an action research approach is that any change is self-directed by the staff and moves at a pace which suits the particular school and especially those in power positions who may themselves effect discontinuous change. What has emerged strongly in this study is how, more importantly, the pace of change needs to suit those with invested positional power at the school. Developing schools as enabling environments which effect and sustain growth and development could be hampered by power issues and the system's tendency to preserve its homeostatic balance. The principal, with his invested positional power, seemingly had felt the most threatened by the implications for change at his school. Under the circumstances, it would therefore have been difficult for self-generated change to occur in the school. The organic metaphor or "open systems" view sees change as being generated externally, that a change-agent from outside the system, with the co-operation of the head of the school, is needed to take on a consultative role. The political metaphor, on the other hand, emphasises the key role of power in determining political outcomes. This study found the conceptualisation of change inherent in both metaphors relevant to the actual change process.

Capacity-building

In the process of the reconstruction of education and education support services in South Africa, everyone affiliated to the educational system should ideally have equal access to services such as consultation. Capacity-building is seen as a key factor in the transformation process in education (NEPI, 1993). For the consultants, capacity-building needs to take place at all levels of the school system, and should not remain the exclusive

domain of management. The principle of life-long learning proposes that schools be developed as enabling environments for all those who are affiliated with them (ANC Discussion Document, 1994). It was the experience of the consultants in this study that certain subsystems continue to be neglected or ignored, or are simply not regarded as forming part of the staff at the school. As a result of the consultants' work at the school, the acting-principal became aware that the bus drivers formed a subsystem whose needs remained anonymous to management. This was an example of how proactive development occurred within the system, and certain of the bus drivers' structural needs, such as bus shelters to work under, were ultimately met by management.

The consultants noted that the deeper issue underlying the complaints of the teacher-assistant subsystem was that of feeling unimportant and disregarded at the school. The relationship between the teacher-assistant and management subsystems were the most disengaged in a system where a pattern of alienation existed between the subsystems. The consultants selected the teacher-assistants as a focus group, working on the hypothesis that the system possibly needed linking between management and workers. As a result of the service, management has set up a tenuous link with the teacher-assistant subsystem by appointing a Head of Department to act as mediator between the subsystems. The consultants attempted to develop team-building and negotiation skills with the aim of empowering the teacher-assistant subsystem to get its voice heard in the system.

The consultants failed to enlighten and to get the support from the management and teacher subsystems for this focus on the teacher-assistants. The focus on the teacher-assistants probably became construed by the other subsystems as the consultants' attempts to "stir up trouble" at the school. This again points to the need for school consultants to negotiate a contract with the staff which clarifies what they can expect in terms of consultancy style, methods and procedures, and emphasises the need for a degree of autonomy as regards focus on any particular subsystems.

This chapter has raised two substantive issues relating to school systems consultation as they emerged from this study. Firstly, the limits and possibilities of action research as a collaborative, participatory and reflective form of service delivery were illustrated. Secondly, the issue of power in the context of South African schools raised questions about the role of the school consultant as an external change agent who aims to promote capacity-building at all levels of the school system.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The future implications of school systems consultation as a service delivery option for the educational psychologist working in the South African context are considered in this chapter.

1. Influence of curative training

It becomes apparent in this study that the dominant curative practices and training activities of educational psychologists interferes with their ability to practise systemically. There is a tendency to slip into individualistic, traditional service delivery methods, such as using pathogenic labels. The language of the consultants reflects the curative influence, as in the notion of the problems in the hostel having been *fixed*. It will not be possible for Educational Psychology to achieve the full potential of a systems approach without making the paradigm shift that is required in its practice and training activities.

2. Conflict of values

Educational psychologists who perceive their roles as change agents in the South African education system need to challenge theoretical systems injunctions to operate within and respect the status quo. The implications of systems principles such as "respecting the existing hierarchies" and "forging alliances with those in power" need to be questioned. Educational psychologists are presented with a unique opportunity to do things differently in this country. The nature of the practices that they construct must reflect the values that are being shaped in society. This requires that they work collectively and in partnership with *all* sectors of the education system, "unleashing the creative energies, talents, skills

and resources of all our people: learners, teachers, parents, communities,...". (ANC Discussion Document, 1994).

