A Pilot Study of the Ecosystemic Approach to Changing Problem Behaviour in Mainstream English Primary Schools

by

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Abstract

The research relates to a new and innovative approach for dealing effectively with problem behaviour in schools. The Ecosystemic approach was developed in the United States and is based on a phenomenological system theory and systemic family therapy. It is a pragmatic approach to changing chronic problem behaviour in schools which does not depend on punishment or control. The approach provides seven distinct but related techniques to enable teachers to deal with these chronic problems. The techniques are based on a series of discrete steps which can be taught to teachers through a series of conferences.

There has been considerable academic and professional interest recently in the approach. It is featured in a number of recent texts on the management of problem behaviour and a considerable amount of work has been undertaken with regard to the theoretical perspectives which inform and underpin the approach. Despite this interest, no research on the approach had been undertaken in Britain and many authors have pointed to the need for further research. The present study aimed at addressing this shortfall by carrying out *"a pilot study of the ecosystemic approach to changing problem behaviour in mainstream English primary schools"*.

The research project utilised an action research method involving local primary teachers and the present author. Teachers were invited to become co-researchers and attend three conferences within which the ecosystemic approach and techniques were introduced. Teachers were asked to implement ecosystemic interventions within their classrooms and record the process and results of their attempts. In addition, teachers were asked to provide personal responses to the approach. The study aimed at gathering baseline data on teachers' responses to the ecosystemic approach and on how effective the ecosystemic techniques were in addressing chronic problem behaviour. The results indicate that the teachers found the ecosystemic approach to be a new and useful approach for dealing with problem behaviour which had not responded to their usual intervention strategies. Indeed, 90% of ecosystemic interventions attempted by the co-researchers were reported to be successful, or partially successful, in changing problem situations in a constructive way.

The pilot study was seen as a vital prerequisite for more in-depth studies into the ecosystemic approach in Britain and therefore offers recommendations which subsequent research projects may wish to adopt.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The present Chapter begins by highlighting the interest shown in problem behaviour in schools in Britain and considers the need for systemic approaches for dealing with such problems. In Section 1.2 a concise summary of the ecosystemic approach to changing problem behaviour is given and it is suggested that the approach is congruent with the humanistic tradition of British primary education. Section 1.3 introduces the pilot study, summarising its purpose and implementation. Finally, the thesis itself is summarised in Section 1.4 with the content of each Chapter being outlined.

1.1 PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOLS

Problem behaviour in schools has received increasing attention within the last ten years (Davie, 1993) and in particular following the publication of the Elton Report, Discipline in Schools (DES, 1989). One of the findings of the Elton Report concluded that while '... a wide variety of strategies and sanctions were reported as being in use for dealing with bad behaviour ... none were uniformly endorsed as being highly effective or ineffective' (Elton Report, DES, 1989, p. 63). In light of this the report suggested that there would be support from the teaching profession for a broad range of approaches.

However, there are already '... many approaches to the understanding and treatment of emotional and behavioural problems most of which have been used within and outside the education system' (Upton and Cooper, 1990, p. 3). Further illustrating this point, Davie (1993, pp. 60-67) offers five theoretical models which have been used to understand or explain children's problem behaviour and which suggest ways of responding to, or treating such behaviour. These models are as follows;

        1) The Psychodynamic Approach.
        2) Behaviour Modification.
        3) Humanistic Psychology.
        4) A Systems Approach.
        5) Labelling Theory.

Davie places these models in chronological order and suggests that this represents a trend '... which has been evident and gathering momentum over the past twenty to thirty years in our thinking about children and about the structuring of our services for them' (Davie, 1993, p. 59). He characterises this trend as a '... movement from an individualised to a systems approach, from the atomistic to the holistic, occasionally from the micro to the macro' (Davie, 1993, p. 59).

Upton and Cooper (1990) also recognise this movement from an individualised to a systemic approach. However, they suggest that while such a trend has manifested itself in clinical work, and in particular through the work of family therapists, '... with few exceptions [it] has largely been ignored by educators' (Upton and Cooper, 1990, p. 3). They put forward the argument that there is a prevalence amongst schools to conceptualise problem behaviour within a "medical" model and '... a tendency to view such problems in a very narrow context wherein the problem is seen as residing primarily within the individual' (Upton and Cooper, 1990, p. 4).

Upton and Cooper address this issue by advocating 'the adoption of a systemic approach to the understanding of emotional and behaviour problems in schools' (Upton and Cooper, 1990, p. 3). Specifically they recommend the ecosystemic approach which they describe as 'an approach which offers an entirely new perspective on such problems and which opens up exciting new avenues for intervention" (Upton and Cooper, 1990, p. 3). It is this approach for addressing problem behaviour in schools which is explored in the present study and which is the focus of the following discussion.

1.2 THE ECOSYSTEMIC APPROACH

In Britain there has been considerable academic and professional interest in the ecosystemic approach, particularly with regard to interpersonal relations in schools and approaches for dealing with disruptive behaviour (see for example, Cooper and Upton, 1990a & 1990b, 1992; Upton and Cooper, 1990;). In addition, the approach is now featured in a number of recent major texts on the management of problem behaviour (see for example, Charlton and David, 1993; Cooper, Smith and Upton, 1994; Fontana; 1994). A considerable amount of work

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has also been undertaken with regard to the theoretical perspectives which inform and underpin the approach; specifically it has been demonstrated how ecosystemics has arisen from the need to develop a systemic approach which does not contradict the traditions of a humanistic educational psychology (see Tyler, 1992, 1994a); how the approach is based on key ideas from phenomenological psychology (see Tyler, 1994b) and systems theory (see Tyler, 1996a); and finally how it relates to a pragmatic approach to bullying (see Tyler, 1996b).

In the United States there has been considerable research done into the ecosystemic approach (see for example Brown, 1986; Molnar and Lindquist, 1989). The most influential of these has been the work of Molnar and Lindquist (1989) who have described extensively the successful use of ecosystemic interventions with a wide variety of problem situations encountered by teachers in mainstream schools.

Despite the interest shown in the ecosystemic approach in Britain, no research, prior to the present study, had been undertaken on the introduction and application of ecosystemic intervention strategies within British schools. As a result, many authors have pointed to the need to address this shortfall (see for example; Cooper and Upton, 1990a and 1992; Cooper, Smith and Upton, 1994; Fontana, 1994; Charlton and David, 1993). As Fontana points out:

> Although this approach is claimed by Molnar and Lindquist and by others active in the field to have a transforming effect on classroom relationships, further research is clearly needed and more refined guidelines required before most teachers would wish to put it into frequent use (Fontana, 1994, p. 95).

It was precisely such considerations, coupled with a personal interest in the ecosystemic approach, which prompted the development and subsequent implementation of the present study. Before the study itself is discussed it will be important to provide a concise summary of the ecosystemic approach (a more detailed analysis is provided in Chapter 2).

The ecosystemic approach to problem behaviour in schools was developed in the United States by Molnar and Lindquist (1989). It is based on a phenomenological systems theory derived from the work of Gregory Bateson (1982) and systemic

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family therapy (for further discussion on these points see Tyler, 1992). It is a pragmatic approach to changing established problem behaviour in schools which does not depend on punishment or control. Indeed, the ecosystemic approach actively moves away from negative perceptions of problem behaviour based on pupil's deficiencies and instead focuses on interactional patterns between the teacher and pupil. It seeks to define problem behaviour in terms of these interactional patterns which are seen to maintain such behaviour (Cooper and Upton, 1990a). The method depends on the teacher being able to change her or his usual responses to problem situations by interpreting the problem behaviour in a new and positive framework. This "reframing" (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989) of the problem situation is then communicated to the pupil(s) concerned.

In essence, this is a process of co-operation and acceptance. Acceptance that, from the pupil's phenomenological perspective, their behaviour is an appropriate and rational response to the problem situation:

> The ability to regard a person's problem behaviour as understandable, given that person's perception of the situation, is the essence of what we call a cooperative perspective in problem solving. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.21)

As Fontana (1994) points out, the ecosystemic approach offers guidelines for analysing and modifying the interaction between internal motivation and environmental influences. In doing so, the approach '.... adds to the teacher's repertoire of classroom management skills and helps him or her recognise how ... children's deviant behaviour is in a sense "manufactured" and "sustained" by the parents, teachers, and other significant adults in their lives' (Fontana, 1994, p. 94).

More specifically, the ecosystemic approach provides seven distinct but related techniques which aim to change problem situations constructively. A discussion on these techniques is reserved here, however, a detailed discussion and analysis can be found in Section 2.4.

In addition, it should be pointed out that the ecosystemic approach is concerned solely with changing *chronic* problem behaviour, that is, problem behaviour which has become established over a period of time and has become part of a self-perpetuating cycle of events. For this reason it is designed to be used

alongside other approaches to managing problem behaviour. This is one of the strengths of the ecosystemic approach, as it does not prescribe a particular style of dealing with problem behaviour, and is designed to help teachers address problems which have not responded to other intervention strategies.

Finally, it will be important to explain how the ecosystemic approach fits in with current strategies for dealing with problem behaviour in schools. Fontana (1994) has suggested that the approach '... spans the gap between the behavioural approach *per se* and the cognitive approach' (Fontana, 1994, p. 94) to problem behaviour, both of which are currently established in English schools. In addition, Cooper and Upton (1990a) and Tyler (1992) have identified links between the ecosystemic approach and humanistic approaches to education. Cooper and Upton identify, in particular, the use of empathic understanding, which the ecosystemic approach clearly advocates, as being congruent to the humanistic tradition of British education.

Tyler offers a more emphatic statement by suggesting that 'the ecosystemic approach is fundamentally a humanistic approach, one that can be seen as continuing and developing the tradition of humanistic educational psychology' (Tyler, 1992, p. 23). In this respect, the ecosystemic approach can be seen to complement and develop upon current strategies for addressing problem behaviour in English schools.

However, the approach had not been attempted in English schools and it was therefore only possible to speculate as to its potential use and effectiveness. The present study aimed at addressing this shortfall and instigated research into the ecosystemic approach in the English education system. It is this study which is introduced in the following Section.

1.3 THE PILOT STUDY

The innovative nature of the ecosystemic approach in Britain demanded that an initial pilot study be undertaken in order to ascertain the future potential of the approach and to evaluate the methodological procedures and techniques with which this potential could be most effectively assessed. As such the present study was seen as a pilot investigation as opposed to a piece of experimental research.

The present pilot study was organised in an effort to address the lack of research into the ecosystemic approach in Britain. This undertaking was supported by the Board of Studies of the School of Education and Humanities at Loughborough University, who agreed to a year's funding for the study of an MPhil, and was implemented by the present author. The pilot study was intended to provide the basis for further research by gathering baseline data on two key research areas, these being:

(1) *Primary teachers' response to the ecosystemic approach.*
(2) *The impact of ecosystemic techniques on chronic problem behaviour in mainstream English primary schools.*

In order to do so, local primary school teachers were invited to attend a series of three Conferences and become co-researchers within the present study. A total of twelve teachers signed up for the Conferences which were held at monthly intervals between January, 1995 and March, 1995. Within these Conferences the co-researchers were introduced to the ecosystemic approach and techniques. They were also asked to provide comments on the approach as the research progressed and were encouraged to implement ecosystemic intervention strategies within their classrooms and schools. In addition, the co-researchers were asked to record their methods of implementation and the results of their attempts.

The baseline data which was gathered in response to these requests was collated and analysed with the results being used to address the two key research areas. Furthermore, evaluations of the research methods adopted within the present study, coupled with the research findings, were utilised in presenting recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this thesis is to present the study and its findings. It is hoped that this presentation will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the ecosystemic approach in England and will stimulate further research into this innovative and important approach. The following Section provides a summary of the thesis.

1.4 THE THESIS

The first Chapter of the thesis began by highlighting the interest which has been given to problem behaviour in British schools and placed this within an historical perspective. The ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour was placed within this context and the argument for research into the potential of this approach in Britain presented. In Section 1.2, the ecosystemic approach was summarised and it was demonstrated that the approach is congruent to the humanistic tradition of British education. In Section 1.3, the present pilot study was introduced and summarised, with its purpose and implementation being briefly discussed. The current Section provides a concise summary of the thesis itself, outlining each Chapter in turn.

Chapter Two takes a detailed look at the ecosystemic approach to problem behaviour in schools. The Chapter begins by discussing the origins of the approach with particular reference to General System Theory, the use of systemic approaches to family therapy and the influence which a phenomenological perspective has had upon the approach. From here, Section 2.2 critically analyses the theoretical framework which underpins the ecosystemic approach. Specifically, the Section describes the effects of commonsense views, assigned meanings, cause-effect reasoning and an ecology of ideas upon the way teachers respond to chronic problem situations. Section 2.3 discusses considerations for the practical application of the ecosystemic techniques. This Section focuses on describing five prerequisites which teachers are encouraged to adopt when implementing the techniques. Finally, Section 2.4 discusses the seven ecosystemic techniques. The theory behind the techniques and a description of the practical application of each intervention strategy is also provided.

In Chapter Three the methodological issues of the present study are discussed. The Chapter begins by introducing the positivist and anti-positivist approaches to research methods in education, and critically analyses the theory which underpins each approach with respect to the requirements of the present study. Based on this critical analysis, decisions are made as to which approach would be most suitable for the present study. The analysis is then used in Section 3.4 to inform an in-depth look at specific methodological issues. In particular, phenomenological, ethnographic and action research methods are outlined and critically analysed. This analysis provides an insight into how and why decisions

were made about the applicability of these research methods in relation to the requirements of the present study.

Chapter Four discusses specific research methods which refer to the techniques and procedures utilised during the process of gathering and analysing data within the present study. The discussion is divided into three main Sections. Section 4.1 describes the preparation stage of the study, including the inception of the research, the participant selection procedure and the formulation of the Conferences. Section 4.2 describes the data collection stage of the study with particular reference to the techniques and procedures for gathering data during the fieldwork phase of the research. The discussion focuses on the three Conferences and the intermittent periods during which the co-researchers were to attempt the ecosystemic techniques. Finally, the methods of organising and analysing the data collected are discussed in Section 4.3. The focus of this discussion is on the methods of data analysis in relation to the two key research areas. Each key area is covered in turn with the principal methods adopted being listed and discussed.

Chapter Five combines the results of the analysed data with a discussion of these findings. The Chapter is divided into two main Sections, each relating to the key research areas. In section 5.1 the results of the analysed data on teachers' responses to the ecosystemic approach are provided and critically discussed. This includes the provision and discussion of results on the response rate of teachers to become co-researchers within the present study, the attendance rate of co-researchers within the Conferences and the co-researchers' oral and written responses to the ecosystemic approach. Section 5.2 provides and critically discusses the results relating to the impact of the ecosystemic techniques upon chronic problem behaviour in the co-researchers' classrooms. The success rate of the co-researchers' attempts at the techniques are provided. These attempts are then illustrated through the presentation of detailed case examples each of which is concluded with pertinent comments and elaborations.

In Chapter Six the limitations of the present study are listed and discussed. In addition, based on these findings, recommendations for future research into the ecosystemic approach in Britain are outlined. Specifically, Section 6.1 identifies flaws in the chosen methods of data collection and analysis. These limitations are critically discussed and are used in Section 6.2 to inform recommendations on how these flaws may be remedied by future research projects. In addition,

Section 6.2 makes recommendations for the way in which future research may to build upon the present study.

Finally, the present study is concluded in Chapter Seven. The discussion focuses on providing a retrospective summary of the pilot study and thesis. The purpose of the pilot study is summarised in Section 7.1 and is followed by a summary of the present thesis in Section 7.2. This Section describes each Chapter which is found within the thesis, thereby drawing the thesis to a close.

CHAPTER 2

THE ECOSYSTEMIC APPROACH

The present Chapter discusses in detail the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools. The discussion begins by describing the origins of the approach, and in doing so, provides an insight into how and why the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools was developed. It will be seen that ecosystemics derived from General System Theory and has been traced back to the use of systemic approaches by family therapists. The influence of a phenomenological perspective was an important factor in the development of the ecosystemic approach and is therefore also discussed.

Section 2.2 provides a detailed analysis of the theoretical framework on which the ecosystemic approach is based and describes the ideas which underpin the approach. This includes a description of how common sense views, assigned meanings, multiple assigned meanings and beliefs, cause effect reasoning and an ecology of ideas affect teachers' responses to chronic problem behaviour and influence the way in which an ecosystemic approach views such behaviour. This will provide a theoretical foundation from which the practical considerations for using the ecosystemic techniques can be discussed in Section 2.3.

Within this Section ecosystemic ideas about the way in which teachers' perceptions and behaviours can be changed in order to facilitate successful ecosystemic interventions are discussed. In particular, five prerequisites for using the ecosystemic techniques are identified and each is discussed in turn.

Finally, the seven ecosystemic techniques are discussed in detail in Section 2.4. This includes a discussion on the theory behind each technique, and a description of the practical application of each ecosystemic intervention.

2.1 THE ORIGINS OF THE APPROACH

The ecosystemic approach to problem behaviour in schools is a relatively new area of study and practice. While significant research has been carried out in the United States (see Section 2.2), discussion of the approach in Britain is very limited, with the "ecosystemic banner" being held by three main advocates

whose writings have focused on introducing the approach to British academia (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, 1990b; Upton and Cooper, 1990) and developing theoretical perspectives (Tyler, 1992, 1994a & 1994b, 1996a &1996b)

The origins of the ecosystemic approach have been traced back to General System Theory and the use of systemic approaches by family therapists (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, 1990b) and in particular to the work of Gregory Bateson (1972, 1979). The following Section offers a brief outline of General System Theory with particular reference to the work of Bertalanffy (1950, 1968). This will act as a foundation from which it will be shown that inconsistencies in system theory coupled with concern amongst some family therapists over the dehumanization of the approach (e.g. Hoffman, 1988), resulted in attempts to adapt the theory to fit human situations. The influence of a phenomenological perspective upon these adaptations is discussed in Section 2.1.2.

2.1.1 GENERAL SYSTEM THEORY

This Section begins by outlining briefly General System Theory. While there have been successful applications of the theory to mechanical systems, these have not been accompanied by equivalent applications to human systems. It will be seen that this shortfall in the application of General System Theory to human systems influenced work by systemic family therapists and resulted in the development of an approach that accounted for the complexity and variability of human systems.

Bertalanffy (1950) is recognized as being the "father" of system theory. He aimed to develop a theory which could be applied to all systems, irrespective of their particular types. A detailed analysis is deferred here. Suffice it to say that, General System Theory viewed the world not in terms of individual components but in terms of relationships and interactions between these components. This concept challenged established scientific analysis, rejecting the exploration of single cause-effect factors in favour of the scientific exploration of "wholes" and "wholeness" (Bertalanffy, 1968).

Bertalanffy's desire to develop an all encompassing theory to fit all types of systems has had varying success. The systemic approach has been successfully

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applied to technological systems, particularly those involving computer technology, cybernetics, automation and control (Tyler, 1992). The approach has also been applied to problem solving in the social sciences (e.g. Parsons, 1970). However, it has been met with some resistance (see Checkland, 1981, particularly pp. 245-285). Central to this resistance has been the realization that systemic principles can impose a mechanistic model on social relationships and interactions. Indeed, Bertalanffy himself recognized this concern:

> This humanistic concern of general system theory as I understand it makes a difference to mechanistically orientated system theorists speaking solely in terms of mathematics, feedback and technology as so giving rise to the fear that system theory is indeed the ultimate step toward mechanization and devaluation of man and towards a technocratic society (Bertalanffy. 1968, cited in Tyler, 1992, p. 17).

It may indeed be helpful to view social problems as a "whole", and by doing so, acknowledging many cause-effect factors. However, applying systemic techniques to social problem solving can result in the depowering and dehumanizing of people (Cooper and Upton, 1990a). In systemic terms, the cause of a given social problem is considered to be the inefficient working of the system. The inefficiency is brought about by the system's human components because they are unreliable and unpredictable. In order to solve the problem arising from this inefficiency the system must be modified and this involves the use of control. The system needs to be controlled, brought back into a state of equilibrium, if it is to work efficiently. It follows then, that it is the human component which needs to be controlled. The human element '... either has to be eliminated altogether and replaced by the hardware of computers, or it has to be made as reliable as possible, that is, mechanized, controlled and standardized' (Boguslaw, 1965, p. 17).

However, control in and of itself may not be problematical. Most societies develop control mechanisms to maintain stability. It is when these mechanisms fail to take account of the freedom of the individual and when control is abused (by those higher up the social hierarchy), that problems can emerge (for further discussion on these points see Tyler, 1992, pp. 17-18).

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Attempts to develop a theory which could incorporate both human and mechanistic systems has not been achieved. General System Theory has only been successfully applied to technological and engineering systems. This is partly due to the realisation that, 'individuals' behaviours and experiences cannot be simply translated into the language of mechanistic systems without destroying their uniquely human character' (Tyler, 1992, p. 18). It was this inconsistency that resulted in steps being taken by family therapists to search for new models. This search was influenced by phenomenological perspectives of human systems which are discussed in below.

2.1.2 THE INFLUENCE OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

This Section considers briefly the nature of the system as seen by, first, family therapists adopting the General System Theory approach and, second, those adopting a phenomenological approach. A comparison of the two illustrates their differences and provides an insight into the development of an ecosystemic approach to systems.

Based on the ideas deriving from General System Theory many family therapists placed themselves "outside" the "dysfunctional" family in order to control it (Hoffman, 1988). The family therapist made assumptions about how the family system should be (based on her interpretation of the system) and, using her professional judgment, suggested strategies for change. Failure to change was not seen as failure of the therapist but as the family presenting "resistance" to the therapist (De Shazer, 1984). Such approaches considered the family system as an object with defined boundaries between subsystems and subordinate systems. As such, the therapist was able to set herself outside the system and from this vantage point make objective observations.

In sharp contrast to this approach, phenomenologists view a human system not as an independent object but as a complex system of intentions and meanings (Tyler, 1992, 1996a). The therapist cannot remain independent of these intentions and meanings and becomes an integral part of the system, influencing and being influenced by its members. From a phenomenological perspective, any individual interacting within a human system carries with them their own expectations and interpretations which become part of the system and need to be considered in any understanding of that system.

The phenomenological perspective influenced family therapy and resulted in a move away from mechanical systemics to the development of models with an emphasis on individual perspectives within human systems. Concern over the application of systems theory to human systems resulted in the development of the ecosystemic family therapy model. This model combines the principles of systemic theory with a phenomenological perspective (De Shazer, 1982).

Cooper and Upton, 1990a, (after Speed, 1984) draw upon this model in identifying three approaches to Family Therapy which focus on the ecosystem of family dysfunction; '... that is, a particular range of influences on interactional events' (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, p. 304). First, they describe an approach '... provided by the Milan group (Selvini-Palazzoli et al., 1973; Selvini, 1988), which advocates that therapists should focus on those conflicts which the family system is attempting to avoid' (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, p. 304). Second, an approach which they refer to as the Structural approach (Minuchin, 1974) where the emphasis is placed on the family structure. Finally, they describe the Strategic therapy approach which focuses on '... the interactional sequences which surround and maintain the symptomatic behaviour' (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, p. 304).

Each of these approaches provided '... a systematic analysis of interpersonal interaction in families' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 68). They also provided Family Therapists, who had considered the school system as having a role to play in family difficulties, with '... a range of analytical tools for developing systemic analyses of classroom and other interactional systems' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 68).

The Strategic therapy approach is seen to provide the basis for Molnar and Lindquist's ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools, focussing as it does on the interactional elements of the ecosystem which sustain problem behaviour. It is the ecosystemic approach which is the focus of the present study and as such is discussed in greater detail in the following Sections.

2.2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To date, "Changing Problem Behavior in Schools" (1989) by Alex Molnar and Barbara Lindquist is the only piece of literature which fully discusses the theoretical framework of the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools. Therefore, the following Sections have, of necessity, used this book as the principle foundation for their discussion. However, where applicable, pertinent comments and elaborations from other authors have been included.

The discussion begins by providing information on Molnar and Lindquist and their book. Section 2.2.2 introduces the theoretical background to the ecosystemic approach to problem behaviour with particular reference to the way in which an ecosystemic perspective views the system and the individual. A more detailed analysis of the theory is then provided in Sections 2.2.3 - 2.2.6.

Each of these Sections analyse different aspects of an ecosystemic understanding of chronic problem behaviour and why it can be difficult for teachers to change their perceptions of and responses to such behaviour. Section 2.2.3 describes the influence of common sense views and assigned meanings upon the ecosystem of the classroom or school and in particular the way in which these factors influence the perception of, and response to, problem behaviour by teachers and pupils. Section 2.2.4 describes the influence of multiple assigned meanings and beliefs upon the way in which teachers and pupils perceive and respond to problem behaviour. Section 2.2.5 describes the influence and implications of cause-effect reasoning upon teachers' attempts at addressing problem behaviour. Finally, Section 2.2.6 discusses the effects which an ecology of ideas has upon the ecosystem of the classroom or school and the ensuing implications for addressing problem behaviour.

2.2.1 ALEX MOLNAR AND BARBARA LINDQUIST

Molnar and Lindquist's understanding of the ecosystemic approach to problem behaviour in schools stems from an expertise in education and psychology. Their book, far from being simply a theoretical analysis of the approach, is based on

detailed case examples which illustrate the use of ecosystemic techniques within American schools and classrooms.

Both Molnar and Lindquist were trained and currently work in the United States. Alex Molnar is professor of education at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and a qualified family therapist. Barbara Lindquist is a practising psychologist in Wisconsin. All discussion and data found in their book is based on the 'American' experience. As no such discussion and data has been collected from the "British" experience any connections made between the two are purely speculative.

"Changing Problem Behavior in Schools" was written as a handbook, '... intended to provide you [the educational practitioner] with an opportunity to examine and constructively rethink your commonsense ideas about problem behavior' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. xiii). Throughout their book the ideas they discuss are supported by case examples. These are drawn from the experiences of educationalists who attended their "Making Schools Work" course and their workshops. The ideas described in their book have been used by students working in city, suburban and rural schools. They have been used with children of all ages, children with varying ability and children from diverse backgrounds.

2.2.2 THE SYSTEM AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The basic ideas behind the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools are discussed in this Section. The ecosystemic approach regards schools and classrooms as social ecosystems. The word "ecosystem" is drawn from the "ecological" perspective of the natural world which is concerned with '... the way small changes in any part of the ecosystem have consequences which are amplified throughout the global environment' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 69). As such, the ecosystemic approach adopts the concept of 'interdependence and recursive causation ... which stresses the ways in which human systems constantly adapt in order to minimise the destructive effects of change and in doing so create new patterns of interaction' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 69). Cooper and Upton take care when using the term ecosystemic and stress that it is a very different view from that which is associated with the term "systems

approach". As has been seen in Section 2.1.1, the systems approach takes a mechanistic view of the social system where change is achieved through the exercise of power over others.

The approach is called "ecosystemic" because it views problem behaviour as part of, not separate from, the social system within which it occurs. This means that problem behaviour can influence, and is influenced by, the behaviour of all members of the system. 'From this perspective a change in the perception or behavior of anyone associated with the problem has the potential to influence the problem behavior' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. xiv). Furthermore, 'although it is not possible to predict precisely what the changes in the situation will be, it is possible to predict that *when something in the ecosystem changes, the ecosystem will change*' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.11, emphasis in text).

In the author's experience many schools, tend not to view problem behaviour in this way and often described such problems in terms of a child's history and deficiencies. For example, an individual who repeatedly refuses to follow the teacher's instructions is likely to be identified as having behavioural problems. She or he will then be assessed as having any number of deficiencies including, learning difficulties, anti-authoritarian tendencies, hyperactivity, and so on. Finally, historical events and/or experiences, including coming from a broken home, being an only child, social deprivation and so on, will be used to explain his or her behaviour.

This approach to identifying a cause for problem behaviour is often useful. It can allow the teacher to develop a clearer understanding of the individual and may result in a more sympathetic, tolerant stance being taken. Indeed, should this new stance be successful in changing the problem behaviour or at least in changing the teacher's perception of the problem, the approach can be said to be useful. A problem arises when this approach, or indeed any other approach, repeatedly fails to change the problem behaviour.

It is the repeated failure of intervention strategies that signals the development of a chronic problem situation. Indeed, 'the chief characteristic of recurring problem situations is their apparent self-perpetuating inevitability' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 73). Furthermore, the problem with such behavioural difficulties '... is their persistence and apparent resistance to the approaches which teachers most commonly use to oppose them (e.g. reasoning, punishment, ignoring,

detention, discussion, withdrawal, referral to another teacher, withdrawal of privileges [see the Elton Report, DES, 1989, p. 240]' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 70).

It is these chronic situations that the ecosystemic approach seeks to resolve. Ecosystemic interventions aim at breaking the self perpetuating cycle of events which characteristically surround chronic problem situations:

> The purpose of ecosystemic intervention techniques is to offer participants the means to break out of destructive cycles of interaction, through the creation of new cycles. (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, p. 312)

The ecosystemic techniques aim at helping teachers to see chronic problem behaviour from within an interpersonal context and to change their usual responses to these behaviours. In so doing, the ecosystemic approach '... seeks to offer teachers the means to change the problem behaviour, not by challenging the behaviour overtly, but by utilising the systemic principles which sustain interactional patterns' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 70). As Molnar and Lindquist point out:

> From an ecosystemic perspective, problems are not seen as the result of one person's deficiencies or inadequacies. Instead, problems are viewed as part of a pattern of interpersonal interactions. Viewed this way, attempted solutions to problem behavior that do not change things for the better are part of the problem (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. xvi).

The ecosystemic approach does not reject the notion that individual circumstances may play a role in problem behaviour, but seeks to provide alternative explanations of that behaviour. 'Such divergent explanations seek to redefine problem situations so that conflict (or resistance) is seen as co-operative' (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, p. 311).

Interestingly, Tyler (1994) has drawn links between the ecosystemic procedure of finding alternative explanations and Kelly's (1955) theory of personality which is '... based on "constructive alternativism" - the idea that personal change and development are made possible through the construction of alternative points

of view' (Tyler, 1994, p. 55). Tyler suggests that this perspective '... is also a central feature of ecosystemics particularly in relation to its practical application' (Tyler, 1994, p. 55).

From an ecosystemic perspective, descriptions of a person's deficiencies and inadequacies are unhelpful in four ways. First, while descriptions of an individual's history may be true, they are often unhelpful as a practical guide for positive change. Second, if the history of an individual cannot be changed then the identified cause cannot be either. This can give the teacher a sense of powerlessness to address the problem behaviour. Third, focusing on the past can draw attention away from social interaction in the school environment. Finally, identifying causes for the behaviour can result in the individual being labelled in a particular way. Once a child has been labelled the whole process of identifying what the individual does well and what can be changed to make things better becomes increasingly difficult. In effect, such an approach may not facilitate constructive change of a chronic problem situation. As Molnar and Lindquist explain:

> In an ecosystem, problem behavior is only one part of any pattern
> of behavioral interactions. Therefore, a problem is defined as the
> problem behavior itself and the responses to that behavior. For
> example, if a child repeatedly speaks out of turn and the teacher
> repeatedly responds by explaining that the child should wait to be
> called upon, then the teacher's response is just as much part of the
> pattern of behavior as is the problem behavior itself. (Molnar and
> Lindquist, 1989, p. 17)

However, it can be difficult for teachers to see chronic problem situations within an interpersonal context and to change their usual responses to such situations. The following Sections, 2.2.3-2.2.6, explain using an ecosystemic perspective why it can be so difficult for teachers to change in chronic problem situations.

2.2.3 COMMON SENSE VIEWS AND ASSIGNED MEANINGS

The previous Section illustrated that the ecosystemic approach views problem behaviour, not as the result of an individual's deficiencies, but as a part of a pattern of social interactions between those in the ecosystem (classroom, school):

> From an ecosystemic viewpoint, human behaviour is the product of ongoing interaction between environmental influences and internal motivations which derive from prior (mainly social) experience.
> (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, p. 302)

Seen in this way, attempts to solve chronic problem behaviours that are not successful, or attitudes and beliefs held about the individual which do not help produce constructive change, may well become part of the problem itself. The ecosystemic approach is designed to help the teacher to see this dilemma and view problem behaviour within its interpersonal context. The following discussion takes a closer look at how the ecosystemic approach views problem behaviour and in particular how an ecosystemic perspective of commonsense views is used as a basis for understanding why it can be so difficult for teachers to address chronic problem situations.

Molnar and Lindquist suggest that teachers frequently use "common sense" to guide them in solving problem situations. Indeed, this certainly holds true for the present author, who has frequently, and successfully, used his commonsense as a tool to guide his responses to problem behaviour in primary classrooms. However, Molnar and Lindquist also suggest that; '... when these actions do not result in the desired change, the educator's commonsense view (as well as the actions that flow from it) is part of the problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 1-2).

Acknowledging that commonsense views can become part of the problem suggests that these views need to be changed. However, changing commonsense views can be difficult and in order for this goal to be achieved the teacher must understand how commonsense views develop within an ecosystem and the role they play in the continuation of chronic problem behaviour. Molnar and Lindquist (1989) provide an insight into the required understanding and aim '... to help you [the teacher] solve problems that have defied solution despite elaborate diagnoses or repeated applications of common sense' (Molnar and

Lindquist, 1989, p. 2). In the following discussion a phenomenological perspective is used to highlight the difficulties teachers can face when attempting to change their commonsense views.

Commonsense views are developed from the way we "construe" (Kelly, 1955) ourselves and our environment. We construct an interpretation of our world that we perceive to be real and which determines how we react to particular events. Such an interpretation is developed using our senses and the meanings we give these (Kohl and Kohl, 1977). The following is an example to illustrate these points.

Example 1.

> A teacher sees (*sensory observation*) a pupil push a fellow classmate out of line. She equates this with the pupil being aggressive (*meaning*). The combination of sensing the event and perceiving the behaviour as aggression is sufficient for her to construct an interpretation of the event that is real for her (*commonsense view*). She perceives the pupil to be behaving inappropriately and sends him to the back of the line.

The above example demonstrates how we may organise our experience of the world around us using our senses (a biological boundary), and the meanings we place upon these experiences.

Phenomenological psychologists seek to clarify what events mean to us by articulating, '... explicitly, the implicit structure and meaning of human experience' (Keen, 1975, p. 19). They identify events as being experienced against a backdrop, a "horizon". There are many different horizons, including the temporal backdrop of past and present experiences, and future expectations; the spatial backdrop of the physical environment; and the moral backdrop of our perceptions of right and wrong.

'Furthermore, every horizon has a horizon; that is, a horizon means what *it* means only because of the backdrop against which *it* appears' (Keen, 1975, p. 20, emphasis in text). Phenomenologically, there are no distinct layers of horizons, they are integrated and overlap each other into a "meaningful field" (Keen, 1975, p. 22). The meaningful field must also have a horizon if it is to have meaning. Keen calls this the "critical" horizon and describes it as the

horizon of who we think we are and which gives our experiences meaning. Indeed;

> We can say that we can understand what something means to someone only if we can see *his* implicit sense of who he is, which is a critical horizon against which events appear to that person and against their meaning. (Keen, 1975, p. 22, emphasis in text)

In phenomenological psychology, each individual has his or her own sense of "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1962). Phenomenological psychology seeks to interpret behaviour based on the individual's being-in-the-world by utilizing three fundamental approaches, namely; phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and phenomenological interpretation (see Tyler, 1994).

Tyler makes a connection between these approaches and those adopted by the ecosystemic approach. In particular, he maintains that 'phenomenological reduction lies at the heart of the ecosystemic approach to changing problem behaviour in schools' (Tyler, 1994, p. 380). Phenomenological reduction is based on "suspending the natural attitude", that is, ' ... we have to avoid seeing people or the situation in terms of stereotypes, we have to avoid positive and negative value judgments, we have to be as open as possible' (Tyler, 1994, p. 380). This is indeed related to Molnar and Lindquist's ecosystemic approach where commonsense views about problem behaviour are set to one side and alternative explanations are sought.

However, as Tyler goes on to explain, while phenomenological reduction can be instrumental in changing the individual's being-in-the-world, 'the most important lesson which reduction teaches us is the impossibility of complete reduction' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xiv). This point highlights the difficulty teachers can have when suspending their commonsense views about chronic problem behaviour.

