chapter four - the contexts of system orientation in secondary-school counselling

This is the fourth and final article in a series exploring the ways in which secondary-school counsellors resolve their working dilemmas. It examines evidence to suggest that the resolution of such dilemmas, in terms of the degree to which the demands of the school are legitimated, is carried out in the internal context of other considerations in the minds of the counsellors. Among these other considerations are the extent to which they seek to work within a 'person-focussed' frame of reference, as opposed - perhaps - to the use of organisational structures; and the extent to which they see themselves in a posture of active 'interventionism' in the lives of their clients or the functioning of the system. Evidence is also examined which indicates that the effects of system orientation may be modified by the external context, represented by the capacity of the system as an organismic cell to resist ingression. The suggestion emerges that counsellors are involved in sociological as well as psychological tasks, requiring an ecology model to represent them adequately.

One of the considerations used by counsellors to help in the resolution of their working dilemmas is the extent to which they legitimise the demands that the school, as an organisation, makes upon them and upon their clients (Law, 1977a*). This consideration is called 'system orientation', a high degree of system orientation being represented in a counsellor who accepts the school's definition of objectives, problems, clients, roles and resources. High system orientation on the part of counsellors is related to the personality characteristic of 'other- directedness'; is linked with the availability of less time to do the work and less training to support it; is more likely to be associated with the role designation 'counsellor'; and is less likely to be associated with the experience of high degrees of role conflict, both in the sense of inter-role conflict (when the teaching and counselling roles are combined) and in the sense of intra-role conflict (that is, with the expectations of teaching colleagues concerning the way in which the counselling role itself should be performed) (Law, 1978b**).

This is the fourth and final article in a series (Law, 1977a; 1978a***; 1978b) which has presented evidence from a questionnaire survey of 400 secondary- school counsellors. The presentation is necessarily selective. The whole study is reported in Law (1977b) and - with more elaboration - in Law (1979****). For the most part the evidence has been used to test the specific hypotheses with which the study has been concerned.

This particular article will follow a more extrapolative course. Further selections of evidence will be presented, this time to examine some of the senses in which conceptions of system orientation in counselling may be set in a wider context. The two 'contexts' selected are the 'internal' context of the other considerations

* chapter one.
** chapter three.
*** chapter two.
**** this was completed but never published.

in the minds of counsellors which contribute to the resolution of counselling dilemmas, and the 'external' context of the changing social situation which counsellors experience in accomplishing their own transition from training to the implementation of their rules. It should be emphasised, however, that the evidence presented here is a secondary analysis of data gathered for the hypothesis- testing purposes mentioned above. The data is only tangential to the issues to be discussed below, and can, therefore, be no more than suggestive of hypotheses for further examination.

the internal context

Assuming that school counsellors are not exclusively obsessed with considerations of system orientation in the way in which they resolve their working dilemmas, a factor analysis of the distributions of scores on all the items accumulated in the study presents us with the possibility of gaining some clue as to what other sorts of considerations they have in their minds. As a method it suspends all prior guesses as to what those considerations might be. There are 48 items to which the counsellors have been asked to respond* in the System Orientation Inventory (SOI) (see Law, 1977a) and 18 in the Teaching Identification Inventory (TII) (see Law, 1978a). Factor loadings were examined for the first five factors - that is, those factors which indicate the most dominant and identifiable considerations in the minds of counsellors. The factor loadings indicate the extent and direction of the correlation between the item content and the consideration in the minds of the counsellors. Among these factors, three are predicted by a consideration of system orientation and teaching identification. Factor 1 is closely related to the content of the TII, although it is also strongly correlated with SOI item 6 (about the maintenance of school discipline). Factor 3 is closely related to the SOI - particularly with those items which refer to the legitimacy of the demands of the school upon the counsellor and his client. Factor 5 is closely related to elements from both the TH and SOI, combining from both inventories items which seem to represent a consideration of the extent to which the school can be ingressed with a new kind of supplementary provision.

But we are here primarily concerned with the identification of factors which do not correspond with the main thrust of the SOI and TH. Factor 2 may be one such. The items which correlate ±0.35 with this factor are listed in table 1. The factor appears to be concerned most dominantly with an acceptance or rejection of client-centred techniques (item 17), the use of the children's informal social systems (14), advocacy on behalf of individual children (4), and the adoption of non-teaching role identifications (43, 33 and 35). It may not, however, be concerned with the acceptance or rejection of the teaching role as such, because it correlates positively with the 'agree' form of items (e.g. 40) which welcome the child-centred role of the teacher.