3. Accessibility

Educational psychologists must endeavour to reach out to all subsystems within education, especially those who have been historically ignored or neglected. The work of the psychologist needs to be designed to give access to participants who may have varying literacy levels, communication skills and low status levels in school systems. For instance, in the initial session with the teacher-assistants there was a problem in terms of the language used. Educational psychologists need to be sensitive to the levels from which participants operate.

4. Transparency in the consultant's agenda

Educational psychologists must be open about the motivations on which their whole school interventions are based. This study indicated that consultants who perceive themselves as change agents are strongly motivated by political agendas, such as capacity-building. Whilst continuously seeking and finding ways of unleashing the energies, talents and resources of all people, psychologists need to maintain their ethical standards of practice when working with schools. The issue here is to balance transparency in terms of management being aware of the consultants' agenda whilst respecting the confidentiality of subsystems who have less power.

5. Power struggle

Educational psychologists need to be aware of the potential for a power struggle with those in invested power positions at the school. As a result of this study, the authoritarian management style at the school was called into question by the other subsystems and those

in invested power positions sought to minimise the consultants' influence in the system. Conflicting expectations of the role and tasks of the consultant undermine the feasibility of the service. Greater clarity in the contracting process with tighter boundary setting could limit the extent to which consultants become enmeshed in the power struggle.

6. Credibility

It was the consultants' experience in this study that their age, race, gender and experience undermined the credibility they were given within a White, male-dominated, predominantly Afrikaans-speaking school. The historical context of schooling in South Africa continues to perpetuate the traditional values upheld in different communities. The implications for the young, Coloured and Indian female trainees in this study were two-fold: on both social and professional influence levels their impact on the school system was minimised. It is evident that in order to maximise their influence as school systems consultants educational psychologists must take reflexive cognisance of the social and political implications of the contexts in which they practice.

7. Contracting

This study highlights the need for greater clarity in the contracting process. The expectations of the various subsystems at times conflicted with the objectives and procedures decided upon by the consultants. What becomes apparent is the necessity for a clearly written agreement between the contracting parties which would prevent problems about role, termination, method of intervention and the focus of the consultation. Unlike psychotherapy, where resistance and reluctance are grist for the mill, focusing on such defence mechanisms in consultation appears to be detrimental to the process. The tasks and responsibilities of all parties have to be defined in an unambiguous way in order to short-circuit potential attempts at sabotage. Even with a clearly defined contract, the school's investment in resolving emergent issues, as well as the consultant's leverage in this regard, appear to be of an arbitrary nature and beyond control in consultation.

8. The school context

Changes within the school's staff composition and academic calendar influenced the priority status the consultation was given at the school. Spanning the consultation from year to year meant that the consultants needed to re-establish links at the school and to re-acquaint themselves with changes in personnel and the school's programme. The implications of conducting a consultation service when the commitment of a key person, such as the principal who had gone on a term's leave, was not assured had serious repercussions for the ultimate status of the consultation in this study. Consultants need to assess the feasibility of conducting a service within a changing milieu by considering the realities of the logistics at any particular time of the school context within which the practice.

9. Time frame

A limited time period does not give the consultant sufficient flexibility to assess and intervene in the system in as thorough a manner as may be required. Ideally, developmental and formative systems consultation would take place within a long-term project. Both Burden (1978) and Checkland (1981) emphasise the importance of an involvement which allows the intervention to reflect on itself. The time restraint within this study allowed for a systems analysis and a brief intervention on the patterns within the system. It did not allow for the recommended changes to be implemented, monitored and assessed by the consultants. The implications of a limited and incomplete follow-up within a system may result in a feeling of having been short-changed by the consultants who could be perceived as having had limited investment in the outcome of the intervention.

10. Systemic-preventive vs individualistic-curative approach

School systems consultation, despite its limitations as discussed in this study, hopefully indicates the extent to which consultancy, through perturbation of a system can lead to a service delivery option which ultimately reaches more stakeholders than the traditional one-to-one individualistic approach can possibly hope to. Through locating issues of concern as being situated within a system rather than within an individual there is more chance of effecting change which will impact on all members of the subsystems involved. Clearly in the South African context where resources are scarce, rapid changes are being implemented and power relations are crucial, an approach such as this is highly recommended.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully explicate the advantages of an indirect service delivery model through consultancy. It should however be apparent that a consultancy approach involving action research methodology has the potential to effect meaningful long-term change in South African schools, within the broad socio-political context of the Reconstruction and Development Programme for Education and Training in South Africa.