Commonsense views inform teachers about how they should react to problem situations. It has been shown that these views are developed from the way in which teachers perceive who-they-are-in-the-world. While these perceptions represent truthful interpretations of an individual's experiences, for teachers in chronic problem situations they can become part of the self perpetuating cycle of events that surround the problem. Changing commonsense views about chronic

problem behaviours is difficult because teachers perceive such views as being a true interpretation of that chronic problem situation.

In addition, difficulty in changing perceptions and behaviour towards chronic problem behaviours is compounded by the multiple assigned meanings that can be attributed to such behaviour. Within an ecosystem there are multiple worlds of experience that coexist (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989). The meanings given to these experiences by each individual are created and adapted by their participation in the social system. Their participation is influenced on a macro scale, for example; depending on gender, race and social class (de Lone, 1979). It is also influenced on a micro scale, moment to moment, for example; depending on past, present experiences and future expectations of events (Keen, 1975). Given the wide variety of participation, it follows that, within these multiple worlds of experience coexist complementary multiple meanings assigned to them. As Keen explains:

> Who I am in the world determines what fields will be salient, what they will mean to me, and how they will influence the meanings of events in my experience. Who-I-am-in-the-world is the gigantic assumption upon which I rely in order for my experience to be meaningful at all to me. (Keen, 1975, p. 23)

It is the influence of multiple assigned meanings upon interpersonal relationships within an ecosystem that is discussed in the following Section.

2.2.4 MULTIPLE ASSIGNED MEANINGS AND BELIEFS

Molnar and Lindquist use the idea of assigned meanings, maintaining that within a particular social setting (for example a classroom or school) 'a single behaviour may be consistent with, and therefore supportive of, a variety of divergent meanings' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 13). It is these meanings that individuals assign to an event that inform their actions. A closer analysis of Example 1 will illustrate this point.

The action taken by the pupil (pushing in line) is indisputable. However, the teacher's response was based on the meaning the behaviour had for her. She

perceived the pupil as behaving aggressively. This perception will have been based on her experience of the event as set against a multitude of horizons. Examples may include the following: the pupil had been aggressive towards classmates in the past (*temporal horizon*); the pupil had been seen to push in line in other locations (*spatial horizon*); the teacher perceived pushing in line to be an inappropriate behaviour (*moral horizon*).

In contrast to this, had the teacher experienced the event against other horizons the assigned meanings may have been very different. Examples may include the following: the pupil had not been aggressive towards classmates in the past (*temporal horizon*); the pupil had not been seen to push in line in other locations (*spatial horizon*); the teacher did not perceive the behaviour to be inappropriate (*moral horizon*).

These examples highlight possible experiences of an event. However, they are simplified as the teacher's experiences are not likely to be static but adapt and change according to the meanings she places upon them. Furthermore, several meanings can appear to the teacher at once. Indeed, 'it is common for one person to hold competing and apparently conflicting ideas about the meanings of another person's behavior' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 4). Despite this, the teacher is able to choose a particular stance and act accordingly.

Festinger (1957) offers an explanation of how the teacher makes choices within problem situations and contends that people will attempt to eliminate conflict between two (or more) held beliefs by either disregarding one (or more) of them, or adding perceptions that support the chosen belief. He calls the conflict between beliefs that are inconsistent, cognitive dissonance. The pressure to eliminate cognitive dissonance is proportional to the importance of the belief held, so that a strong desire to uphold a particular belief will result in the conflicting belief(s) being rejected. Even if the chosen belief about a chronic problem behaviour repeatedly fails to change that behaviour it will be upheld if deemed to be the most important.

Molnar and Lindquist (1989) identify two factors which influence how we choose which belief is most important. First is prior learning. Bateson (1972, 1979) suggests that the belief that has been used most successfully and most often, will survive. So that, for example, if a teacher adopts a particular explanation for a problem behaviour that is frequently effective in "solving"

similar problem situations she is likely to use that belief to inform her approach in the future. Molnar and Lindquist provide an example to illustrate this point:

> This [prior learning] suggests that if a teacher has frequently worked effectively with children who verbally taunt others during lessons by interpreting that behavior to mean that such children have poor social skills, the teacher is probably going to respond to this child's verbal taunting in a way consistent with the belief that the child has poor social skills, even if the teacher recognizes intellectually that there may be other good explanations for the behavior. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 5)

In Example 1 the teacher's response to the "aggressive" behaviour may have resulted from prior leaning. She may have previously used the, "sending to the back of the line", intervention with a high success rate. However, if the behaviour continued after the intervention then, '... the preeminence of more abstract ideas (those used most successfully most often) over less abstract ideas' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 5-6) suggests that the teacher will disregard other explanations. The success of the (aggressor) explanation in helping the teacher stop instances of pushing in line in previous situations can therefore become an obstacle in formulating or accepting a new idea about why this child is not responding in a way she or he is not "supposed to".

> We might also predict that the teacher might be puzzled by the student's apparent "resistance" to "effective" strategies and will seek ways to "overcome" this "resistance" that are compatible with the idea that the student is acting in this way because he or she is deficient in some unusual way. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 6.)

The second factor that Molnar and Lindquist identify is the influence of social-group support. Again Festinger's ideas about cognitive dissonance are used to explain this. He maintains that social support for one (or other) of the beliefs is one of the most influential factors in determining which belief will be retained. An individual will place more importance on a belief if it is supported by his or her social group than if it is not. In schools, it is the social support of professional peers that is likely to influence teachers:

The social support teachers receive from their professional peers for explanations of problem behavior that fail to lead to acceptable results may help to strengthen those explanations, even in the face of repeated failure. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 6).

Cooper and Upton (1992) also explore the effects of social support upon a social ecosystem. They suggest that:

The overarching, twin human needs for a recognised personal identity and a sense of social belonging, make the social group (or 'system') the central focus of human activity, to the extent that individual's personal needs and motivations are often subordinate to those of the group as a whole. (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 67)

In addition, Molnar and Lindquist suggest that as a child moves through the education system ideas about her or his behaviour become embedded within official records and within informal networks that pass on the ideas. They put forward the argument that, 'as children move through school, their behavior is increasingly understood by making reference to the "frozen" perception of their past behavior' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 6-7).

This suggestion certainly rings true for the personal experience of the present author. Having taught in seven mainstream primary schools and a private sector primary school I have had ample opportunity to witness discussions amongst colleagues, particularly in a staffroom context. It was commonplace for teachers to share negative perceptions of "problem" pupils and to offer each other support for these perceptions. Indeed, it was apparent that teachers, myself included, gained some comfort with colleagues empathising with their "gripes".

Tyler (1994) also considers the issue of assigned meanings amongst social groups. He draws a parallel between the ecosystemic approach and Kelly (1955) and Rogers' (1951) theory of personality, particularly in terms of differentiation and integration. Tyler explains that; 'the development of a construct system involves the progressive differentiation into subsystems as well as the functional integration into hierarchies' (Tyler, 1994, p. 52). He goes on to suggest that while Kelly and Rogers' focus on the balance between differentiation and integration and the subsequent effects on the personality of individuals, Molnar

and Lindquist (1989) focus on the effects of these components on the social ecosystem as a whole.

As Tyler points out; '... groups are also characterised by a degree of differentiation and integration, which emerge from the differing meanings assigned to individual behaviours' (Tyler, 1994, p. 53). In "normal" groups divergent assigned meanings are simply part and parcel of the group's evolution. However, '... in dealing with problem situations the assigned meanings are often at the heart of the situation' (Tyler, 1994, p. 53).

Molnar and Lindquist also suggest that both teacher and pupil '... carry inside themselves racial, cultural, and gender related experiential histories that shape and
support the meanings they assign to the behavior in question' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 7). They go on to suggest that:

> It is also not surprising that a person whose interpretation of events is shared by a large number of other people whom that person regards as significant is not likely to readily change his or her interpretation, even if faced with a chronic problem. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 7)

In chronic problem situations, multiple assigned meanings and beliefs about a problem behaviour can contribute to the continuation of that behaviour. 'Considering the meanings assigned to behaviors deemed problematic is important, because in problem situations these assigned meanings are part of the problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 13). The influence of prior learning and social group support can compound the difficulty that teachers face when attempting to change the way they respond to chronic problem situations. However, these are not the only factors that potentially hinder constructive change. Ecosystemically, cause-effect reasoning can also pose problems. It is this factor which is discussed below.

2.2.5 CAUSE AND EFFECT REASONING

Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, maintain that in Western culture people tend to believe that reality is best explained by cause-effect relationships and that this belief is used in the form of a "mental rule". This mental rule is outlined as a series of assumptions, namely; all behaviour has a cause and is an effect of something else. Cause precedes effect and therefore controls it; removal of the cause will remove the effect.

These assumptions often help teachers to explain problem behaviour and explanations based on cause-effect reasoning can help to change such behaviour. Indeed, in example 1, the teacher identified the "cause" of the problem as the pupil acting aggressively towards classmates. The "cause" preceded the effect (pushing in line) therefore to remove the effect, the "cause" had to be removed. The teacher sent the pupil to the back of the line and (it was hoped) the pupil would cease pushing.

However, from an ecosystemic perspective, two main difficulties can arise when assuming every effect has a cause. First, when using cause-effect reasoning the teacher assumes that the identification of a "cause" of a problem behaviour will result in a strategy for changing that behaviour being formulated and subsequently the behaviour being changed. This can be problematical, as Molnar and Lindquist suggest:

> Any teacher who has referred a child for psychological evaluation
> in the hope of learning how to solve the problem knows that the
> diagnosis of the presumed cause of the behavior by no means
> necessarily provides any specific guidance about how to change it.
> (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 1)

Indeed, should the identified "cause" be based on a child's history, for example the pupil coming from a single parent background, then devising a strategy for change becomes impossible.

Second, attempts to find a "cause" can result in strategies for change being focused on the individual as opposed to helping the teacher to see the numerous possible explanations that might be useful in changing the behaviour:

The process of reducing behavior to ever smaller elements in an attempt to find it's cause makes it difficult to see behavior in its context and to consider the full variety of explanations that might be helpful in changing things for the better. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 9)

The ecosystemic approach addresses these issues and suggests that by viewing classrooms and schools as ecosystems within which multiple worlds of experience, meaning and behaviour co-exist and interact, it becomes unnecessary to identify the causes of problem behaviour. Furthermore:

Since ecosystemic logic holds that in a social environment all ideas and behavior interact with and influence each other in continuous patterns of interaction, the attributed "cause" of a behavior can never be established as the truth. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 14)

Ecosystemically, 'it is enough to know that a change in the ideas or the behavior of any person in the classroom or school will influence the behaviors and ideas of every person in the classroom or school' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 13-14).

Setting aside cause-effect reasoning in favour of an ecosystemic perspective of problem behaviour can be problematical because it challenges the teacher's usual way of viewing such behaviour. However, it is precisely the stability of the perceptions and reactions of those within a problem situation that facilitate its continuation and its eventual development into a chronic problem. The ecosystemic approach attempts to highlight this realisation to teachers thereby providing them with the knowledge to change themselves and in turn their responses to chronic problem behaviour.

The following Section discusses the final barrier that teachers can face in their attempts to change how they respond to chronic problem situations, an ecology of ideas.

2.2.6 AN ECOLOGY OF IDEAS

An ecosystem such as a school or classroom will contain individuals who attribute both widely diverging meanings and complementary meanings to a problem situation. However, it is commonplace for members of the ecosystem to have their assigned meanings confirmed by the behaviour of other members. Bateson (1972, 1979) puts forward the argument that within a social setting (such as a school or classroom) there exists an "ecology of ideas". Molnar and Lindquist (1989) describe this phenomena as follows:

> Individuals have ideas about the behavior of other group members,
> they have ideas about group actions, they have ideas about the
> ideas of others, they have ideas about the ideas of other's ideas of
> them, and so on. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.12)

In a classroom or school, the interaction of these ideas and the behaviours that ensue are experienced by its members. Their experiences will be influenced by the assigned meanings they give to the behaviours. While the social group involved is likely to be identifiable by '... the predictable interaction patterns that occur among group members, these patterns are not necessarily dependent upon group members sharing a common idea about the meaning of individual behaviors' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 12). Indeed, each member can have her or his assigned meanings confirmed by regarding their behaviour and that of other members as being consistent with the meanings he or she has assigned. This is what Bateson (1972, 1979) calls an ecology of ideas. The following hypothetical scenario will illustrate this point.

Example 2.

> A teacher perceives a particular pupil as being anti-authoritarian.
> This pupil perceives the demands placed upon her by "the
> establishment" as threatening her individuality. A friend of the
> pupil perceives her as a strong, independent individual who is to be
> admired.

When the pupil repeatedly fails to respond to the teacher's demands, the teacher has his assigned meanings about that behaviour confirmed in two ways. First, the pupil's lack of response to the requests is consistent with his perception that the

pupil is anti-authoritarian. Second, the teacher's issuing of demands is consistent with the perception that the pupil should recognise authority and act accordingly. Similarly, when the teacher repeatedly makes demands of the pupil, the pupil has her assigned meanings confirmed in two ways. First, the teacher's demands are consistent with her perception that the teacher is challenging her individuality. Second, the pupil's lack of response to the demands is consistent with the perception that her individuality needs to be protected.

Finally, the pupil's friend also has her assigned meanings confirmed in two ways. First, the pupil's lack of response is consistent with the friends perception that she is a strong, independent individual. Second, the friend's support for the pupil is consistent with the perception that she is worthy of admiration.

In non-problem circumstances a single behaviour being consistent with and therefore supportive of widely divergent meanings is not cause for concern. 'However, considering that meanings assigned to behavior deemed problematic is important, because in problem situations these assigned meanings are part of the problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 13).

Prior learning, social support, cause-effect reasoning and an ecology of ideas, can all serve to sustain the assigned meanings and behaviours of the people involved with a problem situation. In problem situations these can become liabilities by maintaining the stability of the ecosystem and therefore locking peoples perceptions (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989). These perceptions can be useful if they are successful in developing a strategy that helps change the problem in a constructive way. However, 'chronic problem situations are characterized by stability' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.9). In these chronic situations a change in the behaviours, or perceptions, of the people involved is required because any pattern of response that does not produce satisfactory results (i.e. does not change the perceptions or behaviours of those involved) becomes part of the stable characteristics of the ecosystem.

The following Section discusses the practical considerations for using the ecosystemic techniques and begins by introducing two ways in which perceptions and behaviours towards chronic problem situations can be changed by using an ecosystemic approach. Section 2.3.3 then introduces five prerequisites for using the ecosystemic techniques. Each procedure is designed to enhance the teacher's ability to address the pitfalls of prior learning, social group support, cause-effect

reasoning and an ecology of ideas and encourage the teacher to view chronic problem situations within an ecosystemic framework.

2.3 PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As has been discussed in the previous Section, viewed ecosystemically, problem behaviours are considered to be part of a pattern of social interactions between those in the ecosystem. The complex and varied interpersonal relationships that constitute an ecosystem such as a school or classroom make understanding difficult. However, 'the concept of ecosystem allows us to focus on the relatedness of behavior in a social setting' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.10) and view peoples perceptions and behaviours as part of a pattern of perceptions and behaviours that influence and are influenced by (but do not cause) the perceptions and behaviours of all members of the ecosystem (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989).

It follows then, that change in one person's perception or behaviour will influence all members of the ecosystem '... in an ecosystem, it cannot be otherwise' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 12). This is a powerful way of approaching problem situations because it suggests that teachers can influence a problem by changing themselves. As Molnar and Lindquist point out:

> As a part of the ecosystem of the classroom or school, your [the teacher's] thoughts, attitudes, and behavior influence the thoughts, attitudes, and behavior of the people with whom you share the classroom or school. In other words, you can influence problem behavior by changing yourself. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 16)

The relationship between perceptions and behaviours of people within an ecosystem is the focus of the following discussion. Section 2.3.1 introduces two ways in which perceptions and behaviours can be changed. Section 2.3.2 discusses five prerequisites that Molnar and Lindquist (1989) consider important to successful change.

2.3.1 CHANGING PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS

The ecosystemic approach to changing chronic problem behaviour in schools identifies two ways in which, despite the "obstacles" of prior learning, social support, cause-effect reasoning and an ecology of ideas, change of a chronic problem situation may be achieved. Each theme will be introduced below.

2.3.1.1 IDENTIFYING NEW INTERPRETATIONS

The first way in which chronic problem behaviour can be changed is by identifying new interpretations of the behaviour. Using ecosystemic logic it becomes impossible to identify a "true" cause for a given behavioural problem because all perceptions and behaviours influence each other. Indeed, 'Ecosystemically, the truth is a function of the point at which the observer begins and ends ("punctuates") the observation of a pattern of interactions' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 14).

As no single cause can be attributed to the behavioural pattern, '... if one punctuation does not help to change things, others can be used without fear of abandoning the truth' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.14). This understanding is also helpful because within an ecosystem there are many divergent and conflicting views, each being "truthful" to the individual experiencing the situation.

Tyler (1994) has drawn links between phenomenological psychology and the ecosystemic approach to identifying new interpretations of problem behaviour, and in particular with the strategies of imaginative variation and phenomenological variation. These links elucidate the ecosystemic theme of identifying new interpretations of problem behaviour, and as such, each of these strategies will be briefly explored and their relation to the ecosystemic approach discussed.

First, Tyler describes the strategy of imaginative variation as a way of trying ' ... to see an event from as many different points of view as possible' (Tyler, 1994, p. 381). This is precisely the strategy that Molnar and Lindquist (1989) advocate. Indeed, as they explain, 'any alternative explanation that helps you to behave

differently in relation to the behavior you consider problematic has the potential to lead to a solution' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 19).

Second, Tyler suggests that; '... an important characteristic of phenomenological interpretation is the assumption that people experience events as meaningful ...' (Tyler, 1994, p. 382). Once again this is clearly related to the ecosystemic strategy of co-operation (see Section 2.3.2.1) where the teacher's alternative interpretation of a chronic problem behaviour must be based on acceptance, 'acceptance that the problem behaviour is in some way meaningful or appropriate for the person concerned' (Tyler, 1994, p. 383).

Ecosystemic logic provides the teacher with new strategies to explore the problem behaviour, strategies that are not based on the success or failure of any particular explanation:

> Thus in considering problem behavior, the application of ecosystemic logic calls not for the identification of the 'true' cause of the problem but rather for the identification of an interpretation that fits the facts at hand and suggests new behaviors that might change the situation in an acceptable way. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 15-16)

Therefore, identifying new and positive interpretations of a chronic problem behaviour can provide the teacher with a tool for potentially changing the cycle of interactional patterns that have become entrenched within chronic problem situation. This new perception of a problem behaviour can, in and of itself, change a chronic problem situation in a constructive way because the teacher no longer views the behaviour as problematic but as being meaningful to the individual(s) that exhibit it. However, it is often necessary for the teacher to act upon her new interpretation of the problem behaviour with a complementary alteration of her behaviour towards it. This is the second way in which problem behaviour can be constructively changed and is discussed in greater detail below.

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2.3.1.2 BEHAVE DIFFERENTLY

In chronic problem situations teachers' responses to problem behaviour become part of the problem. Therefore, the second way in which problem behaviour can be changed is by simply behaving differently towards the problem situation. The word "simply" is somewhat misleading because people tend to believe that their responses to a problem situation are rational and understandable (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 20). In chronic problem situations this is particularly so because of the stability of the ecosystem within which the problem is taking place.

Furthermore, from a cause-effect perspective, the rejection of a belief that is held to be "true" necessitates its replacement by another "truth". On each occasion that this happens the person's perception of who they think they are and the meanings they give to problem situations are challenged. The ecosystemic approach addresses this problem because it allows '... people to adopt new explanations about behavior without rejecting old ones. Instead of rejecting your current interpretation of the problem behavior, you are asked to entertain the possibility that other explanations can be true and that some of them may help you solve your problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 20).

It is these new interpretations that allow the teacher to adopt a new and different response towards a chronic problem behaviour and articulate this to those involved. In doing so the teacher radically changes the usual pattern of responses that surround the problem and this has the potential to change the entire ecosystem in a constructive way.

In addition to identifying new interpretations and behaving differently, the ecosystemic approach offers five other procedures designed to aid the teachers' prospect of implementing successful ecosystemic interventions. These are discussed in the following Sections.

2.3.2 PREREQUISITES FOR USING THE TECHNIQUES

Molnar and Lindquist (1989) identify five ecosystemic procedures which can be followed in order to enhance the teacher's ability to change chronic problem

behaviour. These procedures are designed to enable the teacher to view problems within an ecosystemic framework and therefore produce alternative explanations that may create change. For all these procedures the onus is placed upon the teacher (as opposed to the pupil) to change her or his perception of the problem and/or behaviour in relation to it. As Molnar and Lindquist explain;

> ... it is easier for the educator, as the person who experiences the problem, to change her or his thinking or behavior as a way of encouraging change in a chronic problem situation than it is for the educator to change someone else's behavior or thinking. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 43)

The present Section discusses these five procedures and although they may, in and of themselves, produce change they are not discussed here as specific ecosystemic techniques but as possible prerequisites for change. Where appropriate, comments from other authors have been provided.

2.3.2.1 ADOPT A COOPERATIVE PERSPECTIVE

A core theme within the ecosystemic approach is the teacher's ability to entertain the possibility that all behaviour has multiple meaning and that these meanings are equally true for those involved in the problem situation. In other words, teachers need to be empathic. Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, call this "adopting a cooperative perspective" and describe the essence of this as being, '... the ability to regard a person's problem behavior as understandable, given that person's perception of the situation ...' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 21). From an ecosystemic perspective, empathising with pupils can help teachers by helping them to see '... the rational and understandable reasons for a behavior you [the teacher] had previously considered irrational and negative' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 21).

This concept encourages the teacher to view the problem situation from a perspective other than her or his own and encourages the use of positive explanations. Molnar and Lindquist (1989) offer this concept as an alternative to the concept of resistance. The latter is based on the belief that individuals who do not change their behaviour are offering resistance to the strategies being used and

the teacher must overcome this resistance if the problem is to be solved. This perspective can result in a relationship based on conflict where neither party wishes to relinquish "power" or "control" and both struggle to be "a winner". However:

> Since the concept of cooperation encourages the use of positive explanations of the behavior of others, it also helps to avoid struggles and to construct solutions in which there are only winners instead of winners and losers. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 24-25)

Cooper and Upton (1992) provide an alternative insight into the effects of adopting a co-operative perspective in chronic problem situations. They suggest that through the use of co-operation 'it could be said that the control of the problematic behaviour has now passed from the student to the teacher. Where the behaviour may have been perceived in the past as a means by which the student gained control over the teacher ... it has now become a means by which the teacher exerts control over the student' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 76).

This is a contentious suggestion, as the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools is not concerned with the control of such behaviour but with the constructive change of chronic problem situations through co-operation between the concerned parties. To suggest that "the teacher exerts control over the student" implies a hierarchical system of power - a mechanistic view of systems which the ecosystemic approach rejects (see Section 2.1.1). Indeed, ecosystemically, the only power a teacher has over chronic problem behaviour is the power to change her perception of, or behaviour towards, such chronic problem situations.

As a point of interest, in the same article Cooper and Upton also suggest that; 'a key feature shared by ecosystemic intervention strategies ... is that, when they succeed, individuals change their behaviour and become more co-operative with others whilst retaining their sense of control over their own behaviour' (Cooper and Upton, p. 75).

This seems to contradict the previous statement and suggests that the issue of "control" requires further investigation. However, such theoretical issues are

beyond the scope of the present investigation and, as such, are not explored any further.

In any event, viewing chronic problem behaviour from a co-operative perspective can allow the teacher to perceive and respond to problem situations in a new and often constructive way. The following Section further discusses how teachers can enhance their prospect of achieving constructive change within a chronic problem situation by being a detective.

2.3.2.2 BE A DETECTIVE

Ecosystemics is designed to help the teacher to see the role she is playing in a problem situation and to change that role in a way that will positively influence the problem. To do this Molnar and Lindquist (1989) suggest that the teacher treat a problem as though it were a mystery to be solved. They suggest that teachers act as "sleuths", look for clues and gather information that will be used to develop a theory on how to solve the "case". They also suggest that, '... the process of constructing and trying out new theories continues until the "case" is solved ... [and] ... the demolition of one theory helps provide additional information about how to construct amore useful one' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 30).

A number of questions can be asked by the teacher to help her or him gather clues that are pertinent to solving the problem situation. Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, provide the following examples:

1) What is the pattern that keeps repeating itself in this situation?
2) How do the various people involved perceive the behavior in question?
3) What are the positive ways of interpreting the situation?
4) What would be a sign that things are on the way to getting better?
5) What will this room, school, playground be like when the problem behavior has stopped?
6) What is happening in the situation that I do not want to change?

(see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 30-31)

The exploration of these questions makes it '... necessary for the teacher to establish an awareness of his/her phenomenological interpretation of the situation, and to set this against those of others, particularly students' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, pp. 72-72). This inevitably will require the teacher to become self-analytical where '... evidence for the existence of the problem is amassed and scrutinised, along with the teacher's behavioural expectations' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 73).

In addition to looking at the above questions, a number of clues should be sought to help the teacher to see the problem behaviour from the pupil's perspective. Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, suggest that the best source for clues are likely to be the "problem" person's figurative language and information about the pupil's interests and activities. These pieces of information are used '... metaphorically to communicate in the problem situation' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 31).

Cooper and Upton (1992) explain why figurative language can be useful to teachers. They suggest that:

> Since it is through figurative language that we make personal sense
> of the reality around us, it follows that teachers will communicate
> more effectively with students if they make use of their figurative
> language, and use this as an exploratory tool in defining situations
> from the student's viewpoint. (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 73)

Furthermore, when the teacher uses figurative language it may allow the pupil to reveal more clearly her or his perspective of the situation. It can also help the teacher to change their "usual" way of discussing the problem situation with the individual(s) concerned.

Noticing the changes in a problem situation as they occur is an important part of being a sleuth. Indeed:

> Noticing positive change will serve as a source of encouragement
> and help make it easier to consider solutions that may be different
> than the particular solution you had originally imagined. (Molnar
> and Lindquist, 1989, p.34)

However, often seemingly insignificant or unrelated changes are not taken note of '... because they are not perceived as solutions or as contributing to the problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.35). The ecosystemic approach encourages teachers to not only notice changes in the problem behaviour but also to notice any positive changes within the entire ecosystem. This is important because ecosystemically, change in any part of the ecosystem will influence all those that are part of it. Recognising changes as they occur helps the teacher to '... shed new light on the problem situation and the people in it' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 38). Indeed:

> Teachers must also be constantly alert to positive changes, however
> apparently insignificant, which occur in the classroom ecosystem,
> whether or not they appear to be related to the problem situation or
> not. Such minor changes may give rise to hitherto unthought of
> solutions. (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 73)

The identification of positive changes within and around a chronic problem situation can be made difficult by the prevailing negative perceptions and emotions that so often accompany teachers' responses to chronic problem behaviours. The following Section addresses this issue by suggesting that teachers adopt a light hearted approach towards chronic problem situations.

2.3.2.3 HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOUR

Being able to think of positive explanations of problem behaviour is vital if the ecosystemic techniques are to be used successfully. However, people in chronic problem situations often find it difficult to feel positively towards the situation. Often it is the very strength of negative feelings that '... inhibits the flexibility of thought and the creativity that is so helpful in changing things' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 39).
Molnar and Lindquist also suggest that the ability to be light hearted about a problem situation may, in and of itself, be enough to change the situation:

> The ability to find the humor in a situation that had previously
> produced only clenched teeth and a knotted stomach is a big

change and is often enough, in itself, to influence events positively.
(Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 39)

Having a sense of humour about chronic problem situations teachers are facing is a paradoxical way of changing your perceptions of that situation. The following Section discusses the advantages of being paradoxical within chronic problem situations.

2.3.2.4 BE PARADOXICAL

The perceptions and behaviours of people in a chronic problem situation can be locked by the stability of the ecosystem. People's commonsense views become resistant to change even in the face of repeated failure. Molnar and Lindquist (1989) suggest that paradoxical techniques can be used to introduce new interpretations of the problem situations without the need to challenge these commonsense views. Paradoxical techniques allow other views to accompany commonsense views by recognising that many perceptions can be equally "true" at any given time. Paradoxical interpretations will often seem self contradictory but they are an alternative perspective that may help create change.

Molnar and Lindquist also suggest that these techniques can be used to change a problem situation by encouraging the teacher to focus on the non problematic parts of the ecosystem:

> If you think of the problem situation as part of a larger pattern of ecosystemic relationships, one way of solving the problem is, paradoxically, to concentrate on those aspects of the person or of the situation that are not problematic. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 40)

Taking a paradoxical stance with chronic problem behaviour is a central theme within the seven ecosystemic techniques. The following Section introduces the final prerequisite for using these techniques, that of sincerity.

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2.3.2.5 BE SINCERE

The ecosystemic approach rejects the notion that a single "cause" can be attributed to a problem situation. The approach ignores commonsense views about a problem because these are often based on the "truthfulness" of one cause over another. The ability to find and act upon different, but equally valid, "truths" in order to change a problem situation is the basis for many ecosystemic techniques. To achieve this goal the teacher needs to set aside her commonsense views and do so honestly and sincerely because '... saying one thing and thinking something else in order to trick another person into doing what you want' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.44) contradicts the ecosystemic approach and must be avoided. Indeed, Molnar and Lindquist (1989) are clear on this issue:

> If, in any problem situation, you [the teacher] find that you cannot honestly describe the behavior or the situation in a new way, then you should not attempt to use ecosystemic techniques. The techniques are not mind games used for saying one thing while thinking another. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 44)

The importance of being sincere when implementing the ecosystemic techniques should not be underestimated. Indeed, each of the techniques require that teachers honestly and sincerely implement ecosystemic interventions. It is the ecosystemic techniques themselves that are discussed in the following Sections.

2.4 THE ECOSYSTEMIC TECHNIQUES

In the present section the seven ecosystemic techniques are discussed and analysed. Molnar and Lindquist (1989) are the only authors who provide a clear and detailed description of these techniques and as such the following sections have primarily been informed by their book "Changing Problem Behavior in Schools". The discussion begins by introducing recommendations for the type of problem situations that Molnar and Lindquist (1989) believe to be the most appropriate for ecosystemic interventions. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of each of the seven ecosystemic techniques. The techniques are described and their implementation procedures outlined. Finally, potential outcomes of ecosystemic interventions are provided for each technique.

Molnar and Lindquist (1989) offer three recommendations for the type of problem situations which they believe to be most appropriate for the successful implementation of ecosystemic intervention strategies. First, they recommend that the ecosystemic techniques be used in chronic problem situations. These are ongoing problem situations that, despite the use of previously successful intervention strategies, continue to be problematical for the teacher. Cooper and Upton (1992) elaborate upon this description of chronic problem behaviour in schools. They offer the term "oppositional" behaviour as a way of describing behaviour that represents '... deliberate and repeated infringements of classroom rules which teachers impose in order to create, what they believe to be, the necessary conditions for effective teaching and learning to take place' (Cooper and Upton, 1992, p. 70).

Second, Molnar and Lindquist recommend that ecosystemic techniques should not replace the use of psychological or therapeutic intervention, Local Authority legislation or school policies, but be used in addition to these requirements. Indeed, the procedures in Molnar and Lindquist's book '... are intended to help school personnel in their daily or weekly contact with the student that continue even after a report has been filed or some other required procedure has been implemented' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 42). In this respect, ecosystemic interventions are designed to be used alongside other approaches adopted by teachers for dealing with problem behaviour.

Similarly, Cooper and Upton (1992) point out that there may be situations in which a more detailed inquiry into the problem behaviour is required. They suggest that, 'joint systems interventions which involve school and family, would clearly remain within the province of the specialist family therapist' (Cooper and Upton, 1990a, p. 319). Molnar and Lindquist support this by suggesting; 'there are times when it is appropriate to refer students and their families for therapy' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 42).

Finally, Molnar and Lindquist suggest that there may be situations in which ecosystemic interventions should not be used or should be used as part of other intervention strategies. In particular they isolate crisis situations as being inappropriate for ecosystemic interventions by teachers. Although ecosystemic techniques have been used in crisis situations by experienced therapists and teachers, Molnar and Lindquist recommend that they be used '... in chronic

problem situations in which the problematic behavior and response to it are predictable' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.42).

Ecosystemically, any change in the interpersonal relationship between teacher and pupil has the potential to change a chronic problem situation in a constructive way. The following Sections discuss the ecosystemic techniques that Molnar and Lindquist offer as a way of encouraging constructive change of chronic problem behaviour. Each technique is discussed in turn with their essential elements being listed and analysed. In addition, case examples taken from Molnar and Lindquist's book, and which illustrate the practical application of each technique, are provided within Appendix 1.

2.4.1 THE REFRAMING TECHNIQUE

The Reframing technique is described by Molnar and Lindquist (1989) as the formulation, by the teacher, of a positive alternative interpretation of the problem behaviour and the introduction of this interpretation into the problem situation by acting in ways that are consistent with it. Although Reframing is described here as a specific technique, it underpins all ecosystemic intervention strategies. Indeed:

> Reframing embodies the belief that problem behavior can be legitimately interpreted in a variety of ways, as well as the belief that everyone, even "problem people", view their behavior as appropriate to the situation as they perceive it. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 60)

Within an ecosystem such as a school or classroom Reframing has the potential to effect all the members of the ecosystem. However, 'all reframings have their initial effect on the person formulating the reframing. It is this new perceptual frame that allows them to say and do things differently' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 52).

When used by a teacher, the technique requires a new perceptual "frame" of the problem behaviour to be formulated. This perceptual "frame" should be based on three essential elements which are outlined below;

(i) *The perceptual frame should be positive*. This element can be achieved by the teacher being aware of his or her interpretations of the behaviour before reframing begins. Identifying the negative interpretations that had been applied to the problem behaviour allows the teacher to reflect on the inappropriateness of them in changing constructively the problem and to develop a positive alternative interpretation.

(ii) *The perceptual frame should fit the facts*. This element requires the teacher to act as a "sleuth" (see Section 2.3.3.2). An analysis of the problem situation, the pattern of behaviour and the people and places involved, will allow the teacher to formulate a new perceptual frame that is feasible to all involved. This element is linked to the third point.

(iii) *The perceptual frame should be plausible*. An understanding of the situation can allow the teacher to formulate a new perceptual frame that is plausible to him or her. This is important because only then can the reframing be carried out with sincerity and therefore be taken seriously by the pupil(s) involved.

In addition, the teacher should act in ways that are consistent with his or her new perceptual frame. To be able to do this sincerely the teacher must believe the new interpretation to be a possible "truth". 'Acting towards a person based on what one believes to be true about that person tends to strengthen that aspect or truth and to create that reality' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.51). Molnar and Lindquist also suggest that:

> Using Reframing will help you to see many aspects of or truths about the behavior of others and allow you to select an aspect of or truth about another person that you would like to enhance or strengthen by behaving toward that person with this new description of her or him in mind. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 60)

The case examples that Molnar and Lindquist use to illustrate the Reframing technique describe some of the positive outcomes of a reframing intervention (see Appendix 1 for a copy of a case example illustrating the Reframing technique). These include:

> Reframing a chronic problem situation can alter the pattern of interaction that had defined that situation (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 47-49).

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Reframing a chronic problem situation can create a new situation that is different from the problem situation (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 49-51).

Reframing generates new alternative solutions to be used in what have become chronic problem situations (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 55-58).

Using Reframing helps teachers to see many aspects of or truths about the behaviour of others that they would like to enhance or strengthen by behaving toward that person with this new description of her or him in mind. (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 58-60).

Formulating a new perceptual frame of the problem behaviour can create a new situation, one that is very different from the problem situation. It can also allow the teacher to react very differently to the situation. 'Reframing, because it changes one's view of a problem situation, generates new alternative solutions to be used in what have become chronic problem situations' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.58).

2.4.2 THE POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF-MOTIVE-TECHNIQUE

The Positive-Connotation-of-Motive technique is described by Molnar and Lindquist (1989) as the identification of possible positive motivations for problem behaviour and the introduction of this interpretation into the problem situation by the teacher acting in ways that reflect recognition of the positive motive.

Attributing a motive for a problem behaviour is a way of explaining that behaviour. Often, motives attributed by teachers to a problem behaviour are negative and therefore the explanations of that behaviour also tend to be negative. Chronic problem situations are characterised by stability and this stability can be facilitated by negative perceptions.