We should not be too surprised by the detection of this kind of consideration independently of identification with teaching. An examination (Law, 1978a) of the way in which counsellors responded to the items in the TII indicated that, in general, little difficulty seemed to be experienced in reconciling the work of

* chapter three.

Table 1 – chapter four: Items most closely correlating with factor 2

item no.	Item content	Factor loading
17	I want to employ client-centred techniques (i.e. 'listening' techniques aimed at improving client self understanding) (disagree)	-56
43	The work I want to do is more like that of a social worker than like that of a teacher (disagree)	-55
14	I want to contact and work through the children's informal social systems (disagree)	-49
40	I want to combine my counselling and interviewing role with a role where I am also working with timetabled groups in an informal way and where children can discuss the topics for study and discussion (agree)	45
4	I want to be free to act as an advocate on behalf of the child (disagree)	-44
33	I want to do work which is more like that of a child psychotherapist than it is like the work of a teacher (disagree)	-41
35	The work I want to do is more like that of an educational psychologist than it is like the work of a teacher (disagree)	-40
27	I want to work with children having primarily 'personal' difficulties (disagree)	-39
26	I want to engage in liaison, communication and consultation work in the school (agree)	36

Note: The factors have been correlated with items in their 'agree' and 'disagree' forms.
This means that where a 'disagree' item is negatively correlated with a factor, a positive relationship is indicated between the item content and the factor.
Decimal Points are omitted.
Item numbers correspond with those given in previous articles.

the counsellor with an approach to teaching which was child-centred, easy and relaxed, based on the child's perceptions of himself, directed towards self- rather than legislative discipline, using informal methods, and offering opportunity for autonomy and participation on the part of the child.
Counsellors do not uniformly accept or reject all aspects of the teaching role. There are some elements in this role which are generally seen to be quite reconcilable with counselling - even with counselling in its low system-oriented form. Where low system oriented counsellors reject identification with teaching - as they do (Law, 1978a) - they are probably rejecting selected authoritarian components in the teaching role. Counsellors do not have - and do not see themselves as having - a 'corner' on child-centrality: they acknowledge child-centrality in aspects of the teaching role; and - for some anyway - it seems that acceptance or rejection of child-centrality is also an important consideration in the role conceptualisation of counselling.

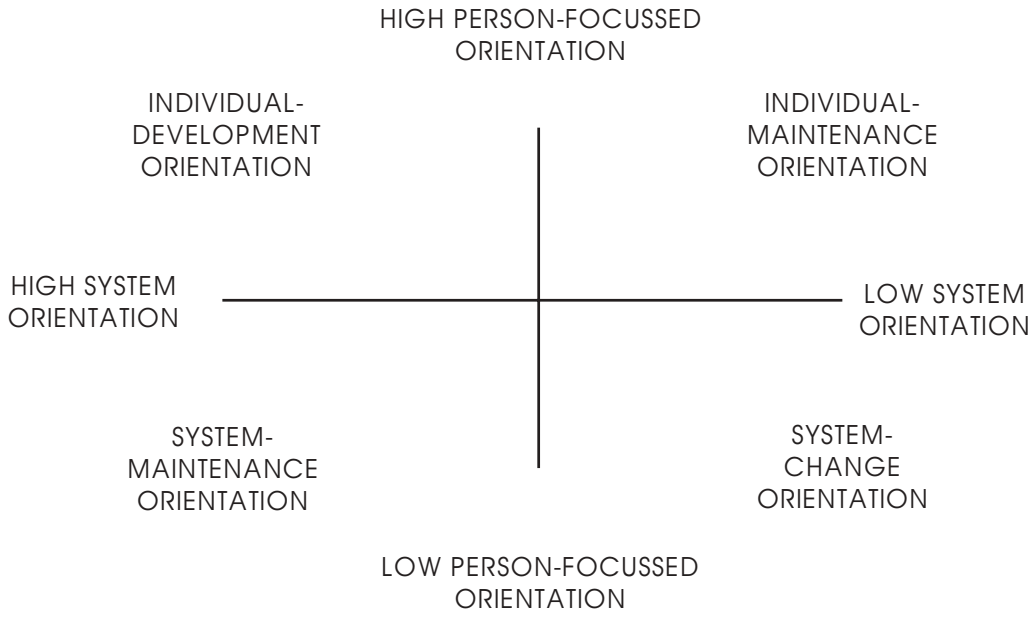
It is possible, therefore, to see factor 2 as representing the relative strength of person-focussed altruism in the role conceptualisation of counsellors. A unifying component in the wording of the nine most significantly- correlating items 'is the extent to which a person comprehending, person- contacting and person-sponsoring orientation belongs to the counselling role.