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APPENDIX A

Systems Consultation Report

*** Training Centre**

April 1994

**Ardela Daniels
Nadeen Moolla**

BACKGROUND TO THE REFERRAL

The report intends to document and provide feedback on a systems analysis of x Training Centre by a consultancy team. Both team members (Ardela Daniels and Nadeen Moolla), are qualified teachers with experience in the field of schools systems analysis. Their work reflects a particular interest in the theory and practice of Educational Psychology service delivery in South Africa.

The team was approached to conduct an analysis of the x System, not only to look for problems, but to gain an understanding of how the school and individuals therein function. It was requested that we address particularly the issue of role definition within the school, management style and the supportive role which management could play. We were also required to explore the functioning of the school as a whole, searching for ways in which things should or could be done differently.

The process of systems consultation began in August 1993, and extended over a period of eight months, concluding with the submission of this report.

We hope that, just as this report marks the end of a process, that it is also seen as providing the impetus for further development at x.

SYSTEMS CONSULTATION CONTRACT WITH X

The team undertakes to do the following:

1. to complete active work at x by the end of the first term 1994
2. to work at the school on Friday mornings and/or afternoons
3. to provide feedback in the form of discussion to all groups that have worked with the team
4. to engage in an intervention with a selected group from within the x system
5. to submit a report on 18 April 1994 which will include
 - (a) an analysis of the system
 - (b) recommendations for the future

THE NATURE OF THE CONSULTATION

The process of consultation involved entry into the system, information-gathering, feedback, intervention and the compilation of a written report.

Contacts were documented and comprehensive field notes were kept to inform our work at the school as well as the analysis of the system.

The methods employed were varied, including observation, conducting interviews, facilitating group process, role-play and the use of metaphor. We chose to connect with particular individuals and groups, depending on what the system presented to us. The analysis focuses on patterns of relationships, behaviour, communication and beliefs in the system. It also explores identified needs and how power dynamics and expectations determine whether or not goals are achieved.

The team's work at the school was geared towards understanding how problems are maintained by various groups within the system, and not to scapegoat individuals or lay blame at any one particular point.

The team often played a role in giving the system mobility, in keeping the system open and creating space for things to continue to work. Our aim was to open up communication channels - to get people and groups to speak and to listen to one another. We are aware that this may have been perceived as threatening to the system, however it could be used as an opportunity to begin to do things differently.

HISTORY OF CONTACTS

Dates	Contact Persons	Description
10.8.93	Principal and Deputy Principal	Introductions
13.8.93	Principal and two heads of department	Tour of the school and interviews
17.8.93	Teachers and Acting-principal	Clarifying roles and expectations of the team
24.8.93	Teachers and Acting-principal	Needs assessment - groupwork
14.9.93	Teacher-assistants and hostel staff	Introduction, needs assessment, groupwork
11.10.93	Acting-principal	Feedback and feedforward
21.1.94	Principal and Deputy-principal	Re-entry into the system
18.2.94	Teachers and teacher-assistants	School visit and observation
25.2.94	Principal and Deputy Principal Teachers	Feedback and groupwork
4.3.94	Principal, Deputy Principal Head of department Teacher-assistants	Feedback and groupwork
11.3.94	Teacher-assistants	Intervention
25.3.94	Teacher-assistants	Feedback and feedforward
18.4.94	Principal and Deputy Principal	Submission of report