Ecosystemically, it is suggested that 'the motive you attribute to the behavior of another person represents a hypothetical explanation for that persons behavior'

(Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.63). Viewed in this way, all attributed motives (negative or positive) are hypothetical and therefore equally accurate (or inaccurate). In chronic problem situations negative interpretations of motives for the behaviour may do little to change that behaviour. They may be viewed by the teacher as being accurate but if they do not change the behaviour in a constructive way then they can become part of the problem. Positive attributions of motive are also hypothetical, however, the value of these can be determined by their effectiveness in changing the problem situation.

The Positive-Connotation-of-Motive technique is based on a number of essential elements which are outlined below:

(i) *The teacher needs to be aware of the motives she or he currently attributes to the pupil(s) exhibiting the problem behaviour.* As the attribution of motive to anyone's behaviour is hypothetical it is not possible to ascertain whether or not it is accurate. If the attributed motive is not changing the problem situation in a constructive way (as will often be the case in chronic problem situations) it needs to be changed. By evaluating the current effectiveness of the attributed motive the teacher can reflect on their inappropriateness and act accordingly.

(ii) *The teacher should formulate alternative motives for the problem behaviour that are positive.* This element is indicative of the ecosystemic idea that many different motives can be attributed to a problem behaviour and that each can be equally "true". Describing the motive in many and varying positive ways can allow the teacher to explain the behaviour positively.

(iii) *The teacher needs to select a plausible positive motive for the problem behaviour.* The selection of a plausible positive motive does not suggest that this particular choice is the correct one because all positive motives are possible "truths". Equally, failure of the chosen positive motive does not necessarily mean failure of the technique, but that, for this particular problem situation, it is not appropriate for constructive change. The teacher must attempt to respond to the pupil in a new way that is based on the positive motives she thinks could be possible.

(iv) *The teacher should formulate a sentence or two which describes the new positive motive for the behaviour.* This encourages the teacher to express

explicitly, to him or herself, the implied new interpretation of the problem situation and provides a foundation for the final essential element below.

(v) *The teacher needs to act in ways that reflect recognition of the positive motive.* As with all ecosystemic techniques, the teacher must be able to act in a sincere way as only then will the pupil(s) be likely to take her or him seriously.

The acid test for the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive technique is its effectiveness in constructively changing the problem situation. There is no guarantee that the chosen attributed positive motive will change the problem situation. Indeed, it can be '... difficult to maintain this new, different way of reacting if the student initially continues to respond in the old ways' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.72). However, the many case examples used by Molnar and Lindquist suggest that the technique can be successful (see Appendix 1 for a copy of a case example illustrating the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive technique). The following outcomes of positively connotating a pupil's motive for problem behaviour have been selected from these case examples and illustrate some of the constructive changes which can occur:

> The pupil may respond positively to having his behavior described as being motivated by something positive and adopt the positive motive the teacher has attributed to him (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 65-67).

> Positive connotation is an alternative technique that can be used by the teacher (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 68-69).

> Using positive connotation to solve a chronic problem with a colleague can enhance their professional relationship while working to the benefit of the pupil(s) involved (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 70-72).
> The teacher may, for the first time, recognise that the pupils behaviour stems from positive motives. The acknowledgment of this possibility may contribute to a change in the teacher's and/or pupil's behaviour (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 77-78).

As Molnar and Lindquist explain:

> Attributing a positive motive to behaviour you [teachers] do not
> like can help to improve the problem situation, because if you
> [teachers] attribute a positive motive to the problem behaviour, you
> [teachers] may well be less bothered by it. Also, you [teachers]
> may begin to respond differently if you think of the motives for the
> behaviour as positive. Once these changes are made, the problem
> situation cannot remain the same. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.
> 80)

As a final point of interest, it is apparent that the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive
technique is very similar to the Reframing technique, as both seek to identify
positive interpretations of chronic problem behaviour. However, where
Reframing is a general technique designed to be used in any chronic problem
situation, the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive technique is designed specifically
for use in problem situations where positive alternative *motives* for a problem
behaviour are sought by the teacher. In this respect, the Positive-Connotation-of-
Motive technique can be described as being more focused than Reframing.

2.4.3 THE POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF-FUNCTION TECHNIQUE

The Positive-Connotation-of-Function technique is described by Molnar and
Lindquist (1989) as the identification of positive functions for a problem
behaviour and the introduction of this interpretation into the problem situation by
responding in ways that reflect recognition of the positive function.

It is important to make ecosystemic distinctions between "motivation" and
"function". Ecosystemically, the motivation for a behaviour is a "truthful" and
appropriate perception of a situation that drives an individual to behave in a
particular way. The "function" of a behaviour is a "truthful" and appropriate
perception of what will be the outcome of the behaviour.

It is not uncommon for a teacher to attribute a motive for a problem behaviour.
However, the functions of a behaviour are often overlooked (Molnar and
Lindquist, 1989). Even when the function of a behaviour is recognised, it will

tend to be based on the teacher's negative interpretation of the function. Negative connotations of function may be accurate perceptions of a pupil's desired outcome of their behaviour. However, if the teacher's perceptions do not constructively change a problem situation then they can become part of that problem.

The positive-connotation-of-function technique is based on a number of essential elements, namely;

(i) *The teacher needs to b aware of the functions currently recognised for the problem behaviour.* Evaluating the effectiveness of the functions presently recognised allows the teacher to reflect on their inappropriateness. It is important to view an individual's behaviour in the context in which it occurred. 'When problems arise, we tend to look inside the person for the cause of the problem and tend not to see the context in which the problem occurs or look for aspects of the context that influence the problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 94).

The interactions of people influences the context in which a problem behavior occurs, they are part of the context. Recognizing this point '... is valuable in suggesting a place to begin to change problem situations' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.94).

(ii) *The teacher should identify alternative positive functions for the behaviour.* The technique requires the teacher to identify as many positive functions as possible. In chronic problem situations this can be difficult because the function of a problem behaviour can be very different from the outcome intended by the person whose behaviour is being described. 'When identifying positive functions for a behavior, it is helpful to remember that a function is the relationship between the behavior and the other elements in the ecosystem and is not the same as the intended result' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 84).

Seen this way, the teacher can formulate positive connotations of functions for a behaviour which has previously been seen negatively. This can help the teacher to determine how to behave differently in the problem situation.

(iii) *The teacher needs to select a plausible positive function for the behaviour.* There are many possible positive functions that can be selected but the teacher is asked to select at least one that they feel they can articulate sincerely. By identifying a positive function for a problem behaviour that is truly recognised as positive, the teacher can behave toward the pupil in a new way that is genuine.

(iv) *The teacher should behave in ways that acknowledge and are consistent with the positive function.* The teacher must behave sincerely if the pupil(s) are to respond well.

Looking for positive ecosystemic functions of problem behaviour can help the teacher to see the context in which the problem occurs. The new perceptual frame developed from this understanding can help in determining how the teacher can behave differently in a problem situation. Ecosystemically, a problem behaviour has both negative and positive functions and these influence the ecosystem in which they occur. Recognising positive functions of a problem behaviour can be difficult because the functions of the behaviour do not necessarily reflect the desired outcome.

However, the case examples used by Molnar and Lindquist (1989) explain that the technique can be successful (see Appendix 1 for a copy of a case example illustrating the Positive-Connotation-of-Function technique). The following are examples that illustrate some of the constructive outcomes that can occur;

It can suggest to the pupil a function for their behaviour that they may or may not have intended and, in doing so, define their behaviour in a positive light (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 85-87).
It can help the teacher to positively connotate problem behaviours that seem to have only negative qualities (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 88-90).

Initial changes in the ecosystem, created by positively connotating a function for a problem behaviour, can have ongoing positive influences both in that and other ecosystems (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 95-97).

As Molnar and Lindquist explain:

> Looking at the function in a positive light can lead to seeing a
> positive ecosystemic function for the behavior. Responding to the
> behavior with the view toward the positive function it may have for
> the classroom can lead to dramatic changes (Molnar and
> Lindquist, 1989, p. 91).

As a final point, it is interesting to note that positively connotating the function
of a chronic problem behaviour, while being more focused, is very similar to
Reframing chronic problem situations. In light of this, it is suggested that the
Reframing technique and the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive and Function
techniques could be presented as a single basic technique with adaptations being
available to teachers in differing chronic problem situations. However, at this
early stage of research into the ecosystemic approach in England it would be
inappropriate for this suggestion to be implemented within the present study.

2.4.4 THE SYMPTOM-PRESCRIPTION TECHNIQUE

The Symptom-Prescription technique is described by Molnar and Lindquist
(1989) as the identification of possible ways a problem behaviour can be
performed differently yet regarded positively by the teacher and the request that
the behaviour continue in one of these modified positive ways.

> In essence, symptom prescription involves asking for the problem
> behavior to continue, the proviso being that it continue for a
> different reason and/or at a different time and/or place and/or in
> some modified form. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.102)

This technique is the epitome of the paradoxical method ecosystemic techniques
use to change chronic problem behaviour constructively. It is also closely linked
to the concept of cooperation because asking a person to continue behaving the
way they are, but differently, is an acknowledgment that their behaviour is
appropriate and deemed necessary for them. 'You also tacitly communicate that
life in school involves the negotiation of mutually acceptable behaviors' (Molnar
and Lindquist, 1989, p. 103).

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The symptom-prescription technique is based on a number of essential elements that are outlined below.

(i) *Teachers should be aware of their current attempts to convince the pupil(s) to stop the problem behaviour.* Ecosystemically, the behaviour of a person is meaningful and appropriate for that person regardless of the implications (positive or negative) of their behaviour. Attempts by the teacher to stop the problem behaviour fail to acknowledge this point and, ecosystemically, can contribute to the continuation of the problem situation.

(ii) *The teacher needs to identify ways the problem behaviour can be performed differently.* It is important that the teacher identify as many different ways the behaviour can be performed as possible. This is because with this technique '... in particular there is at first the concern that asking someone to perform a problem behavior will make things worse' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 115).

Indeed, sometimes the problem behaviour may initially increase. 'However, any change - even a temporary increase in the problem behavior - is a change in the pattern of the chronic problem situation that can provide clues leading to alternative solutions' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 115-116). Identifying many different ways in which a problem behaviour can be performed differently provides the teacher with many different possible avenues to follow should the chosen strategy not succeed.

(iii) *The teacher needs to select one or more of the different ways the problem behaviour can be performed and positively regard it in some way.* The teacher must adopt an attitude that he or she feels can be articulated to the pupil(s) in a sincere way, i.e. 'that the chronic problem behavior may be useful in the problem situation and/or that the person engaging in the behavior has a good reason for the behavior under the circumstances' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 118).

(iv) *The teacher should request that the behaviour continue in the chosen modified, positive way.* The modification of the teacher's perception of the problem behaviour may not always remain static. As the problem behaviour improves the teacher may need to modify his or her already modified

perception of the behaviour to fit the problem situation at hand. The aim of the teacher is to constructively change the problem situation.

With the symptom-prescription technique it is often the pupil who indicates to the teacher what changes need to be made as the problem situation improves. The teacher's role is to cooperate with the pupil, with the understanding that the behaviour is appropriate and necessary for the individual performing it.
Molnar and Lindquist provide case examples which demonstrate some of the constructive changes which can occur when implementing the Symptom-Prescription technique (see Appendix 1 for a copy of a case example illustrating the Symptom-Prescription technique). These include;

> One of the characteristic experiences described by educators when they use symptom-prescription is that they no longer feel like they are struggling with the student to get the student to change. Rather, they describe creating a new situation in which they can agree with the student about what should be done. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 106)

The benefits of this cooperation can also be experienced by the pupil whose behaviour is being modified:

> Often with the technique of symptom-prescription, the persons whose behavior has been "prescribed" reacts by indicating that for the first time she or he feels understood. Interestingly, people often change when it is no longer necessary to convince others of the validity of their behavior in the problem situation. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 108)

In addition, cooperation can lead to an exchange of perspectives between pupil and teacher where the pupil adopts the suggested modified, positive way of performing the problem behaviour:

> It is not unusual when using symptom prescription to see this kind of exchange of perspective between the person using the technique and the other person involved. As the person using symptom prescription cooperates with, instead of struggles against, the problem person's perception and/or behavior, the problem person reciprocates. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 110)

2.4.5 THE STORMING-THE-BACK-DOOR TECHNIQUE

The Storming-the-Back-Door technique is described by Molnar and Lindquist (1989) as the identification of nonproblem aspects of the person who's behaviour is problematic and the communication of this by the teacher using positive comments about the individual and to the individual.

This technique is very different from the previous techniques described. While these have focused on changing the chronic problem behaviour directly, Storming-the-Back-Door focuses on constructively changing the behaviour indirectly. The technique encapsulates the ecosystemic idea that all elements of an ecosystem are related and change in any part of the ecosystem has the potential to change problem situations in a positive way:

> Storming-the-back-door is our metaphorical way of saying that in problem situations the problem is like a strongly bolted door standing between you (the teacher) and a more constructive relationship. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 122)

The technique offers an alternative to the teacher finding 'a battering ram string enough to break down the door' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 122) and suggests alternative ways of breaching the barrier.

The technique was devised in response to problems that did not respond to any of the techniques previously described. Furthermore, 'although this technique was initially developed after we found that nothing else seemed to be working with a problem behavior, it is often the first choice for people once they try it' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 122). The reason for this preference may be that the teacher is asked to identify aspects of the problem individual that present themselves as being innately positive. Unlike the other techniques described, this requires little paradoxical reasoning and therefore may be more easily attainable.

The Storming-the-Back-Door technique is based on a number of essential elements which are outlined below;

(i) *The teacher needs to identify nonproblem aspects of the ecosystem that involve the pupil(s) whose behaviour is perceived to be a problem.* The

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teacher is asked to ignore the problem behaviour and focus on the positive, nonproblem behaviours, characteristics, relationships or aspects of the person(s) involved.

(ii) *The teacher should identify several possible positive attributes or behaviours of the problem person.* The requirement that several positive attributes or behaviours be identified allows the teacher to have a variety of options to choose from when attempting the third essential element below.

(iii) *The teacher should select a positive attribute or behaviour.* It is important that the teacher selects an attribute or behaviour that he or she sincerely believe to be positive.

(iv) *The teacher needs to formulate a way of communicating positive comments about the chosen attribute or behaviour.* The teacher is asked to think of behaviours that will articulate, to the problem person, an acknowledgment of that attribute or behaviour.

(v) *The teacher should communicate the positive comment to the problem person.* 'The key is that whatever the behavior of the teacher, it is new or different and is not connected to the problem behavior' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 122).

Ecosystemically, whether the change of behaviour takes place in the setting of the problem situation or outside should be unimportant because '... since all elements of the ecosystem are related, a change in a nonproblem part of the ecosystem has the potential to influence the problem behavior' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 121). However, 'changes in one part of an ecosystem do not affect every part with the same force. Nor is every part of an ecosystem affected in the same way by a given change' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 126). The likelihood of a change in one part of the ecosystem to then influence the entire ecosystem is often determined by the ecosystemic boundary. '... as a practical matter the functional boundary of an ecosystem is often the same as the setting in which the problem occurs, that is, the classroom, hallway, family and so on' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 126).

This suggests, first, that the teacher should focus on communicating her or his behaviour within the setting of the problem situation. Second, that the teacher be

aware of the possibility that communication outside this setting may also be successful in positively changing the problem situation.

Paradoxical interventions can be difficult to implement because they are often very different from the teachers' commonsense views about chronic problem behaviour. However, Molnar and Lindquist provide case examples which illustrate some of the constructive changes that can occur as a result of the Storming-the-Back-Door technique (see Appendix 1 for a copy of a case example illustrating the Storming-the-Back-door technique). These include:

> Storming-the-Back-Door can allow the teacher to respond differently toward chronic problem behaviours without challenging their commonsense views (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 129-130).

> Storming-the-Back-Door can provide relief from a chronic problem situation in which teachers feel powerless (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 123-126).

> Storming-the-Sack-Door allows teachers to identify positive characteristics of a "problem" pupil and in doing so help to increase these characteristics (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 126-127).

The Storming-the-Back-Door technique offers the teacher a way of constructively changing a problem situation when other ecosystemic techniques have failed to do so. It is a way of approaching problem situations which does not involve the destruction of relationships. Metaphorically, the teacher does not need to find a battering ram strong enough to break down the door. Instead, 'it is sometimes possible to walk round to the frequently unlocked back door and just walk in' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 122).

2.4.6 THE LOCATING-EXCEPTIONS TECHNIQUE

The Locating-Exceptions technique is described by Molnar and Lindquist (1989) as the identification of a person's positive behaviours that occur outside the problem situation and the formulation of an approach that increases the possibility of these positive behaviours continuing.

This technique is an extension of the Storming-the-Back-Door technique. While Storming-the-Back-Door is designed to be nonspecific, Locating-Exceptions is designed to focus the teacher's attention onto specific nonproblem behaviours without referring to the problem situation (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 133). The technique focuses on the entire ecosystem, as opposed to the problem specific ecosystem, and attempts to change the problem behaviour by influencing specific parts of the ecosystem. As opposed to focusing on the problem parts of the ecosystem, emphasis is placed on identifying anything '... that involves the problem person but that is not a problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 133).

The Locating-Exceptions technique is based on a number of essential elements which are outlined below;

(i) *The teacher needs to identify situations when the problem behaviour is not occurring.* The teacher is asked to draw his or her attention to nonproblem behaviours of the person and note the situations where these behaviours occur. This helps the teacher to identify what the problem person does that is positive. 'In addition, it helps to recognise that your [the teacher's] behavior in relation to the problem person is effective when that person is not causing a problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 132).

(ii) *The teacher should distinguish between situations where the problem does occur and where is does not.* This helps the teacher to identify situations where her or his behaviour works well with the problem individual. It also helps the teacher to identify what behaviours, qualities and characteristics of the problem person she or he would like to encourage and suggests to the teacher what situations do not need to be changed. In doing so, the teacher will '... begin to see the differences between the problem situation and other situations. Often identifying these differences is the first step towards positive change' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 133).

(iii) *The teacher needs to select a nonproblem behaviour or nonproblem situation that would be easiest to increase in frequency.* To help the teacher to select the appropriate behaviour or situation two questions are asked. First, how does she or he behave differently towards the problem person in nonproblem situations? Second, what is he or she already doing to encourage the nonproblem behaviour(s)?

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(iv) *The teacher should formulate an approach to increasing the time spent in the nonproblem situation or the incidence of the nonproblem behaviour.* The teacher is asked to use her or his knowledge of the nonproblem situation, what behaviours work well with the individual and the behaviours they wish to encourage. To do this effectively the teacher needs to act as a sleuth and identify '... the resources and strengths present in the ecosystem ... that is, what do I (we) do well that can be used as a foundation to do even better? (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 132).

The Locating-Exceptions technique focuses on identifying the positive behaviours of a problem person or the positive situations that involve this person. This is different from other ecosystemic techniques because '... it emphasizes increasingly the instances of positive behavior rather than focuses on how to decrease problem behavior' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 142). With this positive focus the teacher may establish a cooperative relationship with the problem person(s). Indeed, 'the result of using locating exceptions is often a generally more positive attitude toward the person whose behavior is problematic' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 142).

The case examples which Molnar and Lindquist provide demonstrate other constructive outcomes of the Locating-Exceptions technique (see Appendix 1 for a copy of a case example illustrating the Locating-Exceptions). These include;

> Locating-Exceptions allows the teacher to discover positive aspects of a "problem" pupil that had previously been hidden by the prevalence of negative perceptions and reactions toward the pupil's behaviour (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 134-135).

> Locating-Exceptions provides encouragement for teachers to keep looking for solutions to chronic problem behaviour (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 135-136).

> Locating-Exceptions can help teachers to think differently about chronic problem behaviour and utilise their strengths in finding a solution (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 137-139).

Locating-Exceptions can change the relationship between teacher and pupil from one of conflict to on based on co-operation (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 140-142).

Ecosystemic logic suggests that a change in the ecosystem, i.e. a positive focus instead of a problem focus, has the potential to influence the entire ecosystem. A change in perspective of the problem behaviour will, ecosystemically, change the ecosystem and thus the problem behaviour.

It is worthy of mention at this stage that the similarities between the Storming-the Back-Door and the Locating-Exceptions techniques may result in a degree of confusion when it comes to their implementation. Indeed, it may be difficult to differentiate between chronic problem situations which warrant Storming-the-Back-Door intervention and those which warrant Locating-Exceptions intervention. Although the ecosystemic approach leaves this decision to the professional judgment of the teacher, it is suggested that the techniques suffer from an unnecessary multiplication of categories. As such, it may be appropriate for the two techniques to be offered under a single technique. However, this suggestion is beyond the remit of the present study and, is therefore, only offered as a point of interest at this stage.

2.4.7 THE PREDICTING-A-RELAPSE TECHNIQUE

The Predicting-a-Relapse technique is described by Molnar and Lindquist (1989) as an acceptance of the re-emergence of problem behaviour as being part of the normal progress of constructively changing the problem, and the communication of this belief by acknowledging to the problem individual that the re-emergence is an understandable but temporary setback.

Chronic problem situations are characterised by interactions that repeatedly fail to positively change problem behaviour. The stability of ecosystems develops over considerable time, therefore making it difficult to change the cycle of interaction. While the ecosystemic approach offers the teacher ways of breaking this cycle, it also recognises that, 'in well-established patterns of behavior, it is to be expected that, after some change, there may be some reoccurrence of the old behavior or behavior pattern' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 144).

The Predicting-a-Relapse technique embodies this attitude and uses it to predict that a relapse is likely to occur. Predicting that there is likely to be a reoccurrence of the problem can help the teacher to focus on the positive changes that have already occurred within the ecosystem. Furthermore, it helps the teacher to view this relapse as a normal part of constructively changing chronic problem behaviour. By doing so, '... everyone in the problem situation can continue to cooperate and maintain the change by seeing the relapse as the exception and the changes as the rule' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 144-145).

As the Predicting-a-Relapse technique is used to support constructive changes of chronic problem behaviour once they have begun it is therefore designed to be used in conjunction with other ecosystemic techniques.

The technique is based on a number of essential elements which are outline below;

(i) *The teacher needs to realise that a relapse of a problem behaviour is a predictable event and is part of the normal process of positively changing the problem.* With this realisation the teacher is asked to assume the problem behaviour will recur instead of assuming the problem will not return. This protects the teacher from potential disappointment should the behaviour reappear. Indeed, 'if your [the teacher's] expectation is that the problem behavior will never reappear, then seeing it again can be very discouraging' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 151). This viewpoint also allows the teacher to continue focusing on the constructive changes that have already occurred.

(ii) *The teacher should describe the reappearance of the behaviour as a temporary relapse that is normal and expected.* Described in this way, the relapse of the problem behaviour becomes '... a sign that the normal processes of positive change are occurring rather than a cause for alarm' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p.145).

(iii) *The teacher should communicate this belief to the problem person.* Communication can take place before relapse occurs by the teacher predicting to the problem person that it would be normal for the relapse to happen. It can also be used after the relapse has taken place by telling the problem person that the relapse was a normal part of the change process and it could have been predicted.

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The implementation of the Predicting-a-Relapse technique can result in the constructive changes of chronic problem behaviour being maintained. The case examples in Molnar and Linquist's book demonstrate some of the changes which can occur (see Appendix 1 for a copy of a case example illustrating the Predicting-a-Relapse technique) The following are examples which illustrate some of these changes;

Acknowledging that a given chronic problem behaviour is likely to return and that this would be "normal" supports the co-operation already established between the teacher and pupil(s) involved (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 146-148).

Predicting-a-Relapse can often forestall a breakdown of the constructive changes that have already taken place (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 149).

Predicting that the chronic problem behaviour may reappear can help the teacher remember the positive changes that have taken place within the problem situation (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 150-151).

Predicting-a-Relapse can help teachers find a way of communicating with "problem" pupils in a co-operative way (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 153-154).

The Predicting-a-Relapse technique encourages teachers to focus on the positive changes that have occurred within a chronic problem situation. It does not ask teachers to question these changes but asks then to view the reemergence of a chronic problem behaviour as an understandable but temporary setback (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 155).

It would seem that the relationship between teacher and pupil may be threatened by pointing out the propensity for relapse to a problem person. However, the technique should not be accompanied by the attitude of '... you knew that person could not really change for the better (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 155). Instead, the teacher should clearly communicate that the relapse was a predictable, understandable, normal and temporary response. 'Paradoxically, pointing out the relapse, by describing it as normal, supports the cooperation as

well as the changes that have taken place in the problem situation' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 148)

In conclusion, Chapter 2 has provided an in-depth discussion of the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools and the seven ecosystemic techniques that can be adopted by teachers as a means of addressing such behaviour. It has been seen that the ecosystemic approach derived from systemic family therapy and was influenced by a phenomenological perspective of human systems. While considerable research on the ecosystemic approach has been carried out in the United States, the same cannot be said for Britain. As such, the vast majority of the discussion within the present chapter was based on the work by Molnar and Lindquist (1989). In their book 'Changing Problem Behavior in Schools' they discuss the theoretical background to the ecosystemic approach. In doing so, they offer an insight into the way an ecosystemic perspective views chronic problem behaviour. This insight was summarised in the present Chapter and elaborated upon by incorporating pertinent comment for other authors. This summary acted as a foundation from which the practical considerations for using the ecosystemic techniques could be discussed. Finally, the present Chapter discussed and analysed the seven ecosystemic techniques offered by Molnar and Lindquist.

The present Chapter has also demonstrated that viewing chronic problem behaviour in schools is a new and innovative approach and although the approach is not well developed enough to lay claim to sharply defined conceptual boundaries it has been successful in helping teachers to deal with chronic problem behaviour in the United States. However, no evidence has been gathered in Britain to support the contention that ecosystemic intervention strategies would be equally successful in addressing chronic problem behaviour in English schools. It was this lack of evidence that the present study intended to address. The following Chapter discusses the methodological issues that surround the present investigation and provides an insight into how and why decisions on particular methodological procedures were taken.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This Chapter discusses the methodological issues of the present study. Cohen and Manion (1994) summarise the aim of methodology as being '... to help us to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific inquiry but the process itself' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 39). Given this, the present Chapter aims at describing the process by which specific methods were chosen for the collection and analysis of data within the present study.

It is often useful to use comparative studies as a reference point from which methodological issues can be critically analysed and their applicability to similar studies assessed. However, such is the innovative nature of the present research that no such literature is available. The present study was therefore open to many potentially applicable methods within educational research and had to reach decisions as to which methods would be most appropriate for the collection and analysis of the type of data that was sought.

The following Section begins by introducing two contrasting perspectives on research methods, namely; the positivist and anti-positivist approaches. These approaches are described in Sections 3.2 and 3.3. Based on a theoretical understanding of the approaches, and the research requirements of the present study, a decision was made as to which approach would be most appropriate. Section 3.4 takes an in-depth look at specific methodological issues in the present study. The discussion outlines the methodological approaches that were deemed to be potentially useful and critically analyses each. The critical analysis provides an insight into how and why decisions were made about the applicability of the various approaches in relation to the requirements of the present study.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Cohen and Manion (1994, pp. 8-9) divide research methods in education into two contrasting perspectives, namely, the objective and subjective approaches. The

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objective approach aims to discover universal laws that explain and determine the social world. In contrast to this, the subjective approach challenges the existence of universal laws and favours an emphasis on the particular and the individual. Each perspective is based on a particular way of viewing and interpreting social reality. The first perspective holds that social reality is of an objective nature, external to the individual and imposed upon the consciousness from the outside; knowledge is tangible, real, and acquirable by all. The second perspective holds that social reality is of a subjective nature, the product of the individual's consciousness; knowledge is unique, based on the experience of the individual. This distinction is also characterised by the way each approach views human responses to their environment. The objective approach contends that humans respond mechanically to their environment, while the subjective approach believes that humans initiate their own response to their environment.

Each perspective has a profound influence on the researcher's choice of methodology. Scientific investigation by those who subscribe to the objective perspective, '... (or positivist) approach to the social world and who treat it like the world of natural phenomena as being hard, real and external to the individual' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 8), will predominantly use quantitative methods. However, those who favour the subjective perspective, '... (or anti-positivist) approach and who view the social world as being of a much softer, personal and man-created kind' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 8), will predominantly use qualitative methods.

Broadly speaking, the choice of methodology for this research falls within the "anti-positivist" approach to scientific investigation and is therefore predominantly qualitative. Care is taken here not to give the impression that only qualitative methods have been utilised. While the majority of the methods of inquiry used do focus upon those techniques found within the anti-positivist school of thought, not all areas of the investigation do so. Indeed, it was found that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies was required in order to ensure complete analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

A brief critical appraisal of the two approaches, provided in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 below, will illustrate the rationale for a predominantly qualitative approach. This will include a description of the common characteristics of, and arguments for and against, each approach. The implications for this research are also discussed.

3.2 THE POSITIVIST APPROACH

Positivists follow a general doctrine of positivism towards knowledge. Broadly speaking they reject metaphysical and speculative attempts to understand the world by reason, in favour of gaining knowledge through observation and experiment. Historically, the term positivism has been used in many different ways, so it is difficult to assign a specific meaning. However, there are a number of common characteristics that are identifiable.

First, positivism supposes 'that the methodological procedures of natural science may be directly applied to the social sciences ... [and] ... that the end product of investigations by the social scientist can be formulated in terms parallel to those of natural science' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p.12; after Giddens, 1975). These suppositions imply that the social scientist should act as an observer of social reality and express these observations as "laws" or generalisations, as is the case with observations of natural phenomena.

Second, positivists assume that events have causes that can be uncovered and understood. Furthermore, they assume that there is regularity in these causal links. This is known as the assumption of determinism; events in both the natural and social world are believed to be determined by cause\effect circumstances. The contention is that, by investigating the causal links of particular events, reliable conclusions can be made not only about the event specific but also about similar causes and events. Indeed, 'it is the ultimate aim of the [positivist] scientist to formulate laws to account for the happenings in the world around him, thus giving him a firm basis for prediction and control' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 13).

While causal links of phenomena within the natural world may be predictable and controllable, the same may not be true for the study of human behaviour. It is suggested that:

> Where positivism is less successful, however, is in its application
> to the study of human behaviour where the immense complexity of
> human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social
> phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the
> natural world. (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p.12)

Third, positive approaches are based on empiricism. This assumption contends that the best way to acquire reliable knowledge is by collecting empirical evidence. Cohen and Manion (1989) describe empirical evidence as '... that which is supported by observation; and "evidence", data yielding proof or strong confirmation, in probability terms, of a theory or hypothesis in a research setting' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 13). Depending on the information sought and the problems that are encountered, numerous methods of gathering empirical evidence are adopted by scientists. Proponents of empiricism argue that quantification assisted by statistical theory and method is the best way to achieve an objective, value free interpretation of phenomena.

Many social scientists have criticised this belief held by the positivistic approach. A central theme to the criticisms has been that when quantification becomes a form of mathematical study rather than an attempt to explore the human condition (Ions, 1977), the social sciences become dehumanised.

Finally, the positivist is concerned with observing particular events and generalising the findings to fit a model of the world as a whole. This is the assumption of generality, the belief that, through empirical evidence, laws can be formulated to explain, predict and control events. However, generality does not hold the key for all scientists:

> ... the concept of generality presents much less of a problem to the natural scientist working chiefly with inanimate mater than to the human scientist who, of necessity having to deal with samples of large human populations, has to exercise great caution when generalising his findings to the particular parent population. (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 14)

It has been pointed out that positivists aim to develop a '... generalising science of behaviour' (Cohen and Manion, 1989). In so doing, positivists attempt to develop interpretations of specific actions or events into theoretical explanations of behaviour (Dixon, 1973). From the above considerations it became clear that positivistic research methods are not the most appropriate for the current study for the following reasons.

First, the purpose of this research is not to formulate generalised laws pertaining to the cause and treatment of chronic problem behaviour in primary schools.

Indeed, no assumption is made about the "truth" of an ecosystemic understanding of chronic problem behaviour, or about the effectiveness of the approach in dealing with problem situations. To attempt to do so, given the lack of prior research on this topic in Britain, would be premature and beyond the scope of this study. Future research may attempt to formulate generalised laws but pilot studies such as this are a vital prerequisite to such in depth studies.

Second, ecosystemic logic rejects the notion that "true" causal links for chronic problem behaviour can be identified and be seen to have regularity. Instead, ecosystemic logic suggests that within a problem situation many divergent and often conflicting views are held, and believed to be "truthful", by the individuals experiencing the problem (see Section 2.2.4 for further discussion on this point).

Furthermore, the ecosystemic approach suggests that each problem situation has unique characteristics that are based on the beliefs and perceptions of the individuals involved. Therefore, from an ecosystemic perspective, identifying causal links that occur with regularity is impossible. For this research to attempt to identify an "objective reality" of chronic behavioural problems that has regularity would, therefore, have conflicted with the theoretical foundations of the approach under study.

The third point relates to the issue of empiricism and the dehumanising effect it may have on the study of human behaviour. There is an important link here with the development of the ecosystemic approach itself. As has been previously mentioned (see Section 2.1.1), the dehumanising effect of General System Theory upon the study of human behaviour gave rise to the search for new 'humanistic' models within family therapy. This, coupled with the influence of a phenomenological view of human systems, gave rise to the ecosystemic family therapy model and, in turn, the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools. In much the same way, this research was concerned with the dehumanising effects quantification may have had on the data collected. Indeed, adopting an empirical methodology of this research would have served to contradict a central tenant of the topic under study.

3.3 THE ANTI-POSITIVIST APPROACH

The desire to formulate generalised laws about human behaviour that can then be used to explain, understand and ultimately control the social world has been met with sustained criticism. The result has been a growing body of scientists who have developed alternative strategies to positivistic social science investigation. These scientists are known as anti-positivists and it is their qualitative approaches to methodology that are discussed below.

As with positivism, the term anti-positivism has been described in many different ways. However, these descriptions share a number of common characteristics. First, anti-positivism rejects the notion that human behaviour can be generalised and is governed by regularity. This rejection stems from the belief that the social world can only be understood from the point of view of the individual(s) who are experiencing the event(s) being studied. Furthermore, these individuals are seen to act autonomously. Their behaviours therefore cannot be generalised, but are person specific.

Critics of the anti-positivist approach do not deny that an understanding of human behaviour requires knowledge of the individual's experience of social events. However, they do challenge the belief that this is the purpose of a social science. As Giddens (1976) argues:

> No specific person can possess detailed knowledge of anything
> more than the particular sector of society in which he participates,
> so that there still remains the task of making into an explicit and
> comprehensive body of knowledge that which is only known in a
> partial way by lay actors themselves. (Giddens, 1976)

Second, anti-positivists maintain that to understand the behaviour of these individuals, the researcher must understand the person's interpretation of the event. Therefore, anti-positivists view social science methodology as necessitating a subjective focus where individual's experiences are studied, analysed and commented upon. The following quote summarises this point:

> ... the purpose of social science is to understand social reality as
> different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape
> the action which they take within that reality. Since the social

sciences cannot penetrate what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with man's definitions of reality and with the rules he devises for coping with it. While the social sciences do not reveal ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social sciences offers is explanation, clarification and demystification of the social forms which man has created around himself. (Beck, 1979, p. 121)

However, the way in which qualitative methodologies are implemented has come under heavy criticism, particularly with regard to the way in which an individual's understanding of social events are gathered and interpreted. It is argued that in attempting to understand the subjective world of human experience, the qualitative researcher is likely to impose her or his viewpoint upon the interpretations made. Indeed, 'one important factor in such circumstances that must be considered is the *power* of others to impose *their* definitions of situations upon the participants' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 37, emphasis in text).

We can see that anti-positivists aim to understand the meanings and intentions behind human behaviour. In so doing, they aim to understand how these behaviours manifest themselves within a particular situation and compare this with other, similar, behaviours and events. They do not hope to find universal laws pertaining to human behaviour but believe that there are '... multifaceted images of human behaviour as varied as the situations and contexts supporting them' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 39). An understanding of these perspectives and those of the ecosystemic approach led the author to consider that anti-positivistic research methods were likely to be the most appropriate for this study. The following principle reasons are given.

First, the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in schools is based on a phenomenological view of human systems. That is, members of a human system such as a classroom respond to problem situations based on their phenomenological interpretation of the situation in question. Ecosystemically, all interpretations are deemed to be rational and the responses that ensue are deemed to be understandable given the individual's phenomenological interpretation of the problem situation.

