

**THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST AS A CONSULTANT:
AN EVALUATION OF A SYSTEMIC PROBLEM-SOLVING
APPROACH IN THE JUNIOR-PRIMARY SECTION
OF A SCHOOL HOSTEL**

by

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ABSTRACT

The application of systemic principles to a consultancy model was explored, using the systemic problem-solving methodologies developed in Britain by Burden (1978, 1981, 1983) and Checkland (1981). It is argued that, in addition to the traditional role of the educational psychologist as a child and family psychologist, the role of the educational psychologist should be extended to include a function as a consultant to social systems.

The focus of the intervention was the children in the junior-primary section of a boarding-school. A team of consultants was formed for the duration of the intervention. The team comprised of key members from the system and the novice educational psychologist, with the academic supervisor acting as an outside consultant.

The analysis focused on rules and patterns. Patterns of communication, support, isolation and problem-solving were highlighted. The intervention focused on structural changes. Structural changes, attitudinal changes and the process itself were evaluated. Agreement by consensus was used as a measure of change.

Consensus was reached that the model had impacted positively on the problem-solving skills of the team and the previous isolation of team members. However limited news of difference was found in relation to the children. This was connected to the fact that many of the changes had not been implemented fully or for a sufficient period of time.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to (explore) the role of the educational psychologist as a system consultant. The intervention is based on systemic problem-solving, with specific reference to the work done in Britain at Exeter University and the 7-stage model of Peter Checkland. The target group consists of a boarding-school population of 15 children between the ages of 5-10, and adult staff. The study proposes to (assess) the impact of a systemic type intervention, which includes the use of interviews, questionnaires and children's drawings.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The evolvement of systems theory

At the end of the 19th century experimental science, with mathematics and physics as the main tools of analysis, was becoming increasingly sophisticated. At the same time, a change in vision was introduced with the increase in awareness of the interconnectedness of living systems. Einstein's relativity theories showed that the concepts of space, time and matter are mental constructions and thus relative to the observer's frame of reference. The notion of absolute objectivity was replaced by that of observer-interdependence. Quantum theory made it clear that an element such as light can sometimes appear as particles and sometimes as waves.

Capra (1983) described the new holistic vision with reference to quantum mechanics. In classical mechanics the properties and behaviour of parts determine the whole, while in quantum mechanics causality is viewed from a different perspective as it is the whole that determines the behaviour of parts.

With the increase in prominence of the biological and social sciences (including psychology), it became progressively clear to some of these scientists (Broad 1923, Koestler 1945, Popper 1957) that the application of physics and mathematics could not provide sufficient information to engender satisfactory conclusions. A different perceptual tool was needed.

In 1947 Von Bertalanffy, a biologist working in Vienna, put forward the notion of a unity and likeness between the sciences, proposing that this unity ("Einheit") provided a key to a new understanding. To him all living systems seem to present with "an amazing order, organization, maintenance in continuous change, regulation and apparent teleology" (1972, p.29). An essential distinguishing feature of living organisms is their organisation and what he called "organized complexity" (1972, p.30). Von Bertalanffy called his new theory Systems theory and in 1954 helped to found the *Society for the Advancement of General Systems Theory*.

Von Bertalanffy was one of the first scientists to consciously include developments in different fields, e.g. cybernetics, information theory, factor analysis and organisation theory. He argued against a monopolistic model, towards an interdisciplinary one which could address multivariable problems. A serious limitation of traditional science, according to him, was its focus on two-variable problems which looked at linear causal trains that could be measured by statistics. (He pointed out that nature did not work in a linear way, but was marked by patterns underlying structures. He put forward the notion of circular causality, in which systems maintain themselves through a continuous reciprocal flow of energy.

{ Systems theory can thus be viewed as a paradigm which has been found useful in addressing the problems highlighted by the present world-view which takes cognisance of the fact that all life (and hence all developments) are interrelated and that paradoxical co-existence can not be ruled out. }

TERMS FROM SYSTEMS THEORY

For the purposes of this study the following concepts seemed central. A brief description of each follows.

- HOMEOSTASIS:

A concept taken from cybernetics. It is described as "the ensemble of organic regulations which act to maintain the steady states of the organism and are effectuated by regulating mechanisms...an open system will attain a steady state...this constancy is maintained in a continuous exchange" (Von Bertalanffy 1972, p.35). Homeostasis describes the state to which a system tends to return after any disturbance. The system maintains this homeostasis through a self-regulatory process known as FEEDBACK LOOPS (Maruyama 1968).

- OPEN vs CLOSED SYSTEMS:

An open system is seen as an ideal system which allows for change as it adapts to new information. It operates on the principle of EQUIFINALITY, i.e. its behaviour is not determined by initial conditions as is the case with closed systems, which tend to be rigid and are characterised by a lack of differentiation.

- ENTROPY:

A concept in physics which describes the limited ability of an organism to express all the energy which is invested in it. Thus the total available energy decreases with an increase in input (the Second Law of Thermodynamics). Closed systems are characterised by ENTROPY: with an increase in input, the total available energy grows constantly less, resulting in a static system. An open system is characterised by NEGATIVE ENTROPY: energy is transferred into increased levels of differentiation and complexity. (English and English, 1958).

- ISOMORPHISM:

A concept in biology which relates to similarity in unrelated forms. Von Bertalanffy defended the use of analogy, i.e. the comparison of similarity in seemingly unrelated forms, as a fundamental tool of the new theory. Although this is not a new method, it becomes explicit in systems theory, specifically through the later work of Bateson (1979) on ABDUCTION (see p. 4).

- PATTERNS:

Patterns can be stated to be the identifiable arrangements of relationships, recognisable through the constellation of rules. Plas (1986, p.73) states that a pattern is "complementary with the idea of a 'a rule of behaviour'" and quotes the Webster dictionary (1980) which defines it as " a regular, mainly unvarying way of acting or doing".

According to Bateson (1979, p.8) ("Metaphor") expresses structural similarity or, better still, similarity of organization...Metaphor (is) the pattern which connects".

Connections could be first-order, i.e. within the individual, second-order i.e. between different individuals, or third-order i.e. comparing the second-order connection with another second-order connection (e.g. comparing the relationship between mother and son with the relationship between the father and the school).

CONTEXT:

Bateson (1979, p.14) sees context as "pattern through time", which in turn provides the meaning. Checkland (1981) includes notions such as *Zeitgeist* and *Weltanschauung*.

- RULES:

A rule is a specific version of a pattern found in human systems, specifically codes of conduct and communication. They can be informal - *ideographic* rules or formal - *nomothetic* rules.

- RECURSIVE THINKING:

Bateson (1979, p.218) preferred the term recursive as opposed to linear, as this includes the notion of multidirectional feedback. He thus prefers the notion of a "hierarchy of orders of recursiveness" in the place of the traditional notion of a hierarchy of classes.

According to Plas (1986, P.62),

A recursive phenomenon is the product of multidirectional feedback, which occurs as functional and arbitrarily identifiable parts of a system engages in transaction across time and space. A recursion is non-linear, there is mutuality of influence.

- NEWS OF DIFFERENCE:

Bateson (1979, P.29) emphasised the notion of difference, stating that, perception operates only upon difference. All receipt of information is necessarily the receipt of news of difference, and all perception of difference is limited by threshold.

Accord to Bateson, we deal with this difference by comparing information, and in so doing often connect an unfamiliar pattern to a known one. The interaction between these parts is triggered by the difference which reacts in terms of negentropy or entropy.

- ABDUCTION,

i.e. the use of comparison in which like may be compared with like or unlike, allowed for the introduction of wholes or patterns in analysis. Bateson pointed out the similarities of this process with that of poetry, which uses metaphor to compare larger wholes. E.g. a man with a tree. This allowed for the perception of patterns of similarity and difference. It should be noted that this process still relies on the method of induction, and to a lesser extent deduction, to form the homology.

- ORGANISED COMPLEXITY:

The subject matter of the systems approach was often referred to as "organised complexity". "The concern was to be organization as such, the principles underlying the existence of any whole entity" (Checkland 1981, p.5). Bateson addressed the issue of complexity (a problem for traditional science according to Checkland 1981, p.60) and extended the theory to include the use of metaphor (including stories) and paradox. According to him the verbs "to have " and "to be" have dominated Western thinking, thus largely excluding the relativity and relational qualities of existence. He argued that *relationship should be the basis of all definition*, as they were in stories (Bateson 1979).

Systems theory thus attempts to deal with complexity, not by breaking it up into parts to be tackled separately, but by addressing the framework itself. It does not claim to be without limitations. Boulding wrote in 1956 that, "General Systems Theory does not seek, of course, to establish a single, self-contained 'general theory' of practically everything which will replace all the special theories of particular disciplines" (Checkland 1981, p.9). The limitations of systems theory are probably easier to detect as it attempts to deal with that which is often not quantitatively measurable and difficult to predict with statistical accuracy. It does highlight different types of information, noticeably within the field of *communication*.

It was clear to Von Bertalanffy (1972) that the theory was limited and did not meet the scientific criteria of objectivity and predictability. Yet it could provide a level of understanding and intervention unavailable to traditional reductive practice.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMS THEORY IN THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY:

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Behaviourism, psychoanalysis and the humanistic schools can arguably be stated as having informed the basis of psychological practice. Behaviourism focuses on empiricism and deduction as a method to generalise from the sample group to the individual. The analytic schools use the logical- sequential model of thinking, with an emphasis on induction, to generalise from the individual to the population. The humanistic schools, which developed later, (and are typified by the models proposed by Rogers and Frankl), can be seen as offshoots of the tradition of humanism; a post-war phenomenon which emphasises the importance and value of the individual, in line with the rise of democracy as a new solution to the problems of mankind. This formed part of the move away from the mechanistic focus of science and philosophy. However, these paradigms still represented an ontogenic model of thinking, emphasising the development within the individual's life history.

In time a subtle shift away from empiricism and the focus on the individual was manifesting itself. The research on perception done by the Gestalt group introduced the concept of wholes (being more than the sum of its parts) and the notion of spontaneous insight as an important variable in learning. The existential and humanistic introduction of meaning as a valid focus of intervention, not only introduced a subjective category into psychology, but also brought with it the social context in which individuals act out that meaning. The Gestalt and Jungian models enlarged on the use of metaphor, the latter introducing the concept of archetypes. As such it introduced, at least intrapsychically, the concept of universal influence and relatedness. Jung was one of the first psychologists to attempt the analysis of socio-political movements, e.g. Nazism (Jung 1964). Transactional analysis, an offshoot of psychoanalysis, emphasises the reciprocal nature of communication, representing patterns of communication/relationships as feedback systems (Stewart and Joines, 1989). Linear thinking thus evolved towards the inclusion of circular thinking as an additional method of gathering information.

Initially systems thinking impacted on sociology, through which it entered social work practice and specifically informed work with families. The work of Salvador and Patricia Minuchin (1974) was amongst the first offshoots of systems theory in the practice of human problem-solving. It formed the basis of family therapy as it is

practised today. It was via this route that systemic thinking entered traditional clinical practice.

The extension of systemic concepts into the field of family therapy is well documented. The notions of circular causality, of news of difference and of hierarchical connections, of family systems (and sub-systems) having a tendency towards either rigidity or flexibility, and the importance of communication are prominent in the work of the systemic schools of family therapy (Haley 1972, Satir 1975, Koman and Stechler 1985).

Minuchin (1973) argued for an ecological view of services for children which include such issues as adequate housing, employment, etc.

According to Minuchin (1973, p.7),

* the child's development depends on the primary social systems within which he grows, and (that) such primary systems function through complex and interactive patterns...If we are to understand the optimal conditions for child growth, we must understand the ecology of the family and the nature of the structures and adaptations that make for effective family functioning. If we want to intervene for children in distress, our conceptual framework needs also to be at the system level. The actual interventions may be at points in the system other than the child...some of which include the child while others do not.

Minuchin saw the family as a system that operates through transactional patterns which express themselves in sub-system alliances. He saw the ideal system as one with clear boundaries which allow for a flow of communication which does not threaten the equilibrium of the system. Systems which are disengaged or enmeshed tend to be less flexible or open, and react to new information with increased rigidity. He described the family as a hierarchical system (Minuchin 1974).

The systemic model of family therapy was extended by the Milan group, particularly through the work of Boscolo, Selvini-Palazzoli, Prata and Cecchin. (The group has split in recent years.) They made explicit use of mutuality of influence with the emphasis on circular questioning and metaphor (specifically through storytelling), basing these on the concepts of information as news of difference and "the decrease in entropy (which) can be taken as a measure of the amount of information" (Selvini-Boscolo et al. 1980, p.6).

The Milan school, as well as Checkland, looked at substitutions for the verbs "to be" and "to have", arguing that verbs like "show, make known, represent, symbolize, join, associate, connect" etc. offer a more appropriate expression of relational qualities. Checkland advocates the use of verbs "which describe the activities" (Checkland 1981, p.164).

Gorrell Barnes (1986, p.226) defines a family system as " the patterning of intimate relationships organised over time" . Bateson and Hinde (1976) describe the task of the therapist as the creation of the possibility of variation in the external patterns, and consequently the internal rule structure.

Educational psychology inherited this model, particularly with regard to its work with families. However, a specific systems model evolved as a response to its contact with larger systems such as schools and institutions. The model developed in part as a response to the problems traditional school systems were facing.

These problems could not be readily addressed by the traditional paradigms. The work of Burden (1978, 1981) and Plas (1986) and the model developed at the Tavistock clinic in the 70s are typical of the development of a systemic type intervention, based in educational institutions.

Dowling, (1985, p.9) a psychologist at the Tavistock clinic, writes,

One of the implications of this principle of intervention is that it does not matter where the intervention starts (the family or the school) but the important factor is to consider the dual context and the reciprocal influence of these two open systems upon one another.

This model was influenced by the problem-solving work done by Jay Haley (1976) as well as the behavioural consultation model as outlined by Bergan (1976). Organisation development, which was initiated by Kurt Lewin in industrial and governmental settings in North America, influenced educational psychologists such as Miles (1963) and Schmuck (1971) and lately, Burden (1989). To this we can add the influence of the consultation/ negotiation movements prevalent in industrial settings.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONSULTANCY MODEL

Conoley and Conoley (1990, p.87) outline three consultancy styles which encompass most developments in the field. These are:

Mental health consultation

Behavioural problem-solving consultation

Process consultation

MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION

The mental health approach, initiated in the 60s by the psychiatrist Caplan, is often described as the first structured attempt to break away from the unilateral intrapsychic model towards a dialectical reciprocal model of intervention. Caplan was aware of the epidemic proportions of mental health problems and the need for a wider distribution of skills. The mental health approach was based on the role of the professional as consultant to the caregivers in the field, e.g. clinic sisters and teachers.

Initially this approach focused on the processes interfering with the objectivity of the caregivers (regarded as largely intrapsychic and referred to as "theme interference"). In-service training was initiated to address skills deficits. The mental health model was based on the psychodynamic model, with the consultant in the role of the expert, although Caplan increasingly emphasised the importance of a "voluntary", "supportive" role, as opposed to a "critical", "didactic" one (Conoley 1990, p.89). It was open to criticism by community psychologists who described the movement as, *inter alia*, paternalistic (Swift 1984, p.13), insensitive to cultural realities, morally judgmental (O'Donohue et al, 1984) and negating social injustices and resources existing within the client and his/her natural systems (Hunter and Riger, 1986).

But a start had been made and the field was now open to various consultancy models, the more traditional basing themselves on the models for organisational development (e.g. Lewin, working in the field of social psychology in the 50s with T-groups and Schmuck and Miles who were

working in the 70s with organisational development in schools) (Reynolds, 1982). The more radical models developed in line with the liberation concepts of empowerment, participatory research and advocacy (Sarason 1976, Rappaport 1984, Wolff 1987, etc). The focus group became increasingly wider and more democratically involved - the move was from a direct towards a more indirect service delivery, and the role of the expert changed increasingly from advice-giver to facilitator. The latter focus was not only in line with the political Zeitgeist; to a large extent it was a natural extension of the nature of therapy (non-directive, empathetic, immediate, etc.) towards a more socially responsive model.

BEHAVIOURAL CONSULTATION

The behavioural consultation model developed as a problem-solving model and is based on the principles of behaviour modification. Bergan (1982, p.812) describes the stages of behavioural consultation as :

1. Problem identification
2. Problem analysis
3. Plan implementation
4. Problem evaluation

Problems are defined carefully, using quantitative data (e.g. frequency, duration), a specific goal is set with implementation based on behaviour modification strategies. Evaluation is done using comparative data. Thus it is fairly easy to implement, requires collaboration between the consultant and the caregiver, and does somewhat empower the caregiver if sufficient emphasis is placed on the transference of skills. Success is fairly easy to assess as it is so clearly defined and often requires a series of small changes. This model is thus often used with problems which are relatively clear.

PROCESS CONSULTATION

Process consultancy models have attempted to cross the tricky divide between clear-cut problems and problems which seem to have become generalised and diffuse ("everybody is unhappy" "the system is not working"). Systemic problems are increasingly facing educational psychologists. Burden (1978, 1981, 1983, 1989) describes various

problem-solving models emerging at the University of Exeter in response to the needs brought to his teams' attention. He argues that "an understanding and application of systems theory can provide the practising educational psychologist with a good basis from which to begin" (1981, p.43).

Increasingly, ways of applying systems theory are proposed as a solution to the difficulties which systems (including educational systems) are facing (Plas 1986). The process consultancy models referred to in the present intervention share a conscious application of the principles of systems theory. Checkland (1981, p.12) sums up the systems view when he writes, "Systems thinking...starts from noticing the unquestioned Cartesian assumption: namely, that a component part is the same when separated out as it is when part of the whole".

A systemic problem-solving approach can be likened to a therapeutic intervention in the sense that a continuous lookout is kept for the manifestation of patterns which could hinder or provide support for the system's (vs.person or family) designated task. Thus "stuckness" (resistance to change) can become an implicit criterion by which given patterns are continuously evaluated. Data in the form of information are continuously generated by the processes inherent in the intervention which lead to the highlighting of patterns, e.g. communication and support. This is to a large extent a subjective measure, validated simply by the agreement of the team that this is so. In this case the inclusion of additional sources of information, e.g. the questionnaires and the children's drawings, were used as a control.

Metacognitions of the consultant on the meetings and the visits becomes shared information, specifically where these concerned rules and patterns affecting communication, problem-solving and support.

The model described by Burden (1981)

Burden describes a model with noticeable roots in the consultancy models described above. Thus he asks for a clear description of the problem as well as a contract (preferably written) which specifies responsibilities and expectations. He emphasises the notion of "shared responsibility" and "a joint enterprise with specific goals that were either within reach or could be seen

as in need of redefinition" (1978, p.117). Continuous feedback forms an integral part of the process. Context is taken into account. It is essentially a team approach which looks at the overall structure of the identified system as opposed to the identified patient.

The intervention team comprises members from inside as well as outside the system. High-status members are identified and actively engaged. The principal is regarded by Burden as "invariably the most profound influence in the school" who needs to be engaged "if any change is to be brought about" (1981, p.45).

