Growth Centres

QUAESITOR
187 Walm Lane, London, NW2. Tel: 01-452 8489. Director: David Blagden.

EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY
for people in the education and caring professions, 15 Highbury Grange, London N.5. Tel: 01-359-1372. Director Alan Lowen.

STROKES, THE CENTRE FOR TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS
3 Byng Place, London WC1E 7JH. We hold ongoing weekly groups, regular weekend workshops, introductory courses, and offer individual counselling as well as communication skills for organisations. Enquiries: Laurence Collinson 278 8679, Adam Jukes 029 383 470, Margaret Turpin 886 5330, or messages may be left at answering service 794 3344.

SEMPERVIVUM Encounter Groups
Current programme available from: Jo Burns, 6a Cumin Place, Edinburgh. Tel. enquiries to Brian and Sue Sidery - 031 447-7314 (evening, day and weekend groups: basic encounters, Gestalt, massage, men, women and children, movement, meditation, Intensive Journal etc.)

COMMUNITY
15 Highbury Grange, London N.5. Tel: 01-359 1372.

Cost of advertising in this section is £1.50 per line. Copy must reach us by the 20th of the month preceding publication.

Elizabeth Rosser

'And if they turn nasty, well, we can turn nasty too'

Increasingly over the past few years, it has become apparent that social psychology's claim to be scientific, if based upon the naive experiment, is open to doubt and its methodology found wanting. At the root of this is the reluctance to allow its 'subjects' to speak for themselves and an unwillingness to recognise the autonomy of people. Despite general recognition of the weakness of behaviourist psychology, investigations have continued to treat the components of social action as externally defined behaviour, and in social psychology in particular, studies have been conducted without reference to its major phenomena, namely, 'meanings'.

By contrast, ethogenic research (the approach developed by Harré at Oxford) takes people seriously, treating them for scientific purposes as if they were human beings. The resulting conception of human nature accords as much significance to the speech of an individual when describing his actions as to the actions taking place. An

unbroken continuum is assumed between thought and action, mediated by speech.

Ethogenic research attempts to show how scientific understanding can best be achieved by recruiting the 'subjects' as participants, and it sees two converging forms of investigation as necessary. The one, microsociological analysis, takes an observer's point of view. However sensitive such an analysis may be to the appropriate level of meaning of the components of the interaction, it nevertheless involves the imposition of a conceptual framework upon actions which may be quite differently understood by those who perform them. The other, the central tenet of ethogenics, centres upon taking the accounts given by participants in the action seriously as contributions to the social and psychological understanding of those actions and how they are generated.

In looking for the structure of actions, the basic ethnogenic principle is that one should apply the concept of rule-following as a model. As it happens, it appears that even when people are not carrying out ceremonial or formal action-sequences they are nevertheless acting according to rules which are well understood by them and shared in the community. Both the production of and accounting for action, it is supposed, derive from individual cognitive resources, and local knowledge of the social meanings of action.

The study I am about to describe was ethogenically oriented and involved my recording conversations with two sets of young people between 15 and 17 years of age. The sessions were very loosely structured and the talk was taken by the participants wherever they wished it to go. The analytical framework was based on two principles: (i) that rules for generating intelligible and orderly action and presentations of the self cluster around recognised situations, one of which is 'school', (ii) that valuation or devaluation as a person are central dynamic properties of life-situations which significantly determine actions and the planning of actions.

The people to be called Group A had either attended or were attending their local comprehensive and, as measured by their examination aspirations or passes were not academically oriented. The second group, Groupe B, had been the first year intake in a new local comprehensive and, in contrast to Group A, were, on the whole, the more academic group - again using the above criteria. Unlike Group A, they also had well-articulated conceptions of future careers.

For Group A, school was not considered 'serious', that is, the pupils were not living fully in accordance with the official rhetoric for this type of institution. Official task such as learning seemed to them to involve a highly conventional behaviour fulfilling a meaningless ritual. This is not just an arbitrary theory but derives from their seeing themselves as having been written off. As one girl said, 'They sort of couldn't care less if you were going to leave at the end of the fourth year. All their time was spent on the ones that were going to stay on, so ones that were going to leave were never there and nobody sort of worried about them.' References to 'skiving' were not infrequent and one boy had even taken a job without officially leaving school.

Group B, on the other hand, were more willing to accept and use the official reasons for being at school. Apart from being highly involved in the exam system, these

people, in contrast to Group A, came, on the whole, from more supportive families who had primed them for success in school in general and as a means to a professional career. In addition, and importantly, this group experienced a school atmosphere close to their expressed ideal, and, on balance, considered it an advantage to have been the first year through the school. As one of them put it, 'You got a lot of responsibility. A lot is expected of you, but I think there's more advantages than disadvantages. I think it encourages people. You want to achieve what people expect of you.'