Taking a phenomenological view of human systems will therefore, of necessity, result in the characteristics of each problem situation being specific to that problem and to the people and places involved. Indeed, the only characteristic that the ecosystemic approach recognises as being common to all chronic problem situations is the inability of current interventions to deal effectively with the problem behaviour, and the role that the educator's responses play in this. All other aspects of a problem situation are specific to that situation and cannot be compared in terms of similar characteristics. Therefore, the ecosystemic approach adopts a person/problem specific stance and does not lend itself to generality.

This phenomenological perspective of chronic problem situations is directly linked to the anti-positivist belief that the social world can only be understood from the point of view of the individual(s) who are experiencing the event(s) being studied. In fact, phenomenology epitomises this belief, taking it to it's extreme. Consequently, it was strongly felt that the methodology of this study should be consistent with the underlying concepts of the ecosystemic approach.

In addition, the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour necessitates a subjective focus of the individual's experience of situations. Undoubtedly, the anti-positivists' view, that social science methodology necessitates a subjective focus where individuals' experiences are studied, analysed and commented upon, complements that of the ecosystemic approach. It was therefore felt that this clear relationship between the ecosystemic approach and qualitative methodologies could not be ignored.

The following Section discusses those qualitative methods that were seen to be potentially appropriate for the present study. Specific methodological issues are discussed and the identified approaches critically analysed in order to ascertain how appropriate they are for the requirements of the present study.

3.4 DEVELOPING A METHODOLOGY

At the inception of the present study no research on the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour in British schools had been undertaken and it was therefore impossible to extend and develop upon similar studies in this area.

Given this, the present study was seen as a pilot investigation, designed to test the methodological procedures utilised. The information gained could then be used to identify any flaws in the investigation and to develop recommendations for future research. Indeed, Cohen and Manion (1989) identify the pilot study as being a vital prerequisite to any investigation: 'Before embarking upon the actual experiment the researcher must pilot test the experimental procedures to identify possible snags in connection with any aspect of the investigation' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p. 204).

This quote has other ramifications for the current research. It implies that a pilot study, such as this, is not viewed as an experiment but as a testing procedure undertaken prior to the experiment. This is precisely the standpoint which is taken within the present study. It is not seen as an experiment but as an investigation designed to test procedures prior to the "actual experiment" which, it is hoped, will take place at a later date.

It was clear that to achieve this aim the chosen methodology would need to be clearly expressed so as to ensure that future readers would be able to replicate the procedures followed, if not the situations encountered. As the above discussions have shown, a consideration of the ecosystemic approach led to the belief that qualitative methods were the most appropriate for the present study. The next step was to reach a decision on specific methods to be adopted. The process by which this was achieved is discussed in the following Section.

3.4.1 SPECIFIC METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

It has been seen that an understanding of the various methodological approaches led to the belief that a qualitative focus was most appropriate for the present investigation. It has also been seen that the investigation was unable to use comparable studies as a guide to possible and appropriate methodological procedures. Consequently, the author needed to be receptive to many different qualitative (and quantitative) methodologies. Never-the-less, choices had to be made and decisions taken about the appropriateness of some research procedures above others. This was done by evaluating each approach with regard to the two key research areas. For the reader's convenience these are listed again below.

1. Primary teachers' response to the ecosystemic approach.
2. The impact of the ecosystemic approach on chronic problem behaviour in mainstream English primary schools.

At this stage of the discussion it should be pointed out that the evaluation of appropriate methodological procedures did not follow any specified path. Indeed, as the investigation progressed a number of developments occurred which resulted in modifications being made. This flexible stance was seen as a positive and unavoidable outcome of the research. Indeed:

> All the methods associated with qualitative research are characterised by their flexibility. As a consequence researchers can turn this to their advantage as a rigid framework in which to operate is not required. Researchers can, therefore, formulate and reformulate their work, may be less committed to perspectives which may have been misconceptualised at the beginning of a project and may modify concepts as the collection and analysis of data proceeds. (Burgess, 1985, p. 8)

The following discussion will outline the various stages of deciding upon a suitable methodological base. In this way, a clearer understanding of the research methods undertaken will be achieved.

3.4.2 PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Initially, the decision was taken to adopt a phenomenological research methodology. In principle this approach was seen to be both appropriate and effective in addressing the key research areas. It was seen to be appropriate for a number of reasons. First, there were the strong and unequivocal links between phenomenology and the ecosystemic approach (see Section 2.1.2).

Second, there was a high level of uncertainty about the number of primary teachers that would be interested in the ecosystemic approach and that would, therefore, be willing to participate in this study. As has been mentioned, this was due to the lack of any previous research in England. Thus, it was felt that a small sample size would lend itself well to the close scrutiny of individual experiences

that phenomenological research advocates. In other words, should the sample size of participating teachers by very low, at least the systematic and rigorous procedures used by phenomenological researchers could be utilised, and significant data would thereby be collected.

In terms of addressing the key research areas, a phenomenological approach certainly offered procedures that would '... provide a tangible and penetrating overview of the phenomena that evokes the reader's life experiences of it' (Becker, 1992, p. 31).

Indeed, it was anticipated that the study would try to capture valid and reliable knowledge about the experiences of participants, about how they reacted to the ecosystemic approach and how effective they felt the ecosystemic techniques were in changing chronic problem situations. As Becker (1992) explains:

> This structural understanding of what something is for the people experiencing it, can provide crucial information in theoretical, empirical, and intervention realms. Because empirical phenomenological investigations result in the descriptive summaries of what something is, they evoke the reader's similar and different experiences of the phenomenon and, through this resonation, convey a validness of the findings. (Becker, 1992, p. 48)

Initially, the collection of data was to be done through unstructured research interviews that were to be audio taped and transcribed verbatim. It was anticipated that teachers would be interviewed at their respective schools, at regular intervals throughout the period of fieldwork. However, it was the next stage of the phenomenological research method, that of data organisation and analysis, which caused concern and the eventual abandonment of this approach.

The following quote provides a brief summary of the procedures that are employed by phenomenological human scientists when undertaking data organisation and analysis. It illustrates the complexity and rigour of the approach even when expressed in such basic terms:

> Organization of data begins when the primary researcher places the transcribed interviews before him or her and studies the material

through the methods and procedures of phenomenological analysis. The procedures include *horizontalizing* the data and regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value. From the horizontalized statements, the *meaning* or *meaning units* are listed. These are *clustered* into common categories or themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements. The clustered themes and meanings are used to develop the *textural descriptions of the experience*. From the textural descriptions, structural descriptions and an integration of textures and structures into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon are constructed. (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 118-119)

Phenomenological researchers have used various words to describe this stage of their research, they include, "strenuous" (Keen, 1975), "tedious" (Becker, 1991), "disciplined" (Moustakas, 1994). However, one common theme which reappears in the literature is that the process of data analysis is very *time consuming*. Phenomenological researchers put aside, of necessity, large blocks of time for data analysis to ensure that the rigorous procedures are correctly and fully implemented.

It was felt that this investigation would not be able to designate the time required for a full phenomenological analysis. Indeed, the twelve month duration of the project was considered to be too short a time span for a satisfactory phenomenological study to be carried out. Furthermore, as the study progressed, the preliminary fears of a small sample size proved to be unjustified and another approach was required.

It should be pointed out that, although the procedures of phenomenological data collection and analysis were rejected as an appropriate approach, the general ethos of phenomenological research was still seen to be important to this investigation. This point is further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4.3 ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The desire to preserve the integrity of the situations within which the present study was to take place resulted in other methodologies being investigated. Once again the author turned to the key research areas to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of possible methodologies. The ethnogenic approach was investigated and the following discussion outlines the main features of this approach that were deemed to be of importance to this study.

Cohen and Manion, 1994, describe the term "ethnogenic" as; '... an adjective which expresses a view of the human being as a person, that is, a plan making, self-monitoring agent, aware of goals and deliberately considering the best ways of achieving them' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 204; after Harre, 1978). Ethnogenic research is concerned with human behaviour and aims to describe and explain the culture of a social group. Furthermore, it has a particular interest in gaining an insight into the group member's understanding of the world in which they operate (Denscombe, 1983).

In the present study, the culture was that of primary teachers and the world in which they operate, the classroom and school. The insight to be gained was that of teachers' responses to the ecosystemic approach, and their view of how effective the approach was in dealing with chronic problem behaviour. Having seen the links between the ethnographic approach and the current research, more in-depth reading took place to ascertain which of the variety of research methods available to ethnographers may have been appropriate and effective in addressing the key research questions.

Ethnographic research on teachers uses three main methods, namely; non-participant observation, participant observation and interviews (Denscombe, 1983, p.107). Each of these methods will be discussed below.

3.4.3.1 OBSERVATION METHODS

Observation methods are at the heart of case study research, while the interview method underpins accounts research. The selection of a particular method will depend on the context within which the research is taking place and on the type

of data sought. Furthermore, each method is influenced by the 'researcher-member relationship' and the impact this has on the results of the investigation. Indeed:

> Aware that ethnographic research generally involves some interaction between the researcher and the members of the social group in question, ethnographers are not content to assume that their presence is inconsequential for the situation they want to observe. Generally, they acknowledge that their very presence can disrupt the "naturalness" of the member's behaviour and they are, therefore, usually at pains to keep a low profile and minimise the disturbances their presence might cause. (Denscombe, 1983, p. 107)

It was precisely this concern, coupled with concern over the context within which the research was to take place, that influenced the author's decisions about the three aforementioned methods. First, the concerns over case study research, and in particular the effects of observation within the classroom or school context, will be discussed. This will be followed by a closer examination of accounts research and in particular the interview method.

Ethnographers freely admit to the problems posed by case study research. They are aware that the understanding of what is being observed may not correspond with the understanding of those being observed. Consequently, case study researchers critically examine what they claim to know and whether or not their observations are a faithful reflection of the "normal" setting within which they are working (Denscombe, 1983, p. 107). This is a problem of internal validity and stems from the belief that, through observation researchers will, of necessity and unavoidably, assign their own meanings to what is being observed. Indeed, 'the ethnographer using *observation* as the method may find it impossible to take adequate precautions against research interference with the situation ...' (Denscombe, 1983, pp. 107-108; emphasis in text).

In response to this fundamental problem, ethnographers have developed participant observation, where researchers incorporate themselves into the study group and seek to observe the characteristics of this group, as an "insider", from within it's natural setting. They attempt to become a recognised member of the group and, in doing so, hope to observe events as they would occur in a natural

setting and from a group member's perspective. However, once again, ethnographic researchers recognize that in certain circumstances this method may not be appropriate. As Denscombe points out, 'in certain circumstances - specifically in the case of the school teacher - its use is not necessarily the most appropriate' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 109). Furthermore, Cohen and Manion suggest that, 'in effect, comments about the subjective and idiosyncratic nature of participant observation study are to do with its external validity. How do we know that the results of this piece of research are applicable to other situations?' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 111).

Ethnographic researchers put forward strong counter arguments in response to these problems. In response to the problem of internal validity, Walker, 1986, maintains that;

> It is implicit in the notion of the case study that there is no one true definition of the situation. Within the confines of the study we act as though truth in social situations is multiple: the case study worker acts as a collector of definitions, not the conductor of truth.
> (Walker, 1986, p. 216)

Ethnographic research, then, is based on the collection of "definitions" or the "portrayal of reality" as opposed to the discovery of a single truth or finding explanations. This portrayal of reality also addresses the problem of external validity. Here, Walker (1986) suggests that case studies are identifiable by their audience. Although they are event specific, the events themselves are likely to ring true to the audience. As the case study researcher offers a portrayal of events as they "really" occur, the audience is able to use its own interpretation of the case study in order to find meaning and relate to it.

Despite these counter arguments, the problem of interference by the researcher upon the context within which observation takes place led the author of the present study to consider that observation (both participant and non-participant) would have been wholly inappropriate for the purposes of the current investigation. The reason for this decision will now be discussed.

The ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour focuses on the ecosystem of the classroom and school. It closely analyses chronic problem behaviour with regard to this system and the complex and varied behavioural

interactions that constitute it. Chronic problem behaviours that arise within the ecosystem are seen to be part of a self-perpetuating pattern of behavioural interactions that are characterised by stability (see Section 2.2.2). The ecosystemic techniques are specifically designed to break the cycle of events that surround this stability. They do this by encouraging the teacher to recognise the role her or his perceptions of, and behaviour towards, chronic problem behaviour may play in maintaining the problem situation. As Molnar and Lindquist point out:

> In ecosystemic terms, a teacher and his or her students are part of a classroom ecosystem and are therefore influenced by the ecosystemic relations in that classroom. A teacher's perceptions and classroom behavior are part of a pattern of perceptions and behaviors that influence and is influenced by (but does not cause) the perceptions and behaviors of everyone else in the classroom, and vice versa. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 11)

A central tenet of the ecosystemic approach is that, by changing his or her perceptions of, and or behaviour towards, chronic problem behaviours the teacher has the potential to also change the problem situation. 'Although it is not possible to predict precisely what the changes in the situation will be, it is possible to predict that *when something in an ecosystem changes, the ecosystem will change*' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 11; emphasis in text).

Clearly the presence of an outside observer (the researcher) within the classroom or school ecosystem must constitute a change in that ecosystem. The ethnographic researcher would then '... find it impossible to be sure that the process of observation itself has not affected the setting and imposed itself on what the ethnographer observes and reports' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 108).

With this realisation in mind the author explored the prospect of using a video camera to observe the classroom ecosystem and its inhabitants. Initially, it was felt that this may overcome the problem of interference by the researcher and provide a wealth of hard data that could be rigorously and systematically analysed. However, on reflection it was apparent that the presence of an inanimate object, which both children and teacher alike would recognise as "observing" their behaviour, would very likely "change the ecosystem". Furthermore, ethical issues of consent from teachers, parents and children, the

availability of resources and time constraints, all contributed to the rejection of this prospect.

It became apparent that observation methods could not possibly be utilised within this investigation and therefore ethnographic observation methods were rejected. The author then investigated the possibility of using the ethnographic interview method. The key features of this method, deemed to be of importance to the present study, are discussed below.

3.4.3.2 INTERVIEW METHODS

From the inception of the research, it was anticipated that the co-researchers (the teachers) would be interviewed. The reason for this was twofold. First, the interview was to act as a means of collecting hard data on teacher's responses to the ecosystemic approach and their perception of how effective the ecosystemic techniques were in addressing chronic problem behaviour. Indeed, 'interviews lend themselves to the collection of data 'for the record' and are therefore amenable to providing the kind of *hard data* required by most conventions of research' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 110; emphasis in text).

Second, the interview allows the researcher to delve more deeply into the world and experience of the teacher. 'Through interviews, informants can be used to gather data on relevant events and facts occurring before the research began or beyond the scope of the research context, and thereby enrich the data' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 110).

Once the decision had been made to utilise interviews as a research technique the next step was to choose between the type of interviews that were available. Cohen and Manion (1994) identify four interview techniques that may be used as research tools, namely; '... the structured interview; the unstructured interview; the non-directive interview; and the focused interview' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 273). Each technique is briefly discussed below.

The structured interview is formulated in advance of the interview itself. It follows a preordained schedule of question sequence and content and '... is therefore characterised by being a closed situation' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.

273). A fundamental problem with the structured interview technique for the present investigation was that it offered no leeway for the respondent to elucidate their responses and therefore had the potential to provide invalid results.

Cannel and Kahl (1968) argue that the cause of invalidity is "bias". Cohen and Manion provide an overview of what can cause this bias:

> The sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent, and the substantive content of the questions. More particularly, these will include: the attitudes and opinions of the interviewer; a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in her own image; a tendency for the interviewer to seek answers that support her preconceived notions; misconceptions on behalf of the interviewer of what the respondent is saying; and misunderstandings on behalf of the respondent of what is being asked. (Cohen and Manion, 1994, pp. 281-282)

Furthermore, bias can stem from other aspects of the person being interviewed:

> When formulating her questions the interviewer has to consider the extent to which a question might influence the respondent to show herself in a good light; or the extent to which a question might influence the respondent to be unduly helpful by attempting to anticipate what the interviewer wants to hear; or the extent to which the question might be asking for information about a respondent that she is not certain or likely to know herself. Further, interviewing procedures are based on the assumption that the person interviewed has insight into the cause of her behaviour. (Cohen and Manion, 1994, pp. 282-28; after Tuckerman, 1972)

This approach was deemed unsuitable for the present study for several reasons. First, the present study needed to be undertaken without any preconceptions or bias about the attitudes and opinions of the co-researchers or the outcome of this investigation. Second, the innovative nature if this study and subject area in Britain meant that such a stance was unavoidable. The author was keen to gain an insight into the co-researcher's responses to the ecosystemic approach and its techniques and actively chose to set aside his own opinions on these issues.

Given these factors, the structured interview technique was rejected as a possible choice.

In sharp contrast to the structured interview technique the unstructured interview offered far greater flexibility on behalf of the respondent. Indeed:

> Specifically in the case of unstructured interviews, respondents are encouraged to talk about areas of relevance to them rather than respond to the pre-ordained factors specified by an interview schedule. They do not wait passively on the side lines to be told what topics to consider and what range of answers are applicable but become actively involved as constructors of the data. The unstructured interview, in other words, has the effect of eliciting a *member's account* which inherently focuses on respondents' problems and their analysis of these, rather than being moulded to fit categories created by the researcher.' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 112; emphasis in text).

Ethnographers who utilize the interview technique (and in particular the unstructured interview) to evoke accounts are known as *account* researchers. They also concern themselves with the validity of their methodology and suggest that '... there is inevitably some element of "interference" from the research tool' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 121). However, it is also suggested that, 'to regard such interferences as the downfall of interviews ... would be an overreaction since the problem is not unique to interviews and is in fact a universal feature of research methods within the social sciences' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 121).

Nevertheless, account researchers do attempt to address the issue of validity. Walker (1986) suggests that the interviewer needs to be "psychologically mobile" and become aware of the extent to which she or he is influencing, dominating or controlling the social episode of the interview. Walker also suggests that, 'it is not enough simply to be self-aware and to know how your own values are entering the situation. You need to enter the world of the other' (Walker, 1986, p. 215). This is achieved through 'emotional intelligence' which heightens the psychological mobility of the interviewer in order to enable him or her to empathise with the interviewee.

Account researchers not only concern themselves with the interference of the research tool but also with the "truth" of what they are told by respondents. They are '... worried that what is reported to them by informants might not be an authentic account of their activities, opinions and interpretations of events, but rather an attempt to "fob off" the researcher with a plausible but fraudulent story' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 112).

Within educational accounts research, Denscombe (1983) suggests that the teacher poses particular problems for the researcher. Various reasons are given for this belief, including; the teacher's '... characteristic verbal skills mean that, in the process of the interview, they are likely to meet researchers at their own level in terms of the intricacies of nuance and meaning in the talk and hence be better placed to parry and sidestep issues they do not wish to discuss' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 114).

Teachers are also likely to be *research wise* and have an understanding of the methods and ambitions of the researcher. They therefore '... are in an even better position to side step or misrepresent issues during the interview' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 114). Finally, teachers can be *research weary* and '... are likely to be skeptical about the motives of the researcher and engage in defensive ploys because they do not wish to contribute to any selfish aggrandisement on his part' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 115).

Account researchers address such problems by acknowledging respondents' potential concerns over being misrepresented and exposed, or their information being used against them. They attempt to develop a relationship of mutual respect and trust and acknowledge that respondents are likely to have an interest in what is said and written about them. 'The information they *do* give is consequently 'negotiated' between the researcher and the respondent - reflecting the extent of rapport and trust established between the two' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 115, emphasis in text).

In addition, account researchers see interviews not simply as a way of addressing their research questions but also as '... an integral part of the immediate "social episode" in which they are given' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 121). As such, they explore the intrinsic properties of interviews as social episodes. In doing so, they suggest that in interviews the researcher can '... assume the existence of some

implicit pressure on the respondent to show the interviewer how and why the action or beliefs [of the interviewee] are reasonable' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 122). In other words, 'they seek to display their purported "sensible" and "rational" character' (Silverman, 1973, p. 44). This is known as a "display of rationality". In order to display rationality the respondent is seen to need to provide both a description of relevant views, events and situations and a justification for these descriptions.

This feature of the interview episode, it is suggested, provides '... certain ground rules which can actually aid the ethnographer's research rather than constitute a troublesome interference' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 122). Indeed, this feature can allow the account researcher to gain a clearer understanding of the reasoning behind the interviewees' responses and therefore help to establish and maintain a reciprocity of perspectives.

It is this sharing of perspectives that ethnographers consider to be fundamental to social life because 'it is only through such a process that actors can learn what meanings are to be attributed to what situations within a particular culture' (Denscombe, 1983, p. 123). Moreover:

> *Because interviews elicit accounts, and because accounts have certain constitutive features, the researcher is given, on the one hand, some display of the reasoning deemed appropriate by the member and, on the other, there is a check by the respondent that the reciprocity of perspective has been established.* (Denscombe, 1983, p. 125; emphasis in text).

Given this understanding of account research, and the unstructured interview method it utilises, it was felt that this investigation could adopt such approaches. As has been previously mentioned, it was anticipated that the co-researchers would be interviewed throughout the duration of the fieldwork. The use of accounts generated by the unstructured interview were seen to be a useful and appropriate way of studying the co-researchers and their responses to the ecosystemic approach and techniques.

It was anticipated that through unstructured interviews vital data could be collected, including; (i) a description of the co-researcher's opinions, activities and interpretations of events with regard to the ecosystemic approach and the

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implementation of the ecosystemic techniques; and (ii) a justification of these descriptions, by the co-researchers. Finally, the method allowed for the reciprocity of perspectives between co-researcher and researcher, therefore allowing a validity check of the information gathered.

Although the decision was made to use the unstructured interview technique, the remaining two interview techniques (the non-directive and focused interviews) were also investigated. The following discussion briefly outlines the main features of these techniques and comments on their appropriateness for this study.

The non-directive interview is seen as an extension of the unstructured interview. Here, the interviewer plays a passive role (Moser and Kalton, 1977) while the respondent, on the other hand, is given freedom to fully express her or his subjective feelings on the issues at hand.

The technique originated from work by the psychologist Freud and is therefore known as the therapeutic interview. Cohen and Manion (1994) use work by Carl Rogers (1942) to describe the stages of therapeutic interviewing.

> Beginning with the client deciding to seek help. He is met by a counselor who is friendly and receptive, but not didactic ... ; the client begins to give vent to hostile, critical and destructive feelings which the counselor accepts, recognises and clarifies ... ; these antagonistic impulses are used up and give way to the first expressions of positive feeling. The counselor likewise accepts these until suddenly and spontaneously 'insight and self understanding come bubbling through' (Rogers, 1942; cited in Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 288).

Cohen and Manion go on to point out that the therapeutic interview may be inappropriate in settings other than that of therapy. They offer a number of examples to illustrate this point, including the following:

> The interview is initiated by the respondent [as opposed to the researcher]; his motivation is to obtain relief from a particular symptom [rather than to present pertinent information]; the interviewer is primarily a source of help, not a procurer of

information; the actual interview is part of the therapeutic experience [not as part of the research experience]; the purpose of the interview is to change the behaviour and inner life of the person [rather than to provide valuable data for the research] and its success is defined in these terms; and there is no restriction on the topics discussed. (Cohen and Manion, 1994, pp. 288-289)

Some of the points raised above can be construed as being appropriate to the present study (for example; the interviewer being primarily a source of help and aiding teachers in their understanding of the ecosystemic approach and techniques). However, other points fundamentally differ from the ethos of this investigation (for example, the purpose of interviewing a teacher would not be to offer a forum to relieve a particular symptom, or to change his or her behaviour and inner life).

For these reasons, it was felt that the non-directive interview would not be adopted as a specific methodological technique within the current study but that the principle of non-direction could be used alongside that of the unstructured interview technique. Indeed, the principle of non-direction was seen to be a positive quality of the technique, providing the opportunity to 'elicit highly personal data from patients (co-researchers) in such a way as to increase their self awareness and improve their skills in self analysis' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 288).

Furthermore, this principle complemented a general ethos of the ecosystemic approach which '... is intended to provide you [the educational practitioner] with an opportunity to examine and constructively rethink your commonsense ideas about problem behaviour' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. xiii).

The focused interview was developed by Merton and Kendall (1946) in response to a belief that the principles of non-direction should be retained while introducing '... rather more interviewer control in the kinds of questions used ... [and limiting] ... the discussion to certain parts of the respondent's experience' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 289). The technique has certain characteristics which set it apart from other interview techniques. These are briefly discussed below.

First, the researcher chooses respondents who are known to have experienced a particular situation. The researcher then uses the techniques of content analysis to explore significant elements of this situation. The analysis provides the researcher with a set of hypotheses which are used to construct an interview guide. Finally, the interview itself focuses on the subjective experiences of the people who have been exposed to the situation (see Merton and Kendall, 1946, for further discussion on the focused interview).

Merton and Kendall (1946) argue that the focused interview has distinct advantages over other interview procedures. They suggest that, prior knowledge of a particular situation makes the interviewer's role easier as time does not need to be given to discovering the objective nature of the situation. Furthermore, they argue that, 'equipped in advance with a content analysis, the interviewer can readily distinguish the objective facts of the case from the subjective definitions of the situation' (Merton and Kendall, 1946).

It was this primacy of "objective facts" above "subjective definitions" that caused concern over the focused interview technique. The purpose of interviewing co-researchers in the present study was not to obtain an objective truth of interviewee responses. Indeed, as has been mentioned, the ecosystemic approach to chronic problem behaviour views each problem situation as unique to the ecosystem within which it occurs. No objective truth can be assigned to a problem situation because those involved hold subjective perspectives and interpretations of that which occurs.

Furthermore, the ecosystemic techniques encourage teachers to reflect upon the way in which their subjective perspectives of chronic problem behaviours influence those behaviours. The techniques do not challenge the objectivity of teachers' perspectives, but acknowledge that every individual within an ecosystem holds equally valid and "truthful" interpretations of a given problem situation (for a more in depth discussion of these points see Section 2.2.4). The key, therefore, to the ecosystemic approach is the analysis of subjective definitions of chronic problem behaviours and the investigation of how these may be adapted to positively influence chronic problem situations. Given this, it becomes apparent that the role of the focused interview is not suitable as a possible methodological procedure.

3.4.4 ACTION RESEARCH

It has been seen that none of the aforementioned methodologies, which were examined for the present study, were to be adopted as a specific methodological style. It has also been seen that, certain elements were identified as being useful and appropriate and were therefore accepted as offering partial fulfilment of the methodological requirements. However, the author was aware that methodological "holes" were to be found as a result of this "partial fulfilment". In response to this, action research was investigated and is discussed in some detail below.

Action research is the most widely used and accepted method in educational research, both in terms of the professional development of teachers and the introduction of new approaches into the classroom (Cohen and Manion, 1994, pp. 186-203) and specifically in relation to training teachers in techniques of managing problem behaviour (Merrit and Wheldall, 1984, 1988 and Clayton, 1985). The approach was seen to be appropriate to the present study for five main reasons, each of which will be discussed below.

First, action research is a *situational* procedure concerned with analysing a problem in a specific context and attempting to solve it in that context. 'The emphasis is not so much on obtaining generalizable scientific knowledge as on precise knowledge for a particular situation and purpose' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 187). This emphasis was seen to complement that of the current study (as is outlined in Section 3.2).

Furthermore, the situational procedure is precisely that which is followed by teachers when implementing the ecosystemic techniques. Indeed, teachers are asked to monitor closely the characteristics of a chronic problem situation and use these observations to help guide their choice of an appropriate ecosystemic intervention strategy. (see Section 2.3.2.2 for a detailed discussion of this point).

Second, action research is *collaborative*, where teams of researchers and practitioners work together on a project. Cohen and Manion (1994) state that, in the realms of action research, this situation is '... perhaps the most characteristic in recent years - where a teacher or teachers work alongside a researcher or researchers in a sustained relationship' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 189). This feature of the approach was seen to complement the desired ethos of the current

investigation. Indeed, from the onset of the present research, emphasis had been placed on the teacher as co-researcher (this will be discussed in greater detail in Section 4.2). Seen in this way, action research '... is a means of improving the normally poor communications between practising teachers and the academic researcher, and of remedying the failure of traditional research to give clear prescriptions' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 189).

Third, the nature of action research is *participatory*. As has been discussed in Section 3.4.3.1, the author could not be present during the implementation of the ecosystemic techniques in primary classrooms because his presence would have influenced the social interactions of the ecosystem in unpredictable ways. This meant that all observations, formulations and data recordings would need to be made by the teachers themselves. The teachers, therefore, directly participated in the investigation. The author's participation focused on initiating the research, the introduction of the ecosystemic approach and techniques to the teachers, the provision of unconditional support and advice during the fieldwork, and the feedback of results to teachers and interested audiences. It was therefore apparent that the nature of this investigation was also participatory.

Fourth, action research is *self evaluative* where the procedures are;

> Constantly monitored over varying periods of time and by a variety of mechanisms (questionnaires, diaries, interviews and case studies, for example) so that the ensuing feedback may be translated into modifications, adjustments, directional changes, redefinitions, as necessary, so as to bring about lasting benefit to the ongoing process itself rather than to some future occasion. (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 192).

Once again, there is a distinct relationship between this feature of action research and that of the ecosystemic approach. As was discussed in Section 2.3.2.1, the implementation of ecosystemic techniques within the school or classroom requires that any modification to a teacher's behaviour or perception is continuously monitored within the problem situation by the teachers themselves. In addition, teachers are asked to apply their findings (that have resulted from self evaluation) to the problem situation. This is also a characteristic of action

research, '... that the findings are applied immediately (then) or in the short term' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.192).

Furthermore, the monitoring and modifying nature of action research inevitably requires a high degree of flexibility and adaptability. 'These qualities are revealed in the changes that may take place during its implementation and in the course of on-the-spot experimentation and innovation characterising the approach' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 192). Flexibility is also a distinct characteristic of the present study (see Section 3.4.1).

Fifth, action research is a means of *in-service training* which '... equips teachers with new skills and methods, sharpening their analytical powers and heightening their self awareness' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 189). In this way, it is a means of injecting additional, innovatory approaches into an ongoing system which normally inhibits innovation and change. It was apparent that each of these features was particularly relevant to the task of studying the introduction of ecosystemic techniques into the primary school and classroom for the following reasons.

First, the ecosystemic approach and techniques are certainly *innovative*, as they have not hitherto been introduced into English primary schools. Second, the ecosystemic techniques are designed to be used *in addition to*, not instead of, the usual strategies employed by teachers when addressing chronic problem behaviours. Third, the ecosystemic techniques were to be introduced into the *ongoing system* of primary schools, which were seen to potentially *inhibit* the constructive change of chronic problem behaviour. Chronic problem behaviours are characterised by stability and this stability is seen to inhibit change within a problem situation. The ecosystemic techniques are designed to break the cycle of events that surround this stability, thereby promoting change within problem situations.

It has been seen that the characteristics of action research compliment those of the current study. This, in and of itself, suggested that action research could potentially be used as a specific method within this investigation. Cohen and Manion (1994) discuss the occasions when action research as a method is appropriate. A brief examination of the three occasions identified will further illustrate the appropriateness of action research for this study.

First, action research is considered to be a fitting and appropriate method of research 'whenever specific knowledge is required for a specific problem in a specific situation' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 194). This is linked to the characteristic of action research being a situational procedure concerned with analysing a problem in a specific context. For the purpose of the current investigation, specific knowledge was required by both the researcher, in addressing the research questions, and by the co-researchers, in learning the ecosystemic techniques. The research also concerned itself specifically with chronic problem behaviours in primary schools. Therefore, action research was deemed to be appropriate on this occasion.

Second, action research is considered to be an appropriate method '... when a new approach is to be grafted onto an existing system' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 194). This is linked to the in-service training characteristic of action research discussed, and as has been seen, therefore relates directly to the purpose of this investigation. In particular, the terminology of, "grafted onto an existing system" was seen to complement the general ethos of the ecosystemic techniques not replacing but running alongside existing intervention strategies employed by teachers when addressing chronic problem behaviours.

Finally, 'the action research method may be applied to any classroom or school situation ... [the proviso being that suitable mechanisms are] ... available for monitoring progress and for translating feedback into the ongoing system' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 194). This is linked to the action research characteristic of being self-evaluative and therefore again relates to the current study. The provision of mechanisms to monitor and feedback progress will be discussed in Section 4.2. At this point it will be important to discuss some of the issues that can arise when using the action research method and respond to these in relation to this study.

The present study involved the collaboration of two professional bodies, namely; teachers and researchers. This can be inherently problematic when undertaking action research because although '... both parties share the same interest in an educational problem [in this case, that of chronic problem behaviour] their respective orientations to it differ' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 195). Cohen and Manion go on to suggest that 'research values precision, control, replication and attempts to generalize from specific events. Teaching, on the other hand, is

concerned with action, with doing things, and translates generalizations into specific acts' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 195).

These discrepancies between action (by the teachers) and research (by the researcher) are acknowledged by the author. Indeed, precision was seen to be an important factor in this study given the purpose of the investigation to act as a pilot study from which future research could be developed. However, as has been discussed, the study does not attempt to generalize or control its findings. To do so would conflict with the ecosystemic approach itself (see Section 3.2 for further discussion). Similarly, any hopes of replication were dismissed as impossible due to the complexity and individualistic nature of the area under study.

Although the discrepancies identified by Cohen and Manion were addressed, there still remained the fundamental, potential difference between the teachers' purpose of inclusion within the study and that of the researchers. While teachers sought insight into a new approach to chronic problem behaviours, and therefore an extension of their classroom management skills, the researcher sought an insight into the process by which the new approach was to be introduced to teachers, how they would respond to the approach and how effective the ecosystemic techniques were in addressing chronic problem behaviour in English primary schools.

In response to this potential conflict, it was anticipated that the adoption of a *co-researcher* ethos would go some way to address the issue. This would result in, amongst others, 'a clear unambiguous statement of the project's objectives such that all participants understand them and their implications, and a careful analysis of the context(s) in which the programme is to be mounted to determine the precise, but flexible, relationship between the two components' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 196). The issue of co-researchers will be discussed in greater detail in Section 4.1.

Another issue which is identified by Cohen and Manion (1994) as being potentially problematic is that of data interpretation. They cite Winter (1982) when pointing out that 'the action research\case study tradition does have a methodology for the creation of data, but not (as yet) for the interpretation of data' (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 197). The crux of Winter's argument is that data collected through action research is not representative of the population

from which it was gathered. However, the current study does not aim to validate the data collected by generalizing interpretations to fit the parent population. Rather, it attempts to ascertain how specific teachers, in specific contexts respond to the ecosystemic approach and how specific problem behaviours respond to the ecosystemic techniques.

This Chapter has discussed the methodological issues that arose from developing a method for the present study. The chapter began by critically analysing two contrasting perspective of research methods in education, namely; the positive and anti-positive approaches and commenting on the appropriateness of each for the present study. The anti-positivist approach was seen to be most appropriate. Section 3.3 discussed the process by which a methodology was developed. It was seen that no single method offered complete fulfilment of the methodological requirements and that certain aspects of phenomenological, ethnographic, and in particular action research, could be combined to address this issue. The following Chapter discusses the specific methods which were adopted and the procedures and techniques that were followed.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

In Chapter Four specific methods are discussed which refer to the techniques and procedures used during the process of gathering and analysing data. As is appropriate for a qualitative pilot study of this kind, this process did not follow any formal structure but unfolded and evolved as the research developed. The discussion begins by describing the procedures which were followed during the preparation stage of the present study. Section 4.2 describes the data collection phase, where the techniques and procedures for gathering data within the fieldwork stage of the investigation are discussed. Finally the methods of organising and analysing the data collected will be discussed in Section 4.3.

4.1 PREPARATION

Preparation for the present research began in March, 1994 with the drawing up of a research proposal outlining a pilot investigation into the introduction of the ecosystemic approach to primary schools. The proposal was accepted as a topic of study for an MPhil and the research began in earnest in October, 1994. A copy of the research proposal can be found in Appendix 3.

At this stage of the discussion it will be important to mention that all work during the present research project was done in collaboration between the author and his supervisor. In particular, the methods of preparation, data collection, organisation and analysis, were undertaken in a joint venture.