Rules, both formal (nomothetic) and informal (idiographic) are probed, patterns of communication are analysed, context is broadened to include such seemingly vague concepts as "work out where the power structure lies", "obtain some of the tone of the school" (1981, p.44). News of difference is taken seriously, e.g. "Do different members of staff have different perceptions of what the problem is?" (1981, p.5).

analysis

According to Burden (1981) intervention is a four-stage process.

1. Preparation:

This phase entails what Burden describes as "cultivating the host culture" (1981, p.44) and entails identifying how open the system is to change, relevant change agents and a clear, mutually accepted description of the problem as well as of realistic change.

2. Planning and implementation:

This involves establishing the team ("systems engineers"), allocating specific tasks to each team member and drawing up a contract which should be explicit and realistic.

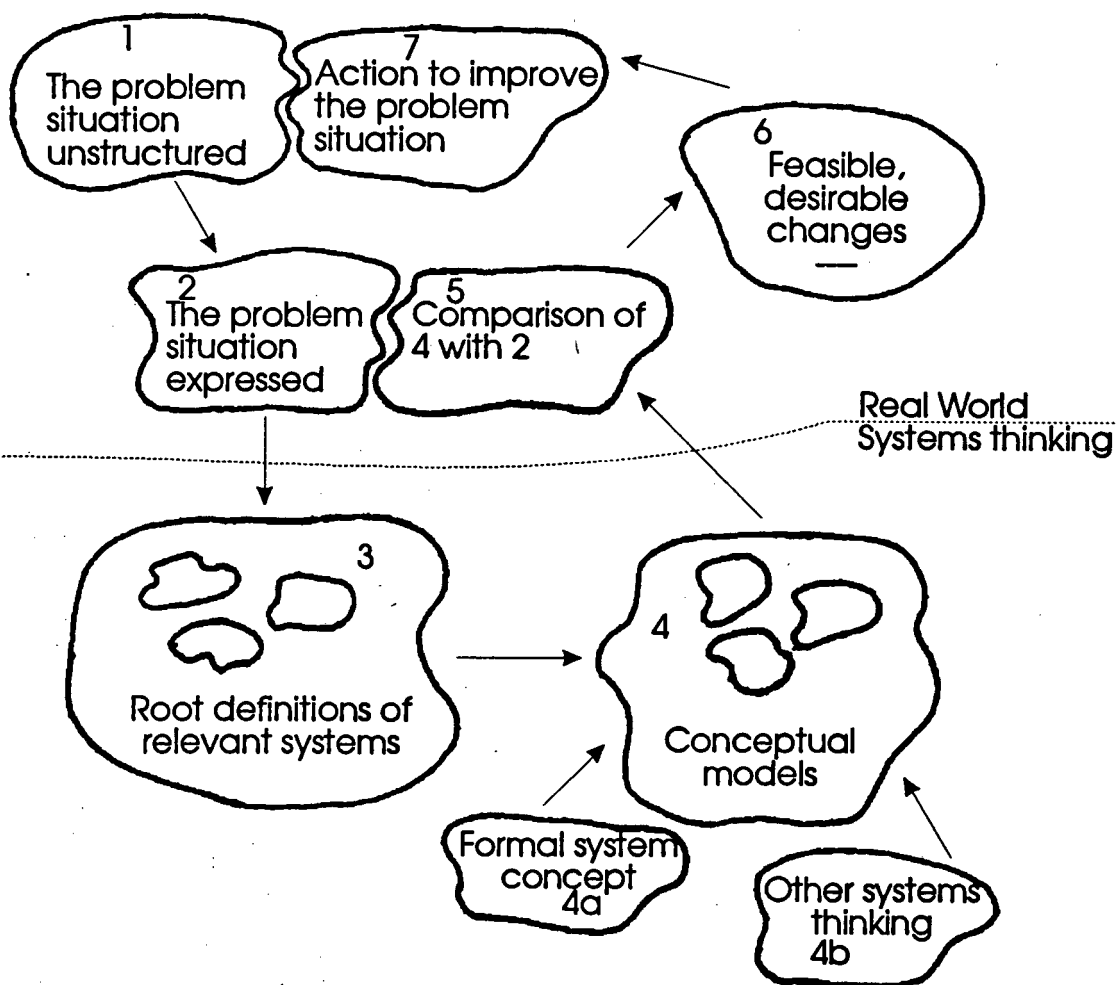
The team should include : Preferably two committed professionals, one of whom could be an expert on the area under investigation, a high-status member from inside and a consumer. A minimum of four members is recommended

3. Data collection:

This essentially involves looking at patterns of behaviour. Continuous feedback takes place, which includes feedback on the process itself.

THE METHODOLOGY IN SUMMARY

(Checkland, 1981, p.163)



Emphasis is placed on identification of patterns of communication and the identification of mismatched expectations. Placing the responsibility for the problem on an individual is not

part of this process. Burden writes that it is at this stage that anxieties start to surface. Personal experience suggests that this is because the identification of patterns not only highlights the power hierarchies within the system, but also starts to question these. Thus a lot of containment is needed at this stage.

4. Pulling it all together:

This consists of a formal feedback session which includes data presented in the form of flowchart diagrams as well as a written report of progress (i.e. changes which have made a positive difference).

The main advantages of this approach seems to lie in the fact that more general problems can be addressed, e.g. concern about the lack of reading progress in the school as a whole. It also engages nodal members in devising and implementing strategies "that are likely to be effective in achieving satisfactory solutions for all concerned " (1978, p.31.). Thus it allows for systemic change as well as the empowerment of individuals.

The 7 stage model of Checkland (1981)

Checkland (1981) describes a seven-stage intervention which evolved in response to unstructured problems. He refers to these as "conditions to be alleviated rather than problems to be solved." Checkland states that all problems can not always be clearly defined and that experience has shown that "in problems in human activity systems history always changes the agenda!" (1981, p.155). He points out that there are often many aspects which can be targeted as problem areas and that assisting an organisation which shows a readiness for change (an important criterion) in selecting an appropriate area should be part of such an intervention.

Checkland (1981, p.162) points out that organisations can be remarkably complex, with diffuse decision-making structures. A methodology was needed which "should be capable of being used in actual problem situations: it should not be vague...it should not (be) precise...but should allow insights which precision might exclude" .

Checkland (1981, p.219) preferred the term methodology to technique. He described the former as "a set of principles of method" which were not as precise nor as prescriptive as a technique, but which could take into account both variety (multiplicity) and richness (different contexts). He described the model as a "methodology (which) emerges not as praxiology but as a learning system in which underlying Weltanschauungen are exposed and debated alongside alternatives".

Checkland emphasised the intervention as part of a continuum, which has as its aim the learning of alternative strategies of problem-solving, but also alternative ways of viewing the problems.

Characteristics of the methodology include (1981, p.162):

- It should be capable of being used in actual problem situations
- It should not be vague, i.e. what is being done, and the principles applied, should be clear
- It should not be precise, like a technique, but should allow for insights which precision might exclude
- It should be able to accommodate any developments in systems theory, which could be applied where appropriate.

Stages 1 and 2: Setting the scene

The problem-situation unstructured and the problem-situation expressed:

Checkland refers to the first two stages as the "expression" phases. During these the richest possible picture of the situation in which there is perceived to be a problem, is assembled. Stage 1 can be likened to context; it takes cognisance of concepts such as Zeitgeist and the setting and the historical background of the relevant system. From an expression and integration of context, one moves towards a statement of the perceived problem. This can be likened to brainstorming in the sense that it is not an evaluative process. This already starts to illuminate the different Weltanschauungen of individual members or groups.

Included in the two phases are initial analyses of both "slow-to-change structure" within the situation and "continuously-changing process", as well as the relationship between them. Checkland warns against a rush for action.

Structure includes concepts like hierarchy, layout and patterns of communication. Process refers to the activities of decision-making, monitoring and taking corrective action. The relationship between structure and process has been found to express core characteristics of a problem (1981, p.166).

Stages 3 and 4: Making the problem explicit

These represent both the Weltanschauung of the various members in the system, as well as a comparison between the ideal and reality. It explores the anomaly between what people think is being done and what is actually happening.

Checkland (1981, p.214). emphasises the importance of Weltanschauung, which will probably remain different for people in different roles. He sees the formulation of root definitions as a means of explicating these, arguing that they should become an explicit part of the intervention in systems consultancy:

[T]he methodology is a learning system...rather than a prescriptive tool... (as such) it will always be only one possibility out of a large number, and this is true even if people in the problem situation are not disposed to challenge a root definition...A root definition will be a meaningful description of the relevant system according to a particular view of the world, or Weltanschauung. There will be other feasible Weltanschauungen, however, because human beings can always attach different meanings to the same social acts.

The community psychology paradigm adds that the negation of the Weltanschauung of a particular community (or system) often results in resistance and the potential sabotaging of the planned intervention.

Stage 3: Root definitions of relevant systems

According to Checkland "A root definition (is) a concise description of a human activity system which captures a particular view of it" (1981, p.167).

Stage 3 requires the naming of the relevant system and a definition of what the task of the system is (not what it does). At this stage differences of view often surface. Checkland (1981) argues that it is important that Weltanschauungen should become explicit as they form part of the individual's reaction to the system. In the present study the boarding school was described as, inter alia, "a place where they (the children) can receive proper education", "a refuge from an unhappy home" and "an unnecessary evil" (taped conversations, 1992).

Stage 4: Making and testing conceptual models

Whereas the definitions in stage 3 attempt to "account what the system is; the conceptual model is an account of what the system must do in order to be the system named in the definition" (1981, p.169).

The conceptual model is built using a description of the tasks which the system must carry out to fulfil the function of the system as described in the definition. Checkland (1981, p.222) emphasises that the descriptions should be useful rather than clever and that they should consist of verbs ("simply all the verbs in the English language"). The model should denote the task which the organisation has been "created to perform" or which "it must perform if it is to survive". According to Checkland the model consists of "the minimum list of verbs covering the activities which are necessary [for the] system defined in the root definition, and to structure the verbs in a sequence according to logic" (1981, p.170). Thus a "main verb" should be selected, followed by \pm six important activities. The activities chosen should be direct and not consequential (e.g. having physical contact vs. the consequential idea that their emotional needs should be cared for).

In the present study the team agreed that the boarding school was "a place of holding in order for education to take place". What needed to be defined was: a) what is meant by holding and b) what is needed for this holding to be satisfactory to all the members within the system. The main verb chosen by the team was "holding". Activities which were generated by the team were,

inter alia, each child should be physically touched at least once a day. Touching could take place during bath time, when plaiting hair and by holding and/or touching a child when she approached the adult with a story or a complaint. It was also decided that in order to be successful, the adult involved with the children should be able to pick up a consistent sign of distress and should be able to react to the distress with an appropriate intervention.

Checkland warns against overloading the model and describes this activity as the closest that the methodology gets to a technique.

Stage 5: Comparing conceptual models with reality

A comparison is made between the verbs engendered during the stage of conceptual model building and the activities taking place within the existing system. Any discrepancies between the ideal and the real can be analysed for a) the contribution that this gap between expectation and delivery makes towards the perceived problem(s) and b) the potential solutions which lie in the information thus generated.

Checkland (1981, p.177,178) comments that the "comparison is the point at which the intuitive perceptions of the problem are brought together with the systems constructs" and that "the need is to use the systems models to open up debate about change" . Mismatches in expectations, including strategies to be used, often surface during this stage. Inadequacies in root definitions often surface and these may have to be adjusted.

Stage 6 and 7: Implementing feasible and desirable changes

Checkland describes three types of changes:

Structural changes, e.g. organisational groupings, reporting structures.

Procedural changes, e.g. changes to the processes of reporting or informing.

Attitudinal changes, e.g. changes in expectations or in the readiness to debate or to evaluate.

Checkland points out that the changes implemented are often modest. Hard systems changes occasionally evolve, but rarely during the initial

intervention. During stage six all the "concerned actors in the problem situation" (1981, p.181) agree on *desirable* changes as measured against the criteria stated in the root definition and the conceptual model. These changes should also be *feasible*, given the cultural, financial and practical restraints of the situation and the people who operate within it. The actions which should implement these changes are listed and allocated during the final stage.

According to Checkland (1981) each system comprises a problem-content system, in which is contained the role of the problem-owner, and a problem-solving system in which is contained the role of the problem-solver. The problem solving system applies systems methodology to take action to improve aspects of the problem-content system.

The North American experience

In North America, family therapy, specifically the Milan method (Selvini, 1980), informed systems consultancy models with the emphasis being on circular questioning and the use of metaphor (notably storytelling) and description to determine functionality. I.e. a symptom tends to act as a metaphor for family functioning, at the same time providing a protective function. Thus the symptomatic behaviour is redefined as acting on behalf of the family, rather than as against it. Paradoxical injunction, gossiping in the presence of the client and prescriptions (notably of rituals) is used. According to Plas (1986, p.108) "this kind of inquiry reveals patterns and redundancies (and) can quickly lead to a higher level of intimacy"

Plas (1986, p.119) stresses that positive connotation should not be seen as a call for change.

Change will occur when an important communication rule is identified and targeted for pressure. In systemic work, the rule is pressured, not the behaviour, the person or the group" (1986, p.112), and "the emphasis is on the communication patterns within the group and the ways in which these rules of the game shape behaviour and attitudes.

Outcome

Outcome is described by Checkland (1981, p.213) as:

The outcome is never an optimal solution to a problem, it is rather *a learning which leads to a decision to take certain actions*, in the knowledge that this will in general lead not to 'the problem' being now 'solved' but to a new situation in which the whole process can begin again.

Burden (1978, p.126) describes outcome in terms of:

It [is] not considered realistic that the school should make any sudden changes on the basis of the psychologists' recommendations alone - but rather that a majority of all concerned should feel a clearer sense of purpose and direction with regard to an improvement...together with a rational belief that steps were being taken to accomplish this.

The methodology is thus not a finite one, leading on to final solutions. It is method of continuous learning, allowing for change as it brings different insights to perceived difficulties. It actively includes *Weltanschauung*, focuses on realistic/available possibilities for change and demonstrates the principles of participatory (action) research.

Including equifinality as an inherent characteristic of the system, the models rely on feedback loops, actively uses news of difference and, aiming at the features of negentropy, assume that homeostasis (albeit in a more conscious and differentiated form) will return.

The process can lead to an increase in tension and insecurity, especially during the middle stages when differences become explicit. Some change is inevitable. However a commitment to change and a basic trust in the process seem of specific importance for this type of methodology to be experienced as empowering and renewing.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

More recently Burden and Brown (1987, p.20) have described a "movement away from the more mechanistic aspects of systems theory towards the more comprehensive and humanistic approach offered by organisation development" (1987, p.20). This includes "spiral consultancy" (1987, p.5), which refers to the appointment of a consultant by the consultant (who can approach a consultant). A preference for the term "organisation development" (as outlined by Miles 1963 and Schmuck 1971) is justified by Nichols, Burden et al (1989, p.1) on the basis that the term "systems approach" is too diffuse and "has outlived its usefulness"

CENTRAL CONCEPTS

Central to all these models is a problem-solving approach which has been described by Gutkin and Curtis (1982, p.812). It can arguably be stated that today all models of consultancy at least recognise and acknowledge the six stages of problem-solving as outlined by Gutkin and Curtis.

The six stages of problem-solving:

1. Eliciting specific needs from within the community.
2. Using the clinical skills such as listening and empathy combined with the problem-solving skills to build trust and to define an area of intervention.
3. Planning the intervention together with relevant community members.
4. Executing the planned intervention in a manner which allows for reflection and sharing throughout the process.
5. Evaluating the intervention.
6. Generalisation of the skills and principles underlying the intervention.
This stage should occur throughout the process.

Tingstrom et al (1990, p.41) refer to consultation as "collaborative problem-solving". They state, "Most authors agree that the ideal consultative relationship is...voluntary, egalitarian, and colleague in nature. Consultation can therefore be viewed as a social interaction whose success or failure can largely depend on the dynamics of this social interaction" Furthermore, "the successful consultant should, at least, be knowledgeable, competent, and congenial" (1990, p.49). To these attributes Plas (1986) adds, inter alia, the ability to work in a team and the ability to adopt systemic perspectives .

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

The relevancy of the traditional role of the psychologist and his/her accountability have been extensively debated over the past two decades (Sarason 1976, Davidson and Rappaport 1978, Heller and Price 1984, Turton 1986, O'Neill 1989).

In educational psychology Britain and North America have been at the forefront of this debate. Loxley (1978) emphasises the importance of a wider view, which would include preventative strategies. He wrote at the time, "Your clientele is not just the group on your waiting list, it's all the kids out there...it becomes possible to treat the child as the client and the situation and the organisation as the case." (1978, p.40). Urging prevention, he maintains that, "no condition is ever prevented by treating the victim of the condition itself" (1978, p.21).

Bardon, in the same year, asked for educational psychologists to model the type of coping behaviour asked for, i.e. to be "participant and democratic" (1978, p.26). He emphasised the role of the educational psychologist as an "agent of change...and what we are asking for...is a more constructively educational role" (1978, p.5). Together with Trachtman (1979), he proposed the transfer of knowledge and skills as part solution to the new demands.

Gillham (1978) edited a book in which the role of the educational psychologist was extensively debated, highlighting the timeousness of the issues. A central theme was the shift from the traditional medical model towards a more socially responsible one.

Trends internationally (for Israel, Brazil, England and Wales, see the School Psychology International, Feb.1990, for North America, Plas 1986) reflect this shift towards a more participatory relationship with a desire for a "responsiveness (which is) not merely an ability to react, but rather a capacity to anticipate and proact with the changing environment" (Acklaw 1990, p.4). In Britain an Audit Commission, sponsored by the Department of Education and Science is currently reviewing the school psychological services. Included in their review is the question: "what kind of service structure is appropriate to the demands of the new political and social environment?" (Acklaw 1990, p.5).

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The need for revision in South Africa has been pointed out, inter alia, by Dommisse (1983), Vogelmann (1986), Gilbert (1989), Nell and Seedat (1989), Manganyi and Du Toit (1990), Nicholas and Cooper (1990) and Dawes and Donald (1993).

The current practice of psychology in South-Africa is faced with many of the dilemmas which confront the British and American models. From South America (via North America) we have become aware of the central issue addressed by community psychology: an attempt to bridge the gap between supply and demand at the same time as being politically appropriate. The emphasis is on a participatory intervention which responds to the needs perceived by the community. Its ultimate aim is the empowerment of disempowered communities. The distribution of knowledge is seen as a primary task towards achievement of this goal (Rappaport, 1984).

The importance of the present Zeitgeist cannot be underestimated. The post-modern era brings with it the importance of dialogue (whatever happens is negotiated between forces). It favours a discourse, often within an ideological criticism and always refers to context. The psychological debates superimpose the issue of relevancy. Retief (1989, p.76) writes that "relevance is currently a shared and central value...The indications are that the notion of relevance of social scientific theorising and research tends to assume special prominence in cultures subject to social upheaval."