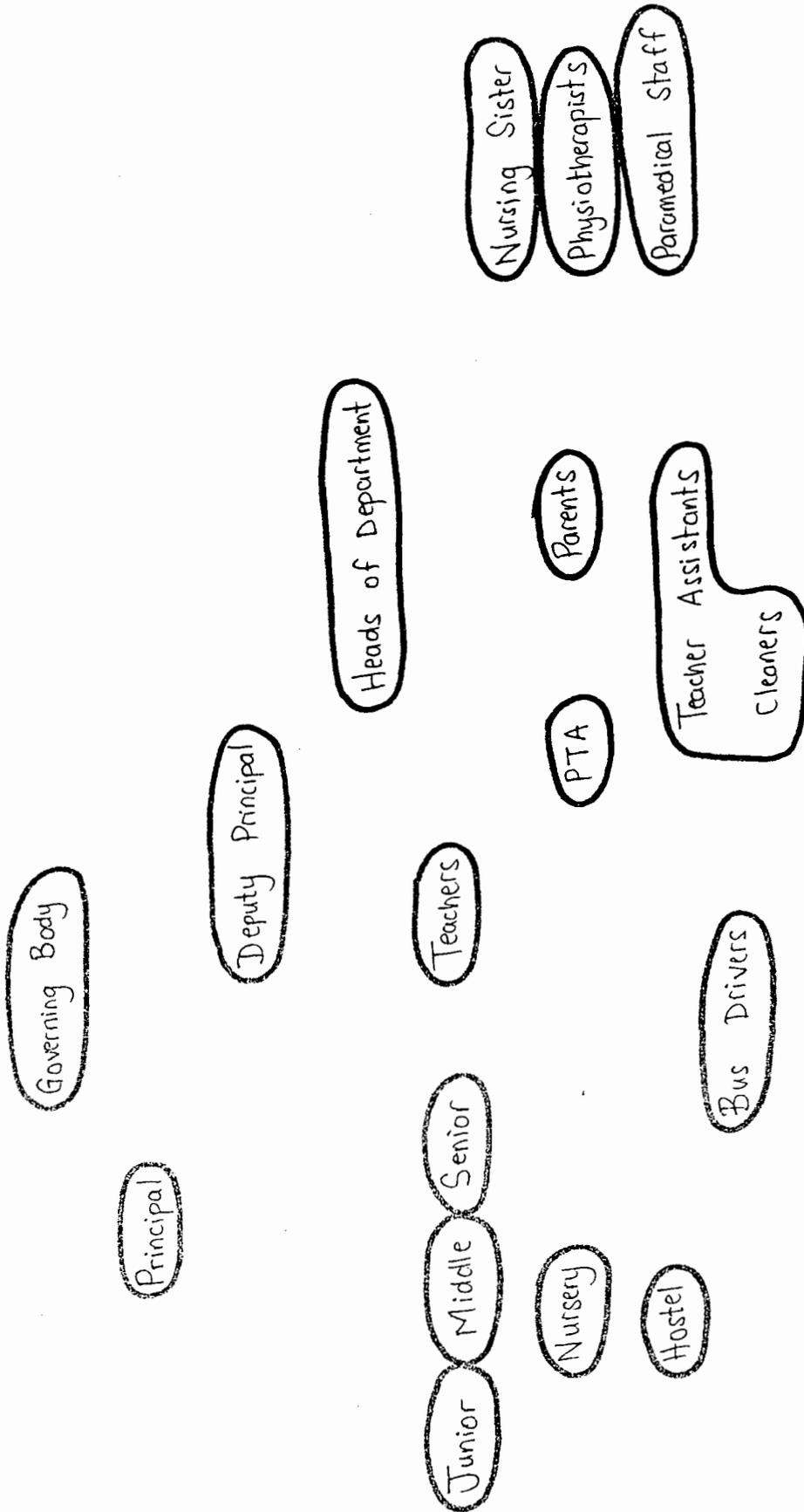
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The consultants worked from a systemic framework, that is, they saw the school as a living system which incorporated various subsystems which are in a state of continual interaction with one another. The subsystems are groups such as management, the teaching staff, the teacher-assistants, the governing body and so on. It is important to note that the consultants view the school system as interacting with other systems such as the families and communities of its members. Therefore, what happens at school could affect how you behave at home.