The next phase of the investigation was directed towards developing contact with primary teachers. The research topic demanded that teachers would play an integral, and indeed crucial, role in the research process. More than this, the author believed that teachers would need to be incorporated within the study as *co-researchers*. Reason, 1994, encapsulates the rationale behind this belief:

> If the behaviour of those being researched is directed and
> determined by the researcher, the research is being done on them
> and they are not present in the research as persons. One can only

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do research with persons in the truest and fullest sense, if what they
do and what they experience as part of the research is to some
significant degree directed by them. (Reason, 1994, p. 41)

Furthermore, the use of teachers as co-researchers was not only desirable but unavoidable. As was discussed in Section 3.4.3.1, the influence of an outside observer upon the ecosystem of the classroom or school meant that the majority of data on the impact of the ecosystemic techniques would need to be collected by the teachers themselves. Teachers were therefore inextricably linked to the success of the project. Without a co-operative relationship between teacher and researcher the investigation could not have been undertaken.

Contact was made with the potential co-researchers in November, 1994, through letter correspondence. Contact was not made before this date as problem behaviour needs time to develop into chronic problem situation and become a stable part of the classroom ecosystem.

State primary schools were targeted, with geographical proximity to Loughborough being the only criteria of selection being set. Care was taken with the content of the initial contact letter, which was seen to be of vital importance to the future development of the investigation. The letter (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the initial contact letter) had five main purposes:

(1) To introduce the ecosystemic approach and the type of problem behaviours it addresses.

(2) To introduce the present study; its purpose and process; and the anticipated timetable of events.

(3) To carefully explain what was felt to be the teacher's role within the study, the commitment level that would be required; the teacher as co-researcher ethos that underpinned the investigation; and the potential benefits that were to be gained from inclusion within the research project.

(4) To invite potential co-researchers to attend three half day conferences at which the research would be discussed in greater detail and teachers would be introduced to the ecosystemic techniques. The format of half day conferences was chosen due to a lack of funding available to offer schools

financial help with supply cover for those teachers attending. All conferences were offered free of charge to the participating schools.

(5) To ask respondents to provide descriptions of the type of chronic problem behaviour they were encountering amongst their pupils. These descriptions were to be used in the preparation of Conference One by providing reference points when constructing the content of the conference. This was designed to allowed the researchers to adapt the conference to complement the experiences of those due to attend (see Appendix 7 for a copy of the co-researchers' descriptions of problem behaviour in their classrooms).

Following the initial conference letter the first conference was prepared. The content of Conference One (and indeed, the proceeding two Conferences) largely mirrored that used by Molnar and Lindquist in their "Making Schools Work" course (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 170). However, a number of adaptations were made based on time constraints and, with regard to Conference One, in response to the descriptions of chronic problem behaviours amongst co-researcher pupils.

The remaining two Conferences were adapted in response to evaluation sheets completed by co-researchers following each conference. The evaluation sheets were prepared in advance and asked the co-researchers for their comments on the content and presentation of the mornings work, and ideas for the following conference. In doing so, the co-researchers were to be given the opportunity to share in the direction of the investigation, a point raised earlier in relation to the teacher as co-researcher ethos of the study. The information provided was kept anonymous so as to encourage open responses both from the co-researchers, and from the researchers when analysing the content of the comments. Copies of the evaluation sheets can be found in Appendix 8. In addition, a copy of the timetable and content list of Conferences One, Two and Three is provided in Appendix 9.

A major part in the preparation for each Conference was the formulation of a handbook containing detailed notes on the morning's work. Three handbooks were formulated and their content are outlined below.

(1) Handbook 1:

      - a general introduction to the ecosystemic approach.

      - the ecosystemic prerequisites for changing chronic problem behaviour.

      - an introduction to the Reframing technique.

      - case examples illustrating the Reframing technique.

      - practice activity sheets for the Reframing technique.

(2) Handbook 2:

      - an introduction to the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive and Function techniques; the Symptom Prescription technique and the Predicting a relapse technique.

      - case examples illustrating the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive and Function techniques; the Symptom Prescription technique and the Predicting a relapse technique.

      - practice activity sheets for the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive and Function techniques; the Symptom Prescription technique and the Predicting a relapse technique.

(3) Handbook 3:

      - an introduction to the Storming-the-Back-Door and Locating Exceptions techniques.

      - case examples illustrating the Storming-the-Back-Door and Locating Exceptions techniques.

      - practice activity sheets for the Storming-the-Back-Door and Locating Exceptions techniques.

      - guidelines for trying ecosystemic interventions again after initial attempts have failed to produce the desired result.

      - guidelines for refining ecosystemic skills already learnt.

      - guidelines for being creative with what teachers already do in problem situations.

      - guidelines for where to start ecosystemic intervention strategies.

(For copies of the handbooks see Appendix 2)

It should be pointed out that Molnar and Lindquist's case examples were used within the handbooks. This was unavoidable as no examples illustrating the use of ecosystemic techniques in Britain have been published. However, the examples in the handbooks were adapted by the researchers in response to the distinctly American bias with which they were originally written. Indeed, the

researchers themselves encountered difficulty in fully relating to some of the case examples as a result of the American vocabulary used to describe them. It was therefore felt that the co-researchers would benefit from small adaptations to the wording of the case examples used in the handbooks.

This was further highlighted by the knowledge that the researchers would be unable to accompany the co-researchers during the fieldwork. These handbooks were therefore seen as vital aids to the teachers and were to be used as a reference once they had returned to their respective schools. Examples of the original case examples for each ecosystemic technique, as provided by Molnar and Lindquist (1989), are included in Appendix 1, thus allowing for comparisons to be made between the two.

In addition to the handbooks, detailed activity sheets were prepared prior to each conference. These sheets, the format and content of which were based on that suggested by Molnar and Lindquist, 1989 (pp. 173-178), encouraged the co-researchers to record the process by which they implemented the ecosystemic techniques in their schools and the results of their interventions (see Appendix 10 for copies of the activity sheets). The information gained from the activity sheets was to be used as a basis for individual case examples (see Section 4.3.2 or further discussion on activity sheets).

Preparation for Conference One was completed in January, 1995, when potential co-researchers had received information detailing the time, place, date and anticipated structure of the Conference (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the reply letter). Following the preparation stage of the present study the fieldwork was undertaken. The methods of data collection within this phase are discussed in below.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION

While data was collected during the preparation stage of the investigation (for example; the number of schools contacted and the response rate), the vast majority of data was collected during the 5 month period of the fieldwork. It is this stage of the investigation that is discussed below.

The data collection phase focused on the three Conferences which were held at monthly intervals. The intermittent periods were designed to provide the co-researchers adequate time to grasp the ecosystemic ideas and to implement the ecosystemic techniques in their own classrooms before attending the next Conference.

Much thought was given to the presentation of information in each Conference. The co-researchers needed to have clear presentations of the theoretical ideas behind the ecosystemic approach and of the implementation of the ecosystemic techniques. The innovative nature of the topic in England meant that the onus was placed upon the researchers to provide this information. However, the researchers were keen not to impose a rigid or prescriptive regime upon the Conferences. This is in line with action research methods which encourage the development of collaborative relationships between co-researcher and researcher.

In addressing this issue, it was decided that the presentation of information would, in the first instance, be through an informal lecture format. This would be followed by a group discussion format. The lecture was seen as the provider of issues that could be discussed by the group.

Although each Conference had similar characteristics, each also differed in fundamental ways. A more detailed discussion of the three Conferences is provided in Sections 4.2.1-4.2.3 below, thereby outlining the various stages of data collection during the fieldwork of the present investigation.

4.2.1 CONFERENCE ONE

The first Conference was held in January 1995, and was seen as a pilot conference, the evaluation of which would inform the content and presentation of the remaining two Conferences. In addition to this important role, Conference One had seven main purposes;

(1) To introduce the purpose of the research and the role of the teachers as co-researchers, and that of the researchers themselves, within it. This was of crucial importance to the future progression of the investigation as it was at this stage that researcher and co-researcher would develop an active

relationship based on the content of co-operation. To help achieve this, the development of a relationship based on mutual respect and non-judgment was to be encouraged.

(2) To introduce the theoretical background of the ecosystemic approach. This was to be achieved through an informal lecture.

(3) To introduce the Reframing technique. This was to be accomplished through a brief informal lecture, followed by the analysis of case examples illustrating the implementation of the technique. The case examples were taken from Molnar and Lindquist (pp. 47-60) and were included within the handbook accompanying the conference (see appendix 2 for a copy of Handbook 1).

(4) To form a discussion group, where the following topics would be covered; first, the issues that had revealed themselves during the morning's work. Second, the co-researcher's experiences of chronic problem situations. Finally, the ecosystemic approach, and in particular the Reframing technique, were to be discussed in relation to these problem situations. No distinct format was to be followed during this period, with the conversation being led and guided by co-researcher requirements and facilitated by the researchers.

It was important to have an open ended situation in order to facilitate the expression of co-researcher's perspectives. Indeed, it would be impossible to do otherwise given the lack of prior knowledge on the co-researcher's potential responses to the new approach and technique to which they had just been introduced. The discussion group therefore aimed at capturing an overview of the co-researcher's initial responses to the ecosystemic approach and the Reframing technique.

Data was to be collected in note form, highlighting the key issues that were identified by the group as a whole, as opposed to the researchers alone. This verification of what constituted a key issue by the entire group was seen to provide validity for the data collected. The data is presented and discussed in Section 5.1.3.1.

(5) To ask co-researchers to implement the Reframing technique in their own classes and record their process of implementation and results on an "activity

sheet" (see Appendix 10 for a copy of the activity sheets). In addition, it was suggested that co-researchers keep a diary of events for each intervention attempted. This was seen to be potentially beneficial to the co-researcher, providing an instrument for self-reflection (an attribute identified by Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 16, as being crucial to successful change). It was also seen to be potentially useful to the researchers by providing, with the consent of the co-researcher, more in-depth data on the situations they described on the activity sheets. The data from the activity sheets is presented in Section 5.2.2.

No pressure or expectation was placed upon the co-researchers, by the researchers, to either try the Reframing technique, complete the activity sheets, or keep a diary. However, the vital role of the co-researcher within the present study was made clear to the teachers and any decision to act as co-researchers was left entirely to the individual. The researchers also stressed that failure to implement the Reframing technique, or any other ecosystemic technique, would not result in exclusion from future conferences. Indeed, their opinions and perspectives would be valued as "non-participant" co-researchers.

(6) To ask co-researchers to comment on their initial feelings about the content, structure and presentation of Conference One. They were also to be asked about their opinions on the ecosystemic approach and the Reframing technique and whether or not they intended to continue with the research. This was to be achieved by providing the co-researchers with comments sheets to be completed following the conference (see Appendix 8 for a copy of the comment sheet).

The co-researchers were to be provided with stamped addressed envelopes for the return of the comment sheets. This was designed to facilitate the openness of responses from the co-researchers by offering privacy and time for the completion of the sheets. In addition, the format of the sheets was to be left as simple and open ended as possible, the aim being to minimise biased information being produced based on what the co-researchers felt the research wanted to obtain.

The comment sheets were to be the basis for a continual monitoring of the co-researchers' perspectives of the ecosystemic approach and techniques, the number of individuals likely to continue with the research and why they had

chosen to do so or not. The final analysis of this monitoring was to be used to address the first key research area, namely: Primary teachers' responses to the ecosystemic approach.

(7) Finally, the Conference offered the co-researchers an opportunity to meet with the researchers during the interim period between Conferences. This was an unconditional offer, the instigation of which was left entirely to the individual. Co-researchers were not forced to attend meetings as this would have conflicted with the collaborative ethos of the investigation by depicting a hierarchical relationship between the researcher as controller and dictator of the study and the co-researcher as the compliant servant of the investigation.

The meetings were to have two main purposes. First, it was anticipated that an ethnographic, unstructured interview technique (see Section 3.4.3.2) would be adopted at these meetings. This would facilitate the collection of data on the co-researchers' opinions, activities and interpretation of events with regard to the ecosystemic approach and the implementation of the Reframing technique. It would therefore elicit further in-depth data.

Second, the meetings aimed at providing the co-researchers with a forum for discussing any problems, concerns or confusion they may have had regarding the ecosystemic approach and Reframing technique. The researcher's role within this was to act as a sounding board, utilising the principle of "non-direction" (see Section 3.4.3.2) during the discussions. The meeting was therefore seen as a support mechanism, available as and when the co-researchers required.

The decision to offer this support was influenced by the work of Molnar and Lindquist (1989). They discuss the benefits of developing a "consultation group" where groups of people, interested in ecosystemic ideas, meet to share their experiences and help each other to find creative ways of behaving differently in chronic problem situations. They suggest that; 'a consultation group will help you [the educational practitioner] to avoid the perceptual trap of either-or thinking and make it possible to turn even random comments into useful resources for promoting positive change' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 169). With this in mind the researchers felt the need to offer an opportunity to develop such a situation between themselves and the co-researchers.

The structure and presentation methods of Conference One, although planned in advance, remained flexible. This was due to the innovative nature of the investigation resulting in uncertainty over the outcome of the proceedings. This flexibility, however, complemented the predominantly qualitative nature of the inquiry (see Section 3.4.1), and in particular, the action research procedure of continuous evaluation (see Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 199).

Indeed, the evaluation of Conference One (and the remaining two Conferences) was to take place on two levels. First, a retrospective evaluation based on the comments provided by co-researchers following each Conference (see Section 4.2.1). Second, an immediate evaluation was to take place throughout the duration of each conference. Co-researchers were to be asked for their opinions on the proceedings thus far and for their ideas on what would be the most beneficial direction to follow given this. The researchers would then try to accommodate the co-researcher's expressed requirements as fully as possible. This active inclusion of co-researcher in the decision making process was seen to be in line with the teacher as co-researcher ethos of the investigation.

4.2.2 CONFERENCE TWO

The second Conference was held four weeks later. Prior to this date the evaluation and comment sheets were to be used as the basis for adaptations to the content, structure and presentation of Conference Two. This Conference had five main aims;

(1) To provide a group discussion forum where co-researchers could describe and analyse their attempts at the Reframing technique over the past month. This procedure was designed to serve two purposes. First, it aimed at encouraging the sharing of perspectives in the form of a consultation group. Second, the group discussion was designed to expose the co-researchers (and researchers) to case examples which would illustrate, for the first time, the implementation of the Reframing technique in English primary schools. It would therefore constitute a major turning point in the research of the ecosystemic approach in England. In addition, the examples would have direct relevance to the co-researchers where previously the relevance of the United States examples had been speculative.

The case example data was to be collected in two ways. First, the activity sheets would offer a structured description of the procedures followed during the implementation of the Reframing technique, and of the outcome of the intervention. Second, the diaries would provide more in-depth descriptions of the intervention. In addition, the discussion would allow further data to be collected on the co-researcher's perceptions of the ecosystemic approach and techniques at this stage of the study. This was seen to be part of the continual monitoring procedure of co-researcher's perspectives during the fieldwork.

(2) To introduce the co-researchers to the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive technique, Positive-Connotation-of-Function technique, Symptom-Prescription techniques. The evaluation sheets completed by the co-researchers following Conference One suggested that, while the informal lecture format of presenting the techniques was deemed to be useful, a focus on the analysis of case examples illustrating the various techniques would be most beneficial. With this in mind, the lecture format was rationalised, thereby providing more time for the discussion of case examples.

The case examples were to be taken from Molnar and Lindquist, 1989 (pp. 65-80; 85-99; 103-118; 146-155), and once again were to be included in the handbook accompanying the Conference (see Appendix 2 for a copy of Handbook 2).

(3) To ask co-researchers to attempt these additional techniques in their respective schools and record their process of implementation and the results on the activity sheets provided. Each technique was assigned its respective activity sheet as the process of implementation would differ within each. Co-researchers were once again encouraged to maintain a diary of events during their research.

As with the Reframing technique, the decision to implement and record the results of their ecosystemic interventions was left entirely up to the individual. The reason for this was twofold; First, as was the case with the Reframing technique, the researchers were sensitive to the possibility of imposing their "research requirements" upon the needs and wishes of the co-researchers. Such a prescriptive stance would not have facilitated the development of a co-operative relationship between teacher and researcher.

Second, the ecosystemic techniques are not designed to act as blanket procedures, suitable for all chronic problem behaviours, but are to be used in conjunction with other techniques employed by teachers. In addition, the ecosystemic approach does not assume that the ecosystemic techniques should be adopted by all teachers, with the decision to utilise ecosystemic procedures being left to the professional judgment of the individual. This point is clearly made by Molnar and Lindquist:

> Since you are the expert on your problem and on yourself, you know what you will and will not attempt. You know the other people in the situation. You know what you have already tried. You know the demands and expectations of your school. You are a professional paid to make professional judgments. Although ecosystemic ideas have been used very successfully in a variety of problem situations, the decision to use any of our ideas in a problem situation you face is a matter of your professional judgment. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 43-44)

Perhaps the most important reason behind this belief is the requirement that all ecosystemic techniques be implemented with honesty and sincerity. Molnar and Lindquist stress that; 'If, in any problem situation, you find that you cannot honestly describe the behavior or the situation in a new way, then you should not attempt to use ecosystemic techniques' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 44).
Given these considerations, the researchers felt that they would be unable to ensure, and unjustified to expect, that each co-researcher would implemented and recorded the ecosystemic techniques introduced in Conference Two (and indeed, any of the other ecosystemic techniques introduced during the research).

(4) To ask co-researchers to comment on their feelings about Conference 2, particularly the ecosystemic approach and techniques covered at this stage of the investigation, and whether or not they intended to continue with the research. As with Conference One, comment and evaluation sheets were to be used to collect this data, which would be used in the continual monitoring of co-researcher perspectives and the evaluation of the conferences (see Appendix 8 for a copy of the comment\evaluation sheets).

(5) Finally, co-researchers were to be given the unconditional opportunity to meet with the researchers during the interim period between Conference Two and Conference Three.

4.2.3 CONFERENCE THREE

The final Conference took place four weeks after Conference Two, in March 1995. Once again, the comment and evaluation sheets were to be used to adapt the content and structure of the presentation. Conference Three had six main aims;

(1) To provide a consultation group where the co-researchers could describe and critically analyse their attempts at the ecosystemic techniques introduced thus far. This was to serve the same purpose as that of the discussion group in Conference Two (see Section 4.2.2).

(2) To introduce the co-researchers to the remaining two ecosystemic techniques of Storming-the-Back-Door and Locating-Exceptions. Once again the evaluation sheets had suggested that the analysis of case examples in Conference Two had been very beneficial to the co-researcher's understanding of the ecosystemic techniques. As such, emphasis was to be placed on this aspect of the proceedings in Conference Three (see appendix 2 for a copy of Handbook 3).

(3) To ask the co-researchers to attempt these final two techniques in their classrooms and record their process of implementation and results in the form of activity sheets (see Appendix 10). The onus was again to be placed upon the individual to do so or not.

(4) To provide the co-researchers with information on how to continue using the ecosystemic techniques once their role within the current investigation had ceased. This information was to act as a post-research support mechanism for teachers, ensuring that they were not abandoned following Conference Three. The desire to offer this support stemmed from a sense of responsibility, on behalf of the researchers, to the co-researcher's future development regarding the ecosystemic approach. This was seen to be

ethically correct, rejecting the "abandonment" of teachers following the completion of the fieldwork in favour of the continuation of a co-operative relationship that had developed during the investigation.

The information offered focused on three main issues; First, the co-researchers were to be provided with guidelines for trying the ecosystemic techniques again should their initial attempts at a particular technique have appeared to be unsuccessful. Second, the co-researchers were to be provided with information on how to refine the skills they had already learnt in the previous conferences. Finally, the co-researchers were to be offered help on how to be creative with the procedures they already followed, and followed well, in order to increase the effectiveness of future ecosystemic intervention strategies (see Appendix 2, Handbook 3 for further discussion on these points).

(5) To ask the co-researchers to complete a comments sheet following the conference (see Appendix 8 for a copy of the comment sheet).

(6) To offer co-researchers the opportunity to attend a follow up meeting in two months time, the purpose of which was fourfold. First, to provide the co-researchers with an opportunity to describe and critically analyse their attempts at the ecosystemic techniques introduced during Conference Three. Second, to provide the researchers with an opportunity to gather long term data on the implementation of the ecosystemic techniques, and the development of co-researcher's responses to the approach. Third, to provide the researchers, and co-researchers alike, with the opportunity to discuss any long term issues that had arisen during the interim period. This would include issues pertaining to the practical application of the ecosystemic techniques. Finally, it would allow the co-researchers who had provided case example material to give consent for the publication of their work (see Section 4.2.4 below for further discussion on this point).

Attendance at the meeting was optional as it had not been included in the initial timetable of the research sent out to potential co-researchers (see initial contact letter, Appendix 4). Teachers would therefore need to apply for additional time release which may not have been feasible.

(7) To offer co-researchers the opportunity to meet with the researchers during the period between Conference Three and the follow up meeting.

(8) Conference Three was to conclude by offering thanks and gratitude for the co- researchers' efforts within the present study.

4.2.4. THE FOLLOW-UP MEETING

Two months following the final Conference an afternoon was set aside for the follow-up meeting. This meeting was called in addition to the three conferences and was not included in the initial research strategy. It was the flexible nature of the present investigation, coupled with the continuous evaluation procedure, that allowed for this decision to be made and implemented.

There were four reasons why this meeting was thought to be necessary. First, prior to the introduction of the follow up meeting, no procedure was in place for the discussion and analysis of the ecosystemic techniques introduced in Conference Three. This was seen to be a shortfall within the data collection method which needed to be addressed.

Second, during the fieldwork co-researchers had provided data on the procedures they followed during the implementation of the ecosystemic techniques, and on the outcome of their interventions. These had been recorded in the form of activity sheets, the data from which was to be written up by the researchers as case examples. Although every effort was made to ensure that the write ups were in accordance with the data provided by the co-researchers, they had to be verified as true representations of their work and corrected, as necessary, by the co-researchers themselves. The follow up meeting was to provide an opportunity for the co-researchers to do just this and was therefore vital if the case examples were to be considered to be valid pieces of data.

Third, the meeting would provide more long term evaluations, including evaluations of the co-researchers' perceptions of the ecosystemic approach and the effectiveness of the ecosystemic techniques.

Finally, the follow up meeting was to provide the final opportunity for the co-researchers to express their perceptions of the research itself, including any future considerations that they felt may be beneficial to subsequent investigations.

Following the completion of the fieldwork the process of data analysis began in earnest. It is this phase of the present study that is discussed in Section 4.3 below.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Following standard action research procedures, the analysis of data in the present study took place continuously throughout the duration of the fieldwork, and in greater detail following its completion. Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 will discuss the methods of data analysis in relation to the two key research areas. Each area will be covered in turn and the principal methods of analysing the data collected will be discussed.

4.3.1 THE CO-RESEARCHERS' RESPONSES

The analysis of data pertaining to this research area incorporated various methods depending upon the type of data collected, these methods are outlined below.

(1) Analysing the response rate of the co-researchers to the invitation letter sent during the preparation stage of the investigation. The analysis was to be statistical, with the results being expressed as a percentage of the population contacted. The analysis aimed at gaining a description of the population group's initial reaction when introduced to the ecosystemic approach.

(2) Analysing the attendance rate of the three conferences. This was to be a statistical analysis, with the results being expressed as a percentage of the co-researchers attending each conference. The aim of this analysis was to gain a measure of the co-researchers' participation in the present study.

(3) Analysing co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach during the fieldwork. The analysis of data relating to this issue was to take place on two levels. Within each level of analysis a phenomenological perspective of the co-researchers' responses was adopted. This meant that the analysis aimed at capturing a descriptive summary of the co-researchers' experiences that were valid and reliable.

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The first level of analysis involved the identification of the main themes that arose during the discussion groups and the follow up meeting. The identified themes were to be fed back to the co-researchers for verification. The second level of analysis involved the contents of the comment sheets within which re-occurring features were to be identified and fed back to the co-researchers for verification. A detailed content analysis of the data collected was not possible due to time constraints.

At this point it should be mentioned that the author had anticipated a third and fourth level of analysis involving data collected during the interviews and from diaries completed by the co-researchers (see Section 4.2.1). However, for reasons that will be discussed in Section 5.1.3.3, no formal interviews took place during the fieldwork and none of the co-researchers undertook to write diaries.

4.3.2 THE IMPACT OF THE TECHNIQUES.

All data relating to this key area was, of necessity, collected by the co-researchers in their respective schools. The analysis of this data utilised two methods that are discussed below.

(1) Statistically analysing the activity sheets. The activity sheets completed by the co-researchers provided detailed and structured data on the process by which teachers implemented the ecosystemic techniques and the result of their interventions. The results of the co-researchers' interventions were to be statistically analysed and were to be expressed as a percentage of interventions that proved to be successful in addressing chronic problem behaviours. What constituted a "successful" intervention was to be based on the co-researchers' interpretation of the outcome (see Section 5.2.1 for further discussion on this point).

(2) The collation of activity sheets into case examples. The decision to formulate case examples from the activity sheets developed as the research progressed. Initially, it was felt that the impact of the case examples used to illustrate the ecosystemic techniques in Molnar and Lindquist (1989) was sufficient enough to warrant a replication of such examples in the present study.

Indeed, both researchers believed that their understanding of the ecosystemic approach and techniques was greatly enhanced by these case examples.

As the fieldwork developed, it became apparent that the co-researchers also found the case examples to be beneficial to their understanding. Furthermore, as co-researchers fed back and discussed individual cases of ecosystemic interventions implemented in their schools, the benefits were further enhanced. It therefore became apparent that the formulation of case examples would be a valuable asset to the present study.

The collation of case examples from the activity sheets was to be undertaken by the researchers. The data was to be transcribed into a narrative format and written in third person form by the researchers. In addition, the names of teachers and pupils were changed to ensure anonymity. This data was then to be verified by the co-researchers as a true representation of their work and corrected by them as necessary. Consent forms were formulated which asked the co-researchers for permission to use their work within this thesis and possible future publications in academic journals (see Appendix 11 for a copy of the consent form).

Chapter Four has described and discussed the procedures and techniques which were used to collect and analyse data within the present study. Chapter Five provides and critically discusses the results of the analysed data.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In report writing such as this it is commonplace for the results of the analysed data to be presented as a separate Section and be followed by a discussion of the key points which are revealed. However in the present study, the variety of methods adopted in addressing the key research areas, and the complexity of the findings which this provided, resulted in the decision being made to combine both results and discussion into a single chapter.

Chapter Five will be divided into two main Sections, each relating to the key research areas within this study. Section 5.1 provides the results of the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach and discusses these results in some detail. Section 5.2 provides and discusses the results on the impact of the ecosystemic techniques on chronic problem behaviour. This will include the provision of case examples formulated from the activity sheets completed by the co-researchers. Pertinent comments on each case example are also provided.

5.1 THE CO-RESEARCHERS' RESPONSES

5.1.1 RESPONSE RATE

Sixty primary schools in the north Leicestershire area were sent invitations to attend the three conferences on the ecosystemic approach and become co-researchers within the present study. Of these, thirteen schools responded, with twelve teachers and three educational practitioners signing up for the conferences. The educational practitioners comprised of two special needs teachers and one ancillary. This did not pose any problems for the present research. Indeed, Molnar and Lindquist clearly state that '... the suggestions in this book (Changing Problem Behavior in Schools) are intended to help *school personnel* in their daily and weekly contact with the student' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 42; emphasis added). They also report that they have taught the ecosystemic approach to a wide variety of educational practitioners including; '... hundreds of experienced teachers, school psychologists,

counselors, social workers and administrators' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. xiii).

A further three schools and five teachers made inquiries about the research but were unable to attend for a variety of reasons including a lack of funds to pay for supply cover, and clashes with prior commitments.

A response rate of 26% of the contacted population was seen to be encouraging given the lack of prior knowledge of the ecosystemic approach amongst English primary teachers.

5.1.2 ATTENDANCE RATES

(1) Conference One:
All of the co-researchers who had signed up for the Conferences attended Conference One.

(2) Conference Two:
86% of the co-researchers attended Conference Two, with two teachers choosing not to continue with the research. The expressed reasons for this 'drop out' were provided by the comment sheets completed following Conference One, and are discussed in Section 5.1.4.1 below.

(3) Conference Three:
Twelve of the original fifteen teachers that had signed up for the conferences attended the final conference. This was an attendance rate of 80%, with non-attendance being attributed to the two teachers who had previously withdrawn and one teacher who was ill.

(4) Follow-up Meeting:
Four co-researchers attended the Follow-up meeting. this low attendance rate resulted from flaws in the preparation stage of the present study. This is discussed in greater detail in Section 6.1.1 (No. 5).

An average attendance rate of 88% (excluding the Follow-up meeting) suggested that the teachers' response to the ecosystemic approach was one of interest and a

commitment to continue with the research. The following Section elaborates upon this contention.

5.1.3 CO-RESEARCHERS' ORAL RESPONSES

5.1.3.1 THE DISCUSSION GROUPS

(1) Conference One:
The co-researchers' initial response to the ecosystemic approach and the reframing technique was one of familiarity. There was broad agreement amongst the group that the ecosystemic approach was similar to current practice in schools. In particular, the co-researchers isolated the positive focus and interpretation of problem behaviour as being common to the ecosystemic approach and other approaches to problem behaviour in schools. Comments made during the Conference illustrate this point and include; "I already try to see behavioural problems positively" and "I am not convinced that this is entirely a new approach".

In this respect the co-researchers expressed an interest in how the ecosystemic approach differed from other positive approaches to problem behaviour. In doing so, the co-researchers compared the ecosystemic approach with positive approaches towards problem behaviour they already utilised.

The comparison of the ecosystemic approach with other approaches is discussed by Molnar and Lindquist (1989). They suggest that it is commonplace for educational practitioners to use other approaches as a basis for their understanding of the ecosystemic techniques. Indeed, 'it would be natural for you [the educational practitioner] to try to understand how ecosystemic techniques work by using a theoretical perspective with which you are already familiar (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 41).

However, Molnar and Lindquist put forward the argument that, although the ecosystemic approach '... is not well developed enough to lay claim to sharply defined conceptual boundaries' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 41), such comparisons may have a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of the ecosystemic techniques:

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The risk is that, if you do so, you will actually strengthen a way of characterizing a chronic problem behavior that has already proven unhelpful to you and misuse the ecosystemic technique you want to employ by trying to make it conform to the rules imposed by another approach to changing behaviour. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 41)

The co-researchers also expressed a keen interest in gaining an understanding of how the ecosystemic techniques worked. At this stage of the research the reframing technique had been illustrated by using case examples taken from Molnar and Lindquist (1989) (see Appendix 2: Handbooks, for copy of case examples used) and none of the co-researchers had attempted the technique themselves. This lack of practical exposure to the reframing technique may have accounted for the scepticism from the co-researchers about the potential effectiveness of the technique in addressing chronic problem behaviour in English primary schools.

There was confusion and irritation over explanations of how the reframing technique worked. Two teachers specifically asked, "How does it work?" and were unsatisfied with the response of, "We are not entirely sure other than the classroom is an ecosystem within which all behaviours, and your responses to them, are inter-related and influenced by each other. We hope to gain a better understanding through this research". One co-researcher's response to this was: "So we are the guinea-pigs?"

Although the data collected did not make it possible to explain this response, it may be indicative of the counter-intuitive nature of the reframing technique which makes it difficult for it to be explained using the usual approaches and points of reference, as found, for example, in behavioural and cognitive approaches.

Finally, doubts were expressed, amongst co-researchers who taught younger children, over the appropriateness of the reframing technique when used to address problem behaviour amongst reception aged children. It was felt that the level of communication required, between the teacher and pupil when articulating the reframing of the problem behaviour, may not be attainable with younger children.

(2) <u>Conference Two</u>:

On their return, the co-researchers shared their experiences of implementing the reframing technique in their classrooms. Such was the co-researchers' interest in their colleagues' experiences that the discussion took longer than expected and ran into the time allocated for the introduction of other techniques (Predicting a Relapse, Positive-Connotation-of-Motive and Function, and Symptom Prescription). This was an unforeseen complication, the affect of which was twofold. First, it meant that the co-researchers had little time to discuss the techniques that were introduced in Conference Two (the implications of this are discussed in Section 6.1.3, No 3). Second, the co-researchers had very little time specifically to discuss their responses to the ecosystemic approach. As such, data collected on the co-researcher's oral response during Conference Two was very limited. This was a flaw in the data collection process and is discussed in greater detail in Section 6.1.1.

It should be mentioned at this stage that while the time constraints had a detrimental effect on the amount of oral data that was collected, the benefits of discussing colleagues' experiences of the reframing technique was very evident (see Section 5.1.4.1, No 2.). There was clearly a need to balance the needs of the co-researchers and that of the research itself. This is an issue that should be addressed in future research into this area (see Section 6.2.3, No 3).

Despite this, a number of emergent themes were picked up during the first session. These included the way in which the reframing technique followed a structured format of implementation. While many of the group agreed that they already attempted to view chronic problem behaviours in a positive light, they also agreed that their interventions tended to be spontaneous. As one co-researcher put it; "I do try to see problem behaviour in a positive light but with some children it is not always easy ... You don't always think about what you are going to do or how you are going to react, you just do it on the spur of the moment".

The introduction to the reframing technique, in conjunction with the use of the activity sheet (see Appendix 10 for a copy of the activity sheets), provided structured guidelines on the practical implementation of the technique and this was a radically different and new way of dealing with problem behaviour for this co-researcher. While making the above statement it was apparent that many of the co-researchers were in agreement with the contentions being made.

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Furthermore, exposure to the use of ecosystemic techniques in local primary schools resulted in changes in the response of many co-researchers. Where previously the group had compared the ecosystemic approach to approaches they already utilised, they now expressed uncertainty over the similarities.

(3) Conference Three:

As with Conference Two, time constraints during the final conference resulted in very limited data being collected on the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach. This was once again a flaw in the data collection process and will be discussed in greater detail in Section 6.1.3, No 3. The following are the key points that were identified during the limited discussions that took place on the co-researchers' responses.

The group described the effects of discussing co-researchers' experiences of implementing the ecosystemic techniques, during which a number of key issues arose. First, it transpired that some (it is not possible to ascertain exactly how many as the data collecting process did not account for this) of the group had initially been wary of the approach being tried and tested in the United States but not in Britain. Consequently they were uncertain about being the 'guinea pigs' for introducing the approach into this country. However, this concern dwindled as individuals described their interventions and it became apparent that the approach was also successful with English children.

Second, those co-researchers who had attempted the ecosystemic techniques described to the group how the ecosystemic approach differed from other approaches. They isolated the structure of the intervention strategies, as mentioned in Conference Two, as being different. The paradoxical nature of many of the techniques was also found to be very different, as was the focus on gaining an understanding of the teacher's role within chronic problem situations.

The group concluded their discussion with an overriding positive response to the ecosystemic approach. They felt that the approach would be very beneficial as an addition to the intervention strategies they already adopted. They saw its future alongside current approaches, providing another option when faced with a chronic problem situation within their classrooms and schools. They had expressed pleasure and relief at the realisation that the ecosystemic approach was designed to be used in conjunction with other approaches. This meant that their "usual" interventions were not to be perceived as being wrong or inappropriate,

but that if they proved to be unsuccessful in positively changing a chronic problem situation they may benefit from the inclusion of the ecosystemic approach. The ecosystemic approach therefore did not challenge the co-researchers' ability to address chronic problem behaviour but complimented it.

5.1.3.2. THE FOLLOW-UP MEETING

Four co-researchers, or 30% of the population were able to attend the follow up meeting. The remaining nine teachers were unable to attend due to prior commitments. In light of this, the following results are recognised as being representative of these four individuals and not the whole group.

As a result of the limited data collected on the co-researchers' oral responses during the second and third conferences, the researchers made concerted efforts to record comments made during the follow up meeting. This was achieved by dividing the workload, with one researcher transcribing the comments, while the other facilitated the conversation. In addition, the process of data collection was further enhanced by the amount of time available for discussing the co-researchers responses to the ecosystemic approach.

These two factors facilitated the collection of oral data during the follow up meeting. indeed, the four co-researchers provided personal descriptions of their response to the ecosystemic approach after being introduced to it four months earlier. The key features of these descriptions are outlined below.