The role of the educational psychologist in South Africa has been conservative, with few debates around the issues of relevancy and responsibility. This, in part, reflects the relatively recent professional registration of this category of psychologists with the South African Medical and Dental Council. In part it reflects our isolation from developments elsewhere. However, it is the writer's contention that recent political developments are forcing the issue at hand, although the reaction from institutionalised structures still seem largely tentative. Educational psychology cannot remain insulated from current world trends, neither can it remain deaf to the increasing political demands for a greater community involvement. Above all, the educational system in this country is facing fundamental challenges, as its counterparts in Britain and the Americas did in

the 60s and 70s. They had to respond to the specific dilemmas of their times. We too, are facing this challenge.

Donald (1984, p.30) points out that,

the priority decided upon must determine the nature of the service and equally, the nature of the service and its perceived relevance must affect the priority afforded it. This circularity can only be resolved if educational psychologists themselves take the initiative and, in defining a relevant and effective service, influence the priority that the bureaucrats assign it in the cost structure of overall educational provision.

In Britain the model which developed in the 70s was largely in response to alarm at the social involvement of their youth. The schooling system was perceived as responsible (*inter alia*) for this state of affairs, depicted in the media by articles on punks and skinheads, and debates on the schooling system and the perceived apathy of the youth. This dissatisfaction was reflected by increasing numbers of teachers leaving the profession. In 1972 the training course for educational psychologists at Exeter University included a systems consultancy type model for the first time in order to "help provide *from within these environments* themselves the kinds of strategies that are likely to be most effective in achieving satisfactory solutions for all concerned" (Burden 1978, p.131).

In North America the changing role of the educational psychologist can be viewed as a response to the *Zeitgeist* which emphasised individual rights (the human rights movement). These rights include a notion that disenfranchised communities are entitled to the provision of an appropriate education (including specialised education). The rights and needs of minority groups received significant media exposure during this time and many of the debates around educational psychology reflected these concerns. As Plas (1986, p.85) writes, "They see the schools as the arena in which professionals involved began to sift through the psychological literature in a search for approaches to children *that could be adopted for use in the schools*" (own emphasis). She also points out that parents " had the right to expect " psychological involvement with social issues, e.g. dropout rates and school violence (1986, p.86).

It is clear that we are facing many of these challenges in South Africa today. The school system has started to adjust to demands made by the majority culture. A wider distribution of resources with greater accountability are fundamental claims which cannot remain unaddressed. A shift away from the individual client- centred approach towards a more socially responsible one seems inevitable if our services are to be regarded as appropriate. *Significance*

This shift is already apparent in the many debates on the impact of the off-shoots of Apartheid (especially poverty and violence) on childhood. (Nicholas and Cooper 1990, Dawes and Donald in the press). It is also seen in the work done by the Organisation for Appropriate Social Services for Southern Africa (OASSA) and the more recent National Education Policy Investi-gation (1993).

Donald (1984, p.32), discussing various alternatives to traditional practice, writes, "what these models all have in common is an emphasis on the educational psychologist as consultant". The intervention described in this research is an exploration of a consultancy model.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

SYSTEMIC PROBLEM-SOLVING

The intervention was initially planned according to the principles described in the work done at Exeter University by Burden et al (1978,1981,1983,). During the course of the year the writer familiarised herself with the work done by Checkland (1981), and it became clear that this model was ideally suitable to the intervention at hand. The intervention as a whole, including the subsequent analysis, thus includes reference to Checkland's methodology as well as reference to the general principles of systems theory.

Burden (1978, p.118) refers to the difficult process of acquiring systemic problem-solving skills:

The important point here however, is that we were building in a means of evaluating the effectiveness of our contribution as educational psychologists...We were no longer able to fall into the common trap of assuming that we could provide 'one-off' solutions to problems, nor could we take it for granted that whatever course of action we decided to take was *ipso facto* appropriate.

BACKGROUND TO THE INTERVENTION

Selection of the system

The principal of a private girl's school in Cape Town approached the Education Faculty at the University of Cape Town in 1991 with a request to investigate matters in the Boarding School because of general dissatisfaction amongst staff and students. This manifested in a "culture of complaining" (principal's expression). The principal, who was newly appointed, wanted to explore sources of real grievance in order that these may be acted on. She expressed the need the need for "advice".

The Boarding School houses 142 pupils between the ages 5-18. At the time 4 adults were directly involved with the pupils. The other adults were mainly involved in maintenance activities.

A team of 5 Masters students in Educational Psychology undertook research in line with the systemic principles of school consultancy as outlined by Plas (1986) and others. A report with the findings was sent to the principal at the end of 1991. She expressed her satisfaction with the report and enquired about the possibility of an intervention with the assistance of the University.

Within the 1991 student research initiative a needs analysis of sub-system rules and patterns was made, with the focus on patterns of communication and nurturance. For the purpose of analysis the children were divided into sub-systems, using standard of schooling as a criterion. The tools of analyses were thus contingent on the developmental stage of the group. Different students were allocated to each sub-system to facilitate independent process. The patterns evolving from the sub-systems were largely consistent over the groups. It seemed clear at the time that the members across subsystems had inadequate means of structured communication and that their needs for nurturance were largely unmet.

The school is a traditional system aspiring towards a more appropriate function. It thus seeks change which will approximate the values reflected in our time (e.g. democracy, awareness of pupils' emotional needs etc.). Secondly, it grapples with the problems inherent in a multicultural setting (e.g. the effects of multiple language groups within a closed system such as a boarding school). It is a system in flux. A new principal was appointed in 1991. She is known for her 'progressive' educational ideas. The school had been experiencing considerable problems; the numbers were decreasing and parents increasingly expressed unhappiness about the quality of the education. It seems reasonable to assume that the expectation is that the new principal must attempt to reinstate the school to its former prestigious position. As such she would have to negotiate the delicate balance between renewal and tradition. These forces should find themselves expressed within the rules (both formal and informal) as well as between different individuals.

The school as a system thus displays many of the characteristics which could facilitate an intervention: it is at a junction at which change seems inevitable,

even required (taking into account that a pocket of resistance forms a sub-system which is part and parcel of such an ethos). Key members within the system declared an openness and willingness to change. The principal viewed an ideal system as one characterised by equifinality. Thus she described success in terms of "change which has been questioned and accepted" and "teachers who are open to new ideas" (written statement). The head of boarders described an unsuccessful person as "rigid and inflexible" (written statement). Thus the system presented itself as one in which the high-status members were committed to negative entropy.

Nevertheless, a system committed to change, could pose problems for the evaluation of the intervention. As multiple changes seemed inevitable, it could be difficult to pinpoint those changes clearly resulting from the intervention.

Focus of the present study

This study focuses on the 15 girls who live in the junior-primary dormitory of a private girls' school in Cape Town. They range in ages from 5 to 10, attending classes from pre-primary to std.2. The child care worker directly in charge of them (CW), the head of boarders (HB), the school principal (SP) and the school counsellor (SC) form the core of the adults involved.

The sub-system was selected for the following reasons:

1. They form a natural group or sub-system. The children, who range from pre-primary to std.2 are placed in one dormitory. This dormitory is separated from the rest of the boarders in terms of space as well as by the application of formal rules (e.g. bed and bath times). The children are overseen by one specific adult, demarcating them as the "babies".
2. The group is in need of a specific focused intervention. Many of the recommendations made after the 1991 analysis are being implemented at other levels of the system. E.g. A new house mistress has been appointed with previous experience of teenagers in institutions. A more empowered student representative body is being negotiated. It seems clear that these changes could impact beneficially on the older students, who will be able to give voice to some of their concerns and needs. However, the younger girls

seem in danger of "falling through the net". Children of their age often are not able to verbalise their inner experiences, lacking the concepts to express these. The child care worker in charge of this younger group does not experience herself as empowered to act on their behalf. This was clear from the 1991 analysis.

3. Although a systemic analysis of any part of a system should reveal patterns which are significant at all levels - and the 1991 research confirmed this hypothesis - an intervention should be sensitive to the specific needs, developmental stages, functions and aims of a sub-system. It seems important that for an intervention to be appropriately focused, it needs to discriminate *how the group is different from other groups in this system* to facilitate a focused, relevant intervention.

4. The study aims to research the applicability of a systemic approach to an organised system in which structural changes can become part of the intervention. The extent to which the results can be generalised from a larger system can be posed in the form of final hypotheses.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

The literature stresses the importance of an intervention which is based on the needs of the client. The initial analysis was based on the specific needs of the client (i.e. to understand "why everybody was so unhappy and what could be done about it"), but the intervention was based on the consultant's agenda, i.e. the awareness that a) this group was specifically disempowered and b) constituted a clear sub-system with definite boundaries. This awareness was based on the findings of the 1991 analysis; it represented shown needs of the sub-system, but it did not represent the explicit needs of the main client, who in this case was perceived as the principal. The client's expressed concern was the racism in the std.6-10 group. At the time this writer did not feel sufficiently skilled to deal with such a complex issue.

The client group expressed agreement with the selection of the focus, stating that they were all aware of the unmet needs of these children, but did not have the resources to deal with them. However, this rather vague commitment became problematic later on, as will emerge from the discussion.

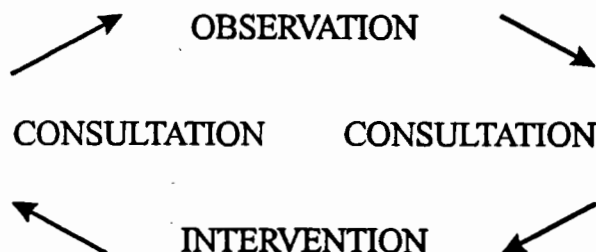
AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

The principal liased with the governing body. According to her financial resources were available for the appointment of another member on the boarding-school staff. Structural changes (e.g. adding a new room) had to be presented to the planning committee who would evaluate these on merit. The school seemed to possess adequate financial resources.

METHOD OF INTERVENTION

Plan of intervention

In line with the paradigm, the plan of intervention evolved from each successive phase. In practice this was reflected by a series of feedback loops:



The plan of intervention which was followed:

- 1) Regular consultation meetings were held with all the adults concerned to assess perceived needs for change as well as Weltanschauungen (root definitions). News of difference formed an integral part of the information generated during these meetings. Circular questions were generated during this process.
- 2) Regular observation visits to the boarding-school took place to assess the impact of the formal and informal rules on the developmental needs of the children. This phase was often combined with informal interviews with the staff concerned.
- 3) Exploration of the possibility of systemic changes (to impact on existing patterns) in consultation with the relevant adults. The possibility of including the children in this process was not initially envisaged, but was to be kept in mind during the intervention.
- 4) Intervention: Changes to nomothetic or ideographic rules and patterns - these could include structural changes - which were identified during the preceding phase.
- 5) Assessment of the impact of the systemic change(s) introduced. These were based on the perceptions of the individual adults involved, but the conclusion(s) were reached through consensus.

Both Burden (1978) and Checkland (1981) point out that these phases need not necessarily follow a specified sequence. However, during this intervention the above-mentioned sequence seemed to present as a natural fit.

Establishing the team: The team was decided upon during the initial contact meeting with the principal. Some difficulties were experienced with the incorporation of the child care worker. She did not attend the initial meetings. The team members from the school expressed surprise at my desire for her inclusion, but agreed to inform her of future meetings. However, the consultant had to take on this task as the other members continued to "forget" to inform her. This pattern is included in the analysis and was presented as information during a feedback meeting.

Contracting

The time and focus of the intervention was agreed to during the first team meeting.

Time: A period of eight months was contracted for. This was not an ideal decision as it was based on the consultant's availability rather than the needs of the situation. Contracting ahead appears to pose a difficulty. A time-span of one to three years seems normative, but Conoley and Conoley (1990, p.89) point out that, "the time-frames associated with noticeable improvement in consultee performance are impossible to specify".

Focus of the intervention: It was agreed that the intervention would focus on the identification of the potential for strategies/ structural changes in the boarding-school which could provide the children in the junior-primary dormitory with reliable and appropriate resources of nurturance (including physical caretaking). The feasibility of small children in the boarding-school was not addressed at this stage.

Key persons acknowledged within the stages of consultancy

1. The child care worker (CW) in charge of the target group of children: An aim of this intervention was, inter alia, to attempt empowerment of the relevant adults. The sharing of perceptions as well as the engendering of potential solutions in consultancy with her, was regarded as important steps towards empowerment.
2. The Principal (SP): The principal is acknowledged as a nodal point of entry to the system. Gillham (1978), noted that the values of head teachers become primary values for the school community. As such the co-option of the principal can be regarded as an important variable if change is to be consolidated within the school system. The principal was also regarded as a valuable resource; the contact during the assessment phase reflected an openness to change as well as interest in different ideas.
3. The Academic Supervisor (AS): The supervisor represents the academic, "objective" world "out there". As supervisor to the project he had a vested interest for the project to succeed, as professional he provided the necessary link with an outside "expert" as consultant. He was not directly involved in the process, thus allowing for an outside perspective. The importance of such a consultant has been highlighted in the systemic school consultancy models of Plas, Gillham and Burdon.
4. The Head of Boarders (HB): It was important to involve her throughout the process. Gutkin and Curtis (1982) refer to the acknowledgement of hierarchical power structure and the importance of not negating it. The head of boarders is not only hierarchically relevant, but needs to be explored as a potential resource and change agent.

5. **The children:** The children were directly consulted about desired changes on two occasions:
1. During the initial research done in 1991. (See addenda)
 2. During an informal session in their dormitory when the question was posed: "What could make things better for you here?" (\pm 3 months after the process had started)

Contact with the children was kept to polite exchanges as far as possible (greetings and niceties) in an attempt to minimalise the possibility of change due to the influence of the consultant-children relationship.

DATA COLLECTION

Sources

Three main sources of data were collected.

1. *Interviews* with the relevant adults and children.

The focus:

- Perceptions of difference (E.g. what has changed, what would you like to be different?)
- Patterns of communication, support and problem-solving (E.g. who do you go to when you have a specific concern about a child/an issue in the boarding-school?)

The interviews were taped.

Examples of questions asked at this stage:

To whom is this a problem?

Who benefits from the present arrangement?

Whom would changes to the present system affect most?

What is the bottom line?

What do you want to see changed?

What should remain the same?

2. *Questionnaires* were completed by the relevant adults (see addendum two).

The focus:

The focus was similar to that of the interviews. The questionnaires were completed anonymously and were used as a control to the interviews. As the sample was so small, it was relatively easy to identify the adults, yet it was felt that they might put on paper what they may not have felt comfortable with during the interview. This proved to be true with the principal (who also identified herself by stapling a visiting card to the questionnaire).

3. *Children's drawings.* The children were taken to the homework room by the child care worker and the consultant in 3 groups of 5 children. Each group was given the instruction:

Draw yourself in the boarding-school, together with a grown-up and a friend. You should all be together, doing something.

On completion they were requested to write their names and ages at the back of the drawings. The children appeared keen and excited and participated with obvious enjoyment.

The drawings done during the initial research (1991) were evaluated by the students. A group consensus on prominent/repeated patterns formed the basis of the findings. To avoid subjectivity an educational psychologist (uninvolved with the project) was asked to make a blind evaluation of the final drawings.

Instruction given to her:

These are drawings done by children in a boarding-school. Please look for patterns.

The children's ages were provided. No other information was given.

The Use Of Collateral Information

The outside expert

Consulting with an expert not involved with the intervention is in line with the principles of consultancy. It can provide the following valuable resources; a) it allows for expertise which might not necessarily be available within the team b) it strengthens and broadens the knowledge base of the team without the complications (including time) and costs involved of co-opting such a person on the team and c) it provides for a balance of opinion and can strengthen the perception of the consultant as being open to information and as not committed to a personal hidden agenda. The educational psychologist who assessed the children's drawings acted as an outside consultant.

Children's drawings

Prout and Phillips (1974) developed the Kinetic School Drawing (KSD), analogous to the Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD), which was found to be an effective means of tapping the child's internal perceptions of family attitudes and emotional resources. In requiring the child to draw the family members doing something it could also depict roles and interactions (Knoff and Prout, 1985).

According to Andrews and Jazen (1988) limited empirical research on the validity and reliability of the KSD exists at this stage. They note however, that it has been particularly useful in the generating of hypotheses relating to social-emotional factors. As a projective technique it can be a means of accessing the child's conscious and unconscious anxieties.

Observation

Regular visits to the boarding-school facilitated the observation of interactions, specifically where these, in time, formed recognisable patterns. To enable cross referencing it was important to visit at set times to observe for both differences and similarities as well as during specific activities, e.g. bath time and supper time.

Visits (± 10) took place between 16h00 and 17h30 hours during the week. This was the time after extra-murals and tea and before supper. During this period the children were free to play and eat tuck. Homework reading was done. It was also bath time. The latter two activities were not rigidly organised; the children were expected to complete these tasks during this period, with intermittent reminders by the child care worker. Four visits were made after supper and one over a week-end. One visit was made to the girls' boarding school of a mixed school in the same area. This was organised by the consultant who was accompanied by the head of boarders.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Consensual validation

The supervisor of this project, the principal of the school and the researcher formed the primary team of consultants. The triad thus consisted of one member from "outside", one from "inside" and one from the "margin". An attempt was made to control for subjectivity through triangulation, the use of an outside expert on the children's drawings as well as the process of ongoing consultation with all the adults involved.

According to Plas (1986, p.56),

Within systemic thinking the only standard for the validity of things must be some sort of agreement...Something is valid to the extent that people agree that it is so. Consensual validation becomes the only possible form of validation.

Checkland (1981, p.242) maintains that,

In dealing with human activities as perceived problems, the best we can hope for is that in the eyes of concerned people former problems are now rated as 'solved' or that problem situations are rated as 'improved'

Thus one arrives at a collective subjective truth, rather than pure objectivity, the existence of which is questioned by systemic thinkers.

Patterns of Change and Homeostasis

A substantial part of the information included in the analysis focused on rules and patterns. Patterns of change and of homeostasis were considered to provide valuable information on the potential for news of difference. These patterns were analysed with the aim of identifying areas of potential for difference as well as those areas resistant to change. As such they formed a substantial part of the focus throughout the intervention. Patterns of communication and patterns of problem-solving were specifically highlighted throughout the process.

Patterns of communication

Patterns of communication were perceived as an essential component of the problem-analysis done by the student team in 1991. They are an inextricable component in cybernetics, organisation and information theory, and are central to (systems) family therapy as well as systems engineering. Patterns of communication can be seen as an inherent concept in any feedback model, which relies per se on the notion of the relationship between components. (Kast and Rosenzweig 1972).

The consultant remained sensitive to communication patterns throughout the intervention. They provided useful information on the hierarchical protocol and acted as pointers towards the nature of the problems experienced within the boarding-house.

The development of new structures and procedures

Schmuck (1982, p.838) maintains that the following is typical of a successful outcome,

What about outcome? If the organization-development effort is to be self-sustaining, the target school should have developed new structures and procedures to accommodate continual problem solving. Cognitive and affective change should have occurred; norms, roles, influence patterns, and communication networks should have become more receptive and responsive - indeed, the culture of the school should have become different."