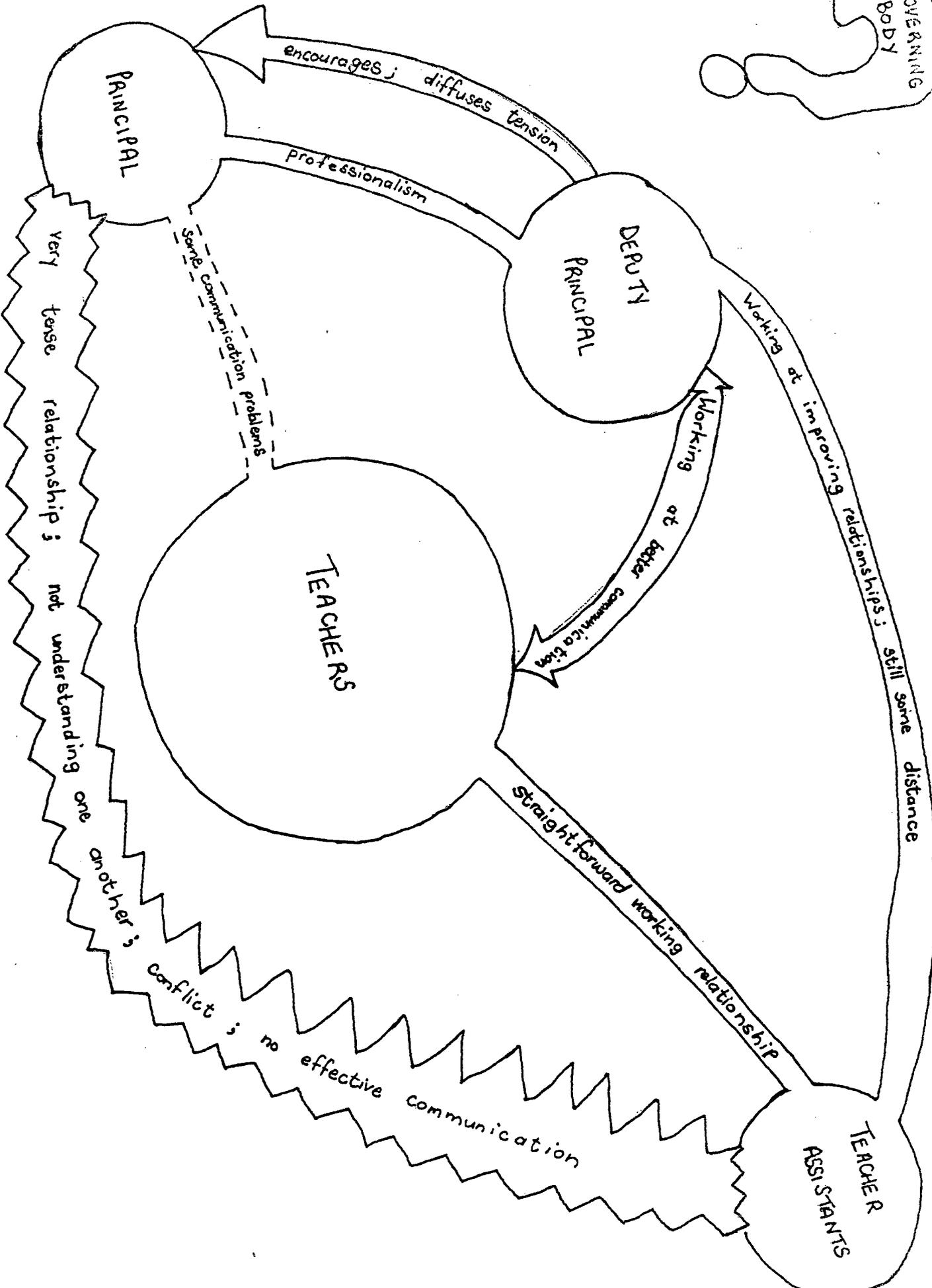
The picture overleaf illustrates how the consultants view what actually happens in systems such as schools. Various relationship patterns can be observed in the picture. Each individual has an important role in maintaining the system they have created. What happens to any individual is as important as what happens to the system as a whole. Each person is depending on another in order to do his job; this is how we believe schools work too. People work together to make the system function in the way that it does. Systems tend to create a balance which could be maintaining patterns that prevent or promote development and growth of the system as a whole.

The systems way of thinking understands change in particular ways. If a problem has existed for a long time, it does not necessarily take as long to resolve. Big problems do not necessarily need big solutions. Change that affects the whole system can be initiated by any of the subsystems. An important thing to remember is that people or groups make the school the way it is. If there is something which makes people unhappy at the school, they are responsible for changing their own actions which are presently helping to maintain the unhappy situation. There is an interdependence between people in terms of what they do. If someone, like the man cutting the rope, alters the pattern, it results in a ripple effect which affects all who form part of the system.