But such person-focussed altruism is not necessarily construed by the counsellors as involving the rejection of the school's definitions of objectives, problems, resources and roles. For there are many items which correlate closely with this factor, but not in the direction predicted by a simple model for the resolution of dilemmas based on considerations of system orientation. These high system-orientation and high person focussed items are concerned with the acceptance of referrals from teaching colleagues (7), helping teachers get student co-operation (19), liaison work in the school (26), helping parents fit their children into the school (29), the acceptance of supervision from within the school (36), and the acceptance of a child-centred teaching role in the extra-curricular domain (48). As a matter of fact, the items which are most central to the S01 - items which are concerned with the legitimacy of the school's demands upon the children (2, 6, 8, 9 and 13) - bear no close correlation with this factor. The relationship between person focus and system orientation may, therefore, be orthogonal. Figure 1 sets out a hypothesised orthogonal relationship between the two continua. The upper part of the diagram is occupied by conceptions which are responsive to some comprehension of, contact with, or sponsoring of, the individual student. The highly system-oriented counsellor will seek to do this in close collaboration with what he presumably takes to be the benign influence of other members of the school, in a 'team' relationship. Whether there is rationality in the concurrent pursuit of high system orientation and high person focus is a moot point. In any event, the evidence assembled into the diagram is not logical but experiential, gathered from counsellors who had little opportunity to identify the logical relationships between the items to which they responded. Experience is rarely as tidy as rational theory.

Since the springs of action in the upper half of the diagram are found in contact with clients, it seems reasonable to guess that in the lower half of the diagram they are to be found elsewhere - although item content does not permit us to say for sure exactly where those alternatives might lie. Halmos (1965) has suggested that one alternative to a personalist orientation is a political one - that is, action based on a primary consideration of political structures. Such a personalist-structuralist dimension was yielded by a cluster-analysis of the 64 items used with the 50 trainee counsellors in the pilot stage of the study (see Law, 1977b).

But there are other theoretical alternatives to person focus: among them, 'theory focus'. It is not difficult to imagine a counsellor using the theoretical constructs which come to him from training and reading as a basis for action. Such action would be responsive not to the way people feel and behave, but to the way the books say they feel and behave. The counsellor who uses psychometric tests for no other reason than that he has been trained to use them may be a variant of this species.

Figure 1 – chapter four: Hypothesised relationship between eight types of counselling orientation arranged on two continua - system orientation and person-focussed orientation



A third alternative to person focus might be self focus. Here the springs of action would lie not in contact with client, in a structure, or in a theory, but in a projection of the counsellor's own needs. The highly heterosexual counsellor who seems to attract a great many clients suffering from sexual 'problems', or the deeply disaffected counsellor who is able to find traces of alienation in a high concentration of his clients, would both be not entirely stereotypical examples.

So much is speculation - until new items are written for a more comprehensive investigation of what SOI and TII items can only hint at.

There is, however, no theoretical necessity to suppose that the postulated structure-focussed, theory-focussed and self-focussed alternatives to person focus need be either in a maintenance or a reform posture with regard to the system. All can be either. Accordingly, the four cells in figure 1 have been entered with four new descriptors of counselling orientation, each of which combines different considerations. The descriptors are based loosely on those suggested by Watts and Herr (1976) for the analysis of career(s) education objectives.