Comprehensive claims, indeed. However, the manifestation of structural change is a valuable criterion when evaluating systemic change.

Perceptual / Attitudinal differences

Adults involved: Agreement by consensus by the adults involved was used to evaluate attitudinal changes. Agreement was based on the notion of "difference". This is a concept often used in systemic family therapy; e.g. "How is what is happening now different to what happened before?" "How is the relationship between x and y different to before?"

Checkland (1981) and Conoley and Conoley (1990,) point out the importance of attitudinal change in systemic problem-solving. Tingstrom et al (1990, p,45) write,

[S]chool psychology can be reconceptualized as a field whose primary applied focus is on modifying the attitudes and behaviours of adults rather than on providing direct care and treatment to children.

The children: A comparison between the children's kinetic boarding school drawings done during the needs analysis in 1991 and those done in November 1992 attempted to look for rules and patterns as well as internalised perceptions of difference. A comparison was made between their favourite stories before and after the intervention.

METHODOLOGICAL CAVEATS

Influence of the observer

It is known that the presence of an observer is influential in the group. As such it can produce change. Any change which occurred would have to be sufficient to account for this influence. To assess difference it was important to take note of changes within the system when the observer was present, i.e. did her presence introduce specific behaviour patterns?

Subjectivity

Subjectivity remained a problem. The consultant was aware that she had strong feelings about the presence of such young children in the boarding-school. As psychologist she was aware of distress in individual children (e.g. depression), when the other adults clearly did not react to these signals. The consultant never verbalised her feelings on the inclusion of the young children, but non-verbal behaviour and subtle directing was more difficult to control. The perceived alliance of the school counsellor with the consultant can be viewed in terms of referent power, but could also have been due to a perceived complementarity of views. Perceived distress in an individual child was shared with HB and CW in the form of a question (X often seems sad. Have you also noticed that?). This was obviously an attempt at some influence, i.e. for the adults to verbalise an awareness and to (hopefully) act on it. Follow-up was not done, as this was outside the agenda of the intervention.

Checkland (1981) argues that *Weltanschauungen* should become an explicit part of the process as they often underlie existing patterns and as such can contribute to resistance to change.

The multivariable nature of change

It became progressively clear throughout the intervention that the consultant as change agent should remain aware of the multivariable nature of change (Davidson and Rappaport, 1978). Change *per se* need not be positive, it could be a stressor. The importance of *discontinuous change* has been highlighted by the family therapists (Plas 1986, p.78), i.e. change which needs to take

place in order for improvement to occur, but which might lead to an increase in stress at the time. Bateson (1979, p.154) refers to the "double description" for positive change; i.e. the individual or system needs stability as well as requiring change. In the present study it became clear that the frequent implementation of change was contributing to the stress experienced by the system. The evaluation of the intervention was tentative as change in the long term, which leads to a perceived decrease in stress, should be a criterion for evaluation. This was difficult to evaluate during the limited period of intervention.

Premature conclusions

The intervention took place over a period of eight months. Most consultants advise a period of at least 2 years. The project was undertaken as a research project, and can in many ways be regarded as a pilot study. The school was aware of this caveat and was in full agreement that the intervention probably would only form the basis of an intervention which would have to be tracked over a longer period. It was agreed that the report at the end of one year would reflect an account and analysis of the process thus far and would be viewed as a comment on the proceedings, with pointers towards future developments.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

OVERVIEW

The main features of a systemic problem-solving model were followed in so far as the consultant had the skills to do so - these improved in time. The process closely followed the structures outlined by the problem-solving models of Burden (1978, 1981) and Bergan (1982) as described in chapter 2. The contents however, seemed to have extended naturally to include features described by Checkland (1981). Thus root definitions were generated during the process of consultation, both by the team as well as during individual interviews.

To this process one individual interview with each adult concerned was added. This was done to gather information on individual perceptions of the problems in the children's dormitory. Although not initially planned, the interviews evolved as an offshoot of the team meetings. The meetings were held in the principal's office and were characterised by her open-door policy, which made for continuous interruptions, as well as a constant pressure for time (double-bookings were commonplace). These factors exerted pressure on the discussions to be brief, with a resultant pattern which did not allow the full expression of individual opinion. A feeling of "unfinished business" led to the consultant's request for individual interviews which were to be held privately, without interruptions. The interviews were taped. The same questions were asked of each interviewee. The impact of the open-door policy was raised as a question in the individual interviews as well as during the subsequent team meeting.

The clarification of root definitions played an important role in the identification of priorities for the group concerned. At the same time, the identification of root definitions assisted in highlighting differences. Individual root definitions were compared with one another during the third and fourth meetings in an attempt to bring different Weltanschauungen into the open and to discuss the relationship between the ideal and reality.

This process was a difficult one as it highlighted differences, creating tension within the group. Questions were used to facilitate the discussion around areas which seemed to create the most tension. The presence of young children in the boarding-school seemed

to create a barrier between the principal and the rest of the team when it transpired that the other team members were not committed to the presence of these children in the boarding-school, feeling that the children in the junior-primary dormitory still needed to live at home.

The school counsellor's position was that "boarding-houses are unhappy places to be. That's really the bottom line. We shouldn't have that age group here". The principal expressed her commitment to an early educational intervention and saw boarding as "not ideal, but necessary". At this stage it was agreed to proceed with the intervention, with the *proviso* that the allowance of young children to the boarding-school will be brought to the attention of the governing body, following the report on the intervention.

Examples of questions asked at this stage:

To whom is this a problem?

Who benefits from the present arrangement?

Who would be most affected by changes to the present system?

What is the bottom line?

What do you want to see changed?

What should remain the same?

The group root definition had been: The boarding-school is a place of holding in order for education to take place. For this holding to be successful the little children need an adult who closely resembles the concept of a goodenough mother, i.e. one who is constant, reliable, nurturant, aware of their developmental needs and able to provide enriching experiences.

Structural changes, decided upon by the team, were made after each feedback session. These were evaluated at the next meeting. Any patterns which emerged from the style of implementation were reported to the group by the consultant. This provided an impetus towards procedural and attitudinal changes. The outcome was evaluated during the final two meetings, with agreement by consensus used as a measure for change. Outcome was measured both in structural changes which had taken place as well as attitudinal changes (cf. Checkland 1981).

In line with systems thinking, themes within the larger system will reverberate within the smaller systems as all are connected. I.e. what happens to members of a family outside of the family affects relationships within the family, including factors such as

political instability, the message of the media etc. The school, a traditional liberal educational institution, could not remain unaffected by the global trends towards democratisation and the empowerment of the previously disfranchised as well as the instability in the country. During team meetings the difficulties which were experienced in the sub-system was often connected to patterns manifesting themselves outside of the system. E.g. the stressors which accompany change and the individual's response to such stress.

The present study took place over \pm eight months. This allowed the process to move through the stages of problem-solving (cf. Burden, 1978 and Bergan, 1982). However, it was felt that the intervention needed a final phase which would allow for the planning of realistic and feasible changes after the stage of assessment. This is in line with Checkland's (1981) model, which incorporates future planning in the final stage of his methodology. The team agreed that another six months of team work would have been desirable, but that feedback would have to be limited to one meeting and the follow-up report as the school counsellor and the consultant were both leaving. The fact that systemic problem-solving provides for such changes (Burden 1978, p.130 describes a similar process), can be regarded as a strength of the model.

The intervention ended on a note of equifinality. A report was submitted to the school three months after the intervention to consolidate the findings and to provide the school with a working document to present to the governing body.

A brief summary of the process

The 1991 research attempted to highlight patterns of communication and support and to identify needs within these two areas. This was viewed as the preparatory stage to the intervention.

The intervention itself formed the second stage. This consisted of a series of regular meetings, interspersed with observation visits to the boarding-school in order to assess potential areas for change as well as the impact of mutually agreed on interventions.

Summative evaluation occurred during a final feedback session where:

1. A summary was made of the changes which had taken place.
2. The report of the outside expert was discussed.
3. Future planning was outlined.

ANALYSIS

The analysis emphasises rules and patterns. The formal rules are accepted, acknowledged rules which have been explicitly stated by the relevant persons. They are not necessarily written or official statements. Informal rules are usually unspoken, implicit assumptions.

The following rules emerged from successive team meetings. An example of behaviour which underwrote the rule is provided in each case.

TEAM MEETINGS

Addendum 1 gives a description of the final team meeting and the observation visits. It contains significant information on the process as well as the patterns of communication and problem-solving. The descriptions of the other team meetings are excluded for ethical reasons (related to the concerns of the school principal).

Five meetings were held in the principal's office. Present at these meetings were: the principal, head of boarders, child care worker, school counsellor and the consultant. The child care worker was included in the team from the second meeting onwards. The members of the system had not considered her inclusion as significant prior to the first meeting. She was included on request of the consultant.

Formal (nomothetic) rules

1. The principal had an open door policy. This was acknowledged and endorsed by the students, the teachers and the administrative and service staff.

The team meetings were frequently interrupted. The secretary had free access and could enter with messages, for filing or with queries about topics related to general school business. The tea lady and students entered without knocking. This made a focused discussion difficult and prevented any real grappling with the problem. It did allow for quick decision-making and no time was wasted on detail. However, this style lent itself to a false sense of democracy. Decisions which had not been fully negotiated at times led to resistance or resulted in practical problems which had not been thought through.

2. The principal and the head of boarders supported change and new ideas. Problems were resolved through change.

They had both repeatedly committed themselves to change. This commitment was reflected in their views on successful people within the system, as well as their preference for structural change as a response to difficulties. Moving furniture or pupils were a favoured response.

Change itself was a prominent feature of the principal's perception of her role in the school. She described a successful person within in the school as, *inter alia*,

Teachers who are open to new ideas and who are prepared to try something and who offer to be involved.

A successful day she described as, *inter alia*, one in which,

A plan that includes change will have been accepted - questioned and accepted.

Informal (idiographic) rules

1. Short term planning was preferred to long term planning.

The preference was for an immediate response to a presenting problem. This was referred to by the school counsellor as "crisis management" (team meeting 4). The adults involved with the children tended not to look for rules of behaviour, but were instead inclined to rush into action. Accordingly, most difficulties were viewed as individual manifestations of personal problems and immediate structural changes were often regarded as the solution.

2. The principal had full executive power and could take decisions without prior consultation.

An example of this rule was highlighted in the final stages of the planned intervention. The principal appointed an assistant without due consultation. The assistant did not comply with the criteria agreed to by the team. The reader is referred to addendum one (Meeting 5: the final meeting) for a description of this process.

It seems important to note that the appointment of an assistant to the dormitory had been prioritised by the team as the most important intervention which had to take place. Criteria for the appointment of such a person had been extensively debated and consensus had been reached about the profile of such a person. This incident was reminiscent of therapy sessions in which the client or family presents a major role at the end of a session or an intervention. This appointment characterised the problem-solving method used by the system.

3. Informal procedures for communication took prevalence over formal, organised procedures.

Information was often relayed through a structure similar to a bush telegraph, e.g. through chance meetings in the corridor.

The child care worker was not informed about a child not returning to boarding-school as everybody "thought she knew". In another incident the consultant arrived for an interview with the assistant. The assistant was away on a camp. The head of boarders remarked: "I thought you knew". Team members often ended up with double-bookings due to commitments they "had not known about".

4. Support was provided through professional alliance and was dependent on personal initiative.

The principal and the head of boarders walked their dogs together and used this time to discuss matters in the boarding-school. This was arranged by the principal.

5. Critical self-disclosure formed an integral part of the discussions during team meetings.

This style was used by all the team members and was generally supported by the team. The principal had a management style characterised by transparency. She was open about her difficulties as well as her ideals. This style was matched by the head of boarders, the child care worker and the school counsellor to the extent that they were open about the difficulties which they were experiencing and the adaptations that they had to make. E.g. the head of boarders reflected that she was "trying too hard to please everybody". The principal did not attempt to gloss over difficulties and was never heard laying blame on her predecessor.

6. Generalisations and the normalisation of behaviour were accepted forms of ascribing causality.

Difficulties were often ascribed to attention-seeking, the legacy of apartheid or naughtiness.

OBSERVATION VISITS

Rules affecting the children in the junior-primary section of the boarding-school:

Formal (nomothetic) rules

1. Visits to other dormitories were prohibited.

This was a traditional rule which had apparently been instated in response to the fighting and rivalries which occurred between dormitories.

2. Tuck could be eaten at all times.
3. The reading of homework and bathing was compulsory. The younger members of the group were assisted with these tasks. The timing was flexible, as long as the tasks were completed before supper.
4. Phone calls were allowed at all times.
5. The dormitory had to be reasonably tidy (clothes had to be hung up after school and toys picked up before bedtime), but the head of boarders and the child care worker both supported the notion of "homeliness" rather than "institutionalised order" (interview, head of boarders).

Informal (idiographic) rules

1. The child care worker had no executive powers. Any changes which she wanted to implement were negotiated with the head of boarders or the principal.

Simple changes, like moving the television, were first negotiated.

2. Decisions affecting the child care worker could be taken autonomously by the head of boarders or the principal without prior consultation.

The child care worker was not consulted on the appointment of assistants. She was dependent on hearsay for information on the movements of children and assistants. She seldom had factual information.

3. Difficulties in the boarding-school, e.g. enuresis, anorexia and suicide attempts, were treated as individual incidents.
4. Generalisations and the normalisation of behaviour were acceptable forms of ascribing causality.

Disruptive behaviour was described in terms of "trying out", "just being naughty" or "settling down". These concepts were used in reaction to e.g. the increase in crying after telephonic contact with a parent, the acknowledgement of depressive features in a child (pointed out by the consultant) or the increase in fighting following the introduction of a new assistant.

5. The child care worker reacted to misdemeanours with verbal directions. These usually carried messages of a moral and/or (Western) socialising culture.
6. The head of boarders reacted to difficulties by imposing structural change.

Following an increase in disruptive behaviour, the two oldest children were removed from the dormitory and placed in the playroom next door. The use of structural change as an intervention was supported by the child care worker who stated that the two oldest children did not get on well, and that this would be a means by which they would learn to accept each other (interview CW).

7. The children reacted to change by being more disruptive. This was marked by an increase in the noise level and an increase in arguments, combined with a decrease in empathy and support for each other. This behaviour typically followed a change in assistants.
8. Assistants were temporary.

Four different assistants were employed during the eight months of the intervention.

9. Anxieties and fears surfaced at night and over week-ends.

The children became more demanding and cried more often and for longer periods at night. Enuresis was a common problem and increased over week-ends.

10. Contact with children outside the group was discouraged.

Week-end activities were organised according to standards. As punishment for a misdemeanour a group of std. 5s had to take some of the junior-primary pupils for reading .

11. As far as could be established, contact with parents was not visibly mediated.

The main form of contact was through telephone calls. E.g at the outset the head of boarders and the matric girl annexed to the dormitory drew my attention to the fact that no photographs of family members were displayed, but no measures were taken to intervene during the period of the intervention.

12. Children tended to react to telephonic contact with their parents with an increase in crying. A telephone call by an individual mother caused a ripple effect in the group, with a noticeable abreaction in the whole group.

13. The Anglo-American culture was perceived by the children as the sanctioned culture. This probably reflected the background and interests of the adults.

When the children were asked to name favourite stories and songs during the 1991 needs analysis, they initially offered Anglo-American material, but on further questioning recited African songs, stories and games with enthusiasm. The African material was not mediated to the non-Xhosa speaking group. When the children were given the same task at the end of the 1992 intervention, they offered only Anglo-American material and denied having knowledge of African material, including those which they had presented in 1991. However, during an observation visit the Xhosa group was observed playing an African game which included singing. Non-Xhosa speakers attempted entry but were ousted by the group.

The categories overlap occasionally (e.g. two adults in one drawing), hence the numbers may add up to more than 14.

1. Adults: An adult is included in 11 of the 14 drawings. 8 Are depicted as ineffective/distant/powerless and unable to meet the needs of the children. The assistant, who was portrayed in 5 of the drawings, were drawn in a benevolent, but disempowered and distanced role ("not able to make proper contact", outside expert's report) . Another 5 drawings depicted adults as anxiety-provoking and/or threatening (4 as punitive/controlling, 1 as sarcastic). Only 1 adult is portrayed as "available for contact" (the outside expert's report, addendum 3). The adult is not connected to the boarding-school, but is a teacher in the school, possibly the child's school teacher.
2. The presence of embellishment and elaboration usually indicates positive feelings and a desire to connect or interact. 11 Drawings located in the boarding-school (2) or the dormitory (6) (the rest appeared to be outside), showed scant elaboration or embellishment. 2 Drawings showed elaboration and /or embellishment, 1 being in the classroom. Beds were depicted in 5 of the drawings and were typically the only feature which was drawn with attention to detail.
3. 12 Drawings had clinical indicators of insecurity, isolation, helplessness and the absence of nurturance. The drawing of the child described as "a little horror...a stirrer" (CW) and "they are being little horrors...little A. especially is being a little horror" (SP), is commented on by the outside expert as; "clearly indicates sadness or depression". Just as disconcerting is the drawing which depicts the self as "extremely fragile...The general feeling in relation to the self figure...is isolation and insecurity", with the suggestion "that the child does not feel that (even) the peer is strong enough to support her". This child was never mentioned during discussions and was, it seems, not picked up as either "naughty" or in distress.
4. In 7 drawings the self was clearly isolated from the other figures. In 5 drawings the self is drawn next to a peer (1 in a conflictual situation), 2 Drawings showed the self next to an adult (1 in the classroom). In most cases the self was separated from the adult by a peer and/or multiple barriers. The adult depicted most often were the assistant.

A comparison of the 1991-1992 drawings

1. **Adults:** Whereas adults were mostly absent in the 1991 analysis, the 1992 drawings depicted adults in most of the drawings. Although the adults were portrayed as either disempowered or threatening, this could indicate a shift towards greater awareness and contact. When the request for the drawings were made in 1991, a child remarked: "but there are no grown-ups here". On clarification it transpired that the group as a whole did not view any adults as directly involved with them. This was not the case in 1992, when none of the children queried the request. It is interesting that many drawings depicted the assistant (benevolent, if disempowered), but none the child care worker. This was also the case in 1991. Is she not seen as part of the boarding-school? (The CW does not live in, but comes in every weekday afternoon from 12h00 until 18h30). This hypothesis unfortunately cannot be explored at this stage.
2. **Elaboration/embellishment:** A lack of adornment and scant representation of detail was still typical of most of the drawings. The children thus do not seem to have shifted in their experience of the boarding-school as an unsympathetic structure. The drawings of their beds still reflected a positive connotation, but fewer drawings were placed inside the dormitory. This could indicate a shift "outwards". The child care worker supported this view, stating that the children did appear to be less dormitory bound during the day. This could indicate a shift towards greater security (i.e. they feel safer to move away from their beds), but the evidence is not sufficient to allow for the formation of a hypothesis.
3. **Isolation and absence of nurturance:** No difference.
4. **Peers and siblings:** Peers are still the closest contacts. The absence of siblings in the 1992 drawings is noted. In the 1991 interview the children stated that when they were unhappy they would either "cry on my own" or go to a sibling. The 1992 interview elicited a different response. None of the children gave this answer. All of them mentioned "telling" an adult.