OUR PERCEPTION OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM



GOVERNING
BODY



ANALYSIS OF PATTERNS

HOW RELATIONSHIP AND BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS ARE BEING MAINTAINED IN THE SYSTEM

The consultants perceived certain relationship patterns within each subsystem, between subsystems and between the whole system and its environment:

(a) within the management subsystem

- * a professional working relationship between principal and deputy-principal
- * the principal asked the deputy for his opinion on certain matters
- * the deputy diffuses the principal's tension about thorny issues

(b) within the teacher subsystem

- * awareness of one another's qualifications
- * a professional working relationship with one another
- * gossip
- * less tension than was observed at start of this consultation

(c) within the teacher-assistant subsystem

- * greater team spirit observed than at start of this consultation
- * a willingness to talk about their needs
- * dependent on intermediaries for representation at management
- * a sense of helplessness about their ability to bring about change

(d) between the management and teacher subsystems

- * still evidence of scapegoating, but positive changes were noticed
- * a willingness to lay the cards on the table and negotiate options
- * the teachers seemed to have problems with trust and open communication as they could not as easily express their thoughts and feelings

(e) between the management and teacher-assistant subsystems

- * a very tense relationship, especially with the principal
- * subsystems cannot communicate effectively with each other
- * too much of a power difference to make cooperation and trust possible
- * not willing to negotiate and understand each other's positions

(f) between the teacher and teacher-assistant subsystems

- * seemingly a straightforward working relationship
- * assistants feel unacknowledged for work done with children
- * teachers involve assistants closely in classroom practice

(g) within the system as a whole

- * power dynamics makes relationships tense at all levels
- * an open communication pattern is slowly emerging
- * there is some willingness to work together to create a different ethos
- * problems are still externalised, blaming others rather than acknowledging one's own role in keeping things the way they are

(h) between the system and its environment

- * the governing body has a "ghostly" presence at the school: perceived as a system that has a great deal of power to make decisions but are not bound to negotiate with each of the subsystems
- * there is a ripple experience of an overflow of the stress at work; this affects members' interactions with their families

The patterns of behaviour noted in the system tended to focus on things negative, and rather than promoting the development of healthy relationships, seemed intent only on laying blame. Groups within the system are reluctant to acknowledge that problems and their solutions are activated at a number of points and that different individuals and groups together contribute to maintaining problems and difficulties or devising solutions. Positive thoughts and feelings are seldom translated into actions and communicated through people's behaviour. This often results in misperception of what goes on in people's hearts and minds.

HOW X REFLECTS PATTERNS AND PROCESSES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Comparisons are often employed in systems analysis by means of metaphors. Such comparisons are used to create a better understanding of the system, as it exists at present, as well as exploring options for the future. Although there may be differences between the two things that are being compared, the emphasis is placed on the things that are similar - what it is that the two things have in common.

The consultation process revealed a distinct similarity between the patterns which mark political processes in the country, and those which characterise the X system:

South Africa	X
A country in the process of transformation	A school in the process of transformation
A vision of change for the better	Expressing need of change for the better

People have not let go of the past;
Remembrance of the horror of apartheid

The need to move forward

How can the citizens begin to make our country
a better place to be?

Many different parties are contesting the
forthcoming elections, each with its own
power-base

Race, culture, class and gender determine
your status in our society

The masses are embittered as a consequence
of experiences of discrimination, inequality
and injustice

Thoughts and feelings about voting for a
particular party are important; however, the
grain of truth lies in putting a cross on the
ballot

There are many people who would prefer for
things to remain as they are in SA

In order to connect with the people at
grassroots level and to win their support,
politicians need to talk, negotiate, hold
meetings

Many people who have been discriminated
against expect that their leaders will
solve problems overnight

Some people choose to leave the country
rather than live with chaos and change

Different political viewpoints are debated
openly on television

One party blames another party for the
violence in the country

Memories of how things used to be;
wishing to be separate schools again

Looking to the future

How can each person contribute in
helping the school achieve its goals?

Different groups within the larger system
striving for recognition, some with more
power than others

Education and qualification determine
your status at the school

Individuals and groups are embittered
because they feel ignored, taken for
granted, disempowered and dependent

Irrespective of how strongly you think
and feel about the need for change at
..... unless you act and do
something, little is achieved

Adapting and adjusting familiar thoughts
and behaviour produces strong reactions

To ensure the effective functioning of
the school, management needs to consult,
negotiate and interact with all levels
of staff

Disempowered groups at school expect
outsiders to solve their problems for
them

Some individuals wondered whether they
needed to move to other institutions

People discussed their perceptions of the
school during groupwork sessions

One group blames another group for the
problems which it experiences

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are not listed in any particular order; the onus is left to X as a system to prioritise and implement as it deems fit. The team acknowledges that some of the ideas put forth may already have been initiated.