Factor 4 presents us with a similar complication. The items with which it correlates ± 0.35 are listed in table 2. These 'freight-carrying' items for this factor are those which welcome a decision-making (item 16), administrative (23), communicating (1), and facilitating (9) role that is at home in the social climate of the school (5) and that is disposed to use behaviour-modification techniques with the children (11) to protect the system (15). It is, then, an

Table 2 – chapter four: Items most closely correlating with factor 4

item no.	Item content	Factor loading
16	1 want to achieve a position of decision-making responsibility in the school (agree)	59
23	I want to be involved in the administrative work of helping to plan and run the school (agree)	56
19	I want to help the teachers by showing them how they can most effectively get the co-operation of the children (agree)	55
1	I want to be a useful source of information about the children to the school (agree)	47
9	I want to mediate the needs and problems of the teachers to the child (agree)	44
3	I want to be able to bring about changes in the school on behalf of the children (disagree)	-43
11	I want to employ behaviour-modification techniques (i.e. 'reinforcing' techniques aimed at changing client behaviour) (agree)	41
15	I want to protect the school against potentially harmful children (agree)	40
5	I want to work in a school where I can subscribe to its general educational and social philosophy (agree)	40
26	I want to engage in liaison, communication and consultation work in the school (agree)	40
7	I want to work with children who are referred by my teaching colleagues (agree)	35

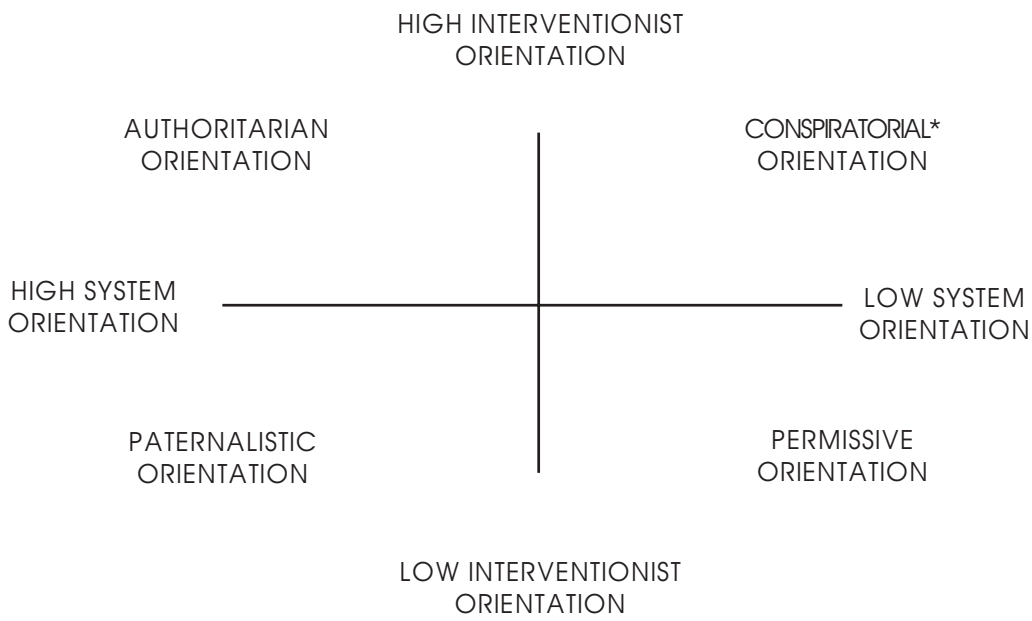
Note: See note to table 1.

orientation which is both personally and organisationally active and interventionist in style, and which also happens - in these items - to be highly system-oriented. It does however correlate positively with items which express the low system orientation of wanting to bring about changes in the school on behalf of the children (3). In other words, it identifies the interventionism of both the 'left' (low system orientation) and the 'right' (high system orientation). Some counsellors who are prepared to intervene on behalf of the system are, apparently, also prepared to intervene on behalf of the child. What is of additional interest is that factor 4 correlates highly with two items (19 and 26) which yielded a low correlation with the SOI in the main-study item-total correlations (see Law, 1977a). In summary, then, factor 4 yields high correlations with three groups of items: (a) items which are interventionist and high system oriented; (b) items which are interventionist and low system-

oriented; and (c) items which are interventionist and neither particularly high or low system-oriented.

It accordingly seems possible that interventionism is orthogonal to system orientation (and probably also to the person-focussed orientation). We have, therefore, the possibility of a three-dimensional presentation of counselling role conceptualisation. For the sake of simplicity, figure 2 portrays an hypothesised orthogonal relationship between two continua: system-orientation and interventionism.