It thus seems as if some shift had occurred away from the peer group and/or siblings towards an adult and that this shift manifested itself through the (mere) presence of adults in the drawings.

PATTERNS

The patterns under discussion do not form separate, mutually exclusive categories. They are connected, with features of one pattern informing another. E.g. the pattern of communication informs the pattern of support, which in turn, impacts on the pattern of isolation.

Communication

The communication of news

The pattern was characterised by individual responsibility, informal procedure and flexibility. This seemed to reflect the principal's expressed commitment to a non-authoritative style and her preference for a structure which allows for flexibility and creativity. However, the lack of organised, consistent procedures for the dissemination of information possibly contributed towards the features of isolation and inadequate support which were experienced by the head of boarders, the child care worker, the school counsellor and the children.

The communication of distress

The adults in the boarding-school: Adults seemed to either contain their distress or to share it with a like-minded individual. All the adults gave the names of individuals whom they would speak to in response to the question, "If you were concerned about a specific pupil or a specific issue in the boarding-school, how would you normally address this concern?" (addendum two).

The children: The children tended to act out distress. An increase in activity, disobedient behaviour, in-group jealousy and enuresis seemed to correlate with a stressful situation, including a change in their routine. The incidence of enuresis increased over week-ends. Midway through the intervention, the children seemed to become "worse". This was picked up by all the team members. The child care worker remarked, "there has been lots of changes, the atmosphere is more relaxed and then they become very naughty. They have become terrible lately." (taped conversation following the departure of an assistant, a change in supper time and the re-arrangement of the dormitory). This concern was reflected by the children who, in response to a question, remarked that "being stricter" would make things better for them (addendum one, observation visit 7).

Support

Support was provided by personal alliances. Peers were the most important source of support. Thus a buddy-system was used by both the adults and the children to provide support. No formal planning was made to address support in times of stress. E.g. the fact that the children in the boarding-school were under stress due to the change in management and concomitant changes in their immediate and external environments, was not considered with the view of providing them with support over this period, e.g. by emphasising non-negotiable (i.e. non-changeable) principles, providing regular feedback in terms of long-term planning etc. Thus the rule of an individually focused style was reinforced.

The child care worker and the assistant were trusted to cope on their own. This contributed towards the open atmosphere in the dormitory, but added to their feelings of isolation. No structure (formal or informal) existed which provided either of them with a continuous source of support and contact.

The children formed a cohesive group, but were isolated from the main group of boarders through physical structures and rules. Older children and siblings were not seen to provide support. Supper-time, which could have provided an experience of contact and support, followed the rule of limited contact and individual responsibility. (addendum one, observation visit 7).

Contact with parents did not appear to be actively mediated and seemed to carry conflicting values; providing contact whilst at the same time creating distress. This contact thus could not provide the child with an inner experience of support.

Isolation

The school is situated in a residential suburb close to town. A theme which appears to be prevalent is that of *isolation*.

- a) *Geographically and structurally*: The school is situated off a main road, surrounded on the one side by a small forest (not accessible to the students for safety reasons), and on the other sides by high walls. The school buildings are set back away from the entrance. The boarding school is situated on top of the school building (the school is on the ground level, the boarding-school forms a double-storey), enhancing the sense of physical isolation.

- b) *Socially*: It is a church school. As such it has a chapel on the premises. The children thus do not form part of the surrounding congregation. The school is not placed in a "youthful" area, i.e. an area marked by the presence of students and student-related facilities. Shopping is done at a small local shopping centre, known for its German character (delicatessen, coffee shop, specialist gift shop) which does not reflect the interests of the children and could add to their sense of alienation. The boarders are not allowed to go to town. Contact with students from different, albeit similar, schools is not facilitated.
- c) *Individual and across groups*: Contact across groups of students within the boarding-school is discouraged. This is done through *formal rules*, e.g. students are not allowed to visit in dormitories other than their own, *formal arrangements*, e.g. extra-mural activities (including week-end activities) are arranged according to standard of schooling. The latter also decides dormitory placement. The seating arrangement during meals reflects this isolation. Although mixed age-groups are seated at one table, the tables are long and the students are hierarchically placed from the highest standard to the lowest, effectively isolating the younger children at the bottom. The level of noise during meal-times limits communication to the nearest neighbours.
- d) Contact with indigenous story characters and themes were not actively mediated. As a metatheme this could be argued to isolate the child from its surrounding environment. In addition, Feuerstein (1991) points out that the mediation of culture is an important variable in the acquisition of learning skills. The demise of African/South-African material is probably related to the cultural backgrounds of the adults involved with the children. The appointment of British and American assistants and the English background of the child care worker, actively encouraged the acquisition of similar themes. It is not known to what extent this represents the aspirations of the governing body and/or the principal.

Problem-Solving

Independent decision-making, the implementation of change, short-term planning and self-critical reflection seemed to be the basic rules which informed the pattern. These often interacted so that changes were implemented in reaction to a presenting problem without consultation with relevant others. This style prevented a problem being analysed for rules, and did not encourage a more informed response. Within the team this appeared to facilitate risk-taking, including the development of different strategies.

The implementation of change *per se* created an interesting dynamic. a) The principal was appointed with the understanding that change would take place.

- b) All the key members had a belief system which included change as response to difficulties.
- c) Equifinality (openness to change) and the implementation of change was a root characteristic of the systems model.

Plas (1986, p.112) warns against a rush for change. Reynolds (1982, p.843) writes, Change for its own sake does not necessarily lead to an improved school organisation with a heightened capacity to solve problems. School staffs must develop criteria for measuring and evaluating progress toward meeting short-range and long-range goals. *Consultants should help staff members become more conscious and analytical of the change efforts they are making.* (own emphasis)

Checkland (1981, pp.165 & 178-179) warns against an "over-urgent desire for action", stating that, "rather the need is to use the systems model to open up debate about change...[the question should be] "Why do this at all? rather than: Is this done well?"".

It is this writer's contention that the system's willingness to change and to self-critically reflect on itself, combined with the way in which the systemic model directly addresses the manifestation and implementation of change, allowed this impasse to become not only a part of the analysis ("the problem"), but to play a crucial role in the development of an approach to problems ("the solution") which would allow for greater efficiency and empowerment.

FINAL EVALUATION

RULES AND PATTERNS

Positive connotation

The system was previously perceived as rigid and bureaucratic with a strong hierarchical component which allowed limited contact across boundaries. The open-door policy allowed for contact across boundaries with the principal presented as an active link in the system and not as an isolated sub-system. She implemented this policy democratically and with no obvious preference for high status members, thus actively demonstrating her strongly-held liberal principles.

The open-door policy had a welcoming effect and conveyed the message that difficulties could be discussed freely.

Individual decision-making was encouraged. This allowed for freedom of movement and had the potential to encourage lateral thinking.

The self-critical style facilitated learning and open discussion. An exception to this rule seemed to be the topic of admittance of small children to the boarding-school.

News of difference

- * Despite the levelling and democratising effect of the open-door policy, the principal often reacted autonomously, thus conveying a conflicting message.
- * The frequent interruptions contradicted the message of openness and respect as they prevented a sustained focus on the issue at hand. The SC specifically stated that she experienced this policy as stressful and at times counterproductive.
- * The informal manner of disseminating information often resulted in information not reaching everybody concerned and this added to the isolation of disempowered members.
- * Disempowered persons, e.g. the children, the child care worker and the newly appointed and inexperienced school counsellor, were left without adequate support structures.

- * The lack of formal problem-solving sessions encouraged the use of short term, often unnegotiated solutions. Thus long term decision-making, which could address the pattern of behaviour rather than its individual manifestation and which could allow for a more informed response, was not encouraged. This added stress to the decision-taking process.
- * The principal's openness to change, combined with the general acceptance by team members that change to the system was desirable, led to the use of change per se as a response to difficulties. Thus problematic issues were often not adequately debated, but rather responded to with a rush for change. This contributed to the stress associated with short-term changes which do not lead to the empowerment of the persons involved, but adds to an existing task load.

Dealing with children having difficulties - a summary

Three main strategies were noticed:

1. Normalising and generalising behaviour.
2. Structural changes.
3. Short term solutions. No long term, informed strategies seemed to exist to address problems like enuresis, depression and the abreaction following a change in assistants.

A discussion of the implications of the strategies

It is this writer's opinion that the absence of an informed style, which does not allow for an understanding which facilitates greater potency, formed the basis of the child care worker's disempowered position. Although hers is a style which is marked by a respectful and kind attitude towards each child, it is not sufficiently informed to deal with more complex situational needs.

Structural change as a problem-solving method and the implementation of short-term solutions carried with them the same dilemmas mentioned above. Although it appeared that an immediate response was made to difficulties, the responses were not based on a reflective, informed approach which could address the roots of the problem. E.g. if the children tended to become disruptive with a change in assistants, i.e. if this behaviour formed a pattern, then the rule regarding the appointment of assistants should be addressed.

The use of change as a problem-solving method could add to the children's distress as this provided them with additional experiences of interrupted relationships at a developmental stage when bonding should still be taking place (Bowlby 1973.)

Not acting on information of distress seemed to be fourth option. Thus it was common knowledge that telephonic contact increased the distress in the child as well as in the group. However, this was not acted on. Not acting on this news could possibly be related to theme interference or a lack of appropriate skills (Conoley and Conoley, 1990). E.g. a hypothesis could be that the child care worker was using generalities to cope with her own distress about the children and in lieu of more informed responses, which she had not been exposed to. She repeatedly stated, "You feel for them, shame, they still need their mothers, you know" (taped conversation) and "I think they are so young and so far from their mothers which is really sad." (written statement in answer to question 9, see addendum two). She responded with enthusiasm to demonstrations of a more informed approach by the consultant.

It was also noted that, although it was common knowledge that parents were not included in the children's prayers, and concern was expressed about this by HB, CW and the assistant, no attempt was made to address this with the children.

Ghosts:

The lack of commitment to the presence of these children in the boarding-school and the emotional implications of their early separation from their families, were freely discussed by the boarding-school staff and the school counsellor who seemed to be in agreement. However, it appeared to be a sensitive matter to the principal and was accordingly treated like confidential information. I.e. it was regularly brought to my attention in a private, confidential tone. The issue was never raised by them in the presence of the principal.

The African culture was acknowledged by the children in an exclusive group, which excluded children from a White English background. The Black children denied knowledge of indigenous material in a formal session, i.e. when the information was requested and placed on tape, but acted out a Xhosa game informally in the presence of the same interviewer. It is hypothesised that they thus demarcated the boundaries between what was perceived to be the system's cultural preference and the African background, which was not perceived to be sanctioned and given official status by the system. Excluding members from a different background could indicate a defence against a perceived threat. It is possible that this incident could contribute towards an understanding of the pattern of racism which is experienced within the system.

OBSERVABLE CHANGES

The aim of a change was to interrupt a pattern, to enhance the problem-solving capacity of the consultees, to affect attitudes towards problems and children's' behaviour and to "facilitate ongoing organizational analysis and renewal" (Conoley and Conoley 1990, p.92).

Changes which would affect the patterns of problem-solving and isolation were sought in order to assist with the above-mentioned processes.

Structural changes

Changes which have been implemented and were perceived to be successful

1. Regular case discussions:

Prior to the intervention no structure existed whereby the adults involved with the children could address specific concerns about individual children or events in the boarding-school. After the third meeting it was decided that a regular meeting, where specific concerns could be discussed, was desirable and feasible. The child care worker suggested that the head of the junior-primary department in the school be invited to join this group, as she had relevant skills in the field and knew the children. The team supported this decision.

Subsequently regular meetings have been held on a Friday afternoon. Both HB and CW stated that they found this arrangement helpful and supportive. CW wrote, " I find X (head of the junior-primary department) helpful because she has the experience - knowledge to deal with these little ones if it is serious" (addendum two, answer to question 6). The case discussions thus have the potential to affect the adults' problem-solving skills and their attitudes towards children's' behaviour. Regular discussion could also facilitate improved communication (being a regular forum for meeting and discussion) and could lessen the isolation and feelings of disempowerment of the child care worker.

CW appeared progressively more relaxed and open and seemed less isolated and more empowered. At the beginning of the year she appeared to be very lonely and unconnected. She never volunteered information, and had a demeanour which could best be described as apologetic.

The intervention highlighted the marginalised position of the child care worker. Previous to the intervention she had rarely been consulted on or informed of issues concerning the children in the dormitory and seemed to have adopted a laissez-faire approach which manifested itself during the initial stages of the intervention. Apart from the individual interview, time was spent bonding with her during the observation visits. This appeared to be sufficient to engage the child care worker to the process. Trust and reliability seems to have been important variables in the engagement of the child care worker. Conoley and Conoley (1990, p.89) support this position, commenting that "Would-be consultants must convey their commitment to confidentiality by words and actions. After a significant period of time teachers learn to trust or not".

2. Suppertime: For description of the evening meal, see addendum one (observation 7).

2.1. Table arrangements: Seating was previously arranged hierarchically according to standard. A matric girl was seated at the end of the table, followed by std. 9s, then std. 8s etc. Hence the youngest children were isolated at the bottom-end of the table. Seating had now been changed so that a senior pupil (std.9) were seated at each end of the table.

SP and HB report that the "children are very happy about it. As a matter of fact some extra changes were made". The matrices are now seated on their own; a request they made and which SP and HB think might contribute towards some group cohesion and lessen some of the racial tension as it provided them with a regular opportunity to be together as a group. (Matrics were separated in the boarding-school, each pupil occupying a single room annexed to a dormitory. This arrangement was seen as a factor which contributed towards the lack of camaraderie and overt racism amongst them).

2.2. The evening meal was moved forward with 30 minutes. This provided time for reading and winding-down before bedtime. It allowed for the HB to say goodnight to the girls and to end the day with a closing ritual.

3. It was agreed that the duties of the matric girl annexed to the dormitory should be curtailed. Rather than having to take up the role of mother at night, she should be given tasks appropriate to an older sister, e.g. playing a game, reading a story or plaiting hair.

Changes which have not been resolved satisfactorily

1. The appointment of a permanent assistant still posed a difficulty. The importance of a long-term appointment was highlighted as the continuously changing nature of the present arrangement did not allow the children opportunities for bonding and security. It is a personal hypothesis that the continuously changing assistants added to the institutionalising effects of the boarding-school which could be seen in the behaviour of the girls. They clung to any adult who entered the dormitory, acting in an over-familiar, over-stimulated way.
2. The week-end program. Activities were still divided according to age-groups. The possibility that this added to the pattern of isolation was discussed by the team. It was agreed that across-dormitory activities were desirable and feasible.
3. Structural changes to the dormitory evolved out of the meetings between HB and CW:

E.g. The two senior pupils (std.2) were moved out of the dormitory to the t.v. room. Apparently they were "very happy" with this move. The corridor in front of this area was changed to a t.v. area. However, conflict between the two girls emerged quickly. They had a history of conflict prior to the intervention.

This example highlighted the pattern of problem-solving, which emphasised continuous change as a resolution, albeit temporary, of presenting problems. The difference between a structural intervention which addresses a pattern and a structural change which confirms a pattern, can be seen in a comparison between the problematic interventions and the ones which were deemed successful.

Comment:

The rigid boundaries within the system contributed to the patterns of isolation and fragmented communication. Changes which could affect interaction across the different age groups were sought. Changing the seating at supper time was seen as one intervention which could affect these patterns. Week-end activities were seen as another. These changes are probably not sufficient in themselves to affect real change, but should be viewed as precursors to a change in perception and thus planning of future formal arrangements.

The time allowed for a bedtime ritual was seen as one way to increase contact between HB and the children. The ritual could also provide the children with a regular, structured experience which could address some of their needs for support and contact. HB was perceived by the children as powerful, but distant and threatening. A hypothesis was that a change in the perception of adults as either powerful and threatening or non-threatening but disempowered, could address the above-mentioned needs. The team agreed that HB had sufficient skills and experience to facilitate a positive experience, but that the demands of the position and her newness to the system had prevented regular, planned interaction with these children.

Changes in attitudes/ perceptions

It is nearly impossible to connect changes in attitude directly to the intervention. The period of the intervention correlated with the increasing familiarisation of the school principal and the head of boarders with the system itself and coincided with changes taking place within the school system. Increased familiarisation and changes occurring outside of the intervention probably contributed to a decrease in specific areas of stress and feelings of isolation. This reservation should be kept in mind in the assessment of attitudinal changes.

It was agreed by the team that change had occurred within the group. All the members stated that they felt more empowered (including self!) and more supported. "I'm not desperate that things can't go wrong. I'm not only establishing problems, I ask, open up and talk to others...I also don't feel as dependent on my own resources any longer" (SP).

The team agreed that the pattern of support affecting them had improved. This resulted in the team members feeling less isolated. The team meetings themselves obviously contributed towards the change in the patterns. However, all the members stated that they now spoke more regularly and more often about matters in the boarding-school, in addition to the meetings and the regular case discussions. It can be stated that a rule of discussion was being formed. This, in turn, allowed more opportunities for contact and communication

The team members also agreed that the intervention had impacted on the way problems were viewed and handled within the boarding-school. Two patterns were noticeable:

1) The style of the meetings had changed: When the intervention started the group process was marked by the consultant and school principal taking up leadership positions. This changed markedly in time, with the other members contributing more and more. Towards the end it was noticeable that the consultant was being used mostly as a source of reference after an agreement had been reached by the team. The process had become increasingly democratic.

2) The focus was shifting from the individual to the rule. This took a surprisingly long time. It was only towards the end that statements were made which reflected this shift. E.g. SC stated during the fourth meeting that fragmentation tends to be the rule, "this place tends to fragment." SP agreed. When asked what would help the process of bonding and consolidation, SC suggested long-term planning. HB agreed, stating that "the general relaxation has caused problems...even the matrices are now keen to stick to old rules". "In the end it becomes that kids also can't handle change. They just frighten".

The discussion then focused on the issue of continuous changes as a stressor. During this debate HB raised the issue of the boarding-school as a place of custody, which SP strongly denied. A discussion of individual root definitions (presented as "a definition of what the primary task of the boarding-school should be") ensued. This appeared to play a constructive role, consolidating the group and allowing the SP to express her concerns about the increasing number of children in the boarding-school with unstable family backgrounds .

The children: The team agreed that some individual children were better - but some were worse! We agreed that it was probably too early to assess for difference, as the agreed to interventions, of which the appointment of a full-time Black assistant was regarded as the most important, had not been implemented fully. The regular case discussions had been implemented for too short a period to allow for meaningful evaluation.