The co-researchers explained that they were in favour of the emphasis the ecosystemic approach placed upon identifying alternative explanations for a problem behaviour. They supported the idea that the ecosystemic techniques steered you away from identifying a "true" cause of a problem behaviour and directed you towards the identification of possible truths. As one co-researcher put it:

> One of the things I liked about the approach was that you always
> say that we should look for possible alternative explanations for the
> behaviour. You don't say that these explanations are right but that

they could possibly be right and that they may help us. Thinking like this really helped me.

The co-researchers also discussed the type of problem behaviour that the ecosystemic approach could be used to address. It became clear that despite the contentions made by Molnar and Lindquist (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 42) severe behaviour did in fact *respond* to the ecosystemic techniques, but that such behaviour could not be *eradicated* through ecosystemic interventions. Never-the-less, the co-researchers felt that the approach could be used to address specific parts of severe problem behaviour (as opposed to the entire "problem" person) and that this alone was a step in the right direction. Indeed, one of the co-researchers had successfully addressed severe problem behaviour using a combination of ecosystemic techniques and other intervention strategies: "The techniques allow you to focus on specific tiny bits of chronic problem behaviours and address them, rather than the whole problem child"

All of the co-researchers present at the follow up meeting were in agreement that the ecosystemic approach was indeed different from other approaches to problem behaviour. They identified the way in which teachers are encouraged to think about how they are behaving in a problem situation, and the effects this has on the children involved, as being different from other approaches. They explained that normally they thought subconsciously about their behaviour, and reacted to problem situations as they occurred. They initially found it difficult to analyse their own responses because this was not part of their normal procedure: "You have to think of your own behaviour when you try these techniques. Normally you act subconsciously and just react to situations as they occur. It is very hard when you have to think about how you are behaving and the effect this has on the children because you are not used to thinking this way".

However, with a familiarity of the ecosystemic techniques developed a complementary growth in their ability to be self analytical: "As I have become more comfortable with the techniques I have chosen to use, they have become second nature to me. The more you use them, the easier it gets".

The co-researchers explained that the ecosystemic approach allowed them to step back from chronic problem situations and adopt a less emotional stance. By focusing on the identification of positive alternative explanations the co-researchers expressed relief in feeling "allowed" to view problem behaviour

from a positive perspective instead of getting "wound up" by the negative perceptions that tended to dominate their thoughts in chronic problem situations: "The approach allows you to step back and take a less emotional view of the situation. Because you have to look for positive alternatives you get less wound up by the negative aspects of the problem".

Finally, the co-researchers discussed the difficulties of explaining the ecosystemic approach to their peers. Three of the co-researchers provided the following quotes:

> When I've tried to tell other members of staff about the ecosystemic approach they find it very difficult to understand and I feel silly when I talk about it.

> You can't explain it in a couple of minutes. People just think it's looking at problems positively, but it's much more than that.

> It's hard to tell the other teachers in my school about the Conferences because they think I'm too lenient anyway and they think that seeing things positively and from the children's point of view is part of this.

These results have ramifications for future research in this area and as such will be discussed in greater detail in Section 6.2.3, No. 4.

5.1.3.3 THE INTERVIEWS AND DIARIES

Throughout the present investigation no interviews with co-researchers were undertaken. As was discussed in Section 4.2, the researchers had intended to interview individuals during the fieldwork. Indeed, following each conference the co-researchers were offered the opportunity to meet with the researchers and discuss any issues that had arisen, or any guidance they may have required regarding the implementation of the ecosystemic techniques (see letters accompanying comment\evaluation sheets, Appendix 8). Despite these offers none of the co-researchers requested a meeting. Similarly, it was hoped that the co-researchers would provide data on their attempts at ecosystemic interventions

in the form of diaries. Indeed, following each Conference the co-researchers were encouraged to do so (see Appendix 8). Despite this, none of the co-researchers took it upon themselves to write diaries during the fieldwork.

The researchers had not insisted that the co-researchers be interviewed or keep diaries as this was seen to be potentially disruptive to the co-operative relationship that had developed. Furthermore, the ethos of teachers as co-researchers that this study adopted meant that any decisions involving both parties had to be negotiated. The researchers had repeatedly offered to meet with the teachers and encouraged them to keep a diary of events, however the decision to do so or not was left entirely to the individuals' professional judgment.

In the event, the researchers respected the teachers' decision not to do so. Certainly with regard to the diaries, the researchers were sensitive to the time and workload which they would necessitate from the co-researchers. Never-the-less the researchers were perplexed by the response not to meet and sought to address the issue at the follow up meeting. When asked, three of the four co-researchers felt they did not need to meet with the researchers, or when they did, were unable to find time to do so. The remaining teacher expressed concern over the cost of these meetings to her school. When it was explained that the meetings were offered free of charge her response was one of surprise. She believed that had she known this information she may well have taken the opportunity to meet with the researchers.

5.1.4 CO-RESEARCHERS' WRITTEN RESPONSES

5.1.4.1 THE COMMENTS SHEETS

(1) Conference One:
Ten written responses were provided by the co-researchers following the first conference. Within these results three main issues arose, each of which will be discussed in turn. First, two co-researchers explained that they were not willing to continue with the research. They stated;

> As a school we are familiar with similar strategies - e.g. "No
> Blame Approach" (Senior staff attended a recent Conference and

there was a certain amount of scepticism given our circumstances, needs and thinking). We are currently developing a behaviour\anti-bullying policy and after consultation with staff it was felt that ecosystemics did not alter our current thinking.

[and]

It was evident from the start that experience of the method was in short supply. To "old hands" at the teaching profession who had come expecting help with a method to solve all, some or a small part of classroom discipline problems, I was not entirely convinced. The alternative positive approach is one advocated in a lot of discipline methods and it is not entirely new. I feel "going with" the behaviour and allowing them (children) to continue in the way you do not really want but condoning it, up to a point, could on occasions prove a minefield to all but the experienced teacher.

A closer analysis of the latter quote reveals some interesting points that are worthy of comment. Firstly, the lack of experience of the method is acknowledged as being a true statement, certainly within English schools. However, the author would contend the suggestion that "the alternative positive approach is one advocated by a lot of discipline methods" and rejects the assumption that the ecosystemic approach "is not entirely new". Finally, the co-researchers, comments on the application of ecosystemic interventions ("going with" the behaviour and allowing them (children) to continue in the way you do not really want but condoning it, up to a point) illustrates a lack of understanding of the ecosystemic approach. As has been stressed, the successful implementation of all the ecosystemic interventions is inextricably linked to the teacher's ability to be sincere about her new interpretation of the problem situation.

With regard to the reframing technique two of the group expressed concern over perceiving chronic problem behaviour in a positive light. They stated that positively reframing some pupil's behaviour was difficult because "sometimes children behave spontaneously, they have no idea why they behave as they do, so it can't be that obvious to the teacher how to reframe the situation".

Seven of the co-researchers expressed a willingness to attempt the reframing technique. A variety of reasons were given for this response. These included;

(1) The innovative nature of the ecosystemic approach:

> At present the school in which I am teaching have in place a discipline policy which is based around Lee Cantor's assertive discipline. Although this policy is effective with children who do not regularly break school rules, it is less effective with regular offenders. Therefore, I welcome the new ideas of the reframing technique.

(2) A desire to test the procedures for themselves:

> I would like to try out the reframing technique in order to judge for myself how effective it is.

(3) A desire to address problem behaviours which have not responded to their usual interventions:

> I am interested in using this approach with a number of children whose behaviour has not been modified by other techniques.

> I am prepared to give it a try on the basis that it is better than continuing to bang my head against a brick wall.

> I do intend to continue with the course\research as another method of dealing with "constant niggles" is always useful.

(4) A desire to address problem behaviour in their classrooms:

> I hope to try the ecosystemic approach. We have quite a few behavioural problems within the school (minor rather than major). I work closely with two classes who team teach. If I can involve the class teachers to adopt a similar approach I hope that by working together we can gain some success.

> I feel that once I fully get to grips with the ideas of "reframing" it will be of great value to me and my class. My current group of children are very unsettled - there being many personality clashes. I

would like to use the technique to almost calm some of them down
to hopefully harmonize the group as a whole.

(2) Conference Two:

Following Conference Two five co-researchers completed the comment sheets. This response rate was considerably less than that of Conference One and therefore the amount of data collected was also limited. The responses that were received focused on two main areas.

First, all five of the co-researchers stated that they found the discussion around the implementation of the reframing technique, by fellow co-researchers, to be very beneficial to their own understanding of the technique and the ecosystemic approach. The following quotes illustrate this point;

The most useful part, for me, was listening to the experiences of other teachers at the Conference when they were describing reframing situations.

It was interesting to hear of other teachers' attempts to put ecosystemics into action and the varying degrees of success.

I found other peoples comments and experiences very useful and was pleased that the people who had tried the reframing technique were able to speak at length.

The discussions clearly went some way to address the co-researchers' scepticism over the appropriateness of the ecosystemic approach within English primary schools. Indeed, the experiences of the co-researchers who attempted the reframing technique suggested that the ecosystemic approach was likely to be affective in addressing chronic problem behaviour amongst English (as well as American) children.

The second main focus of the co-researchers' responses was on the theoretical framework and practical application of the ecosystemic techniques. The co-researchers explained that the theory behind the ecosystemic techniques aided their understanding of problem behaviour intervention strategies that they were already using; "It is interesting to have them put into a fully worked out theoretical framework - it makes our own strategies less ad hoc".

They also explained how the ecosystemic approach encouraged them to recognise the role the teacher plays in the continuation of chronic problem behaviour; "These (positive-connotation-of-motive and function and symptom prescription techniques) highlight the need for teachers to alter their responses to situations and their attitudes towards problem behaviour. This has made me consider more carefully how I perceive behaviour and the ways in which I react to it - maybe how we handle children causes, or aggravates, the problem behaviour.

(3) Conference Three:
Only two co-researchers returned their comment sheets following conference Three. This low response rate inevitably resulted in a very small amount of data being collected. This was a limitation of the pilot study and one that further illustrates the need for future research to address the data collection procedures used in the present study (see Section 6.2.1, Nos. 4,5,6 and 8) Despite the lack of data, that which was collected is worthy of comment and is provided below.

The first response described how the co-researcher had found the use of case examples, illustrating the Storming-the-Back-Door and Locating-Exceptions techniques, to be very beneficial to their own understanding of these techniques;

> The techniques described seemed more complicated and I found them harder to understand in real terms, i.e. imagining classroom situations that could be interpreted as needing these techniques. For this reason I found the case studies most useful as through them I was able to imagine real situations and therefore understand the techniques more easily.

She also explained that although she was not a class teacher, and therefore did not have specific chronic problem behaviours to address, "the ideas put forward will, I am sure, keep returning to my thoughts, as these problems arise. I shall be thinking of positive alternatives as a matter of course"

The second response explained that although the co-researcher had not been able to implement any of the ecosystemic techniques introduced in Conference Three, she did "intend to look at them again in the future and will consider using them at a later stage". She also explained how she had continued to use the ecosystemic techniques from the first two conferences. "With some children,

especially with one who is very difficult to handle, I have continued to use techniques from the first two conferences".

5.1.4.2 THE FOLLOW-UP MEETING

Although not representative of the entire group, the results of the follow up meeting's comment sheets provided the research with some interesting points that are worthy of mention.

First, the co-researchers commented upon the benefits of discussing the ecosystemic approach with fellow co-researchers. Indeed, all of the co-researchers said that they would have liked more time for discussion. The co-researchers explained that they would have liked more;

> (1) "Time to discuss with other teachers."
> (2) "Time for general discussion."
> (3) "Time! It would have been useful to have a full day - to discuss the case studies and teachers' experiences in, say the afternoon."
> (4) "More discussion time please. I gained as much from chatting with other teachers as I did from the methods."

Second, the co-researchers' responses suggested that more time was need to enable them fully to take on board the information that they were given during the conferences. As the co-researchers explained:

> (1) "The work is very interesting and informative; I didn't find that I had enough time to absorb all during the second and third conferences and enough time at school or at home to get to grips with everything."
> (2) "Spread over more time because it's a lot to take on board."
> (3) "An extra couple of sessions to understand the amount of information received."

These quotes suggest that the ecosystemic techniques are difficult to grasp in the time that was made available in the present study. This has ramifications for future research and is discussed in greater detail in Section 6.2.

Third, three of the co-researchers explained that some of the language used within the conferences was confusing. indeed, these co-researchers all said that they would have liked less:

(1) "Terminology - which was fine during the first session, but as more was presented it was harder to understand and differentiate between each concept."
(2) "Some of the jargon was difficult to absorb - is it possible to put things in more every day language?"
(3) "Jargon - too much and couldn't see the wood for the trees."

As each of the three Conferences were based on the work of Molnar and Lindquist (1989) there is room for speculation that the language used to describe the ecosystemic approach was culturally biased, having an American emphasis. Future research may wish to address this issue (see Section 6.2.3, No. 1), however it is beyond the scope of the present investigation.

Finally, two of the co-researchers suggested that future conferences should recommend the attendance of two or more teachers from the same school. They suggested that, "possibly another member of staff coming on the course to give feedback at school" and "at least two teachers from each school to enable more interaction at school level", would be an improvement to future conferences. This suggestion complements Molnar and Lindquist's (1989) contention that the development of a 'consultation group', within which teachers can discuss ecosystemic ideas, can be beneficial to teachers attempting ecosystemic interventions (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 167-169).

However, a note of caution arose from one co-researcher who expressed uncertainty over the practical application of this suggestion due to the increased cost of supply cover that would be necessitated. She suggested that "schools would probably not be able to release the staff. Perhaps a family of schools could be involved - with inset?". This is certainly an area which future research may wish to consider and is discussed in greater detail in Section 6.2.3, No. 5.

This Section has discussed and critically analysed the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach. The following Section discusses and analyses the

impact of the ecosystemic techniques on chronic problem behaviour in the co-researchers schools and classrooms.

5.2 THE IMPACT OF THE ECOSYSTEMIC TECHNIQUES

5.2.1 THE SUCCESS RATE

A total of 7 co-researchers, or 46% of the population, attempted 10 ecosystemic interventions during the fieldwork. Of these five were reported to be successful interventions. This was a success rate of 50%. A further four interventions were reported to be partially successful. This was seen as an encouraging result given that these were the first attempts at the ecosystemic techniques in English primary schools.

All claims about the success of the ecosystemic techniques were provided by the co-researchers and were based on their perception of what constituted a 'successful' intervention. For some of the co-researchers an intervention was deemed successful only if the chronic problem behaviour ceased to continue. For others, small changes in the problem situation, making the problem behaviour easier to cope with, were sufficient to warrant success. For others still, a change in their perception of the problem behaviour, from one of negativity to one of empathy, constituted a successful intervention.

This variety of perspectives illustrates that it is not possible to make generalisations about what constituted a successful intervention within the present study. Indeed, the co-researchers' assessments were based on their own phenomenological interpretation of a "successful" intervention. As such, any inferences made about the potential effectiveness of the ecosystemic techniques outside the experiences of the co-researchers is purely speculative. However, it is noteworthy that the definitions provided by the co-researchers complemented those provided by Molnar and Lindquist (1989). They suggest that '...in order for a problem to be considered solved, one or both of the following must happen: (1) The behavior considered problematic is changed in an acceptable way; (2) the interpretation of the problem behavior changes so that the behavior is no longer considered a problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 18).

Of the ecosystemic interventions that were attempted by the co-researchers, seven were based on the reframing technique, two were based on the positive-connotation-of-motive technique and one was based on the positive-connotation-of-function technique. No data was collected on the implementation of the remaining four techniques. In the following Section the co-researchers' attempts at ecosystemic interventions are provided in the form of case examples which were formulated from the co-researchers' completed activity sheets.

The decision to adapt the activity sheets into case examples was influenced by two factors. First, it was influenced by the work of Molnar and Lindquist (1989). They use case examples to illustrate ecosystemic interventions and these were found to be very useful in aiding the researchers' understanding of the ecosystemic approach and techniques. As such, the present study sought to formulate similar case examples. Second, such was the positive response of the co-researchers to these case examples from America, it was felt that similar examples taken from an English perspective would be beneficial to the understanding of the ecosystemic approach and techniques for future audiences.

5.2.2 THE CASE EXAMPLES

Nine case examples were formulated from the activity sheets completed by the co-researchers. Each case example was checked by the respective co-researcher and authorisation for its use agreed (see Appendix 11 for example of the consent form). In addition, teachers' and pupils' names have been changed so as to provide anonymity for the individuals involved.

It is these case examples that will be discussed in this Section. Each example will be provided in turn and will be accompanied by pertinent comments and elaborations. This will provide an in-depth analysis of how effective the ecosystemic techniques were when implemented by the co-researchers. Firstly, six case examples illustrating the Reframing technique are provided. This is followed by two case examples which illustrate the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive technique, and the Positive-Connotation-of-Function technique respectively. Finally, a case example illustrating the use of the Reframing technique in conjunction with the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive technique is provided.

5.2.2.1 THE REFRAMING TECHNIQUE

(1) The Day dreamer.

Richard, a seven year old, was apparently bright and capable yet produced very little work. He did not chatter and was not disruptive in class but did appear to daydream a lot. This resulted in his work being rarely complete, with a number of tasks being left unfinished at the end of each day. His teacher, Anne, responded to this behaviour by reprimanding Richard and reminding him to concentrate on the task in hand. However, the effects of these reprimands were short lived; although he did begin to work for a short period of time, as soon as his teacher was involved with others he stopped working. This meant that the reprimands and reminders became an almost constant feature of their interactions.

The teacher's initial understanding of the situation was that Richard lacked the ability to concentrate for sustained periods of time. He seemed to have only a little interest in the work he was given and would try to avoid work if he could. Although Anne felt that these were correct interpretations of his behaviour it was clear to her that they were not helping to change the situation. She then decided to use the reframing technique and try to find other explanations for his behaviour.

Anne identified three possible alternative explanations for his inability to complete work. Firstly, he thought deeply about his work and found it difficult to record his thoughts quickly. Secondly, that because his work was always neat, he was particular about presentation. Finally, he felt overwhelmed by the task and needed more help. Once she had been able to find positive alternative explanations for his behaviour, Anne decided to talk to Richard about the unfinished tasks in order to introduce the reframing of his behaviour to him. She complimented him on the fact that his work looked very neat, but as he took such a long time maybe he needed more help. They talked about daydreaming, and Richard said he was thinking about their topic on Space and how he would like to be an astronaut when he grew up. He also said he liked this work, enjoyed finding out about lots of things and liked to produce good work. His teacher was taken aback by these comments as she had no idea that he felt this way about his work. She promised to help him begin pieces of work and asked him to come to her if he found it hard to continue.

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This discussion showed Anne that Richard did indeed think deeply about his work, although she was somewhat surprised that he talked so enthusiastically about it. As promised, Anne helped Richard for a short time (four or five minutes) at the beginning of each session and found that he did his work more quickly. After their discussion Richard seemed happy to work a little longer on tasks than usual. He also started to come to Anne for help more frequently rather than spending long periods of time daydreaming. There has been a significant improvement in this situation - Anne doesn't need to help Richard at the start of every session now and most of Richard's work is being completed or almost completed.

Discussion:

The stages that this teacher went through in dealing with the problem behaviour are a good illustration of the reframing process. This case is also a good example of how an ecosystemic intervention can help in those chronic problem situations which have not responded to other approaches. Although Richard's behaviour was not disruptive it had become a source of concern for his teacher. She knew that Richard could do more work - but the question was how to achieve this.

There seem to be several clear stages in this example. First, the teacher recognised that the problem situation was stable - the same things were happening over and over again: - daydreaming and little or no work being done; reminders and reprimands from the teacher; only immediate or short term improvements; return to daydreaming and no work; more reminders, and so on. The teacher's response in this setting has become part of the problem situation. This is a sign that the problem has become a stable ecosystem and is a cue for using the reframing technique.

Second, she identified her existing interpretations of the problem situation; and although she felt that they were true, she realised that they were not helping to change the problem. Her interpretations of Richard's behaviour may also have been helping to perpetuate the situation.

Third, the teacher was able to identify three possible positive interpretations for the problem behaviour. She found this quite difficult to do at first, as in order to do this she had to suspend her previous ideas about Richard's behaviour, she had to put her preconceptions on to one side so that other, more positive perspectives

could be found. It was also important for Richard's teacher to frame these alternatives in an honest and plausible way; she needed to feel that they were genuine alternatives in which she could believe.

Fourth, once genuine positive alternatives had been found, the teacher was able to communicate them to Richard during a discussion about his work. By changing her own behaviour in the problem situation and by maintaining a high level of support initially, she was able to change the problem behaviour itself.

The solution to the problem seemed simple and straightforward once it had been found. The difficulty is in being able to set aside natural responses to the situation and in finding positive alternatives. However, once these have been found and communicated to the child the whole nature of the problem changes. Occasionally interventions need to be repeated, but in this case the teacher was able to monitor the situation and provide the agreed level of support to effect the change. Incidentally, the teacher noted that although this could be regarded as a small or even trivial problem, it was a considerable relief to see Richard taking a more active role in his school work and contributing more to the class. Not only had the problem situation improved significantly but so had her relationship with Richard, which was no longer characterised by constant reminders and reprimands.

(2) First at Everything.

Matthew, a year two pupil, always wanted to be first at everything - first to line up, first to show his work and first to answer questions. He also persisted in answering questions directed at other children during class discussions, as well as when children were working individually or in groups. He would often push others out of his way in order to be first in line.

Sue, his teacher, had tried telling him quite firmly that he must wait his turn and insisted that he put up his hand and wait until she had asked him a question. When he pushed others she reprimanded him and made him wait until the other children had lined up. Sue felt that the reason for his behaviour was that he was seeking attention from both herself and other children. He clearly wanted to be first on every occasion and was happy to dominate others by answering questions or by his physical presence. Sue had tried positive reinforcement, for example by giving Matthew turns at being first, or by directing questions at him before he

could shout out an answer and then giving positive feedback whenever his behaviour was appropriate, but there had been no change in his behaviour.

As these attempts had produced little change in the situation, Sue decided to use the reframing technique. She tried to find some positive alternative explanations for his behaviour, and after some hard thinking came up with the following plausible ideas: more than anything else, Matthew wanted to please his teacher and his fellow pupils, and he wanted to win their approval. He tried to do this by demonstrating his knowledge by answering questions correctly; in this way he hoped to win praise from his teacher and admiration from other children. He also demonstrated his eagerness to please by lining up quickly, wanting to be seen to be the first to do as his teacher asked.

Sue implemented her reframing by telling Matthew that she understood his enthusiasm and that she was very pleased that he really wanted to help her and to do what she wanted. They discussed answering questions in discussions and told him that she would say quite clearly when she wanted Matthew to answer. (She had made up her mind that she would respond with praise for a correct response or help to provide the right answer if his initial one was wrong.) She also told Matthew that she would also ask him to choose the next person to answer a question in these situations. In relation to lining up she told him that she would be asking him to go and line up first, hold the door for others and select the order in which other children lined up.

These interventions were very successful during the question and answer sessions. However, there was still a problem with the lining up situation. Many of the other children felt that it was unfair that Matthew was nearly always first in line. In response to this Sue explained to the class how pleased she was that Matthew wanted to do as she asked so quickly and readily, and explained that she would give others the chance to be first in line and see if they could organise the line as efficiently. Rather than letting Matthew always be first in line, she now asked him to walk to the line in an orderly fashion to show the other children how to behave. She also extended the idea of letting Matthew choose the next person to answer a question in group discussions by asking him to select the next person to be first in the line.

Sue was part of a group of teachers who were researching the reframing technique and she told the group about this situation just after she had implemented the second stage of this process; she also said that she wasn't sure

whether it would be successful. At the following meeting of the group a month later, Sue did not mention this particular example, and a colleague from another school asked her what the outcome had been. After a brief pause, Sue replied that she had forgotten all about that particular problem because it had gone away. Matthew no longer called out to answer questions and lining up was not a problem any more. She was surprised at herself for not remembering as it was a considerable relief at the time and a good example of how a positive reframing can have a positive outcome.

Discussion:

This is quite a complex example because of the way that the teacher was able to modify her original intervention because of unforeseen problems. However, she did not change her positive alternative explanations for Matthew's behaviour, only the practical application of those ideas. The teacher in this situation demonstrates a real understanding of the processes which are operating in the complex ecosystem of the classroom.

The particular interventions which produced such a positive results may at first look very similar to the teacher's previous strategies. Sue had already tried positive reinforcement by giving Matthew positive feedback for appropriate behaviour when she gave him "turns at being first, or by directing questions at him before he could shout out an answer". This technique, which is often successful, is quite different from reframing as it focuses solely on the behaviour of the pupil rather than on the teacher's interpretation of that behaviour. In this example, the teacher had to rethink her own point of view and try to look at the situation in a positive way. The key to the difference here is that the teacher then communicated that positive view of his behaviour to Matthew by talking the situation through with him and used that as the basis for moving forward.

*The initial intervention was successful in terms of Matthew's behaviour but it was causing problems with some of the other children in the class who felt that it was unfair that Matthew should always be first in line. The teacher was able to maintain her alternative explanation that Matthew really wanted to help her and to do what she wanted by first of all saying to the whole class how pleased she was that Matthew wanted to co-operate with his teacher **(this is an example of repeating the original intervention)** and then by asking them if they could organise the line as efficiently. Matthew was then given the responsibility of showing the other children how to line up properly and of choosing the next child*

to be first in line. This new intervention gave Matthew further scope for demonstrating his willingness to please his teacher. The boy who would once call out in discussions and who would push and shove to be first in line now seems to thrive on his new responsibility and his improved relationships with his teacher and his peers.

The story around this case example also shows how easy it is to forget problems once they have gone away. Once the ecosystem had adjusted, the new behaviours became stable and a part of a new classroom atmosphere. Within this new framework people behave, feel and relate in different ways.

(3) The Key Holder.

Hazel is a special needs teacher in a large primary school, who works with small groups of children in her own specially appointed classroom. Her normal routine is to go to each class to collect a group of pupils and take them back to her room. As it is such a large school this often means walking a considerable distance through the school with a group of five or six potentially disruptive children. Normally this is not a problem, but it does feature in the present case study. As she is away from the classroom for some time whilst she is collecting her group of pupils she always locks the door.

Bradley was a year six pupil in one of the groups which Hazel collected from the other end of the school. The group normally worked very well together and looked forward to their sessions. The pupils were now in the second term of the school year and they were used to the routine of walking over to the special needs room with Hazel. When they arrived at the room, several of the children would want to use the keys to unlock the door and arguments would often start. Bradley was usually at the centre of any dispute and would often become quite angry and subsequently uncooperative if he was not the one to unlock the door. This situation had got the point that the discussions and arguments about who was going to use the keys would start as soon as Hazel had collected the group from their classroom. The arguments would then continue all the way over to the special needs room and sometimes continue into the main teaching session. The issue of the keys was becoming quite disruptive to the smooth running of the group and to the enjoyment of some of the pupils.

Hazel's initial response was to explain to the group that everyone should have a turn at using the keys but Bradley seemed to become more and more persistent about being the one to unlock the door. When it came to Bradley's turn to open the door he ran off with the keys, unlocking and entering the classroom some time before the rest of the group arrived. This behaviour concerned Hazel for a number of reasons, but mostly because she felt that it was unsafe for Bradley to rush through the school with her keys and then enter the classroom on his own. Even though she had reprimanded and talked to him about the seriousness of this situation and stressed the consequences of doing it again, Bradley continued in the same manner and even ran off with the keys a second time. Hazel was annoyed by his behaviour and felt that Bradley couldn't be trusted to be on his own in this way; she was also becoming tired of the way that he constantly pestered her for the keys and refused to do as she asked. Hazel was also starting to feel powerless in the situation as she realised that her interventions were not effective and were creating a highly charged confrontational atmosphere.

It was at this stage that Hazel was introduced to the reframing technique and realised immediately that she could use it in this situation. The first step was to try to think of plausible positive explanations for his behaviour. After giving the situation a lot of thought, she came up with several positive alternatives and used these for the basis of her intervention. Her key ideas were that Bradley was being helpful and that he was very keen to please her by unlocking the door.

She told him quite clearly that she was pleased that he was trying to help her by taking responsibility for opening the door for everyone, and because of his enthusiasm she had decided that he should be "the key holder". When Hazel collected the group from the class, she gave the keys to Bradley to hold. Carrying the keys, he would walk over to the special needs room with the rest of the group. He would then decide who would unlock the door, ensuring over the course of time that everyone had a turn.

Hazel was amazed at how effective this intervention was. There had been a transformation in Bradley and the problems he was having simply disappeared. There were no longer any arguments about the keys and the atmosphere in the group sessions were vastly improved. Bradley seemed genuinely pleased by this development and took his new role very seriously. Hazel complimented him on how well he did his job and felt considerably relieved that this problem had been solved in such a positive way.

Hazel was a member of a group of primary teachers who were trying the reframing technique and the group had been discussing the idea of an ecosystem (particularly in relation to the classroom ethos) in order to help teachers understand the approach. When she reported the above case study to the group, someone said that it was interesting that the intervention had been so successful as she didn't have her own class. Her response was that even though she didn't have her own class, she did have her own ecosystem!

Discussion:

This is a good example of how the reframing technique can change an established pattern of behaviour. As this teacher said, even though she didn't have her own class, the group had got used to the routine of going to her room on a regular basis and had worked together as a unit for some time and had thereby formed a stable ecosystem. During the spring term the problem behaviour had become part of that stable system and the teacher was having difficulty in changing that behaviour. As many other teachers have commented, the hard part about using this technique (especially for the first time, as in this case) is being able to break away from normal responses and explanations, which tend to be negative (i.e. Bradley was being difficult and not doing what his teacher told him) and finding positive perspectives (i.e. Bradley was actually being enthusiastic and trying to help his teacher). This may even take a couple of days of mulling the situation over until plausible alternatives come to mind. However, once this positive view has been found, implementing the technique is quite straightforward.

(4) Everything Takes Forever.

Joanne is a year six pupil who seems to do everything at a totally different pace to other children. Some children are slow, but Joanne is almost stationary; metaphorically speaking, she always seems to be standing still and unable to be moved on by others. No matter how much encouragement she is given, Joanne still takes forever to do the simplest things. Mike, her teacher, finds that Joanne's reluctance to do anything at a reasonable pace is really starting to annoy him. He especially finds it frustrating when he spends time trying to hurry her along and she almost appears to be slowing down. Whatever action Mike takes has no impact at all, and Joanne responds with a slow reluctance. She is the last to arrive in the morning, the last to go out to play, and the last to leave the dining hall. She

will often be sorting out her books and other belongings at the end of the day when everyone else has gone home.

Mike decided that as he was getting nowhere in trying to change Joanne's behaviour he would try the reframing technique. He decided that he would select one particular situation to start with, and one for which he could find a positive interpretation. After the next swimming session he told Joanne that he realised that it *was* important that she made sure that she was really dry and that she should take all the time she needed to do this. Joanne was incredulous, and took even longer than usual to get dry and join the other children on the coach. The intervention did not have the desired effect and a few days later Joanne told Mike that her mum thought that he was "taking the mickey". One result that this change of perspective had was that Mike no longer felt so frustrated by Joanne's behaviour and this was a significant change for him. He realised that in the past he had been too concerned and "stressed out" by his inability to get Joanne to hurry up. Even though Joanne was taking as long as ever, Mike felt a lot more relaxed about the situation.

Discussion:
During the discussion group of Conference Two this teacher reported back to his fellow co-researchers and described this example as an unsuccessful intervention. Later in the discussions the group had been looking at the importance of being sincere in communicating interventions and the importance of really believing in the positive perspectives which were being presented. It was stressed that ecosystemics is not a form of "reverse psychology" where you say one thing and mean another in order to manipulate people. The ecosystemic techniques depend on this genuine and sincere form of communication to be effective.

The teachers in this case example pointed out that sincerity could be an important factor in his own case example. He was the sort of teacher who had very light, jokey relationships with children. He found that this communication style had developed over the years and was one that suited him and the children he worked with in this inner city school. Most of his interactions with children were characterised by a light banter, half serious comments and a strong element of irony. The children enjoyed this form of communication and would relate to him almost in a playful fashion.

As he reflected on this and discussed it with the group, he realised that Joanne may well have thought that he was being sardonic and that he really wasn't serious at all. She may have thought that he was just joking and being ironic, and so when he said that she should take as long as she needed to get dry, he obviously meant that she should hurry up. As far as Joanne was concerned he was "taking the mickey", and was simply using an ironic way of telling her to hurry up. If this was the case then there was a useful lesson in the case example, as it reinforced the importance of being sincere in reframing children's behaviour. Molnar and Lindquist point out (1989, p. 44) that if, in any problem situation you cannot honestly describe the situation in a new way, then you should not try to use the ecosystemic techniques at all. This is particularly important when the intervention seems to contradict or ignore common sense, as reframing often does; if the communication is not sincere then it is unlikely to be effective.

Mike had highlighted an important point for the group in focusing on this aspect and said that he would need to think carefully about whether he could use this approach given his own style of interacting with children. Ecosystemics is a technique which cannot necessarily be used by everyone; it depends on a particular view of children and a particular way of communicating with them. At the same time it does not seek to undermine or criticise those who cannot use, or choose not to use, the approach. Ecosystemics is just one among a whole range techniques which depend upon the personality, values and manner of the practitioner for their success.

(5) Belligerent and Uncooperative.

Robert was a year six boy who had an educational statement due to moderate learning difficulties leading to emotional and behavioural problems. He would become aggressive and uncooperative for no apparent reason. In such situations, Robert would become withdrawn and would only do what he wanted to do, when he wanted to do it. His teachers were aware that Robert was a difficult child and that he could become aggressive if provoked in any way.

His behavioural patterns can be illustrated by an incident relating to the use of a tape recorder. Robert had great problems writing stories and accounts, and support services teachers had suggested to the school that a tape recorder should

be used as a writing aid as this approach had often been successful with other children they had worked with.

Jane, his special needs teacher in the school, thought this was good idea and tried to use the tape recorder with him but Robert simply refused to co-operate. She tried to coax him to "give it a go", but he refused to give any sort of response. Jane had experienced this sort of reaction before and knew that it would be useless to force the issue as it would give rise to a confrontational situation. Jane had to abandon the idea of using the tape recorder for the time being.

Jane's interpretation of this and similar behaviour had been that Robert wanted to manipulate any given situation. He only wanted to act when he wanted to, in a way that suited him at any specific time. Although Jane felt that this view was valid and was supported by Robert's behaviour, especially his body language, she acknowledged that this perception had not helped in changing the situation. In fact, it didn't help her in any way to deal with the situation and so the situation simply had to be avoided. As a result she decided to try reframing Robert's behaviour.

In looking for a positive explanation for his behaviour, Jane felt that perhaps Robert wanted to be seen as acting and working in the same way as his peers, and that he did not want to be singled out for individual treatment as had been the case in the past. With this new interpretation of the situation in mind Jane decided to try the tape recording exercise again - but this time to involve a peer member to work alongside Robert. She also decided to encourage the use of the tape recorder more often with other pupils, again sending messages to Robert that he was not being treated differently from his peers. Finally, Jane decided to let Robert take charge of operating the tape recorder thereby offering him some control over the situation.

Jane describes the course of events during the implementation of this and subsequent reframing of Robert's behaviour. It also provides an insight into her thoughts as the intervention progressed:

> Robert and a peer were asked to work together and write a story
> about Egypt. It was suggested that they used a tape recorder. (This
> suggestion had been given to Robert previously, but met with strong
> opposition). Both boys agreed to try it and we withdrew to a

resource room. Robert was asked to operate the machine but for the first ten minutes he withheld co-operation saying that he had missed part of his play-time because assembly had over-run into it. After a further ten minutes he began to work well. Robert enjoyed operating the tape recorder and working with a peer who is not often given specialist attention. Both boys were surprised that they found the lesson interesting but it proved to be quite difficult to achieve the required standard. Their enthusiasm for the task lasted for 30 minutes.

Afterwards Robert wanted to present the tape to the class, but he then had a very bad afternoon, culminating in him running-off. Are there too many behaviour difficulties involved?

Ten days later Robert was continuing to be uncooperative but Jane continued to look for alternative positive explanations for this behaviour. Other children had their own folders - would Robert like one?

Perhaps he needs to know exactly what is expected of him during the week. Previously, he had been offered a folder of work to give him some sense of choice and control of his progress but he had always refused. Was he just trying to be difficult? A positive alternative might be that he was worried that he would be expected to take the folder home as another boy did?