Figure 2 – chapter four: Hypothesised relationship between eight types of counselling orientation arranged on two continua - system orientation and interventionism



Four new (slightly tongue-in-cheek) designations have been evolved to occupy the four cells in the diagram. They have been written in terms of a person-focussed orientation - that is, they refer to the implementation of degrees of system orientation and interventionism which can refer to altruistic response to students rather than (say) to a preoccupation with the structure of the system.

To some extent the construction of figure 2 is an extropolation from tangential evidence. But such extrapolation finds some support in the close correspondence which exists between the foregoing attempt to characterise four counselling orientations and Eysenck's (1954) characterisation of four types of political philosophy based upon the administration of his Social Attitude Questionnaire. The four political types were: (1) tough-minded conservatism, which is an authoritarian stance supporting strong interventionist measures to maintain the status quo; (2) tough-minded radicalism., which is a subversive stance in the sense that it looks for extensive legislative reform to change the status quo; (3) tender-minded radicalism, which is a permissive stance in the sense that it welcomes change but is opposed to interventionist legislation; and (4) tender-minded conservatism, which has some of the flavour of paternalism in that it seeks to secure traditional values but is opposed to strong

* 'subversive' might be a more accurate term.

interventionist measure to secure them. There appear to be some similarities between what Eysenck has called 'tough-mindedness' and what has been called here 'interventionism'; and also between what Eysenck has called 'conservatism' and what has been called here 'system orientation'.

Although these statements concerning person focus and interventionism as considerations in counselling role conceptualisation can be no more than suggestive, and are subject to more rigorous confirmation, they are supported, in the ways indicated above, by findings from other aspects of this and other studies. They also lend a degree of support and elaboration to the analysis by Watts and Herr (1976) of the objectives which appear to be implicit in approaches to career(s) education. That analysis distinguished between 'change' and 'status quo' approaches to the work (a broader construct than that of school-based system orientation, and incorporating some elements of interventionism) and also between approaches which focussed on individuals and those which focussed on society (again, a construct having some similarities with the distinction made here on a continuum having higher and lower degrees of person focus). The similarities are by no means complete. But the sorts of issues touched upon by that analysis of the literature and by this secondary analysis of empirical data are sufficiently similar to warrant further attention.

the external context

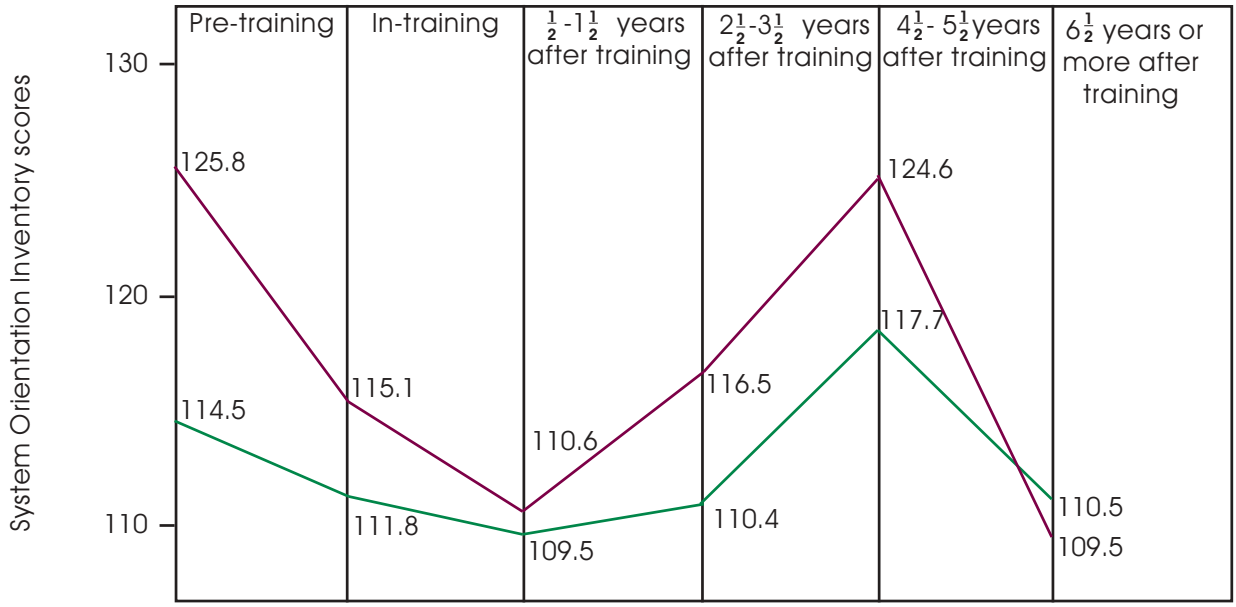
No man is an island - neither is any counsellor. And the resolution of a counsellor's working dilemmas occurs not only in his private world of inner meanings and considerations, but also in the relationships, conflicts and accommodations he makes with the social and organisational life that surrounds him. How much of what a counsellor does is attributable to who he is, and how much to where he is, is unclear, and the findings of this study are not going to resolve this particular facet of the nature-nurture debate. But it is evident that the circumstances in which the counsellor finds himself may well exercise some influence over the way in which he conceives of his role. It has been reported (Law, 1978b) that among concomitants of system orientation are factors associated with his social position in the school, the extent of his exposure to training, and the degree of conflict he experiences with teachers and with teaching. It is difficult, however, to assign cause-and-effect relationships to those concomitancies.