The children's' drawings suggested a shift in the perception of adults in the boarding-school. Whereas adults were previously (1991) regarded as absent, the children at the end of 1992 seemed more aware of the adults in the boarding-school. Contact with adults was apparently more conscious. However this contact was still experienced as punitive and/or inadequate.

THE PROCESS

Criteria for the evaluation

Tingstrom et al (1990) refer to the research on successful consultation relationships. According to them, consultation as a social interaction require collaboration, collegiality, limited resistance, influence power and the acceptance of the recommendations to succeed. To this is added commitment to the process.

Evaluation of the process

Collaboration, collegiality, referent power and the acceptance of recommendations:

These criteria were viewed as reciprocally influential. Hence referent power (i.e. the influence exerted when one individual or group can identify with another) was probably an important variable in the manifestation of collaboration and collegiality and the acceptance of recommendations. The principal, the school counsellor and the consultant had shared experiences; they had attended the same university, had taken similar courses, had a teaching background within similar systems (the consultant had previously been a teacher at a private church school), and fell within similar age groups - the consultant bridging the younger (school counsellor's) and the older (principal's).

Limited referent power was experienced in relation to the head of boarders and the child care worker. This probably constituted a factor of resistance. The consultant attempted to overcome this resistance with the use of expert power and the use of therapeutic alliance skills. The use of listening skills was experienced as influential, specifically with the child care worker.

Commitment, the acceptance of recommendations and expert power:

Commitment to the process was seen to be affected by the following factors:

The focus of the intervention: The selection of the youngest group was the choice of the consultant. The system members were not initially committed to this group. However, the team met consistently and the recommendations were generally accepted. It is debatable whether the changes which had not been implemented fully, reflected resistance related to the choice of the sub-system.

Unfamiliarity with the model of systemic problem-solving was viewed as an important factor which affected expert power. The team knew that the intervention also functioned as a pilot study for the consultant. Transparency and democracy (i.e. the facilitation of maximum input by all team members, combined with the use of critical self-reflection) seemed crucial to the continued commitment and the limitation of resistance.

The use of expert power in the field of child development was seen to assist the acceptance of recommendations and contributed towards the commitment of the child care worker.

The influence of prior expectations

The 1991 needs analysis affected commitment in an unforeseen way. The 1991 study took two weeks to complete. This resulted in the unspoken assumption that the present intervention would also require a short period of time to affect major areas of concern. Connected to this was the assumption that changing structures would be sufficient to bring about the desired results. These concerns emerged during the third meeting and were regarded as contributing towards resistance.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

It was agreed that a report would be sent as follow-up and that the report would be discussed with the governing body. The report, the appointment of a permanent child care assistant and the continuation of the case discussion meetings were seen as important factors which should affect the long-term management of the children.

The report contained four recommendations:

1. Long term planning re the viability of admitting children under the age of nine to the boarding-school. It was recommended that a sub-committee be appointed to research the implications and viability of the present policy.

Comment:

If the argument of systemic thinking holds true, then the changes which have been experienced by the adults should in time be reflected by the children. This is, of course, given the *proviso* that the changes remain constant over time and form an alternative pattern.

2. If the governing-body decides that this age-group should stay, the appointment of a permanent assistant or care worker who meets the criteria set out by the team, becomes essential. Such a person should be encouraged and provided with the resources to attend the workshops run for child care workers by the Child Welfare Organisation.

3. The continuation of the regular case discussions is important. These should include a focus on patterns. The contributions of outside experts from time to time should be encouraged to facilitate growth and learning.

4. Telephone calls should be monitored and if necessary time limits should be placed on them. Follow-up after a parental call is advised. This could be done by the child care worker or the assistant and need not take up more than 5 - 10 minutes. Examples of listening and comforting behaviour were given.

LIMITATIONS

The present study was undertaken as a pilot study and attempted to incorporate the main features of the problem-solving models which have been described. It had some important limitations and thus can not claim to be a flawless representation of the systemic problem-solving model. The following factors were perceived to have limited the full exploration of the model:

1. Team efficacy:

Although a team was formed for the purpose of the intervention, the consultant often felt herself as well as the other members to be operating as individuals. Hypotheses in this regard include:

- a) The low status of the consultant (an unpaid student) affected commitment to the intervention model.
- b) The unfamiliarity of the model to all concerned affecting the commitment of the team and resulting in a learning curve, which meant that the model only started operating smoothly midway through the intervention.
- c) Key members from within the system were not only new to each other, but also to the system. Thus they had not adequately bonded and identified themselves within the system, but were often still functioning with reference to outside systems.

2. Commitment of key members:

The head of boarders' recent entry into the system necessitated an initial stage of entry, preventing a focus on a small subsection of the system as she was still familiarising herself with her environment.

Her "willingness to please everybody" linked to a desire "not to be seen as another miss X" (self-critical statement made during a team discussion - miss X was her predecessor, who was asked to leave after the 1991 analysis highlighted her negative interaction with the children), resulted in an overload. The intervention was thus initially viewed by her as a stressor.

With hindsight it seems clear that a person who is newly appointed in a central role should have time to orientate herself before an intervention of this nature is implemented. The team decided that six months to a year would probably have

been sufficient for such an orientation.

Consultancy, unlike traditional therapy, cannot rely on transference to assist the commitment of the client to the process, but has to depend largely on expert power or referent power for continued commitment to the process.

3. The influence of a time restraint:

Although some brief interventions are mentioned, both Burden (1978) and Checkland (1981) emphasise the importance of an involvement which allows the intervention to reflect on itself and to adjust accordingly, allowing for the feature of equifinality to become established as a (new) characteristic of the system. The time restraint allowed for an evaluation and a brief reflection on the patterns within the system. It did not allow for the recommended changes to be implemented, monitored and assessed by the team. Follow-up was thus limited and incomplete.

4. The influence of positivist training:

Unfamiliarity with systemic problem-solving and a training steeped in the scientific model, resulted in a fear of a lack of information and a distrust of the model. Too much information was collected. The intervention seems overloaded with data on single patterns. Exposure to the model suggests that the process model does not need as much collaborative factual, detailed data as was gathered. The strength of the model lies in the presence of systemic patterns within component parts. E.g. the observation visits could have been limited to three (supper time, bed time and one afternoon visit) and the data from the children limited to the drawings. It was interesting to note that a specific event, e.g. supper or the appointment of an assistant, could reflect the major patterns.

5. Consultancy skills:

The problem-solving model required a combination of therapeutic skills and consultancy skills: it was thus not the one or the other, but a skilful combination of both which needed to be mastered in time.

The process thus was a process of learning, not only for the members from the school, but also for the consultant. Burden (1981) warns against the difficulties associated with trainees. It is this writer's contention that the recommendation that a

novice should be coupled with someone experienced in this type of consultancy was not sufficiently negotiated at the initiation of the project.

With hindsight it is felt that focusing on root definitions earlier on in the intervention would have increased the impact of the process. The introduction of root definitions into the process not only allowed differences in commitment levels to surface, it also revealed theme interferences and highlighted appropriate, desirable interventions.

CONCLUSION

The value of systemic problem-solving seems to lie in its ability to generate the type of question which allows the system to reflect on itself without necessarily highlighting the contribution of individual members. In this intervention it became clear that the team morale provided support during the process of analysis and intervention and facilitated the empowerment of the child care worker. The model seemed to enhance the problem-solving skills of the team. It actively demonstrated the democratic process, facilitated more incisive analytical thinking and had a propensity for long term solutions.

The use of root definitions were found to be specifically valuable. The members of the system were required to describe the ideal task of the boarding-school, employing verbs to do so. These actions were compared to the existing conditions. This process allowed individual difference to surface (differences which have often been implicit, rather than explicit). The task of enumeration stimulated the initiative; participants apparently felt sufficiently safe to differ.

The model requires the inclusion of relatively subjective categories. Comparing the difficulties which the system was experiencing to some of the political and philosophical patterns outside of the system showed a connection, not only between the sub-system under analysis and the team members, but also allowed for appropriate strategies to be formulated. The impact of the instability and multiple changes manifesting themselves "out there" could be compared to the impact of a similar process "in here". Hence the political Zeitgeist was used as a metaphor for the system.

To the consultant an important learning process was the focus on rules and patterns within a system as opposed to an individual. At times this resulted in internal conflict as the consultant had to trust that the changes which were generated would be sufficient to not only identify individual children in distress, but to improve the skills appropriate to intervention. The focus on patterns facilitated recursive thinking and a focus away from the individual towards groups. The focus affected the types of questions which were raised. These reflected systemic problems rather than personal problems. As such the focus resulted in an alternative way of viewing and addressing problems. The latter seems to be an important contribution that systemic problem-solving as a consultancy model can make to the field of educational psychology.

Conoley and Conoley (1990, p.100) write,

The key to consultation success is an awareness by all adults in children's environments that children's problems are at least partially maintained by the actions of adults. If children's difficulties are seen as signs of individual pathology, then consultation is only of limited usefulness. In contrast, if adults believe that *settings are part of the problem*, then consultative work is the most-valued service.

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ADDENDUM 1

TEAM MEETINGS

A narrative style is used to describe the meetings. Thus personal, subjective observations are included which attempt to describe the meetings and the observation visits from the consultant's perspective. This is in line with system's thinking which strives to make point of view explicit in the belief that the each interventionist has a set of values and it serves the interest of the clients for the interventionist to be honest to herself about these. I.e. the interventionist's values are not explicitly brought into the process, but she herself should be explicitly aware of them. The community psychology paradigm supports this view, arguing that the pretence of a value-free intervention allows for hidden agendas to contaminate the intervention (Donohue et al, 1984).

Team meetings:

Meeting 5: The final meeting:

HB reports back on the visit to the neighbourhood boarding-school. She expresses her appreciation and enjoyment, stating, "if he (HB) can survive so well after ten years, I suppose there is hope for me!" Again I notice the need for an appropriate forum for discussion and support.

We discuss the appointment of the assistant to the dormitory. SP had the previous week appointed a young, Xhosa-speaking woman. Apparently her uncle had phoned, looking for employment for his niece. SP immediately offered the job of assistant to CW, albeit for a trial period. She had not conferred with any of the team members. The assistant did not speak English and was unable to work over week-ends. Her appointment was most probably temporary. I am reminded of therapy sessions in which the client or family presents a major rule at the end of a session or an interview. This appointment more or less sums up the problem-solving method used by the system.

We look at the positives: She seems empathic, dignified and can assert herself with the children. She has an indigenous background. She bonded easily (I point out that the children bond "over-easily as it is"). She seems to enjoy assisting with the physical tasks like bathing them and plaiting their hair.

We recap: The team had agreed on the criteria for an assistant. These were: an older empowered woman, who would be able to mediate the African culture, have authority in the boarding-school in general and be available over week-ends. It was assumed that such a person should be able to speak English. I remind the team of the root definition of a goodenough mother and SP of her statement,

We need a Black mother who can drive, whose babies they are. I need to find that person who can look outside of her duty of looking after them and who can phone and organise friends and activities.

We agree: the assistant's youth and lack of command of English (she speaks Afrikaans and Xhosa) will probably prevent her from carrying authority within the boarding-school. The fact that she does not speak English will contribute towards the isolation of the non-Xhosa speaking group (a minority group) and might add to the existing problem of racism. The fact that the assistant is not available over week-ends continues the initial problem of the children who were "motherless" over week-ends. It also adds to their experience of interrupted care-taking.

HB states that the fact the assistant does not speak English could be used to facilitate the learning of Xhosa in the English-speaking group. This group, despite being a minority group, has strangely resisted the acquirement of Xhosa.

We agree:

1. The assistant to remain until the end of the year. Her position will then be re-evaluated by the team (without the consultant).
2. HB and CW to actively motivate and mediate the inclusion of minority members. CW suggests setting up a roster for bath times (previously bath times were not arranged formally), which could be purposefully multiracial, using age as a criterion. They will encourage the assistant to include minority-members at other times and will monitor this.
3. The use of "affirmative action" to be monitored and evaluated. Does it have potential to be generalise beyond this group?

I recap the changes which have taken place and give a summary of the patterns. In light of the above-mentioned incident these seem even more poignant and real.

The atmosphere feels close and warm. I realise that the principal is vulnerable and has, because of her position, been more exposed than the rest of us, but that she must (I hope) experience our support of her and admiration for her openness and willingness to risk as well as her ability to accept criticism.

We agree:

1. I will send a report within \pm three months time. The report will be presented to the governing body by the principal.
2. The most change has occurred within the group. All members state that they feel more empowered (including self!) and more supported. "I'm not desperate that things can't go wrong. I'm not only establishing problems, I ask, open up and talk to other...I also don't feel as dependent on my own resources any longer" (SP).
3. Some individual children are better - but some are worse! We agree that it is probably too early to assess for difference as the agreed to intervention, of which the appointment of a full-time Black assistant is the most important one, has not been implemented fully. Other interventions, e.g. the regular case discussions, have not been running long enough to allow for meaningful evaluation.
4. The intervention has impacted on the way problems are viewed and handled within the boarding-school.

They invite me to the end of the year function and I gratefully accept.

OBSERVATION VISITS

Visit 1. A brief visit to make contact with the child care worker. CW evasive. Difficult to engage with her. CW agrees to write biographical particulars of boarders next to their names.

Go to pick up list 1 week later. CW "forgot" to do list. "Forgets again" the next week. Make appointment to see her on her own about her boarders.

Visit 2. Meeting with CW. We are surrounded by children who come and go and who provide continuous interruptions. CW: Initially evasive and defensive. Describes boarders and problems in vague generalised terms. Slowly she opens up as I listen emphatically. I pick up that she is rather isolated and lonely (depressed?). By the children's reactions to her I also notice that she is a central "rock" figure to many. They come with small complaints and bits of information; all of which she responds to in a seemingly appropriate manner (kind, but not over-involved). Some come for brief hugs. She clearly has favourites, also amongst the "New South-Africans" (her term) and tends to favour conformity and neatness. After \pm 1 hour she is "skindering" and reluctant for me to leave.

Visit 3. CW and some of the girls: CW shows the same diffidence when she sees me, but is friendly when she points me to their dormitory. On leaving she is eager to chat and renew contact. Again seems hesitant for me to leave - as if she wanted to chat a bit more.

The girls are open and eager to communicate - and quick to complain about how the "hate boarding-school and miss home". But their parents say it is "for their own good" This stated mockingly. One girl (D> appears sad and expresses feeling neglected ("over the week-end my father just watches cricket and my mother works"). A Sotho girl has difficulty understanding my English and the Zambian girl (fluent and erudite) interprets for her and seems to take the English girl under her wing. According to them friendships are largely determined by standard. Their sleeping arrangements do not reflect these but at this stage seem arbitrary. A Sterkspruit group seems to exist: of sisters and cousins. L, like last year, appears to be pale and left out. They all eat tuck (chocolates) and a few watch the newly installed t.v. I do not ask, but CW volunteers that she will monitor their watching (thinking I will be critical?). The girls spontaneously disappear in small groups to go and play. L. hangs around CW.

Visit 4.(7/5): K., a primary school teacher on a year's visit from Britain, is listening to the children's reading. They appear keen to share this with her. She is friendly and open; she approached SP about a teaching job and was offered this position: weekdays from 4 - 8, being involved with their homework, specifically listening to their reading. I again realize that CW. did not offer this information to me. Supper time has been changed to 18h00 (from 18h30). This means that the "little ones" now have 30 min. to play after supper + time for a story. I take note of the relaxed atmosphere: CW is sorting out the washing, some girls are having a bath, doing their own thing (singing, laughing, in charge of own baths). As before they continue to "pop in" with CW.

I speak to S., the matric who has been in the room annexed to their dormitory for 2 years; "nobody else wanted to". Her duties include getting up for them at night when sick, having nightmares or wetting their beds (3 still do). She tells me about the new girl, whose father has custody and who brought her in with girlfriend. She thinks the new girl has fitted in easily, unlike L.(a weekly boarder) who still cries, often hysterically ("last time for 1.30 hours) when her parents leave on a Sunday. She cries "Mommy, tell me that you love me, please tell me that you love me" "even after her mother has given her a hiding for crying so much". When I mention this to CW she states that probably L is spoilt, as her parents come and visit her during the week (at which L appears with sweets and new school shoes which father has just brought. She looks pleased and smiling for the first time since I have seen her. (They hav'nt forgotten about her, still love her?) CW repeatedly states, every time I see her that "shame, it must be hard/terrible for them, I don't think it is right you know". This becomes a refrain, echoed by S., K., the teachers on week-end duty and the matron. Interestingly, both CW and the teacher on week-end duty, feel that it is as bad for the most senior students, who have been here for a long time. "They become resentful and bitter, this is the only lives they have; here".

CW seems keen to chat and not eager for me to go, as if she enjoys the opportunity to talk about her duties and difficulties, but I remain aware of how difficult it is to get factual information from her.

Impressions: Relaxed atmosphere. Dormitories are casual, friendly /untidy (not chaotic), children seem free to come and go when no structured activity is planned. The little children are always eating! They seem to have an endless supply of tuck (also just before supper)

The boundaries between the groups: I have never seen across-dorm interaction. I am aware that some of the girls have older sibs, I have only noticed interaction on one occasion, when an older sib briefly came into the dorm to relay some information to her sister. This interaction lasted no more than 30 sec., was done sotto voce.

Every senior person and teacher has mentioned racism in the first 5 minutes that I have spoken to them, despite the fact that I never mentioned the topic: I ask about changes, and specifically those affecting the youngest group; they offer the issue of racism amongst the seniors, with Black students ostracising and humiliating Whites.

A Black student offers that we regard "an injury to one (Black) as an injury to all". According to the White students it is impossible to enter their ranks, and if a Black attempts friendship with a White, she is accused of "sucking up". Most agree with the statement that this has become worse since the previous HB has left.

Comment: There is not a single Black adult in a status position (only cleaners). Even the Xhosa teacher is White. What would the effect of Black adults in a supervisory/authority position be on the polarisation?

- CW, K. and S. leave over week-ends, leaving the pre-primary group to a large extent "motherless". Could the possibility of a Black week-end mother be explored? Such a person could provide some Black authority as well as facilitating some African culture (Could she introduce ethnic songs to all the junior pupils?) It is noted that all culture is strongly European; reinforced by the British K. and and American teacher who is in charge of the "language enrichment" of the Black students.

It is noted that the separation of students by age in the dormitories encourages cliques and isolation and does not reflect a natural system. The isolation of the pre-primary group is noticeable, with the only noticeable contact up to this stage being with S. and the CW.

Visit 5 (8/5): A Friday evening. The pre-primary and sub.A's are delighted to see me. They hang around me, even missing out on McGyver. They show the familiarity one finds with children in children's homes; hanging on to me, holding my hands, wanting to sit on my lap. Y. confides that her real name is a Xhosa one and asks me to call her that. Q. has me practice clicks. They follow me around and when I leave say "Oh no", but quickly accept my temporariness - reminding me of behaviour typical of children with weak maternal relationships. The new girl, who was apparently well-adjusted reveal psychosomatic complaints; initially she complains of a headache, then

tummy-ache then a sore throat. She shows me the Mother's day card that she has made.