1. There is a need for a linkage between management and the teacher-assistants.

This could be done via the creation of certain structures:

- * a team consisting of a representative from the teacher-assistants and a head of department
- * regular scheduled meetings of a forum which includes the above-mentioned team and management

Important processes to consider would be:

- * the need for negotiation
- * consideration of all existing options
- * consultation with other groups where necessary
- * to acknowledge power differences between groups and not to use it in a counter-productive way
- * encouraging open communication

2. Growth would be encouraged by staff participation in workshops on the following issues:

- * conflict resolution
- * communication and negotiation skills

3. Organisational development would be encouraged if greater clarification existed around the roles people are expected to play within the school. A detailed job description needs to be worked on drawing from as many resources as possible.
4. A meeting between the governing body and two representatives from each subsystem needs to take place.
5. It would help if contact was established with other schools where things are done differently, reflecting on shared experiences and implementing ideas which have worked elsewhere.
6. It must be acknowledged that work in this setting produces stress and tension. A suggestion would be to set up a support group where members have an opportunity to share freely both positive and negative experiences. The facilitator of such a group could be drawn from inside or outside the system.

7. It would benefit the whole system if its members take note of each other's strengths, positive feelings and experiences in order to create an ethos of greater trust and acceptance.
8. Support, praise and encouragement need to replace the existing emphasis on the negative, critical approach which is disempowering.
9. The need to develop joint aims and goals for the school by reformulating the existing mission statement such that it takes cognizance of all members of the system.
10. Working towards more realistic goals which imply the acceptance of a "good-enough" school rather than waiting for the "perfect" school to be created.

EXPECTATIONS

what people believe.

What people want.

1. Experts to solve our problems.
2. We want praise and acknowledgement from superiors.
3. The teacher-assistants want more money.
4. There should be separate cleaners.
5. We need people to listen to us.
6. The power games must stop.

1. Nothing ever changes.

2. People are quick to criticise and blame when things are wrong.
3. Salaries cannot be changed.
4. It is exhausting to teach and clean.
5. We do not have enough opportunities to discuss.
6. That's the way things are.

1. Don't try anything different.

2. Don't say enough positive things to one another.
3. The issue of salaries is not transparent, talked about enough.
4. Work out a system differently which causes ^{more} friction.
5. Keep quiet at meetings.
6. Sign the logbook.

What people do.

You are in our hearts.

... you have difficulty giving and accepting criticism.

I feel like I give and give and give, BUT I never get anything back.

I DON'T FEEL LIKE WE'RE A TEAM

WHY CAN'T THINGS BE NEGOTIATED?

That's not what I meant, I understand!

One cannot just keep complaining, you need to come with suggestions.

EK WENS EK WAS SELF DIE HERE.

NOBODY IS TO BLAME!!

THERE'S NO OPEN COMMUNICATION

Things seem so hopeless I've given up hope!

We talk and talk, but nobody really does anything about the situation, why?