One way of achieving a measure of the extent to which such social and organisational pressures modify a counselling role conception would be to follow a single cohort of counsellors through a series of changing social settings, taking measures of key role concepts at each stage. The design of this study permitted no such undertaking, and so the following evidence is offered as being no more than strongly suggestive of the influence of social and organisational factors on role conceptualisation. It was possible to divide the sample for the main study into those who had no one-year fulltime training, those who were in such training, and those who were at various stages of post-training experience; and to compare their scores on the SOI. The evidence on concomitancies to system orientation referred to above suggests that if it is the

cues and expectations external to the counsellor which are a significant influence in role conceptualisation, then we would expect to find a 'topping-up' and 'draining-away' effect of low system orientation, as people pass into and away from one-year full-time training.

Figure 3 graphically sets out the available data for such a process. Lines have been drawn separately for designated and non-designated counsellors (see Law, 1978b*). Both lines correspond to the topping-up and draining away effect that is suggested by the social-influence hypothesis. Counsellors seem to come into training from positions of relatively high system orientation. They are much less system-oriented when they are in training - in response to the dominant ideology of the courses. They progressively return to high levels of system orientation once they return to their work in the schools. The effect is similar both for designated counsellors and for non-designated counsellors - although for the second group the changes at each stage appear to be more dramatic. There are 17 counsellors on the extreme right of the diagram who do not fit into the overall pattern of the findings. It is a small group, however, and this means that a determinedly low system-oriented counsellor or two among them could considerably alter the general position of those mean scores.

Figure 3 – chapter four: Schematic presentation of data available from this study concerning the effects of one-year training on system orientation



NUMBERS:							
'non-counsellors'	147	93	16	10	8	2	=276
'counsellors'	23	12	22	28	18	15	=118

* chapter 3.

Although figure 3 yields a generally consistent and comprehensible pattern, it should not be regarded as being more than suggestive. A complication, of which no account can be taken in this study, is the possibility that training inputs have varied over the years considered. It is possible that the sort of attitude change sought by the earlier training programmes was different from that sought more recently. The objectives and outcomes of training with regard to attitude change need more careful longitudinal study.

discussion

Within these limitations, however, the finding is quite congruent with the view of King (1973; 1976) and Hargreaves (1967; 1972) that schools are relatively resistant to the permeation of their boundaries by 'new thinking' from outside. It is also congruent with the evidence, assembled by Morrison and McIntyre (1969), that trainees experience only temporary attitude change as a consequence of off-site training. Training given to people off-site is highly vulnerable to the capacity of the school to resist it and to modify its content. We may be justified in doubting the indelibility of the outcomes reported by Nelson-Jones and Patterson (1975; 1976) for full-time trainees on the completion, and one year after the completion, of training in counselling skills.