A brief visit to McGyver reveal the teacher's laps overflowing with the sub.B,s and std.1's. They vie for these places, pushing off rivals.

Visit 6 (9/5): The new girl's father was supposed to fetch her on 8/5 at 7h30. He phoned to change the time to 9/5 at 7h30. She got up at 7h00 to prepare. Apparently he arrived at 10h30.

Comment: The use of boarding school as place of custody. Could regular "case-studies" facilitate the management of distressed individuals? (Note L.'s behaviour which has been labelled as "ag, that's just L., ag shame").

The teacher in charge was not aware of any mishaps the previously night. the group informed me that the trio of N., Q. and M. "all cried". Yet they are more wary and distanced from me today, showing disinterest except when I leave when they ask in a chorus, "Are you going away?". I state that I will be back again. They turn around and carry on with the activity (writing).

Visit 7: I attend supper: I am impressed by the quality and quantity of the food. Supper is a noisy, seemingly chaotic affair. Grace is rattled off by a senior. The tables appear fairly integrated - although the 3 vegetarian tables provide for an imbalance as they are mostly senior girls. I notice that the interactions are limited as the tables are too long and the noise level too high to allow communication across the table. Thus the top end of the table is virtually cut off from the bottom-end. This means that although the tables have a racial and age mix, little communication occurs across these boundaries. Some girls are gesticulating across tables, reinforcing their "non-alliance" to their own tables. CW states that she is unaware of how table arrangements (these include the saying of grace, the lay-out and the duties) are organised. It is the task of the matrices. There is movement throughout. Girls come and go. The soup and salad is at a table at the end of the room. Thus they get up to help themselves, take back plates and to leave the room. Saying grace at the end is the same hurried affair. HB now relay messages. She is apologetic, pleading that they comply with the regulations. "Some of you were not at prep last night. Now please, you know that you have to go, the teachers take all the trouble of being there, please see that you are there tonight. + Some dorms were very noisy last night. You know who you are. Please try and be quiet tonight".

The atmosphere at the staff table is one of unconnectedness. This can partly be due to the noise level which makes communication to anybody except your nearest neighbours impossible. But I also notice a lack of awareness of each other's needs. HB arrived late. Nobody offered her food: she had to ask. When the gym mistress arrives, even later, only HB offered her food.

In the dormitory: 19h15 - 20h15: N. looking depressed. Sitting in her bed with her doll, looking pale and sad. T. wants to join the Black girls playing a game with rope, accompanied by a Xhosa song. They tell her up front that, no, she cannot join them. She goes to lie in her bed. H. looking after L., pretending that she is a baby.

D. features prominently again. Taking a leadership role, trying to look after N. She tells me that more discipline is needed and that good manners during meals should be enforced. She asks me to ask SP to increase the discipline, "then there will be less fighting and everybody will be happier". T. calls me to her bed to ask about my interaction with D. She volunteers that "people should be stricter". An e.g. : girls who fight should be made to stand in the corridor. She also asks me to transfer this request to SP. Nz. in the bed above, agrees and adds that silence after lights-out should be enforced, with punishment for infringement (she is unsure what). A plea for silence after lights-out is later made by N. in reply to my question, "what could make things better for you here?"

Story-time: S. reads. She sits on N.'s bed, the others gather around. Ny. and V. are crying: their mother phoned. Ny. is inconsolable although she sits on S.'s lap and S. is trying to distract her. Some of the others say "Tula" in concerned voices. When S. responds by stating that A. is crying because her mother phoned, it causes a ripple effect. T. dives onto my lap, burying her head in my lap. Q. and Th. start fighting, A. starts to jump up and down in her bed, 2 others join Ny. next to S.

HB. comes in to kiss all goodnight.

Lights out: Ny. is still crying. A. starts with a sob and breaks into a heart-breaking cry. I go to her and, not saying anything, rock her. The crying takes its course until it subsides and she lies very quietly. When S. and I are outside we hear someone crying. S. says that some nights up to eight of them cry and all she can do is to leave them. "But they will never let somebody just cry, they will always go to her and try and help". And we hear the "tula, tula" starting. S. seems genuinely kind and concerned about them. I wonder about the responsibility and time involved for a girl writing matric.

Comment: I wonder about a more supportive, symbolic ritual e.g. a sing-song + prayer ritual?

K. is no longer involved with them in the afternoons, she is now a classroom assistant in the junior-primary section in the school.

Visit 8: S. is no longer with the children as she has to prepare for her matric exams. A new girl from England, who has just taken her A-levels, has taken her place. She is strange to the children, having difficulty understanding their English. The children appear chaotic and unruly. CW announces her distress. "I don't know what's wrong with them". She ascribes it to "naughtiness" and "taking chances with the new girl" whom she describes as "far too soft". I suggest the possibility of distress and realise for the first time that CW's rather vague and discrediting descriptions of the children's difficulties is a defense mechanism against her own distress at their unhappiness.

Visit 9: The final visit. The children do the Kinetic School Drawings. A surprise to me is the presence of the newly appointed assistant CW. Was as much a surprise to CW. The children appear calmer, yet when I do the taped interviews their distress levels rise disconcertingly, with some taking up foetal postures. On leaving I emphasize that I will see them at the end-of-year

ADDENDUM 2**QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. If you are feeling really good about the day, what events that had a bearing on your feelings are likely to have occurred at school that day?

2. If you are feeling depressed or angry about the day, what events that have a bearing on your feelings are likely to have occurred at school that day?

3. Think of a person(s) at school who you think is/will be very successful and describe what behaviours, attitudes and values this person(s) demonstrates at work. Do not mention names.

4. Think of a person(s) at school who you think is not/will not be successful and describe what behaviours, attitudes and values this person(s) demonstrates at work, Do not mention names.

5. If you were concerned about a specific pupil in the junior-primary dormitory, who would you consult with?

6. If you were concerned about a more general issue in the junior-primary dormitory, how would you normally address this concern? If you speak to a specific person, please name the person(s) concerned.

7. What, in your opinion, are the benefits of being in the boarding-school for these children?

8. What, in your opinion, are the negative implications of being in the boarding-school, for these children?

9. Any other comments or insights you would like to add:

ADDENDUM 3**INTERPRETATION OF THESIS DRAWINGS
REPORT BY AN OUTSIDE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST**

Interpretation based on criteria of Koppitz (1968), Burns and Kaufman (1970), and Furth (1988).

PRESCHOOL:

AK: no age given. unable to interpret in detail.

SIX YEAR OLDS:**QU: SUB A**

Feelings of insecurity (lack of feet and firm footing) and possible need to be babied (birds and hearts). Has drawn herself close to adult who she is touching. However the adult has been drawn with short arms which could indicate an inability to meet the child's current needs.

BE: SUB A

A sense of movement and energy is conveyed in this drawing in which adults are excluded. The child has drawn herself and her friend together in the same part of the building. The suitcases form a slight barrier between them, and it is noted that the self figure does not have hands. It is possible that the self figure tends to be the follower in the friendship (her friend has hands and is ahead of her on the stairs).

YO: SUB A

BED PICTURE:

The child has drawn the self figure close to a peer whose hand she is touching. The three children drawn are depicted in the air, which could indicate a lack of a firm footing (insecurity). No adults have been included in the picture which suggests that the child's main source of emotional nurturance is the friend whose hand she is holding.

MOTHER:

(Note: Self figure is not identified). The children depicted in the drawing are playing stick-in-the-mud, while the mother waits indoors. The mother is encapsulated and as such, is perceived as distant and removed. She has no feet to stand on and is much smaller in size than the other figures. She also has no hands. The drawing conveys a sense that children are trapped in their environment, and the parental figure is powerless to help them.

SEVEN YEAR OLDS:

LE: SUB B.

Drawing indicates that this child seeks comfort and emotional nurturance from her special friend, and her transitional objects (teddy bears), which she has portrayed as a group on a bed (which is also a possible source of comfort). They are separated from the other figures in terms of distance and a barrier (the bottom of the bed). The emotional nurturance obtained from this group is emphasised by the hearts drawn on the bed. It is noted that the figures on the bed are portrayed as much smaller than the other figures in the drawing which are by contrast, seen as threatening. The adult in the drawing is forming a barrier between the self figure and fighting peers. The impression is that she is more of source of protection than emotional nurturance.

AL: SUB A

DRAWING A: The school play ground:

The self figure is removed from the other figures in terms of distance and barriers. The positioning of the self figure at the top of the swing suggests a need to remove herself from the situation. There is some contact with her peer in the form of a linking ladder, however the adult is drawn the furthest away, with the most barriers in between. The shading on the face of the adult could suggest some negative feelings which the child may have towards this particular person.

DRAWING B: The giraffes

This picture clearly indicates sadness or depression (tears on all the figures, including the sun) and a need for love and emotional nurturance which is portrayed in the messages "I love you", the hearts and kisses, and in the udders of the mother giraffe. This picture is possibly a representation of the child's feelings of homesickness. It is interesting to note that the mother giraffe is tied to the tree. This suggests that the mother is not able come at times when the child feels needy at school.

LA (SUB A)

In this picture, the self figure is depicted as removed from an anxiety provoking scene involving two adults and a child who has wet her bed. She had distanced herself in terms of space and barriers (other seated child, and the television set). On the television a love scene is portrayed which is in marked contrast with the trauma on the other side of the room. It is possible that the child is trying to distance herself from her own "baby" feelings (need for nurturance) and baby behaviour by projecting them onto another child. The adults are perceived in a disciplining role, and possibly represent her own super-ego feelings. One of the adults is offering a child a bottle, but there is a sense of ridicule rather than emotional nurturance in the gesture. This is emphasised by the facelessness of the adult depicted. The scribbled lines indicate feelings of anxiety which probably relate to her frustrated desire for emotional nurturance.

8 YEAR OLDS:

BE: SUB B

This child has drawn herself as isolated from her peer and an adult in terms of distance. The adult is drawn the furthest away from the self figure, and her peer also forms a barrier between them. The short arms given to the peer, and the fact that the adult's hands and rest of body are cut off, indicate a perception that others are not able or willing to make proper contact with her. The sense of isolation is further underlined by the fact that the adult and the peer are in conversation, and the self figure is trying to get their attention ("come").

NO (SUB B)

In this drawing, no adults have been depicted. The self figure has been drawn very close to her friend, and they are holding hands. The feeling of friendship and closeness are underlined by the comment "you Lee, you a lovely frind". It is clear that the child obtains her main source of emotional nurturance from her friend. However there is also a sense that both girls feel insecure and helpless in their situation, as seen by the lack of legs and feet. The electric light bulbs further underline a need for emotional nurturance.

TE

This child has portrayed herself with a peer with whom she feels friction. She is withholding an apple from her friend and her arm is forming a barrier between them. The friend in turn is sticking her tongue out. The shading on the other girl's face emphasises the feelings of negativity which the self holds towards her. On the other side of the page the child has depicted two more peers and an adult. Furth (1988) notes that the placement of figures on the back of the page could be indicative of conflict. The presence of a ball in the second picture could indicate feelings of competition. Once more the adult is seen in a controlling role (the adult is refereeing the game). In conclusion, this drawing portrays feelings of aggression and competition which may be a defence against vulnerability.

9 YEAR OLDS:

DI: STD One:

Di has chosen to draw herself in the classroom situation, and has placed herself in a close group with her teacher. The self figure is drawn next to her teacher. It is interesting to note that the position of the teacher's arms indicate that she is available for contact with the children. However the arms of the children in the drawing are depicted as turned away from the teacher. This could possibly be seen as a mark of respect (?)

HE: STD ONE:

The self figure is placed in the centre of the drawing on a swing. Feelings of isolation and insecurity are evident: She has drawn herself as vastly smaller than the other figures, encapsulated from them, and without a firm footing. The lack of hands suggest a feeling of helplessness. It is possible that she sees the school building (drawn above her) and possibly the school environment as very overpowering. She sees her peer, and the adult in the drawing as threatening, as shown by the size of the figures, their encapsulation, and the shading above them. The pencil pressure used in the shading underneath the adult conveys particular anxiety in relation to this figure. The sharpness of the adults shoulders also conveys a feeling of aggression, and the lack of hands could possibly indicate a feeling that the adult is unable to make proper contact.

TE: STD ONE

The child has drawn herself with a peer and an adult figure. All the figures have been given an embellishment which suggests some positive feelings towards each. However of note is the short arms of the peer and the adult, and the aggressive portrayal of their hands indicating that the child perceives others as not able to make proper contact, and as slightly threatening. The peer forms a barrier between the adult and the self figure which indicates that the child does not feel particularly close to the adult portrayed. However it would seem that this child feels fairly self assured despite some feelings of threat relating to others. This is indicated by the greater sturdiness of her shoes and the better proportion of her arms in comparison to that of the other figures, and the lack of aggression shown in her own hands.

SE: (STD ONE)

In this drawing, the self is drawn as a stick figure, lying on a bed. She has no mouth which could indicate that either she is unable to communicate her feelings verbally, or that she is not "given a say". In comparison to the other figures drawn (which are much larger, and two dimensional), the self figure is depicted as extremely fragile, she is in a prone, horizontal position which could indicate that feels insecure (she does not have a firm footing). This is emphasised by the fact that she has not drawn feet. The general feeling in relation to the self figure therefore is isolation and insecurity. Once again the adult drawn is not perceived as close (peer stands as barrier) or nurturing. The concerns of the adult are with the outside world as indicated by the hockey stick. The lack of feet and fragile legs depicted on the peer could suggest that the child does not feel that the peer is strong enough to support her.

VI: STD TWO

This child has depicted herself as isolated from the rest of the group in terms of space and barriers. All the other figures in the room, including the adult (matric girl) are behaving in a critical parent mode ("Get into bed!!!"; "stop it"; "get into bed you are giving Te a hard time") and the self figure is removing herself from the friction in the room ("going to the loeu"). Generally however, the room is portrayed in a positive light (the detail on the duvet covers, and the congratulations sign). Once again, the adult is in a disciplinary, rather than a nurturing role.

ADDENDUM 4**A SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS OF THE BOARDING SCHOOL****BY****ELZAN FRANK
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We wish to acknowledge the boarders, boarding house staff, and academic staff of ~~the~~ the School for their participation in this project. Particularly, we would like to thank the principal, ~~for~~ for giving us time and space to implement this study, and the school counsellor, Lucy Pohl for her practical assistance. Our consultant, Terry de Jong provided constructive advice and useful guidelines.

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

1.1 The Origins and Purpose of the Project:

As part of a course entitled "School Psychology" offered in the U.C.T. Master of Educational Psychology degree, it was decided that learnings could be consolidated by working on a school project. In order to gain uncomplicated access in to a school system, our course convenor, Terry de Jong, approached ~~his~~ his friend and colleague, with a request to allow masters students to analyse some aspect of the school system (in this case, the boarding house was chosen) which could possibly lead to an intervention at a later stage. The project would be mutually beneficial as the team would have the opportunity to put theory in to practice, and the school would have the opportunity to have light shed on a problematic area in the school system, in this case, discontentment amongst the boarders.

A discussion with the principal about the boarding house highlighted the tensions as arising from difficulties with integration: integration of several languages, particularly Xhosa and English; integration of boarders from elite backgrounds with those from disadvantaged backgrounds; integration of the rigid, traditional approach of the boarder mistress with the evolving needs of the boarders.

1.2 Rationale for a SYSTEMIC Analysis:

A systemic approach was chosen because of its emphasis on relationships between sub-systems, rather than emphasis on individuals. This has proved to be an efficient and creative way of analysing systems.

1.3 Some Key Concepts in Systems Theory:

(a) INFLUENCE OF OBSERVER: the only reality we can know is that created in the interaction between the observer and the observed.

(b) In focussing on WHOLES rather than on parts, it is important to observe their PATTERNS and RULES:

- (i) Patterns are the identifiable arrangements of relationships
- (ii) A rule is a special version of a pattern found in human systems, specifically, codes of conduct and communication. They are informal - IDIOGRAPHIC rules or formal - NOMOTHETIC rules.

(c) Types of systems: a CLOSED system is a self-contained system: it is considered without reference to an external environment. An OPEN system cannot be considered outside its relationship with the environment in which it exists.

(d) RECURSIVE thinking and questioning is employed whereby behaviour is viewed in terms of cycles of interaction. Instead of asking whether A causes B, the behaviour of A is seen as affecting and being affected by B and C.

(e) Reasoning by ANALOGY is useful in focussing on the relationships between things - "this is to this as that is to that" rather than using the conventional, logical sequence of "this means that". Hence, stories are important in systemic work.

1.4 Methodology:

In carrying out our assessment, we attempted to use the above theoretical fundamentals of systems theory to guide us. In order to analyse the whole system efficiently and meaningfully, we decided to consider naturally construed sub-systems i.e. the developmental groupings of the boarders, the boarding house staff, the academic staff and representatives of the administrative staff. A description of the various methods we used to obtain information, and our rationale for using those methods are discussed in more detail in each section. We attempted to maintain consistency in our analysis while also providing room for our idiosyncratic styles and findings.

1.5 Parameters of this Project:

As stated previously, we contracted to do an analysis of the boarding house, rather than an intervention programme, though we have made recommendations for intervention. This seemed realistic considering the time constraints.

References

1. Dowling E and Osborne E. (eds.) (1985). The Family and the School. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
2. Plas J.M. (1986). Systems Psychology in the Schools. New York, Pergamon Press.

FOCUS GROUP: Sub A to Std 1

METHOD:

An informal interview was conducted including all 8 children in this category.

The session was audiotaped.

A circular method of questioning was used, allowing each child the opportunity to speak. No set direction was followed.

- The children were asked to name favourite stories, activities, toys and friends.
- They were asked about resources in times of distress (sadness or anger).
- All the children made a drawing, following the instruction: "Draw yourself in the boarding school, with a friend and a grown up. All of you must be doing something".
- 3 personal wishes could be written at the back of the drawing. These were listened to individually by the interviewer or Ms P.

RATIONALE:

An informal, indirect methodology was used as it was felt that children of this age often feel the need to comply: giving the interviewer what they believe she wants. Furthermore, individual children are often shy about personal questions and allow themselves to be dominated by the more assertive; often mimicking their ideas. Finally, children of this age may not be able to voice their inner experiences, lacking the concepts which define these.

The use of metaphors and stories are known systemic techniques.

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS:

The children were open and generous with their responses. They reacted with enthusiasm, elaborating naturally and spontaneously acting out some of their favourite games and songs.

FINDINGS:

1. Group Structure and Cohesion:

The 5 older Xhosa-speaking girls formed the "main" group, with the youngest Xhosa-speaking girl, the Ovambo-speaking girl and the English-speaking girl forming a tenuous sub-group. The English-speaking girl was most consistently left out.

2. Ghosts:

The African background. Western stories and games were always up front. African content was only elicited following indirect clues (e.g. one girl softly humming a tune).

3. Patterns of Communication:

(i) Often indirect: Xhosa games emerged only in reaction to the interviewer's response to an indirect clue. On questioning it was clear that only the Xhosa-speaking girls played these games. African stories emerged when they were asked to think about stories from long ago: most of the Xhosa speaking girls knew each other's stories. The others clearly did not.