The following Tuesday Robert arrived in a more positive mood. I suggested that he go to his class teacher and asks for a folder, then we would look together at work that he could put in it. Robert remembered how to spell Loughborough and felt very good about it so we put it in his folder. He thought of a good phrase for 'shire' in Leicestershire, 'silly horses in red envelopes'. I took the opportunity to introduce suitable worksheets to be included in the folder. Throughout the day Robert worked steadily - often on work from his folder.

The next day Robert was co-operating. He brought his folder again and a story that he was writing by hand - super ideas, but he required a lot of support to get it down on paper. He worked with a

group of five peers, and I explained that he had to wait for his turn for my attention. (This was explained to the whole group.) His behaviour was exemplary. Can we keep it up?

Robert still has his good days and bad days, but it is clear that this approach certainly helps Jane to deal with the situations more effectively. Jane still finds it difficult to home in on specific situations as she only sees Robert for individual sessions. However, because of the success she has experienced with the reframing technique, she will continue to think of positive alternatives as a matter of course.

Discussion:

This is a good example of how ecosystemic techniques can be used to help teachers deal with quite severe behavioural problems. Molnar and Lindquist (1989) do point out that the methods are not recommended to be used in isolation with such cases, and that appropriate support or therapy may be required. However, these techniques can be used to enhance other therapeutic interventions and, as in this case, can help to create a more positive and co-operative climate.

It also demonstrates the importance of the teacher being empathic towards the pupil, of being able to see the situation from someone else's point of view. The teacher's normal reaction was that Robert was being belligerent and awkward and wanted to take control of the situation. This certainly appeared to be the case to the teacher - there was no doubt in her own mind that Robert was very uncooperative and that he was seeking to dominate the situation. However, she also realised that this behaviour had become established as a pattern and this knowledge helped her to avoid the escalation which could easily develop. The behaviour had become chronic in the sense that it was predictable and persistent. However understandable and natural such a response may be, the teacher realised that the situation was not changing. By putting herself in Robert's shoes, she was able to think of possible alternative explanations for his behaviour. She thought that perhaps Robert resented being singled out for individual attention and arranged for him to work alongside his peers.

This is an interesting example, as unlike many others it does not depend on the teacher actually describing the problem situation or the pupil's behaviour in

positive terms. Most reframing depends upon a verbal intervention where the teacher communicates the essence of the reframing to the pupil concerned; this is then followed up by changes in routine or other practical arrangements, as we have seen in other case examples. This is not the only way to implement this approach. In this example, the teacher lets the reframing speak through the actions she takes by arranging to let Robert work alongside his peers.

She also used this technique in the episode about the folder. Rather than seeing him as "trying to be difficult", she thought of positive alternatives again. As before, the teacher implemented this reframing without communicating it verbally but by approaching the situation in a different way. Although Robert's problems have not all been solved, his teacher has been able to see the benefits of this approach and concludes her case study by saying that she will continue to think of positive alternatives as a matter of course.

(6) Telling Tales or Concerned Helper?

Martin, a year two child, had been very disruptive in class and he was a problem both for the teacher and other children. Martin had always been a rather difficult boy, but recently his behaviour has become quite extreme. He often refused to listen, sitting with his back to the teacher or putting his hands over his ears. If this behaviour was ignored he would begin to make noises, disturb other children, climb on furniture and even throw objects and furniture around the classroom. The teacher, Jenny, had tried to deal with these problems with a whole range of non-confrontational approaches, including positive reinforcement; although these approaches were not completely effective there was a significant improvement in Martin's behaviour. He certainly seemed much more aware of his own behaviour and the types of behaviour which were inappropriate in the classroom.

The improvement continued over a period of time, but as he began to conform more and more to acceptable forms of behaviour he became concerned about the behaviour of other pupils in the class. He repeatedly drew his teacher's attention to what he perceived to be inappropriate behaviour by his classmates and took it upon himself to suggest punishments. He also told children off himself, threatened to smack them and on occasions actually did so. A typical scenario occurred recently when he overheard Jenny telling Matthew that his writing was a little large. Later, Martin came to tell Jenny that Matthew's writing was still too large and asked her to tell him off. Not only did this behaviour demand a

disproportionate amount of the teacher's time, it was also distressing some of the other children in the class.

The teacher usually objected to "tale telling", and she suggested that Martin made sure *he* was behaving properly and leave her to decide if others were naughty. This only exacerbated the problem, causing the child to take the law into his own hands by smacking another child's hands when they were fetching felt pens from her table. As the other child was behaving quite appropriately, Jenny reprimanded Martin, which he saw as unfair. Such behaviour became persistent and caused distress to other pupils or resulted in some of them retaliating.

Jenny's initial reaction was to feel irritated by Martin's behaviour, especially as his views were frequently misconceptions. She thought that he was trying to draw her attention to the behaviour of other pupils because he was so often seen as the "naughty boy" by other children. As she often had to discipline him it seemed that he wanted her to discipline others for actions he believed were wrong.

After being introduced to the ecosystemic approach, Jenny decided to try the reframing technique and identify other, positive, explanations for his behaviour. She considered that this child, who had a long history of behaviour difficulties, was actually attempting to demarcate his own behaviour by observing others and her reaction to them. He was looking for reassurance by telling her of problems and needed to know how she would solve them so he could modify his own behaviour. He was also trying to help her by telling her if others were causing problems. Based on this new perspective, Jenny was able to formulate a way to change her response.

Jenny decided that when Martin told her about other children's behaviour her reaction should be one of concern rather than irritation. Instead of reprimanding him for 'telling tales' she would say that he was good for sharing his concern for others and that he was being helpful to her and other children in doing this. She also decided to actively encourage the boy to assist her in helping the other children.

When she put these ideas into practice the outcome was very successful. The next time she went to help a child he automatically came with her and on other occasions put his arm around the other child. He was reassured by praise from

his teacher when she interpreted his behaviour as concern for others. He became more considerate, co-operative and tolerant. The smacking and threats of punishments had stopped. Tale telling was much less frequent.

Discussion:
This is a good example of how ecosystemics can be used as part of a larger plan for dealing with problem behaviour. It illustrates how ecosystemic interventions are not appropriate for extreme problem behaviour but can be used to focus on specific situations within that context. Ecosystemics can be used to change "chronic problem situations in which the problematic behaviour and response to it are predictable" (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989: 42). Martin was responding well to a variety of strategies but this new problem behaviour began to develop once he had started to become more co-operative. As soon as his teacher became aware that Martin's behaviour and her response to it were becoming persistent and predictable, she realised that she could try the reframing approach. By seeing the "tale telling" in a positive light, i.e. as an expression of concern for other children and an attempt to help the teacher, the teacher was able to change the problem situation by changing her own behaviour.

When the teacher told us about this example she remarked that she was quite surprised at how effective the intervention was because Martin was not normally an easy boy to get along with. This was the first time that the teacher had used an ecosystemic technique and she found it hard to find the key to reframing. The difficulty was in being able to see the problem situation in a positive way because in order to do this she had to change her normal response to the situation.
Although it had taken her some time to think the method through and to find a positive interpretation, once this had been done the intervention itself took little time to carry out and had a real impact on the problem situation. The teacher feels that her relationship with Martin has improved which has helped her to deal more effectively with other aspects of Martin's behaviour.

5.2.2.2 THE POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF- MOTIVE TECHNIQUE.

(1) Rushed, Careless Work.
Adam is a year two boy who always seems to rush his work. He seems almost obsessed with finishing tasks before anyone else - he will finish a task in five

minutes when it takes others half an hour. His work is always complete, but careless, poorly presented and containing many errors. Although Adam very rarely disturbs the other children in the class, he is constantly disturbing his teacher, Claire. For example, he often works at a task for only a few minutes at a time and then takes it to Claire for approval. When Claire asks him to correct his work, Adam objects and argues that it is all right. In fact he becomes quite distressed if he has to correct work or if he is advised to do something in a particular way, and he does not readily accept help.

Claire's normal response is to encourage Adam to make a greater effort to present his work well. She does not expect him to correct everything, but encourages him to correct selected errors, e.g. spellings, words missed from sentences or particular maths corrections. Adam always responds to Claire's help by objecting; he argues that his work is correct and tells Claire that *she* is wrong or that *she* caused the errors. In severe cases, he gets very upset, shouts and throws his book or pencil; at other times he does the work again but makes even more errors.

These situations had become fairly regular occurrences, and Claire had decided to try the positive connotation of motive activity. In considering what Adam's motives were, she was sure that Adam just wanted more than anything to complete tasks quickly and progress to the next piece of work. He wanted everything he did to be accepted and approved, regardless of how accurate it was.

In considering what positive motives there might be for Adam's behaviour, Claire thought that he may simply be seeking her approval for working really hard at everything and completing a lot of tasks. Based on this idea, Claire praised Adam for his willingness to work hard and produce lots of pieces of work. She also made an effort to visit Adam frequently during lessons and praise his efforts or to offer help. She combined this approach with some other measures which were designed to try to avoid the situations which Adam had so much trouble with. She showed Adam how to do things he has previously had difficulty with in order to avoid him making errors, and provided plenty of short activities so he was always well occupied during lessons.

Claire found that Adam's behaviour improved but was not always consistent. Many more tasks were satisfactorily completed and he generally responded very

well to Claire giving him praise and extra help. Unfortunately, there were two major problems. First, he began to monopolise Claire's time and sometimes reacted badly when others came for help. Adam needed so much of Claire's time that it was causing problems in terms of classroom organisation and the needs of other children. Claire developed a strategy of telling him that she needed to see other children and would return in a few minutes, which worked well. Second, providing a large number of shorter tasks was very demanding for Claire.

Claire noted that the situation was still uncertain and unpredictable. Sometimes Adam would not accept help and reverted back to poor behaviour, failing to attend to work for any length of time. However, despite these drawbacks there were days when significant improvements were made - he developed a more positive attitude to his work, took more care and worked on set tasks for longer periods. Claire was unsure about what to do next in this situation and was standing back to see if the situation would settle one way or the other.

Discussion:
This is an interesting example because the positive motive which the teacher identified for the intervention was so similar the motive she had already observed in Adam's behaviour. It may be the case that it is easier to work with a positive motive which is quite distinct from an already existing one. Despite this similarity, the intervention was successful to a degree and produced some positive changes in Adam's behaviour.

To illustrate this point a little further, most people would agree with the teacher that Adam's motives for his behaviour were that "he wanted everything he did to be accepted and approved, regardless of how accurate it was". *We would accept this as a plausible motive because it explains the situation which has been described. The teacher's alternative positive motive was* "that he may simply be seeking her approval for working really hard at everything and completing a lot of tasks". *This would also be accepted for the same reason. Even though this is very similar to the original motive, it's the slight twist in its formulation which gave the teacher the key to the intervention.*

One way to proceed in this example would be to try to formulate another positive motive for Adam's almost compulsive desire to finish work quickly, but this time to find one that was not closely related to the first and did not have the same implications for the teacher's time. Even when the approach is not immediately

or completely successful, it should not be seen as a failure, but only as a step towards the final solution.

5.2.2.3 THE POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF-FUNCTION TECHNIQUE

(1) <u>Tidying Up When Everyone Else Is Ready To Go.</u>
Paul was a year two boy who often refused to do as his teacher asked. He would engage in activities which were perfectly acceptable under different circumstances but were inappropriate at the time. For example, he would take a long time to line up to go to assembly because he was tidying up. The tidying up involved putting almost everything away even if it was to be used later on in the day. He put his own belongings away, Maths equipment back in cupboards and other children's belongings into their draws. This behaviour annoyed the other children and often resulted in the class being late. His teacher, Sally, would tell him to come straight away as things needed to be left out for later use. However, Paul would ignore her requests that he join the line and always found something else to tidy up. Eventually he would come to line when he was ready to do so.

This behaviour had become quite well established and had been going on for some time. All Sally's efforts were having little or no effect on his behaviour. Sally decided to use the positive connotation of function technique to change the situation. The first step in this process is to find answers to the questions "What does the behaviour achieve?", and "What are the results of the behaviour?".

The results of Paul's behaviour are that he gains extra attention at a crucial time of the day and that he can be the last in line, which he seems to enjoy. He also disturbs the equipment and work of other children and puts things away that are still in use. These results are problematical for Sally and the other children in the class.

The next step, and the key step in this technique, is to identify *positive* results of the behaviour, even if they are unintended. Some of the positive functions of Paul's behaviour are that the classroom is tidier, that all pencils and crayons are picked up from the floor, and that books are tidied on the self. It also means that other children do not have to do any tidying up themselves and that Sally does not have to check that the room is tidy or that other children have tidied up.

Based on these positive functions, Sally formulated her intervention. She thanked Paul for his help and said how much better the classroom looked. Sally also told him how pleased she was that he saved her from tidying up and said it was also good that he helped other children by doing things for them. She added that as he was so good at it, she would set him some special tidying tasks from time to time. For example, she asked him to collect in work and then line up when he was ready. She developed this by asking him to organise the tidying up at his table and then when he felt everyone was ready, they could line up. This approach worked fairly well although Paul would still find things to do when everyone else was ready to go.

Sally also had to ask other children to do things for Paul as they were still annoyed by Paul tidying away their possessions. Other children were also given a turn at organising their tables, as many of them asked to do so.

Discussion:
This is a good example of how to implement the positive connotation of motive technique as well as some of the unexpected results which can affect the whole ecosystem. This technique is particularly useful when it is difficult to think of any positive motives for the behaviour. If there appears to be no possible positive motivation for the behaviour which you can genuinely believe in, then it is often possible to find some positive outcomes or results of that behaviour even though they may not be intended. For example, in this case it doesn't seem as if Paul really wants to help the teacher by tidying up as he always seems to do it when she is keen to get the class off to assembly on time. Paul is aware that he is holding everyone up, so it is difficult to really believe that his behaviour is informed by positive motives. However, it cannot be denied that his actions do mean that other children do not have to tidy up and that the teacher does not have to check up as much. It is by focusing on these positive aspects that the intervention proceeds.

In this case example, the approach worked "fairly well" although there were other effects on the ecosystem which had to be dealt with by the teacher, i.e. the request by other children to be given a turn at organising their tables. The intervention was only partially successful as "Paul would still find things to do when everyone else was ready to go". The same problem exists, even though it does not occur so frequently. In this situation it is advisable to wait for a period to see how it develops and to look for any other changes within the ecosystem. If

the situation does not improve then it may be necessary either to repeat the intervention, perhaps using a prediction of relapse technique, or try one of the other techniques.

5.3.2.4 THE REFRAMING AND POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF-MOTIVE TECHNIQUES

(1) James the Whirlwind: Constant Activity, Perpetual Disturbance and Tireless Energy.

> This is an extended case example, showing that ecosystemic techniques do not always work as if by magic. This particular teacher did not lose heart but was prepared to try a range of approaches to try to change the behaviour of a boy who was a serious disruptive influence in her class. It also suggests that the technique may need to be modified for younger children. There are several stages in this particular story, and each is followed by a short discussion. The first stages is based around a reframing activity.

James, a five year old boy with a big presence, would usually arrive in class a few minutes late when the other children were already sitting on the carpet for registration. He would crash through the group, treading on fingers, kicking other children, and immediately start talking to boys in the group. Pat, his teacher, usually responded by asking him to come and sit by her quietly while she did the register. James would do as he was told but managed only a few seconds before he was up and about again, rushing off to the toilet or to look in his drawer. James seemed to be always at the centre of high levels of activity and Pat could not find a way to explain the situation. Pat had tried a range of approaches, including building a positive relationship, using positive reinforcement at every opportunity and ignoring inappropriate behaviour for a while and concentrating on the other children; these were only effective in the very short term and James would soon be at the centre of yet another disruption.

Pat decided to try the reframing technique and to look for positive explanations for James's behaviour. She found that James was alone at home and that this may

have accounted for his desperate attempts to make and keep friends. She thought that James's behaviour on arrival at school could be interpreted as tremendous enthusiasm and that he could not wait to affirm his friendships with the other children.

Pat communicated the fact that she viewed his behaviour as a sign of his enthusiasm for his friends but there was really was no sustained improvement over a two week period. Pat noted that James didn't seem to take much notice of the intervention.

Discussion:
The teacher in this example felt that although this was a chronic problem situation it was perhaps "too big" and too extreme for this type of intervention to be successful. She decided that she would try to focus on one particular aspect of James's behaviour and use one of the other techniques with which she was familiar. This is in line with Molnar and Lindquist's advice (1989, p. 166) that we should start small and focus on particular behaviours which we want to change. Even though ecosystemics is not intended for major or extreme problem situations, it may help to improve situations to some extent. This was not the case with the teacher's first intervention with James. After such an experience it is very easy to just give up and say that the approach does not work. However, ecosystemics does not pretend to produce predictable results and sometimes, as in this case, the results may be insignificant as far as the teacher is concerned. The teacher showed that she was prepared to rethink the situation and to try again - one of the requirements for using the ecosystemic approach.
One other aspect which is demonstrated by this example is that James didn't appear to take much notice of the initial intervention. This is an interesting response; older children are often taken aback by interventions of this kind (i.e. those which effectively acknowledge that the pupil is behaving in a particular ways for positive reasons). Such a minimal response by the five year old may indicate that such a young child would find it difficult to understand such an abstract intervention (i.e. purely verbal) and that a more concrete example would be necessary. An intervention that had some obvious tangible aspect or something which engaged the activity of the child may be required. This is the course of action that the teacher chose to try next, using the positive connotation of motive technique.

Pat decided to work on another feature of James's behaviour: he persistently told Pat of every naughty behaviour, or apparently naughty behaviour, that he saw other children involved in. Pat responded by asking him to wait while she finished with another child. At other times, if she felt that he was exaggerating or just "trying to get others into trouble" she would simply tell him to go away. James usually responded by repeating his allegation louder and harder until Pat acknowledged him. If Pat then took no action, James would take matters into his own hands and shout at or hit the children involved. Pat's responses also depended on what James had reported, who was involved and how aware she was of what was going on. She usually spoke with other children to confirm the reports and tried to explain to James that she did not need to know every little thing that happened. She also tried to explain that he would not make friends by getting others into trouble.

Having reflected on the situation and her usual response, Pat now thought about James's motives for this behaviour. As James had very limited self control he was often in trouble himself, and he found it difficult to see why he should be reprimanded if other children were apparently getting away with things. Pat felt that James was simply trying to get the other children into trouble too. Although Pat felt this to be a reasonable interpretation of James's motives, she was also aware that her methods of dealing with him, based on this interpretation, were not changing the problem situation. The next step was to try to formulate a positive motive for his behaviour. She had to come up with a plausible positive answer to the question "What does James want to achieve in this situation?"

James knew that Pat could not see everything that went on in the class base; he had also seen her listen attentively to other children's reports and opinions when incidents occurred. Pat considered that perhaps James's behaviour was motivated by the desire to try to help Pat by telling her what was going on in the class.

However, Pat felt that this could lead to a situation where James would simply expect her to tell children off at his bidding. She also felt that she needed to respond to all such reports from children in the same way - there could not be a special arrangement for James. She chose to do this by introducing a class "incident book" in which naughty behaviour was to be recorded. The class was told that if their names appeared in the book too often (for example, six times in one week) appropriate action would be taken. The idea was that James's reports could then be written in this book and that Pat could acknowledge his help in

these situations. Every time James needed to use the book, Pat could reinforce the positive reframing of his behaviour that he was being very helpful.

Pat explained that there was no immediate effect as the only name that was recorded more than once on the first day was James's. Also, the responses to James's behaviour in the playground by ancillaries, lunch time supervisors and other teaching staff was not consistent with her own. In fact she found that James was less likely to report incidents that occurred outside the class base, and was more likely to, "plough in, limbs flailing". As James clearly discriminated between what went on indoors and out Pat felt that it was worth persisting with her intervention strategy within the class base.

Pat was able to report that the incident book had proved to be quite successful once the initial reaction had died down. James is now using more discrimination in what he reports and does not always expect an immediate response from her. The problem has not gone away, but it has improved and Pat has found it easier to deal with the situation.

Unfortunately, due to a major reorganisation of the class after the Easter break, , the use of the incident book lapsed. However, Pat has noted that James has not reverted to his former extreme behaviour of informing her of every little incident that occurs, and has found that she can deal with James's help without it intruding on the normal running of the class.

Discussion:
Is it possible that this new behaviour was the result of the previous intervention? This example bears a striking similarity to a previous case example by another teacher, which reports a similar situation of a child monitoring the behaviour of others in the class and making sure that no one else "misbehaved" (see "Telling tales or concerned helper?"). In this previous example, the particular tale telling behaviour only emerged when the boy's very disruptive behaviour began to improve. As he began to conform more and more to acceptable forms of behaviour he became concerned about the behaviour of other pupils in the class. James's behaviour seems more extreme and does not appear to be related to any obvious improvement in behaviour. There may be a link here in that when any child starts reflecting on and becoming aware of his own behaviour, he may also become more aware of the behaviour of others. However, whether there is a connection here or not is not directly relevant to the present account.

There are many interesting features here; the account demonstrates well how the intervention can be made more concrete by the use of a book which the children have to use.

This example shows how ecosystemic techniques can be used to help in cases of quite serious disruptive behaviour. Although the approach is not intended for extreme problems, it appears that it can be used alongside other approaches, particularly where it is used to focus on particular aspects of behaviour. In this case, the teacher reports that although the problem behaviour continues, there are significant improvements, both in terms of James's behaviour and her responses to it. By reframing James's behaviour in a positive way, the teacher was able to change the ecosystem and produce a positive outcome.

The example also demonstrates the importance of other aspects of the approach. First, after the initial intervention had not been successful, the teacher tried another technique, this time making the intervention more concrete. As it is impossible to predict the effect of an intervention, often it is necessary to try several techniques before significant changes occur. Second, it is necessary to wait to see if an intervention is producing effects. The second intervention, for example, did not a first appear to be working, and may have even been counterproductive; after a period of time, however, the system stabilised and there was a significant improvement in the situation. Furthermore, once the particular intervention was stopped, the improvement in behaviour and the teacher's ability to deal with the situation were maintained.

Chapter Five has provided and discussed the results of the baseline data collected during the present study. It has been seen that, although the teachers' responses to the ecosystemic approach varied amongst the co-researchers, a prevailing positive response was seen to emerge as the fieldwork progressed. it is not possible to generalise this result and make assertions about how primary teachers in England as a whole would respond to the approach. However, the results do suggest that the ecosystemic approach is worthy of further investigation. This contention is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

It has also been seen that ecosystemic interventions can be useful in solving chronic problem situations in English primary schools. Indeed, 90% of ecosystemic interventions that were attempted by the co-researchers were reported to be successful, or partially successful, in constructively changing

chronic problem behaviour. This is an impressive result and one that warrants further investigation. Future considerations for such investigations and flaws in the present study are discussed in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER 6

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Six discusses the limitations of the present study and, based on these findings, suggests future recommendations for subsequent studies on the ecosystemic approach. In Section 6.1 limitations of the data collection and analysis methods utilised within the present study will be critically analysed. The analysis will focus on discussing these limitation in relation to the two key research areas, each of which will be covered in turn. In addition, limitations which were seen to affect both key research areas are analysed. Section 6.2 offers recommendations on how these flaws may be remedied in future research projects. The recommendations relate directly to the identified limitations and are discussed in the same sequence.

6.1 LIMITATIONS

This research project was undertaken as a pilot investigation, designed to test the methods adopted and to provide baseline data on the introduction of the ecosystemic approach into English primary schools. The pilot nature of the investigation meant that the methodological procedures were not only susceptible to constructive criticism but that such criticisms were an inevitable component of the study. More than this, the critical evaluation of methods would be vital in providing a sound reference point from which future research on the ecosystemic approach could be developed in England.

The following Sections critically evaluate the methods of data collection and analysis that were adopted in the present study. The discussion is divided into three main Sections. The first two Sections discuss limitations that were encountered while collecting and analysing data on the two key research areas, namely; the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach; and the impact of the ecosystemic techniques. Finally, Section 6.1.3 discusses the limitations that were seen to affect both of the key research areas.

6.1.1 CO-RESEARCHERS' RESPONSES

Limitations were identified in relation to the collection and analysis of data on the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach. The two methods utilised for the collection of data, namely the discussion groups and comment sheets, will be critically analysed in turn and each will be followed by a critical evaluation of the methods of analysis that were adopted. Finally, the limitations of the follow up group will be discussed.

(1) The oral responses of the co-researchers were collected from the discussion groups which took place during each of the three Conferences. Within these discussions a non-directive interview procedure was adopted, with the discussions being guided by the co-researchers. The researchers role was one of facilitation and the recording of key issues through note transcriptions of the conversations. This method of data collection was not rigorous enough to facilitate a detailed content analysis of the data and only a broad description of the co-researchers responses could be obtained. As such, the validity of the responses could not be fully tested.

In addition, it was found that the amount of data collected on the co-researchers' oral responses fell short of that anticipated. This was due to time constraints during the second and third Conferences. This shortfall in the data collection process resulted in only limited data being collected and that which was not representative of the entire co-researcher group.

It should be pointed out that, for the purpose of the present pilot study, the data collected did allow for a descriptive summary of the co-researcher's responses to the ecosystemic approach to be formulated. However, an in-depth study would need to move beyond this simplistic level of analysis and collect data that could be more rigorously analysed.

(2) The present study had anticipated interviewing individual co-researchers to facilitate the collection and analysis of in-depth data. However, as was discussed in Section 5.1.3.3, no interviews were carried out. This was a flaw in the data collection process and one which had a detrimental effect on the amount and quality of data collected on the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach

(3) The written responses of the co-researchers were collected through the use of comment sheets. These sheets were completed by the co-researchers following each Conference and returned via a stamped addressed envelope (see Section 4.2.1, No. 6). Despite the provision of a SAE, and an oral and written (see appendix 8) plea by the researchers for their completion and return, progressively fewer co-researchers completed and returned the comment sheets after each Conference. Indeed, the response rate dropped from 67% following the first Conference, to 33% in the second, and to 13% in the final Conference. The data base was therefore incomplete and the analysis provided results that were unrepresentative of the entire group.

(4) In addition to the limitations of an incomplete response rate, the wording of the questions within the comment sheets was seen to be inadequate. The researchers had attempted to create a balance between open ended questions, which would capture the co-researcher's phenomenological responses to the ecosystemic approach, and the need to collect relevant, valid data for the present study. However, in retrospect, it became apparent that the questions had not been specific enough to fully facilitate the collection and analysis of relevant information on the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach. In particular, asking co-researchers; "Do you intend to continue with the research? and Why?" was seen to be an inadequate question for providing in-depth data on the co-researchers' responses.

(5) The Follow-up meeting was set up in response to a realisation that the co-researchers would not have an opportunity to feed back to the group following the final Conference. This was a shortfall in the data collecting process that was not identified during the preparation stages of the research. This resulted in the co-researchers being given short notice of the additional meeting and consequently, due to prior commitments, most were unable to attend. The data collected during the meeting, while being very useful, was therefore not representative of the entire group and the analysis therefore provided results that could not be fully tested for validity.

6.1.2 THE IMPACT OF THE TECHNIQUES

All the data relating to the impact of the ecosystemic techniques were collected by the co-researchers in their respective schools. As such, the identified limitations within the data collection process are based on the work carried out by the co-researchers. However, as shall be seen, these limitations did not result from the shortfall of individual co-researchers but from characteristics of the ecosystemic techniques.

(1) Less than half of the co-researchers attempted an ecosystemic technique, therefore the data base on the impact of the techniques fell short of its potential. This limitation, rather than being synonymous with an apathetic body of co-researchers, resulted from the person and problem specific nature of the ecosystemic techniques. The techniques do not, and are not designed to, suit all educational practitioners and all chronic problem behaviours.

Molnar and Lindquist (1989) acknowledge this point and suggest that 'there may be situations in which you may not wish to use ecosystemic techniques or in which ecosystemic techniques should be used as part of a larger plan (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 41). They also point out that the decision to attempt an ecosystemic technique must be based on the professional judgment of the individual who will implement that technique. They maintain that 'although ecosystemic ideas have been used very successfully in a variety of problem situations, the decision to use any of our ideas in a problem situation you face is a matter of your professional judgment' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 43-44).

Furthermore, the ecosystemic techniques are not appropriate for all chronic problem behaviours. Molnar and Lindquist (1989) recommend '... the use of these techniques in chronic problem situations in which the problematic behavior and response to it are predictable' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 42).

(2) None of the co-researchers attempted either the Storming-the-Back-Door, Locating-Exceptions, Symptom-Prescription or the Predicting-a-Relapse techniques. Therefore, no data were collected on the impact of these techniques on chronic problem behaviour in English primary schools. This was seen to be a limitation of the present study, however it was also an unavoidable result. Two reasons are given for this contention. First, as Molnar and Lindquist (1989)

explain, the co-researchers had to be certain that the techniques they were attempting could be implemented with sincerity:

> If and when you use the techniques ... you will want to be sure that you are convinced that you can use them honestly and sincerely ... If, in any problem situation, you find that you cannot honestly describe the behavior of the situation in a new way, then you should not attempt to use the ecosystemic techniques. These techniques are not mind games used for saying one thing while thinking another. (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 44)

Second, in order to implement the techniques with sincerity, the co-researchers had to feel confident in their chosen ecosystemic technique, and that it was an appropriate technique for addressing the chosen chronic problem situation. Within the present study, none of the co-researchers either felt confident enough to attempt the three "missing" techniques, or that an appropriate problem situation arose in which the techniques could be implemented. This could not have been anticipated prior to the fieldwork, nor could it have been remedied during the fieldwork.

6.1.3 LIMITATIONS AFFECTING BOTH KEY RESEARCH AREAS

In addition to the above limitations, flaws were identified which potentially affect the collection and analysis of data relating to both the key research areas. These flaws centred around the three Conferences, the presentation and content of which were untested prior to inception of the present study. Although procedures were followed to evaluate and adapt these conditions (see Section 4.1), a number of flaws emerged that could not be remedied before the completion of the fieldwork. Each limitation will be considered in turn and a brief discussion around the key points will be provided.

(1) The ecosystemic techniques introduced to the co-researchers were illustrated using case examples provided by Molnar and Lindquist (1989). These case examples were formulated from work carried out by educational practitioners in the United States and as such the language used, and situations represented, had a distinct American flavour to them. Although the researchers had attempted to

"re-write" the case examples with an English flavour (see Section 4.1), their efforts appeared to be inadequate. Indeed, the American slant was noted by the co-researchers who initially expressed doubt over transferring the ecosystemic techniques to the English primary sector (see Section 5.1.3.1).

It may be fair to assume that this doubt resulted in hesitation to attempt the ecosystemic techniques. However, the pilot nature of the present investigation meant that the presentation of American case examples was unavoidable.

(2) Molnar and Lindquist recommend that educational practitioners who are beginning to use the ecosystemic techniques select 'a small problem to start with and make as small a change as possible in relation to the problem' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 166). Despite this clear and sensible recommendation the present study failed to feed this information to the co-researchers until the final Conference. This was a flaw in the preparation process and may have had a detrimental affect on the results of the study.

(3) The results of the follow up meeting suggested that the co-researchers would have liked to have had more time for discussion within the Conferences (see Section 5.14.2). As far as was possible, within the time constraints of the Conferences, this requirement was met by the researchers. However, the half day duration of the Conferences had been set within the invitation letters and the participating schools had organised supply cover based on this. Consequently, it was inappropriate and impossible to alter the schedule of the Conferences. This resulted in some of the co-researchers returning to their respective schools without having the opportunity to fully explore their ideas and concerns over the ecosystemic approach and techniques.

The ramifications of this shortfall can only be speculative. However, it may fair to assume that some of the co-researchers returned to their school without a clear understanding of the ecosystemic techniques and this may have impeded the teachers confidence in the techniques and willingness to implement them in their classrooms.

(4) The results from the Follow-up meeting suggested that the co-researchers would have benefited from working in pairs from the same school. This, they suggested, would have enabled them to discuss their thoughts while away from the Conferences and facilitate their understanding and confidence in the

ecosystemic techniques. While Molnar and Lindquist (1989), also make this suggestion (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 169), unfortunately the present study did not recognise this recommendation prior to the fieldwork. Consequently, only one school sent a pair to the Conferences.

Unfortunately, the present study did not put in place measures for investigating the potential benefits which the "paired" co-researchers may have experienced. As such, no data was collected as evidence to support or refute Molnar and Lindquist's contention.

The implications of this shortfall can only be speculative, however, it is possible that the lack of support that the co-researchers encountered on their return to schools may have hindered their desire to implement the ecosystemic techniques. This may also have been compounded by the lack of understanding and support that some of the co-researchers faced from their peers (see Section 5.1.4.2).

Section 6.1 has critically discussed flaws in the data collection and analysis procedures utilised in the present study. These flaws have been used to make recommendations for future research in this area and it is these which are discussed in the following Section.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS.

The limitations of the pilot study highlight those areas of the investigation that were flawed. These flaws are addressed in this Section, and used as the basis for recommendations that future research into the ecosystemic approach in England may wish to consider. The discussion focuses on providing suggestions for additional investigations into the two key research areas. These two key research areas will be covered in turn and recommendations will be put foreword for each. This will be followed by recommendations which are seen to affect both of the key research areas.

6.2.1 CO-RESEARCHERS' RESPONSES

The discussion groups, comment sheets and follow up meeting, utilised in the present study, proved invaluable both to the co-researchers and the researchers. However, it is suggested that future research projects may wish to consider more in-depth methods of data collection and analysis. The following procedures are recommended;

(1) It is recommended that the oral responses of the co-researchers be audio taped during the discussion groups, the data collected being transcribed and edited typescripts prepared. This will address the issue of limited and inadequately detailed hard data on the co-researchers' oral responses to the ecosystemic approach, both of which were encountered in the present study.

(2) It is recommended that the co-researchers be interviewed during the intermittent periods between the Conferences. The interviews should adopt an unstructured interview technique (see Section 3.4.3.2) and aim at collecting data on; the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach; and their responses to the ecosystemic techniques which they have been introduced to at each stage of the research.

(3) It is recommended that the invitation letter inform the co-researchers of the interview requirements of the research. This will address the poor interview response rate which was encountered in the present study by giving prior notice of such requirements to the co-researchers. In addition, it is recommended that the invitation letter stress that any "consultation" with the researchers will be offered free of charge. This will address any confusion over the cost of the interviews - a problem which was highlighted in the follow up meeting (see Section 5.1.3.3).

(4) It is recommended that the written responses of the co-researchers be collected by adopting a questionnaire method of data collection. Following each Conference co-researchers should be asked to complete a questionnaire on their responses to the ecosystemic approach. The completion of these questionnaires will further facilitate the collection of hard data on the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach.

(5) It is recommended.that the following specific questions be included in the questionnaire;

  (a) What is your response to the ecosystemic approach at this stage of the research?
  (b) Do you believe the ecosystemic approach will be useful as an approach for addressing chronic problem behaviour in your classroom or school?

(6) It is recommended that the initial contact letter (see Appendix 4) provides the co-researchers with a timetable of events which includes the Follow-up meeting. This will address the short fall of the present study which failed to provide adequate notice of the follow up meeting to co-researchers.

(7) It is recommended that the responses from the questionnaires and the typescripts of the discussion groups be used as the basis for the major areas of inquiry, and the hypotheses to be explored, in *focus groups*. These should be held in addition to the follow up meeting and take place two months after the final Conference, thus providing long term evaluations.

The recommended size for an effective focus group discussion is eight to twelve (Prince, 1978; Fern, 1982). This relatively small group size makes it important that the sample be properly selected. The composition of the group would need to reflect the diversity of the points of view held by the co-researchers. As such, it is suggested that the characteristic responses of the co-researchers to the ecosystemic approach (as identified by the questionnaires and typescripts), be used as the basis for a random selection of participants from each characteristic group.

(8) It is recommended that the analysis and evaluation of the data collected during the focus groups should consist of the collating of disparate materials, the weighing and sifting of all inputs and the organisation of these into an articulated set of premises and speculations (Templeton, 1976). This can be achieved by audio recording the focus group, preparing edited typescripts, systematically relating and classifying the information according to problems and objectives, patters and relationships (Tynan and Drayton, 1988).