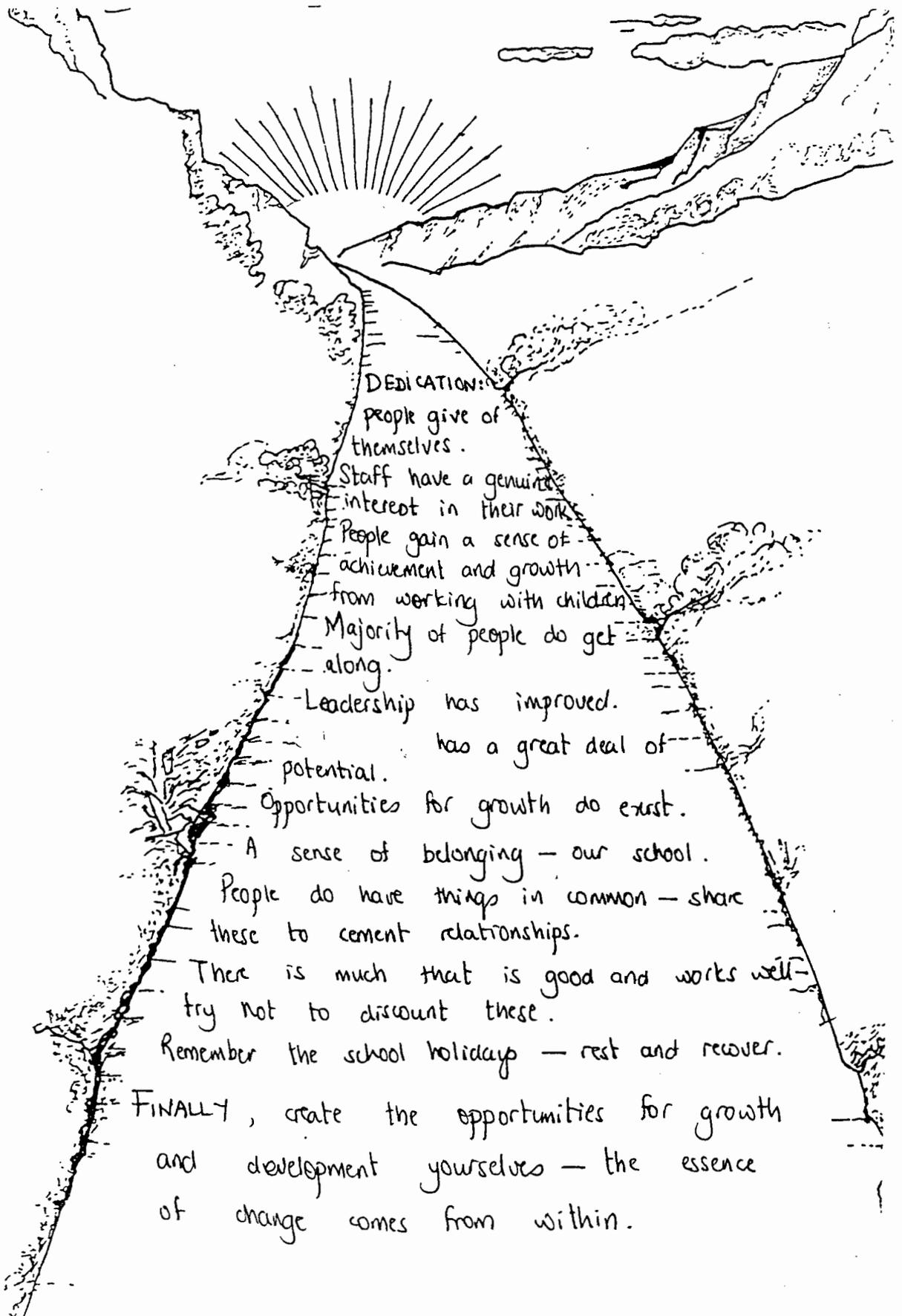
We don't each other talk to each other enough.

I'M ALWAYS SO TIRED.

We all play a part in creating the problem— WE'LL THEN WE ALL PLAY A PART IN FINDING THE SOLUTION. Show that you care!

DIVIDE AND CONQUER!! In your actions not just words!

THE ROAD AHEAD, STRENGTHS and OPPORTUNITIES.



DEDICATION:

people give of themselves.

Staff have a genuine interest in their work.

People gain a sense of achievement and growth from working with children.

Majority of people do get along.

Leadership has improved.

has a great deal of potential.

Opportunities for growth do exist.

A sense of belonging — our school.

People do have things in common — share these to cement relationships.

There is much that is good and works well — try not to discount these.

Remember the school holidays — rest and recover.

FINALLY, create the opportunities for growth and development yourselves — the essence of change comes from within.

APPENDIX B

SYSTEMS CONSULTATION CONTRACT

Team members: Ardela Daniels
 Nadeen Moolla

The team undertakes to do the following:

1. To complete active work by the end of the first term 1994.
2. To work at the school on Friday mornings and/or afternoons from 18 February to 25 March 1994.
3. To provide feedback in the form of discussion to all groups that have worked with the team thus far.
4. To engage in an intervention with a selected group from within the system.
5. To submit a report on 18 April 1994 which will include:
 - a. an analysis of the X system
 - b. comments on the intervention
 - c. recommendations for the future.

Systems Team