Both groups, however, used the same criteria for evaluating their teachers and other aspects of their schooling.

Despite the difference between the two groups, their criticisms of school organisation and atmosphere had much in common. Furthermore both groups judged their teachers by reference to a similar set of criteria.

A fundamental point to emphasize is that 'trouble in school' has been characterized by 'officials' in the situation as meaningless. Much the same can be seen in 'official' descriptions of the behaviour of soccer fans, of. Marsh's analysis in 'Understanding Aggro.' 2. An example of an official school line is seen in an article by Tim Devlin in the Times, 3. where he quotes the speech of a woman teacher who had been 'driven out' of her school. The reality she conjured up described a disorderly, meaningless situation, where, 'I tried to get some kind of order but could not make myself heard above the din.' Order for her did not exist, but was something she wanted. As the scripts show us, however, order of quite another kind does exist in the classroom, and if we want to understand schools and schooling, a comprehensive account must include both sides of the coin.

Within the situation of 'school' is a discernible generic category of action sequences, 'messing about', 'messing the teacher about', 'dossing about', which is seen both as a device for testing the seriousness of the teacher, and thus his/her attitudes to the pupils themselves, and as a retributive routine for dealing in an orderly fashion with what they construe as insulting or demeaning. A basic sequence of offence-retribution emerges:

'I was in this lesson and two or three of my mates were mucking about and I was sat across the other side of the classroom, and someone chucked a piece of chalk at the teacher and then started shouting his mouth off. Straightaway the teacher knew who it was (unjust accusation). He turned round and kicked me out of the classroom for doing it. So I hit him.' (Group A)

This basic sequence is often embedded in a more elaborate episode structure in which the element of provocation is added to the sequence of offence-retribution.

These sequences are themselves embedded in a theory of schooling which is revealed in the pupil's accounts. An example of such an unofficial theory, taken from a different study, is shown in what has been called the 'Colditz Bicycle Game'. In this, the school staff are called by the names of the officers and guards of the camp, the exits of the

school are named after escape routes from Colditz Castle and treated as such when the pupils bicycle out of school. In this instance we see the deployment of a rhetoric from which we can infer the pupils' associated theory of schooling.

Turning to episodes which are seen as offensive, several categories emerge.

1. **Generalized Offence: 'Being Boring'.**

This first category, applied to both teachers and lessons was of a generalised nature and was referred to by the pupils as 'being boring' or it/they 'got on our nerves.' For Group A, although it was seen that, 'everyone gets fed up with school sooner or later,' their boredom and lack of sympathy with the aims of the institutions were aggravated by the more pleasing conditions of Life, as they saw them, outside school. Where Group B were concerned, the occurrence of boredom seemed to be a much more accepted part of the total institution and given the difference in pay-off for these people, coupled with a better school atmosphere, this is perhaps understandable.

2. **Offences of Depersonalization: Contempt**

A generalized offence of this nature but one which was very insulting was recognized as being 'treated like a kid.' Group B were more fortunate in this respect, having teachers who did not offend so frequently. 'They speak to you as a person, not as a little kid, as they do in junior school. They speak to you more like they would do at college, more like you're somebody - as if you know something. It builds your confidence.'

A second more specific form of contempt was being given teachers who were classified as 'a load of rubbish'. Poor teachers were those who were unable to break out of a strict interpretation of the teaching role, were arrogant and belittled pupils and were unable to put their subject over well. Good teachers in essence, were those who made an effort to interest them, were seen to treat them as equals and tried to understand them. Recognition of self as individual and of value was a central concern and teachers who offended against this principle were strongly resented:

'He knows a lot about chemistry but he's hopeless teaching. He just can't put it forward. So you have to get a book and do it yourself . . . He said, 'You're useless. You needn't be bothered to turn up to the exams' - because he thinks I'm going to fail. I said, 'You haven't seen my work for the past year, have you?' He said, 'No, because you haven't done any.' Well, he hasn't actually collected any in and I've been doing a lot of work for it at home. Masses. So I was really confident I was going to pass, and he said, 'I'll give you a pound if you pass,' which isn't really that good a way of teaching. He used to tell me I'm going to fail, but I did so much work at home it was my best subject. He's a useless teacher and he doesn't make me really very confident.' (B)

Not surprisingly, the failure of Group A's headmaster to know their names - except those who were sent to his office everyday - was deeply resented. Group B's

headmaster proved quite the opposite in this respect, being described as strict but friendly and, 'he takes an interest in you which helps.' In fact, Group B recognised in their teachers, and in their school situation as a whole, many of the qualities which Groupe A found to be lacking in theirs.