If the evidence of this series of articles were to be assembled into a series of questions which people doing counselling work in schools - designated counsellors, pastoral-care staff, careers and guidance teachers, and so on - might usefully ask themselves, that series of questions would include:

1. To what extent am I relying on the skills and insights that are traditionally to be found in a school; and to what extent am I involved in the ingression of the school with alternative - non-teaching - skills and insights? (Teaching Identification: factor 1 and factor 5).
2. To what extent are the springs of my actions to be found in a response to a person-contacting, person-comprehending, person-sponsoring relationship with my clients; and how far on - say - a consideration of political structures, theoretical constructs or my own personal dynamics? (Person Focus: factor 2).
3. To what extent do I legitimise the school's definition of objectives, problems, roles and resources - for my own behaviour and for the behaviour of my clients; and to what extent do 1 look for alternative sources of legitimisation? (System Orientation: factor 3).
4. To what extent do I radically intervene - in the system or with my clients - in order to achieve perceptible changes; and to what extent do I adopt a posture which permits change to occur as a consequence of their own organic dynamics? (Interventionist Orientation: factor 4).

The resolution, in either direction, of the first and third of those issues - which are not orthogonal but are closely correlated (see Law, 1978b) - has been shown to have concomitants in the personal orientation of the counsellor, the extent of his training, the position he occupies within the organisation, the amount of time he has to carry through his counselling role, and his perceptions of his colleagues' expectations concerning his role. The pressures point inward and outward: there is evidence to show that both internal self and external situation exercise

cause- and-effect pressures on the conceptualisation of role. And it does not seem too farfetched to guess that the sort of reciprocal pressures that are exerted on issues 1 and 3 are exerted also on issues 2 and 4.

The counsellor is involved, therefore, in a complex series of judgements carried out in a complex social and psychological situation. It may be helpful to try to provide people with some kind of model which they can use to locate and identify the complexity of their own experience. Many of the models offered by the behavioural sciences involve the declared and undeclared use of imagery from the physical sciences.

One such is Durkheim's imagery for diversification in society - applied to the school by Bernstein (1967), and referred to in the previous article (Law, 1978b) - which draws heavily on the concepts of evolutionary biology. It conveys the notion of the functional development of schools and counselling from less diverse and sophisticated, to more diverse and sophisticated, adaptations. It emphasises the explanatory power of the external, societal context of role conceptualisations.

Halmos' (1965) imagery of 'orderly oscillation' between logic and sympathy in the minds of counsellors - re-stated and elaborated, in terms suggested by Allport (1955), as a 'pendulum theory' for the role conceptualisation of counselling (Law, 1978b) - draws upon another physical phenomenon, this time conveying a sense of tension-in-balance. It emphasises the explanatory power of the internal context of role conceptualisation.

Although the way in which counsellors resolve their dilemmas cannot be adequately explained without some reference to the external context, doubts have been expressed (Law, 1978b) concerning the evolutionary image. Those doubts receive some reinforcement in the suggestions found here that at least some of the expectations and cues derived from outside the school may have only a temporary effect upon the way in which counsellors conceive of their work; and that a major pre-occupation of counsellors may be with the school's own capacity to resist the ingression of such externally-generated cues and expectations. The imagery of functional adaptation resolves at too macrocosmic a level to take account of what actually happens on the interfaces between self, role, institution and society.

In the light of these difficulties, the imagery of ecological competition and exchange-of-energy suggests itself as a possible alternative. It is a no less organic imagery than that of evolutionary development. But it is small-scale enough to take account of the cellular life of the internal meanings of the counsellor. and large-scale enough to permit us to see the relationship between the inner meanings of the counsellor and the social setting in which he works.

conclusion

Role conceptualisation does not seem exclusively to occur in the inner world of private meanings, nor in the external context of training, but in the whole ecology of relationships within and between self and social systems. Internal meanings compete with, and feed on, external meanings. We may hope that

the ecological exchange of such energies is mutual, and that some ingression of the boundaries of the school also occurs. But the contexts of counselling role conceptualisations are complex - beyond the reach of models of the wholly sociological or wholly psychological type. The sheer complexity of the relationships strongly suggests that people offering counselling and guidance help to people - often behind closed doors - should be selected, trained, supported and supervised in their roles with considerable care. There may or may not be 'right ' and 'wrong' answers to the four issues listed above; but at the very least each person involved in the assignment of life-chances to rising generations should know very clearly how and why his actions answer such questions in the way they do.

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