(ii) Absence of significant adults: In response to the question to whom they went when sad or angry, no adult was mentioned. Those girls (2) who had older siblings named these as sources of support. The others either "cried on my own" (when sad), "hit back" or "did nothing" (when angry). In response to the question, "Is there anybody you are supposed to go to when you are sad or angry?", the group collectively responded in the negative.

This pattern was confirmed by the drawings. In the response to the instruction about drawing an adult, the statement was made, "There are no grown-ups here". This was negated by one child naming an adult not linked to the immediate boarding house hierarchy but this response was ignored. The drawing reflected this pattern as older girls were also not depicted.

4. Formal and Informal Systems:

The boarding school was typically drawn using the outline of a square. Hardly any elaboration occurred. Nature (e.g. trees, garden) was scantily represented. Clinical indicators of isolation and absence of nurturance were noted.

The need for private space and ownership was expressed in the three wishes, as was the wish to live at home.

The clearest links were with siblings or peers (the latter within the 'main' group).

The role of the boarding house mistress seemed to be that of a keeper.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. A nurturant adult figure be provided.
2. Mediation of the main group's culture to the minority groups.
3. The possibility of combining the above in one person to be explored.
4. A communication network which is more actively structured and which visibly provides a link with the rest of the boarding school should be investigated.
5. The possibilities of private space and ownership be explored.
6. The needs of the girls to be at home be addressed.

FOCUS GROUP:std 2 -Std 5.

Just over half of the pupils (14) of the 26 boarders who fall in this upper primary age group were selected to participate in the session. An attempt was made to choose groupings within each standard to reasonably reflect both the numbers and mix of local and out of town boarders. Apart from this stratification, the selection of participants was random.

METHOD:

The following techniques were used:

1. a drawing of the boarding house. Instructions were given that each pupil should draw herself in the boarding house together with two friends and an adult, each doing something.
2. three wishes for the boarding house. Each pupil was asked to make three wishes for the boarding house.
3. each of the four groups (divided by standard) was asked to improvise and enact a scene according to one of two scenarios:
 - a. "Choose something that happened this year in the boarding house that made you feel happy. Make a short play so that we can understand what happened to make you happy, who was involved and how it made you feel".
 - b. "Choose something that happened this year in the boarding house that made you feel unhappy. Make a short play so that we can understand what happened to make you unhappy, who was involved and how it made you feel".

The whole session, including the introductory and warm up exercise was recorded on video by a UCT staff member from the Audio-Visual Unit.

RATIONALE:

The drawings and fantasy wishes were chosen to link with the techniques used with the junior primary group as a means to see whether commonalities emerged. It was also intended that the drawings and wishes be used as a projective device to gain insight into the feelings and perceptions of individuals about the boarding house as well as their perceptions of significant adults. The drama technique was chosen as it has proved to be a useful way of exploring the immediate concerns of participants about particular issues in a relatively short time. Given the time constraints of the session, this was an important factor. By giving the groups similar scenarios, it was likely that themes pertinent to the boarders would emerge. Moreover, it was

anticipated that the open-ended and non-directive construction of the session would facilitate the emergence of themes, patterns and issues that could be usefully analysed, systemically.

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS:

The children were very keen to participate and enthusiastic. They related to the interviewer in a warm and spontaneous manner and were appropriately curious about the proceedings. They eagerly volunteered information and were keen to voice opinions. The older children, particularly, seemed to understand the rationale for the activities and asked for extra time at the end of the session to give voice to and discuss a recent grievance. They were sensitive about the confidential nature of the problem.

Overall, the interviewer found that rather than having to probe for elaboration and detail about the issues raised, contrary to expectations, it was at times necessary to curtail discussion.

FINDINGS:

1. Patterns of Communication:

Communication patterns between boarding house adults and children were uniformly represented as punitive, corrective and invasive. The images (both from the drawings and the dramatic technique) involved adults who were enforcing rules which on the whole were related to going to bed or to waking up. An adult ringing a hand-held bell figured in several of the drawings.

In contrast, communication patterns between the girls and boarding house staff were represented both in the dramas and drawings as sycophantic e.g. "yes Miss X, okay Miss X". Overt anger was instead expressed to peers.

Another recurrent theme related to boarders making a noise and being chastised for this when obviously quiet was expected.

2. Hierarchy:

The house mistress seemed to be the ultimate authority and of central concern to the children. She was portrayed as a key figure in all of the dramas as well as being included in many of the drawings. Her role was drawn as generally unsympathetic to the needs of the boarders and more than two thirds of the children directly or indirectly expressed the wish that she should be replaced or that a younger person be appointed. More specifically, issues revolved around her control over the use of the phone, television privileges,

corporal punishment (slapping) and racism (differential treatment for non-Xhosa speakers).

It seemed that although the hierarchical system was formally defined, there was a possibility that it could be informally circumvented by appeal to the principal of the school. In one drawing this was represented by a meeting at the fishpond in which a kindly adult talked to the children while another berated them. In an enactment of a sick bay scene, allusion was made to the possibility of telling the principal about the perceived inequality of treatment.

3. Rules:

(a) Formal (Nomothetic) Rules:

Rules that consistently came up (through the 3 wishes and the improvisations) related to:

- * not being allowed to watch t.v in the afternoons
- * not being allowed to bath in the mornings
- * not being allowed to sleep late on weekend mornings
- * not being allowed to keep pets
- * privileges accorded to Matrics
- * not being allowed to visit other dormitories without permission

(b) Informal (Idiographic) Rules:

- * standing in the corridor seems to be standard punishment for infractions but standing in the sick bay corridor is considered the most severe punishment.
- * Although the privileges accorded Matrics were regarded as unfair, younger pupils seemed to accept that in turn they would become Matrics and experience the opportunity to receive those same privileges
- * that the children should use their peers as resources in times of stress and not expect assistance from an adult
- * that older pupils (e.g. dormitory prefects) were not seen as a significant resource in times of difficulty

* that beds were important symbols in the pupils' lives and were inviolate - the boundaries regarding ownership were rigorously drawn (both figuratively and metaphorically)

* boundaries seemed to be tightly drawn around extant dormitory groupings

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There seems to be a need for adults in the boarding house to be seen in roles other than authoritarian or punitive and to be seen as more nurturing. The appointment of a younger and more empathetic house mistress would serve as a nodal point of entry from which to initiate changes.

2. Present communication patterns reinforce the present house mistress's negative authoritarian role as there is always the possibility of informal appeal to the principal. A more structured system of communication might decrease the current hostility between pupils and boarding house staff.

3. Relaxation or restructuring of the rules about visiting between dormitories might facilitate the breaking of the tight boundaries (cliques) between dormitory groupings.

4. The introduction of a boarding house pet e.g. cat, hamster be considered to meet some of the emotional needs of the younger pupils.

FOCUS GROUP: STD 6 - STD 9

METHOD AND RATIONALE:

It was decided that a workshop would be an efficient way of gathering the information, as well as appropriately interactive considering the important role which peer-groups play during adolescence.

A random sample of 5 boarders was selected from each standard: we were informed that the matric boarders would be unavailable that evening. Developmental groupings (Std 6 and 7; Std 8 and 9) would allow expression of themes pertinent to that age group.

Small and large group discussions occurred. Questions were aimed overtly at the theme of change in the boarding house, but at another level, could provide information about communication channels, roles, support networks, etc.

Problems in the process:

(a) We did not adequately negotiate inclusion/exclusion of the head girl and head boarder in our random sample with the school counsellor. However, they (along with the other matric boarders) were later included in a questionnaire sample. (b) We emphasised, at the beginning of our workshop, that we would respect confidentiality, but we did not adequately indicate that the participants should do likewise.

FACILITATORS' COMMENTS:

The boarders had been briefly informed about the purpose of the workshop and were given permission to be honest and for attendance to be voluntary. The participants were open and enthusiastic, though occasionally facilitators had to mediate small group conflicts.

FINDINGS:

1. The Role of the Principal:

It seems that when problems arise in the boarding house, the boarders first deal with them among themselves, before taking the issue to the principal. The students view the principal as approachable and concerned (and to some degree she replaces the house mistress); they also suggested that the principal is trying to please everyone.

2. Patterns of Communication:

No direct communication links to address the boarding house concerns seem to have been set up between the boarders and the staff hierarchy. It appears to be an idiographic

(informal) rule that boarders should approach the principal with their combined problems.

3. Resistance to Change:

The groupings that the girls identified as being resistant to change are the School Council, The Old Girls, the house mistress and her particular student allies. Some people (i.e. the principal, certain boarding house staff members and parents) were indicated as being supporters of change, but those who would resist were referred to more often.

4. Ghosts:

While changes in the boarding house were acknowledged, a comment was that the particular types of changes did not affect them emotionally: in this sense they "lack body".

Some traditional rules tend to "haunt" the boarding house, making change difficult. Adults (besides the principal and the house mistress) were seldom mentioned.

5. Displacement (re-locating the problem):

Criticisms of the house mistress are that she snoops, is unfair and racist, however, sympathetic comments were also made: "She's old"; "We're all she has." Viewing her as the problem could also serve to displace other internal problems, thereby keeping the boarding house united against a common enemy. It is possible that others, including the principal, are colluding in this by being sympathetic to complaints about the house mistress while maintaining that nothing can be done as the house mistress has nowhere else to go.

6. Power Bases:

The house mistress appears to have positional power as well as power due to seniority. Her abuse of power is a central theme.

Of note is that neither the boarding house prefects, the matrices nor the boarding house staff were mentioned, suggesting that they do not have any real power.

Cliques (with the connotation of power groups) was mentioned as being a problem.

7. Nomothetic (Formal) Rules:

Some of the nomothetic rules seem to cause dissatisfaction, and a few are regarded as helpful. Particular rules emphasise division, i.e. day girls not being allowed in to

the boarders' rooms: junior boarders not being allowed in to the seniors' rooms. While at one level privacy is seemingly supported, the lack of it was raised as a major concern.

8. Unwritten Rule:

Despite the boarders' complaints about particular aspects of the boarding house, they were especially appreciative of their friendships, and were able to see "positives" in some of the negative elements, e.g. "We are forced to learn the hard way, to cope with problems, to learn independence."

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That a committee, including representatives from the boarders, the boarding house and academic staff, be set up to address boarding house concerns on a regular basis. The principal could be consulted thereafter.
2. That contact be made with other boarding schools to share ideas and experiences.
3. That serious consideration be given to the role of the house mistress.
4. Based on the girls' suggestion, that the boundaries between sub-systems be made more permeable by, for instance, opening up the boarding house to day girls.

SUMMARY OF THEMES COMMON TO ALL PUPILS (SUB A - STD 9)

There is a noticeable absence of significant adults within the boarding house to whom pupils can turn either in times of difficulty or when they feel they have grievances that they wish to discuss.

Similarly senior girls (prefects and matrics) were never mentioned by these pupils as possible sources of support.

There seems to be a lack of a formal communication system between staff and boarders which pupils can follow to address their problems.

THEMES COMMON TO STD 2 - STD 9 BOARDERS:

There was consensus that the present house mistress was not suitable for the demands of the position.

Although the house mistress was generally perceived to be authoritarian and punitive, it is noted that the overt scapegoating also serves to unite the boarders and to possibly displace other pertinent issues.

There was an implicit acceptance that certain historical traditions (e.g. Matric privileges) underpinned idiographic rules and were an obstacle to change. Nevertheless, pupils expressed ambivalence towards the benefits and values of traditions as they seemed aware that in turn they would experience the benefits.

FOCUS GROUP:

Staff and Boarder Prefects

METHOD AND RATIONALE OF THE ANALYSIS:

The groups included in this analysis were the boarding house staff, laundry staff, academic staff living in the boarding house, academic staff of the school (a random sample but inclusive of heads of departments and principal) and boarder prefects.

The questionnaire method (see Appendix A) was used to obtain maximum information in a limited amount of time. Anonymity would be maintained to increase honesty in responses and overcome possible resistance.

Although the focus group of the study was the boarding house, the academic staff were included as they are an important sub-group impinging on the focus group.

In addition to the questionnaire, interviews were conducted with the principal and counsellor and the process of the analysis was evaluated. These aspects have all been included in the discussion of the findings of the study.

A DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS OF THE ANALYSIS:

The discussion of the findings of the questionnaire, interviews and process evaluation, is based on a thematic analysis of the major issues emerging from the various sub-groups studied (including the boarding house staff, academic staff, boarder prefects and principal). The main themes emerging through the study were those of communication and power.

With regard to intervention possibilities, questions have been raised throughout the discussion, which have the potential to move the system in different directions. The questions are addressed to the principal as she is perceived to be the point of leverage within the system and able to achieve optimal change. In systemic analyses, questions are important as they raise intervention possibilities. Understanding is regarded as intervention.

'The principal is to ... school as F.W. de Klerk is to South Africa or as the peasant revolutionary forces were to France.'

This analogy connects ... school within broader past and present socio-historical contexts. The major task confronting ... is that of adapting to the changing needs of the wider South African society while maintaining an internal state of equilibrium. According to systems theory, a dynamic equilibrium (as opposed to a static one) of a truly open system can be achieved by continual feedback with the environment.

This study represents one form of feedback for the system. The influence of feedback emphasises that systems are continually in a state of flux and are sensitive to discontinuous change. This flux or injection for change was evidenced through the process of the analysis of ... boarding school. An example of this was the change in attitude towards the house mistress, by both the principal and counsellor, who recognised that she discriminated between girls on the basis of 'good' or 'bad' primarily, and secondarily on issues of race.

In keeping with the systemic view of discontinuous change and in order to increase the momentum for change, questions have been posed throughout the report on the findings of the formal and informal analysis, which indicate intervention possibilities.

One of the issues emerging from the formal and informal analysis was that of direct and indirect or guarded information. As a team we first became aware of the issue during the first meeting with the principal and counsellor where it was clear that it had been necessary and difficult to think out a way of presenting the study to the house mistress. She was effectively 'being protected'. The issue of communicating the intention of the study to the house mistress was then overruled. When we met the person in question, we were unable to communicate clearly the intention of our visit and had to 'guard' carefully what we said.

This style of guarded communication in relation to the house mistress seemed to be a pattern as members of the academic staff in the boarding house reported that they "had to watch what they say". The effect of this guarded communication with regard to the house mistress, is to deprive her of feedback from the environment and to ensure that she remains a 'closed system'.

QUESTION: How can the principal encourage open feedback from staff and pupils to the house mistress?

A further significant incident indicating the pattern of indirect communication was evidenced by some members of the academic staff not filling in the questionnaire and one indicating to the house mistress that she was "bearing hers up". This was communicated to the principal indirectly through 'gossip'. This incident indicated that some members of staff had perceived the study as a threat to their sub-group, which included the house mistress and other influential members of staff.

QUESTION: What are the patterns of communication and sub-groups formed by the principal which intensify this suspicion and threat in relation to her?

In contrast to the patterns of indirect communication, patterns of direct communication exist between the principal, academic staff in the boarding house, some of the other academic staff and pupils. These staff members who are "in the know" regarding the pupils can be referred to as the 'new order' in that they embody progressive ideals. Thus the idiographic (informal) rule of this sub-group is the demonstration of care for all pupils of the school, also implying a sensitivity to racial issues. An illustration of this norm (shared expectation) is the principal's 'open door' policy to the pupils.

QUESTION: How can the principal increase the direct communication between pupils and staff who are "not in the know" or encourage a 'sharing of secrets'?

QUESTION: What would be the effect of transforming the idiographic rule into a nomothetic rule?

Many members of staff who are "in the know" regarding the boarding house and part of the 'new order' see the solution to the boarding house 'problem' as deposing (my term) the house mistress. They appear to have a clear definition of the house mistress's role, in keeping with the idiographic rule of their sub-system, which clearly differs from her view of her role.

QUESTION: To what extent would role clarification of the role of house mistress facilitate open and direct communication?

However, among those who would clearly like to identify fully with the 'new order', are indications of ambivalence towards the 'new order'. Some recognised the value of the

'old order' in maintaining discipline and wondered about the difficulty of finding a replacement. There were indications of a desire to maintain the status quo, which may be understood as the system's desire to maintain balance and equilibrium.

QUESTION: In what ways can the principal support the system through the times of change while still challenging it?

This ambivalence was demonstrated by the boarding house prefects. They appeared to be caught between the idiographic rule of the 'new order' (namely, progressive, caring attitudes) and the nomothetic rule - a formally written code of the 'old order' (namely, discipline and respect). The nomothetic rule of the boarding house has however been idiosyncratically extended by the house mistress, thus constituting an idiographic rule. Interestingly, it appears that some of the prefects have been struggling to reinterpret the rule of respect and discipline in a more 'progressive' way than they are seeing it interpreted by others in the environment.

QUESTION: What does the rule of respect and discipline mean in a multi-cultural environment?

QUESTION: What is the function of racism in a boarding school?

Implicit in the discussion thus far is the issue of power and power bases. The academic staff "in the know" about the boarding house regard themselves as fairly powerless to effect change and have their hopes pinned on the principal. They are aware of the positional power of the house mistress and of the power of the tradition supporting the ideas of authority, rules and hierarchies. (See Appendix B).

The principal, to counterbalance this power of the 'old order' has ensured direct communication by pupils, counsellor, academic staff, laundry staff and boarding house staff to herself. In addition, she has enlisted the support of UCT (representing a progressive institution) in the form of this study to add weight to her ideas.

In addition, the counsellor, who is the principal's primary support base, indicates that she has influence with the young boarding house staff and young academic staff. The enlistment of youthful staff and a progressive institution to increase the power of the principal may have in fact increased the suspicion and threat experienced by the 'old order'. (See Appendix C).

QUESTION: What would be the effect of the principal relying on her positional power to effect change rather than the 'expert power' gained through the "academic study"?

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

The following summary of intervention possibilities has been generated from the particular recommendations made for each sub-group which are common or central to most. As there are multiple intervention possibilities, it is expected that the reader will also generate interventions based on the analysis.

It is important to recognise that other types of analyses might have generated different recommendations for intervention but that these recommendations are considered pertinent to this analysis.

1. Meaningful changes to the boarding house require the appointment of a new house mistress. Alternatively, the role of the current house mistress needs to be explicitly defined to ensure that there is accountability and sensitivity to the developmental needs of the boarders, particularly with respect to their emotional development.
2. Formal and informal boarding house rules be re-evaluated with regard to the ways in which they maintain and reinforce present divisive patterns among the girls.
3. Indirect communication patterns be interrupted by establishing more structured methods for boarders to voice grievances. In addition, channels for more direct communication between both staff and boarders be considered.
4. Staff and senior students be encouraged to play a more active and positive role in supporting and nurturing younger pupils.
5. Ways of increasing multi-cultural communication and understanding among pupils and staff be investigated, particularly with regard to issues such as discipline and respect.
6. The principal should communicate more explicitly her values, norms and expectations to both staff and pupils.