Indecision or weakness on the part of teachers was also read as demeaning. Teachers who the pupils felt should 'show they're the boss' but were unable to do so, received rapid and at times violent retribution. The weaker the teacher, the more provocation. 'We made a noise and ignored them. The more meekly they reacted the more we go on. Well, those that could (stop us) did so in the earlier years, so we never played them up again. Those that didn't, that was it for them.' (B)

Equally offensive acts were those where a known 'soft' teacher tried to assert authority and then when challenged, gave in. The teacher is condemned not for trying to be strong but for being unsuccessful.

'She tried kicking me out of the classroom. I'd been mucking around . . . and none of my mates liked that. They just started getting mad with her and chucking wooden dice at her, trying to hit her, and blackboard rubbers, smashing up the lightbulbs and everything, and in the end she just went in the store cupboard, crying, so we locked her in.' (A)

For Group A, the sanction of being sent to the Head made no impression on them. As one Group A girl said of her Headmistress, 'You can say anything to her. She told me once to do some lines, and I goes, 'It's not worth you telling me to do them because I won't do them,' and she goes, 'Well, I think you should do them,' and I goes, 'Well, I'm got going to, so I don't know what you'll have to do with me'. She goes, 'Well, I agree with you that you're an awkward child,' and she goes, 'Go back to your lesson and do your lesson well.' That was it.'

Associated with the offence of weakness are the pupils' own theories about the role of discipline in school. For them discipline was seen as essential to achievement, but frequently lacking. Both groups were emphatic about the need to strike a balance between total rigidity and disciplined freedom in the classroom. 'Subtle control - that's what's needed - you get the work done, everybody's happy and you don't realise you're getting the work done.' In this respect, Group A had little experience of teachers who provided such a balance, and although Group B expressed a great liking for the friendly atmosphere of their school, they were nevertheless critical that it was often too lax.

'I think it could be stricter actually. It's an unusual thing to say, but I think probably if it was strict, it'd get better results. They're not so strict about doing actual work and those sort of things, I think. Probably I could have done quite a bit better if I'd been forced to work, because if I'm not, I'm not so bothered to do the work.' (B)

Finally, where offences of depersonalization and contempt are concerned, there are the offences of unfairness. Again, recognition of pupils as individuals was a major concern. A deeply wounding cause of offence involved a teacher treating a pupil in a

manner which suggested that he or she was the same sort of person as an older sibling who had either offended in some way or was being offered as a worthy model. Unfairness was also seen to stem from their position as 'pupils' as opposed to 'teachers', where, by definition, teachers hold ultimate authority. As such, and in the weaker position, pupils often felt themselves open to unfair practices.

3. Legitimate Offences

For Group A, overt insults - verbal abuse and hitting - were treated as legitimate offences in so far as they felt they could respond in the same vein, within a framework they saw as non-demeaning.

Categories of Retribution

Turning to the principles of retribution, these appear to fall into two broad categories: those of 'reciprocity' and those of 'equilibration'. A principle of reciprocity requires that one gives back whatever one has received, so that in a simple case of verbal insult, one returns verbal insult, or on being hit, one hits back. As one Group A girl put it, *'And if they turn nasty, well, we can turn nasty too.'* There were no instances however, of either Group B, or the girls of Group A resorting to physical reciprocity at school.

In the second main form of reciprocity, the reciprocal action does not take the same form as that insult, and so the pupils mess around as a result of a variety of offences. The proposition that messing around was 'the natural thing', was, in fact, qualified by certain Group B people who felt that it tailed off by the fifth year and that unruly pupils were not in the 'O' level group.

Where forms of contempt are concerned, the accounts also seem to introduce a principle of equilibration, that is, when the pupils feel themselves treated without seriousness, they behave in such a way as to restore themselves to the status of mature beings. In addition to instant reprisals, they also describe themselves as making a non-demeaning withdrawal into silence, and, returning to Tim Devlin's teacher whom he quoted as saying, 'The worst thing they did was to ignore you completely,' we can see that from the pupil's rhetoric, of course, they were not simply ignoring her. From their viewpoint they were restoring a measure of dignity, conceived to have been taken from them, by withrawal into injured and strategic silence. Had there been time to include an analysis of the home situation, we would have seen that withdrawal is perhaps the most frequent form of response used there, and in fact, because there is less freedom of action at school, a wider range of alternative response strategies is seen in the home.

Both groups, as might be expected, refer to their peers as the audience and arbiters before whom their performances are staged and to whose judgement they defer.

'If someone will start it (trouble) I'll join in willingly - the situation demands it, I suppose. You can't very well sit there. You got a whole class of 35 people sat round

absolutely mucking about,chucking books, ripping up books, everything like that, and the teacher stood out in front of the classroom writing a load of work down on the blackboard. You can't really work. So you got a choice. You either stand up and walk out and go to a different class, or you pin in. If you walk out of the class, you get called all the names under the sun - 'cissy', 'pouf' and all this crap. So you just join in. Anybody that works in a lesson that you doss about in, that you know you're going to doss about in, that's it, you get called 'ponce' and everything.'

Teachers count for nothing as arbiters for Group A, but for Group B, they seem to play a larger role. This appears to be the case, firstly, because Group B people like and respect them as a consequence of the way they themselves are treated, and secondly, because of their instrumental value. For both groups, however, where so much importance is attached to the integrity of self, it is not surprising to find a form of self-arbitration, where what they have said and done is judged by reference to their own conceptions of dignity, regardless of outside influences.

Epistemology

The analysis of the content of accounts does not use an explicit scheme into which the discourse is interpreted. Interpretation in ethogenics is aimed at revealing the rule system used by those who construct the accounts. But the analysis is not innocent of all a priori elements since a definite search procedure is used involving searching the accounts for evidence of recognition of distinct social situations, and the organisation of rules, meanings, etc., is achieved with respect to the situations seen as distinct.

Inevitably there cannot fail to be implicit prior categories at work in the analysis. The aim of ethogenics is to reduce the effect of these as far as possible. To this end it adopts a deliberate posture of aiming to reveal participants' meanings. Where 'trouble in school' is concerned, hopefully, this has been achieved. At least, it has revealed the pupils' resources for generating an acceptable account of the situation, although, of course there is no way of checking whether what actually happened was generated from the same sources, since there was no access in this case to the scene of the action.

Apart from the authentication of accounts through the collection and comparison of further accounts, what Harré suggests as methodological safeguards are: (i) that the readings obtained are 'negotiated' with participants. In this negotiation, members of any one group comment upon the readings obtained, that is, they move to the stance of social psychologists, (ii) by participation, a social psychologist moves to the stance of being a member, thus hoping to reveal the intentions in the accounts. Marsh claims to have achieved something of this nature as will be apparent in his forthcoming study of football fans called 'Aggro-Man'.

Finally, we do recognize that the accounts presented might be a function of my particular presence in the interviewing situation but again, this can only be checked by the collection of further accounts using different personnel.

This was a paper read to the British Psychological Society annual conference at York, 1976.

References

2. New Society April 3, 1975

3. Re Issues May 6, 1975

David Porter

A Healthy Effeminacy

Chambers's Etymological Dictionary defines effeminacy as 'the possession of a womanish softness and weakness' and 'indulgence in unmanly pleasures.' Collins's Contemporary Dictionary defines it as 'display, on the part of a man, of characteristics usually associated with women only.' In our study of effeminacy we must therefore take into account positive and negative gender-roles, i.e. what is considered masculine and what is considered feminine.

When we begin to analyse gender-roles and to understand how these are reinforced by the mass media, education and religious instruction, we uncover many of the hidden and partially hidden assumptions about what kinds of behaviour are appropriate to either of the sexes. Such oppressive gender-roles are determined by the society in which we find ourselves. For example, there were women-bullfighters in Ancient Greece and perfumed, outrageously-dressed 'dandies' in Eighteenth Century England. In modern western society, there are certain professions where 'feminine' behaviour by men is permitted, such as hairdressing, ballet dancing and acting. It is understood that behaviour which might normally be severely enjoined against is considered 'acceptable' because such professions involve much emphasis upon personal creativity. Thus an actor can 'get away with' painting himself and behaving flamboyantly simply because he is an actor.

Opinions are divided on the subject of effeminacy. Like transvestism and transexuality, it is calculated to arouse prejudice and hostility in many otherwise fair-minded people, both heterosexual and homosexual. Indeed, one wonders why male effeminacy is included in discussions on male homosexuality at all, since there are many effeminate men who make good and faithful husbands and fathers and who give no evidence of homosexual tendencies, just as there are many homosexual men whole personalities bear no traces of effeminacy.

In the gay movement, male effeminacy is accepted by some and hated by others. The latter generally adopt the argument that effeminate gays draw attention to themselves by their 'camp' behaviour and that this gives gay people a bad name! In a recent issue of 'Gay News' I asked, 'why is there such a dislike of effeminacy in men? Does our