6.2.2 THE IMPACT OF THE ECOSYSTEMIC TECHNIQUES

The limitations of data collection on the impact of the ecosystemic techniques resulted from the characteristics of the ecosystemic techniques rather than the methods utilised. While in the present study these limitations were unavoidable future research may wish to consider the following points.

(1) It is recommended that the sample population of teachers be increased. This may be achieved by establishing two independent co-operative research groups (Reason, 1984), as opposed to the single group found in the present study. Not only will this produce an element of triangulation and coherence of findings, it may also address the problem of a low number of co-researchers attempting the ecosystemic techniques.

6.2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS AFFECTING BOTH KEY RESEARCH AREAS

(1) It is recommended that, whenever possible, English case examples be used to illustrate the ecosystemic techniques. In doing so, it is hoped that future co-researchers will be less skeptical of the case examples used to illustrate the ecosystemic techniques and therefore less hesitant to attempt ecosystemic interventions.

The case examples formulated within the present study go some way toward achieving this aim. However, as has been seen, a number of ecosystemic techniques have not been attempted in English schools and therefore English case examples on these techniques are not available. This can only be remedied by future research projects.

(2) It is recommended that during Conference One the co-researchers be informed of Molnar and Lindquist's recommendation that they initially use ecosystemic interventions on small problems and try to make small changes in relation to such problem situations.

(3) It is recommended that the duration of the Conferences be extended from that of half days to whole days. This will serve three roles. First, it will provide more

time for the co-researchers to complete the questionnaires at the end of each Conference. Second, it will provide more time for group discussions. Finally, extending the duration of the Conferences will provide the researchers with more time to introduce the ecosystemic techniques - a problem which was encountered during Conference Two and Three of the present study (see Section 5.1.3.1).

In addition, it is recommended that the Follow-up meeting be replaced by a fourth Conference day. The Conference will serve the same purpose of the Follow-up meeting in the present study but will be more structured in terms of content. A revised Conference timetable and content is provided in Appendix 12. (4) It is recommended that the co-researchers attend the Conferences with one or more peers from the same school. This is a recommendation offered by Molnar and Lindquist (see Section 4.3.1; No. 7) and one which was suggested within the Follow-up meeting (see Section 5.1.4.2). This, it is anticipated, will enhance the co-researchers opportunity to discuss the ecosystemic approach and techniques outside the Conferences, thereby potentially increasing their understanding of, and confidence in, ecosystemic intervention strategies.

(5) It is recommended that the prospect of setting up an inset course, which a "family of schools" could attend outside school time, be explored. This would go some way in addressing the problem of releasing two or more staff from the same school and would allow any costs to be shared amongst the participating schools.

(6) It is recommended that the comment sheets remain in place as a method of continuously evaluating the content and structure of the Conferences but not as a method of collecting data on the co-researchers written responses to the ecosystemic approach.

Chapter 6 has outlined the limitations of the present study and made suggestions based on these for future research into the ecosystemic approach in English primary schools. It has been seen that flaws in the data collection and analysis procedures were identified and that these had a detrimental affect on the results. However, the pilot nature of the present study such flaws were an inevitable component of the investigation and proved to be beneficial in highlighting adaptations that would need to be put in place if the ecosystemic approach is to be further analysed. Indeed, suggestions for future considerations have been

provided and it is hoped that these will prove to be useful within future research projects.

The final Chapter concludes the present study by summarising why and how the research into the ecosystemic approach in English primary schools was implemented and the results that were obtained from the research.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Prior to the present investigation no research had been attempted on the introduction of the ecosystemic approach into English primary schools. Despite this, there had been considerable academic and professional interest in the approach, particularly with regard to interpersonal relations in schools and approaches to dealing with disruptive behaviour (see for example; Cooper and Upton, 1990a & 1990b; Upton and Cooper, 1990). In addition, the ecosystemic techniques have been featured in a number of recent major texts on the management of problem behaviour (see for example; Charlton and David, 1993; Cooper, Smith and Upton, 1994; and Fontana, 1994). A recurring conclusion within these texts was the need for further research in this area and, more specifically, for research on the practical application of the ecosystemic approach in English schools. Indeed, Fontana (1994) maintains that: "further research is clearly needed and more refined guidelines required" (Fontana, 1994, p. 95).

It was such comments that promoted the development, and subsequent implementation of the present study. The innovative nature of the ecosystemic approach in Britain demanded that an initial *pilot* study be undertaken in order to determine the future potential of the approach, and to evaluate the methodological procedures with which this potential could be most effectively assessed. It was this role that the present study adopted, and it was therefore seen as a pilot investigation as opposed to a piece of experimental research.

7.1 THE PILOT STUDY

The pilot study itself concentrated on addressing two key areas. First, it aimed at describing and analysing primary teachers' responses to the ecosystemic approach. Second, it aimed at analysing and evaluating the impact of the ecosystemic techniques on chronic problem behaviour in English mainstream primary schools. These aims were achieved by inviting primary teachers to become co-researchers within the project and carry out action research on the ecosystemic approach in their respective schools.

As the ecosystemic approach is not widely known amongst educational practitioners in England, the co-researchers were also invited to attend three complementary Conferences during which the theoretical ideas that underpin the approach and the ecosystemic techniques were introduced. The Conferences took place at monthly intervals and the interim periods were designed to allow the co-researchers time to implement the ecosystemic techniques they had learnt. During the period of field work data were collected and analysed in order to address the two key research areas. In addition, evaluations of the research methods and findings were used in presenting recommendations for future research into the ecosystemic approach.

The purpose of this thesis has been to present the research and its findings. The following Section provides the concluding comments on the thesis by outlining each Chapter in turn.

7.2 THE THESIS

The first Chapter of the thesis introduced the present study. The Chapter began by highlighting the considerable interest which has been given to problem behaviour in British schools in recent years and advocated the use of an ecosystemic approach to address such problems. In Section 1.2, the ecosystemic approach was summarised and it was seen that, although ecosystemics is congruent to the humanistic tradition of British education, no research into the approach had been undertaken. Section 1.3 introduced the pilot study itself, stated the two research areas and summarised the procedures by which these areas were to be addressed. Finally, Section 1.4 introduced the thesis by outlining each Chapter which was to be included.

Chapter Two discussed, in detail, the ecosystemic approach to problem behaviour in schools. The Chapter began by introducing the origins of the approach where it was demonstrated that ecosystemics derived from General System Theory, systemic family therapy and phenomenology. Section 2.2 critically analysed the theoretical framework of the approach. It discussed the ways in which teachers' responses to problem behaviour often serve to maintain such behaviour, resulting in the development of chronic problem situations. In particular, it was seen that commonsense views, assigned meanings, cause-effect

reasoning and an ecology of ideas can all act as barriers to the constructive change of chronic problem behaviour. In Section 2.3 the practical application of the ecosystemic techniques was considered. This Section focused on describing five prerequisites which teachers should adopt when attempting ecosystemic interventions. Each requirement aimed at encouraging teachers to view problem situations from an ecosystemic perspective and change their "usual" responses to problem situations. Finally, Section 2.4 discussed the seven ecosystemic techniques. It provided a detailed description of the theory behind each intervention strategy and of the practical application of each technique.

In Chapter Three, the methodological issues of the study were discussed. It was seen that an anti-positivist approach to research methods in education was deemed to be the most appropriate for the requirements of the study. From this stance, the Chapter explored specific methodological procedures and techniques which were seen to be potentially useful to the research process.

A phenomenological approach was critically analysed and rejected on the grounds of time constraints. The ethnographic approach was investigated, with particular reference to participant and non-participant observation and interview methods. The two observation methods were rejected on the grounds of interference with the ecosystem of the classroom. Interview methods offered structured, unstructured, non-directive and focused interview procedures. The structured interview was rejected on the grounds of bias data being gathered. Unstructured
interviews were seen to be an effective research tool, offering as they did, far greater flexibility on behalf of the respondent. Although the non-directive interview was not adopted as a specific methodological technique, the principle of non-direction was seen as a positive quality of the technique and was to be used alongside the unstructured interview. Finally, the focused interview was rejected as a potential technique on the grounds that the identification of "objective facts" , which the technique advocated, conflicted with the phenomenological focus of the ecosystemic approach.

The final methodological procedure to be explored was that of action research which was seen to be the most appropriate research tool for the present study. Five principle reasons were identified in support of this stance. First, that action research is, in much the same way as the study was to be, situational. Second, the collaborative nature of action research was seen to complement to co-researcher

ethos of the study. Third, as was to be the case with the co-researchers, action research is participatory. Fourth, the self-evaluative nature of action research complemented the self-evaluative nature of the ecosystemic approach and the study itself. Finally, action research is a means of in-service training. This element of action research was seen to complement the introduction of the ecosystemic approach to primary teachers through the use of Conferences.

Chapter Four discussed the specific research methods of the study which referred to the techniques and procedures utilised during the data gathering and analysing process. Section 4.1 discussed the preparation stage of the study. At this stage primary teachers were contacted, via letter correspondence, and invited to become co-researchers within the present study. In addition, the first Conference and accompanying Handbook were formulated. Data on the teachers' response to the invitation letter was also collected at this stage.

Section 4.2 described the main stage of data collection within the present study. The discussion focused on the three Conferences and the interim periods during which the co-researchers were to attempt the ecosystemic techniques. First, each Conference was described in detail, outlining the their main aims. Within these aims the data collection process was described.

Data was collected on the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach. This took place on two levels. First data was collected on the co-researchers' attendance at the Conferences. Second, data was collected on the co-researchers' oral and written responses to the ecosystemic approach. Data on the co-researchers' oral responses was collected during the discussion group which took place within the Conferences and data on the co-researchers' written responses was collected through the use of comment sheets. In addition, the Follow-up meeting was described which allowed data to be collected following Conference Three.

During the interim periods between Conferences the co-researchers collected data on their attempts at the ecosystemic techniques by recording their efforts and results in the form of activity sheets. This data was used to address the impact of the ecosystemic techniques on problem behaviour.

Finally, Section 4.3 discussed the methods of organising and analysing the data. The discussion focused on the methods of data analysis in relation to the two key

research areas. Each key area was covered in turn. Data on the co-researchers' responses to the ecosystemic approach was analysed on three levels. First, the response rate of teachers to the invitation letter was statistically analysed, providing a percentage of the contacted population. Second, the attendance rate of co-researchers was statistically analysed, providing a percentage of co-researchers attending each Conference. Finally, the co-researchers' oral and written responses to the ecosystemic approach were analysed. These were used to provide a descriptive summary of the co-researchers' responses to the approach during the fieldwork.

The data collected by the co-researchers on their attempts at the ecosystemic techniques was analysed on two levels. First, the success of the ecosystemic interventions was statistically analysed, providing a percentage of successful interventions. Second, the activity sheets were collated in the form of case examples, each illustrating the process by which the co-researchers implemented the techniques and the results of their attempts.

In Chapter Five the results of the analysed data were provided and accompanied by a discussion of these findings. The Chapter was divided into two main Sections, each relating to a key research area. In Section 5.1 the results of teachers' responses to the ecosystemic approach were provided and critically discussed. It was found that 26% of the contacted population responded to the invitation letter. This was an acceptable and encouraging response given the lack of prior knowledge of the ecosystemic approach amongst English primary teachers. An average attendance rate of 88% of teachers who had signed up for the Conferences was also an encouraging result, illustrating the commitment of co-researchers to continue with the research during the fieldwork.

The oral and written responses of the co-researchers provided mixed results, largely due to poorly implemented collection procedures conducted by the researcher. However, the results did suggest that the co-researchers were in agreement that the ecosystemic approach offered new and innovative procedures for dealing with chronic problem situations in English primary schools. They felt that the ecosystemic approach had broadened their repertoire of classroom management skills and that they would continue to, or would in the future, implement the ecosystemic techniques in their classrooms and schools. More specifically, the ecosystemic approach provided the co-researchers with techniques for dealing with problem situations that had failed to respond to other

interventions. It therefore offered the co-researchers potential relief from all too often demoralising situations.

The results were most encouraging, particularly in view of the fact that these were the first teachers in England to be introduced to the ecosystemic approach. They clearly indicated that, for the co-researchers involved in the present study, the ecosystemic approach would have a future role to play in the management of chronic problem behaviour in their primary classrooms. However, the results do not allow us to make clear and valid assessments of the future role of the ecosystemic approach within the entire primary education system in England. Further research will be required before such generalisations can be made. In this respect, the present pilot study has been an essential starting point. It has demonstrated that the ecosystemic approach is worthy of further investigation and has provided valuable insights into how future research may wish to proceed.

Section 5.2 provided and discussed the results on the impact of the ecosystemic techniques. Of those who attempted an ecosystemic technique 90% said they were successful or partially successful at their intervention attempt(s). This is a high success rate and one which indicates just how effective the ecosystemic techniques were in addressing chronic problem situations in the co-researchers' classrooms. Considering that this was the first time that teachers had attempted ecosystemic techniques in English primary schools, this result is impressive.

However, the results also suggest that a note of reservation should be made about the impact of the ecosystemic techniques in English primary schools. This is because, of the seven techniques that were taught to the co-researchers, only three were implemented within their classrooms.

The methods of data collection and analysis did not make it possible to make an assessment of why this was the case, but Molnar and Lindquist (1989) may provide some insight into the result. They suggest that teachers need to "... select the ecosystemic idea or technique that you [the teacher] are most comfortable with and that you [the teacher] believe is the most appropriate to the situation" (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, p. 28). It therefore may be fair to suggest that the co-researchers either did not feel comfortable with the "missing" four ecosystemic techniques, or that the co-researchers did not feel that an appropriate situation arose within which these techniques could be implemented.

Despite this, such was the success of the ecosystemic techniques that were attempted by the co-researchers that they were keen to continue using ecosystemic techniques in the future. They suggested that their attempts would include the use of the "missing" techniques should the right opportunity arise. This clearly illustrates that the ecosystemic techniques will have future potential for addressing chronic problem behaviour in the co-researcher's primary schools. However, we can only speculate as to the potential of the ecosystemic techniques outside the co-researchers' classrooms and further research will be needed before any generalisations can be made.

The present pilot study has shown that ecosystemic techniques can be successful in addressing chronic problem behaviour in English primary schools. It has provided a foundation from which future research into the ecosystemic techniques can be developed and has introduced suggestions on how such research may wish to proceed.

Chapter Six listed and discussed the limitations of the study and based on these made recommendations for future research into the ecosystemic approach in Britain. Section 6.1 identified flaws in the data collection and analysis process and critically discussed each. It was found that flaws in the collection of data on the co-researchers' oral responses stemmed from time constraints and a poor recording procedure. As a result the data collected was both limited in quantity and in validity. This flaw may have been remedied by the use of interviews; however, none of the co-researchers requested a meeting with the researchers and consequently no interviews were undertaken.

Flaws were also found in the collection of data on the co-researchers written responses. These stemmed from a poor return rate of the comment sheets following Conference Two and Three and from poorly worded comment sheets. The result of this flaw was data which progressively diminished during the fieldwork and that which was not sufficiently in-depth to fully facilitate the collection of relevant data.

Finally a flaw was identified in the preparation stage of the study, where the need to meet with co-researchers after Conference Three was not identified. This resulted in a Follow-up meeting being organised without sufficient notice for the majority of the co-researchers to organise time off to attend. Consequently, only

four co-researchers were able to attend the meeting and the findings were therefore unrepresentative of the group.

Limitations were also identified in relation to data collected on the impact of the ecosystemic techniques. However, these limitations were seen to be a result of the characteristics of the ecosystemic approach as opposed to individual co-researchers. First, it was found that less than half of the co-researchers attempted ecosystemic interventions. Although disappointing, this result was synonymous with the person and problem specific nature of the ecosystemic techniques. Second, four of the seven ecosystemic techniques were not attempted by the co-researchers. As a result no data was collected on the impact of the Storming-the-Back-Door, Locating-Exceptions, Symptom-Prescription and Predicting-a-Relapse techniques.

Finally limitations were identified which were seen to affect both of the key research areas. These limitations included, the use of American case examples to illustrate the ecosystemic techniques resulting in confusion over the language used; time constraints during the Conferences resulting in insufficient explanations of the techniques and not informing the co-researchers of the recommendation that they begin using the techniques with small problem behaviours.

Based on the limitations identified within the study Section 6.2 made recommendations for future research into the ecosystemic approach. These recommendations mirrored the format of the limitations Section. In relation to the co-researchers' responses eight recommendations were made. First it was recommended that future research should audio tape discussion groups during the Conferences and that co-researchers be interviewed during the interim periods between the Conferences. It was recommended that the written responses of the co-researchers be collected using a questionnaire method and be implemented within the time constraints of each Conference. In addition specific questions to be included within the questionnaire were suggested. Finally, it was recommended that future research consider setting up a Focus group to provide long term evaluations.

Recommendations were also made for future research on the impact of the ecosystemic techniques. Specifically, it was recommended that the sample population of co-researchers be increased.

Finally, recommendations were made which were seen to affect both key research areas. First, it was recommended that, where possible, case examples from the experience of English teachers be used in future Conferences. It was also recommended that the duration of the Conferences be extended to whole days and that an additional Conference be set in place of the Follow-up meeting. Finally, it was recommended that teachers attend these Conferences with one or more peers from the same school and that the prospect of setting up an inset course involving a "family of schools" be investigated.

The final Chapter of the thesis concluded the presentation of the research project by summarising the study itself and the thesis.

A final point of interest should be made at this stage. The collation of preliminary results from the present study suggested to the researchers that the ecosystemic approach was worthy of further investigation. In light of this belief a research proposal was sent to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in March, 1995. The proposal used the present pilot study as a reference point from which suggestions for a more in-depth study were formulated. In July, 1995, the ESRC agreed to fund the project for one year. This pleasing response not only illustrates a recognition of the future potential of the ecosystemic approach by a major research funding body, it also demonstrates that the present pilot study fulfilled its aim to provide a foundation from which future research could develop.

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APPENDIX 1.

(The Case Examples by Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

(1) <u>THE REFRAMING TECHNIQUE</u>: Lazy Troublemakers or Best of Friends
   (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 47-49).

Bob insists on spending as much time as possible out of his seat standing next to Pete. They are best friends, and they help each other with everything. For example, when one answers a question, the other says, "Yes, that's right."

Every morning the children came into the room, sat down, and perform some small task quietly while I collected the lunch money. They were held accountable for doing this mornings work as reinforcement.

Every morning Bob came in and stood next to Pete's desk, and they talk about the events of the previous evening. I told Bob repeatedly to take his seat, because it was difficult to see around him and to hear the responses of the others while I collected the lunch money. Also, since Bob was talking to Pete, he did not complete the morning work. In the past it had taken three or four pleasant requests and one more threatening request for Bob finally to go to his seat, where he would still talk or flash messages to Pete. At this point I was usually irate, Pete and Bob did not have their work done, and because of all the confusion, the lunch count was off.

I decided to try reframing. My interpretation of the problem had been that Pete and Bob were trying to waste time, get out of doing their work, and cause a rough time for me. [The teacher's interpretation of the meaning of the boys behavior had been negative, that is, that they were trying to waste time, get out of doing their work, and cause a rough time for her.] In thinking about the situation, I came up with another explanation for their behavior. My positive alternative interpretation was that Bob and Pete were good friends who wanted to spend time together first thing every morning as a way of affirming their bond of friendship. [As this teacher applies reframing, she begins to consider positive ways of interpreting the student's behavior. Having found a plausible positive alternative explanation for their behavior, she formulates a statement she can say to them using this new interpretation, and she acts based on it.]

The next morning when Bob came in and stood at Pete's desk, I said, "Bob, I think it's really great to see that you have such a strong friendship with Pete that you want to spend time with him every morning." He looked at me, raised his

arms, and said, "Okay, okay, I'm going to my seat." He obviously did not think I was serious.

The next morning, as Bob stood next to Pete's desk and began talking, I said, "Bob, you go right ahead and spend some time with Pete, sometimes a strong friendship is more important than anything else." He looked at me as though I was being sarcastic, and Pete began to giggle. As I maintained my matter-of-fact composure, their doubt turned to amazement. [In creating a reframing, it is important that the positive interpretation be plausible to everyone involved. in order for this teacher to say the reframing honestly and not sarcastically, it had to be plausible to her, and in order for the students to take it seriously, it had to be plausible to them.] Bob spoke to Pete only about fifteen seconds more and went to his seat and completed his work.

Bob still stops at Pete's desk to chat for two or three minutes each morning, but then he goes to his seat and begins his work. He is getting more work done. I am starting the day in a much better mood, and I find myself being more tolerant of all my students.

Discussion. The process this teacher went through illustrates some of the essentials of reframing. She identified the negative interpretations she had applied to the problem behavior. She thought the situation through and developed an alternative positive interpretation for the problem behavior, one that was plausible to her so she could say the reframing honestly and nor sarcastically. She chose an interpretation that was plausible to the students so they would take her new positive interpretation seriously.

This case example also demonstrates that it is sometimes necessary to repeat a reframing. handling a problem situation using reframing leads one to act in very different ways and to say quite different things to the other person or persons in the problem situation. It is not uncommon for the listener, on first hearing a reframing, to be a bit taken back. For this reason it may be necessary to repeat the reframing in order for the listener to grasp it.

Finally, this teacher's concluding comments illustrate the affective and behavioral changes that take place as a result of using reframing and their ecosystemic implications, "He is getting more work done. I am starting the day in a much better mood, and I find myself being more tolerant of all my students."

(2) THE POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF-MOTIVE TECHNIQUE: Working Hard in Absentia (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 72-77).

Abigail did not appear for school until well into the third week of September. Shortly after her arrival, I examined her cumulative school record and discovered a pattern of chronic absenteeism in the third grade. She was absent on average two to five days per week. In addition, she was tardy as often as two or three times a week. A closer examination of her records did not reveal any suggestion of school phobia. The majority of the absentee dates were carefully documented with excuses signed by one or both parents. Also, there was no record of any illness serious enough to warrant such a high degree of absenteeism.

Early in the school year, I attempted to discuss the problem with Abigail in a private conference. She was very defensive, claiming that she only missed school when she was ill. However, in the weeks that followed I could not detect any signs of illness, not even mild cold symptoms, following her absences.

Prior to learning about reframing and positive connotation, I had consciously or unconsciously begun dealing with the problem by "negative connotation". One example of my attempt to solve the problem is contained in the following dialogue, as closely as I can remember it, between me and Abigail:

> **ME:** Abigail, you must go to school. Attending school is like holding a job. Failure to get to school indicates a lack of responsibility on your part.

> **ABIGAIL:** Ain't you a trip. I can't come to school if I'm sick. I am not going to infect the whole school with my flu and cold symptoms. Call my mother and she'll tell you how sick I really am. Quit bugging me. It's none of your business whether or not I come to school.

> **ME:** *(now beginning to become somewhat impatient with her flippant response)* You are a very lazy little girl, Abigail. You are not too sick to come to school. You just do not want to get up early enough to catch the bus. Look at how often you are late.

> **ABIGAIL:** I am sick. This school makes me sick. It's like a prison, and we can't even go out of the building at lunch. You make me sick, too!

> **ME:** *(very irritated)* Young lady, you are becoming very disrespectful. I think its time for a little conference with the assistant principle. I will make out a disciplinary report immediately, and you can leave this room!

Abigail left, slamming the door loudly and almost breaking the glass. The result of this negative-connotation problem solving technique was that Abigail did not return to school for the rest of the week.

Shortly thereafter, I learned how to use positive connotation in a problem situation. I decided to positively connotate Abigail's motives for staying at home. I tried this new approach with some trepidation, as the new method was slightly unorthodox for the extremely conservative climate of my school, but I was determined to give it a chance so as to improve Abigail's attendance. [We have found that it is often just this kind of commitment that makes educators willing to try something different.]

The following is another dialogue between myself and Abigail following her next absence, which lasted two days. In formulating the positive-connotation statements, I included some of the phrases Abigail uses better to the communicate with her. [In Chapter Three wee discuss how using a student's language can help solve problems.]

> **ME:** Why, Abigail, I am really surprised to see you in class. I am sure that whatever you were doing at home was very important, or you would have come to school. I think its really cool that you are mature enough to recognize the importance of setting priorities. You probably stayed at home so that you could work extra hard on your assignments so that you would get straight A's when you return. Tell me, after you finished studying did you get a chance to see any interesting segments of "General Hospital" or "Days of Our Lives"?

[The teacher has abandoned her use of what she termed "negative connotation" of the student's motives for staying home, that is being lazy, irresponsible, and

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so on, and ascribes positive motives to her staying home, such as to work extra hard to improve her grades. Even when asking about watching television, the teacher assumes this was done after the student finished studying. The teacher does not know what the student did while absent or why she was absent. The teacher is trying out an alternative way of responding to the student. This new way of responding is based on the positive motives the teacher thinks could be possible.

> ABIGAIL: *(her mouth falling wide open and her eyes bulging with disbelief, following a nervous giggle)* Yeah, I sure did, and it was great. Sure beats school that is so dumb and boring - especially the teachers. I had a great time and no homework either.

The class roared. Restraining myself because of my strong feelings about disrespect from students, I continued, hoping that some student would not report me for promoting truancy. But I was willing to try anything to get this kid to come to school.

> ME: Maybe you can give the rest of the class a report on what's happening on soaps, okay?

[This teacher deserves a medal for the control it must have taken to maintain her new way of responding, given what had just happened. her ability to do this is evidence not only of her commitment to change things but also her willingness to look at the situation differently. Had she only been interested in manipulating the student, she might well have reverted to negative connotation and a disciplinary report at this point.]

I did not expect an instant miracle, so I was not too surprised when Abigail was absent the following Monday. On Tuesday, I spoke to her again.

> ME: Gee, Abigail, I see you took some time off to rest after the weekend. What a trip! I bet by staying at home and studying you were much better prepared for your classes than any of the other kids.

ABIGAIL: *(staring at me again in disbelief, but not quite so arrogant as she was in our last encounter)* It was great. I may stay home again tomorrow.

I restrained myself from shouting at her, "Oh, no, you won't!" and I dropped the subject.

I was really surprised when she made it through the rest of the week without absence, but I never mentioned it to her. I just kept my fingers crossed. [Fortunately the teacher is able to resist the temptation to praise the student. As you will see in later case examples, sometimes praising a student for a new behavior is followed by a return to the old behavior.]

I kept a very accurate record of her class attendance, the problem that I was attempting to conquer with positive connotation. The problem was not solved immediately. During February, she was absent two more times, but this was six days less than she was absent in January. During the first week of March, Abigail was absent one day., Believing the problem to be practically solved, I casually mentioned to her that I was really surprised because her attendance had been so good. She was not in school the following day. [Praise for a behavior we like is a commonsense response that we seem compelled to make, even though it does not always reinforce the behavior.] When she returned again, I positively connotated the motive for staying home, pointing out to her that I was sure she was staying home so that she could be better prepared for all her classes on her return. She has not been absent or tardy since. This is the first time since September that she has attended school for three and a half weeks without missing a day.

Positively connotating this problem behavior worked well for Abigail and me. Parent conference day was held on March 17. For the first time Abigail's mother attended a conference without being summoned by the school. Her mother told me that she no longer has a problem getting Abigail to school. She cannot understand what happened to bring about this positive change in Abigail's attitude toward school. But I can.

Discussion. This case example illustrates a number of important points. It shows the concern an educator might have in using these techniques and having them misunderstood by colleagues or the administration. It also shows the commitment educators have to try something different if what they have been doing has not been working. Also, it shows the teacher's determination to follow

through with this new way of responding despite the student's initial negative responses.

Another point made by this case example is that even long standing, chronic problems can be altered. This student had a long history of being absent an average of two to five days per week. At the teacher's last report, the student had attended school for three and a half weeks without being absent or tardy.

Finally, the positive impact that can take place on home school relations is clearly demonstrated. the student's mother no longer had to be summoned for school conferences and reported that she no longer had a problem getting her daughter to school.

(3) THE POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF-FUNCTION TECHNIQUE: A Serious Student in Comedian's Clothing (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 91-95).

Brenda is a first grade student who lacked self-control and was uncooperative when working with teacher aides. She had a kindergarten history of behavioral problems identified by her kindergarten teacher, but she had been exhibiting appropriate behavior under my first grade teaching style. Unfortunately, her positive behaviors under my direction and structure did not carry over into situations where she was working with my teacher aides. The aides in my class work with the students in individual or small group situations to reinforce skills I have taught.

Brenda's responses were usually silly and annoying when working with aides. For example, when asked to produce a rhyming word for "can", Brenda might say "like" and then laugh and look around at her peers, seeking their responses. Sometimes the other children would laugh, too. At other times they ignored her, because her response did not surprise them. Another example is when Brenda would answer a question with a loud "I don't know" and a laugh, when, in fact, she did know and could produce the answer when asked again. Another annoying behavior was Brenda's poking her hand at another student and asking or telling them something funny.

The teacher aides were frustrated by Brenda's uncooperative behavior. They were unable to carry out their responsibilities in the way that they would have liked. Also, it was distracting for me, because while I was instructing one group, I would be half attending to what Brenda was doing in her group with an aide. Sometimes when she was really disruptive, I would walk over and remove her from the group if the aide had not already done so.

In attempting to solve this problem in the past, the aides and I looked at Brenda's needs as we saw them expressed by her behavior. We decided she needed a lot of attention, so we tried to use positive reinforcement techniques such as (1) tickers on a card when Brenda answered appropriately, (2) verbal praise and letting her know the progress she was making, (3) personal comments on her before work began with her, and (4) a note home when she worked well. At times negative reinforcement was used, and Brenda was removed from the group so that the group could stay on task. The aide would say, "Brenda, you are acting too silly, and we are unable to finish our work, so you will have to leave." She would then have to do the work alone at her desk without help.

These attempted solutions were only minimally successful. The problem as still there. It was an unusual situation, because when Brenda worked with me, her behavior was dramatically better than in the previous year, but she slipped into old patterns when working with the teacher aides. I wanted to see what impact positively connotating the function of her behavior might have when used by my teacher aides as well as myself.

In attempting to positively connotate Brenda's behavior, I looked at both her motives and the functions of her behavior in the classroom. I thought that the motive for her behavior was that she wanted to be funny and well liked by her peers. Although I had previously only seen the negative function of her silliness, which was disruptive, when I looked for a positive function of this behavior, I saw that it added humor and variety to the learning group. [The student had always intended that the result of her behavior would be laughter. Initially, the teacher and aides saw this having only a negative function. When looking for a positive function, the teacher was able to see this same intended result, laughter, as also having a positive function in the classroom. She was then able to use this positive function to suggest a new way for the aides to respond to the student's silliness.]

I talked to Brenda and said, "I have noticed that when you meet with the aides, you often act funny and give silly answers. I guess that is your way of giving fun to the other children and the aides. Am I right?" Brenda grinned very broadly and said "Yes." I responded, "Well, that is what I said to both of the aides when they talked to me. They were concerned that you often do not know the correct answer, and they think maybe you cannot do the work. I told them I was sure you knew the answers, because you knew them during the lesson, but that you wanted to surprise everyone with a funny answer." I said, "You know, it's something that you would rather be funny than have the right answer! So I have told the aides not to worry so much about your answers, because you are just trying to make things fun for everyone." I said very little more and Brenda said nothing.

The next day, one of the aides met with Brenda and her group and commented before the activity, "Brenda, you really are a funny person." [A simple straightforward acknowledgment that the student is funny as opposed to an attempt to get her to stop being funny - this is an example of co-operation at work.] During the activity Brenda stayed on task and gave correct responses. A few times I saw her glance in my direction. The other aide made a similar comment when she had time with Brenda. She said, "You sure know how to give some of the funniest answers!" [Again, instead of attempting to change the behavior by asking or demanding that it stop, the aide cooperates with the student by simply acknowledging that she gives funny answers.] Once again, Brenda's behavior was appropriate, almost shy, and her answers correct.

Since we began positively connotating the function of Brenda's behavior, each aide has worked with her about five times. The aides usually make a brief comment to her about being funny like, "I wonder if this is a funny day?" They are amazed at the improvement in her behavior, and they no longer have to wonder if she knows the material. One of the aides said she was going to try this approach in the lunchroom and see if it works with some kids there, too!

Discussion. In this case example the result the student intended to get (laughter) was initially seen as having only a negative ecosystemic function (disrupting the classroom). Rather than focus on just the function of the student's behavior, the teacher looked at the students motives and the ecosystemic function of her behavior and found both a positive motive (wanting to be funny and well liked) and a positive function (giving everyone some fun) for the behavior. the teacher

chose to combine the positive function and the positive motive in the statements she made to the student. When viewed from this new perspective, the result the student intended to get from her behavior (laughter) was seen as having a positive function for the learning group.

This case example is also interesting because it illustrates how responsive an individual's behavior is to the context in which it occurs. The student's behavior was different in different contexts. She behaved in one way in kindergarten with her kindergarten teacher. She behaved differently next year with her first-grade teacher. And even in the same classroom, she behaved one way in the context that included the teacher and entirely different in the context that involved the aides.

This is an important point, because when problems arise, we tend to look inside the person for the cause of the problem and tend not to see the context in which the problem occurs or look for the aspects of the context that influence the problem. had the teacher chosen to define this student's problem behavior as stemming from some internal deficit)for example, "she cannot attend to lessons because she has a poor self-image"), she would have been blinded to the aspects of the context that influenced the student's behavior.

Keeping in mind that behavior occurs in context, and that this context is made up in part of the interactions of the others in the context, it is valuable in suggesting a place to begin to change problem situations. This teacher was fortunate that the situation showed so clearly that the same student, who obviously carried her internal state with her, behaved one way with the teacher and another way with the aides. the teacher's awareness of this allowed her to alter an aspect of the context in which the problem behavior occurred, that is, the ways the aides interacted with the student, and by altering the context, she influenced the student's behavior.

(4) THE PREDICTING-A-RELAPSE TECHNIQUE: The Relapse Agreement (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 153-1`54).

All students enter the building at 8:35 A.M. and proceed directly to their classrooms.

My students unload their book bags in the hall, outside the room. They dispose of jackets, empty book bags, and other unneeded materials in their lockers. materials needed for the day are brought into the classroom, and at this pint, the student's preparation time begins. They have approximately yen minutes to review their assignments for the day and copy own the assignments for the next day before I begin to take the lunch and milk count.

It was during this ten-minute preparation time that most students would begin walking around the room and talking with one another. I usually moved round the room, reminding the student again and again to use their preparation time wisely. many did not get their new assignments copied, and the talking sometimes spilled over into the lunch-and-milk-count time. this made it necessary for me to raise my voice and ask the students to be quiet during lunch and milk count so that I could hear.

The situation was not out of hand, but it made me feel like I was spending the first ten minutes of each day playing policeman. I did not like this somewhat negative way of beginning each day, and I m sure the students did not like it either.

I decided to reframe the students' behavior beginning on the next Monday. On Monday morning, I waited until after preparation time, lunch and milk count, and music class. Then I explained to the student that I had been beginning to get angry with them until I realized that they needed a time to visit with one another. I then went on to say that I knew there were many things that happened after school and in the morning before school that they liked to share with one another, and that I would allow them to visit freely with one another until lunch and milk count if they would be very quiet so I could hear. I said that I would provide a different time during the day to copy the new assignments.

As I was doing the reframing with the students, the most obvious reaction was the smiles. I am sure e some were smiling because they were happy to hear that they could now visit without having to listen to my nagging. but I had a very strong feeling that many were smiling because they found what they were hearing hard to believe.

On Tuesday I stationed myself outside the classroom door so that I could supervise the hallway, greet the students, and, most of all, observe the new situation on the classroom.

The students appeared more active and louder that usual. however, when I walked into the room after the tone had sounded to take the lunch and milk count, there was complete silence.

The students seemed to settle down and become more quiet as the week came to an end. I observed many students limiting their visits and getting their new assignments copied before the lunch and milk count.

On Thursday of the second week, there was a lot of talking during the lunch and milk count. I decided it was time to use the technique of predicting a relapse. I stopped, asked for their attention, and spent about three or four minutes reviewing what we had talked about on Monday of the previous week. Then I added that it was quite normal for the old talking behavior to come back occasionally. I offered to remind them on those occasions about our agreement. when I continued the lunch and milk count, they were completely quiet.

Now, when it becomes a little noisy during lunch and milk count, all I have to say is "remember our agreement" and it is quiet, and the student have had no problems getting their new assignments copied each day.

Discussion. In this case example, the teacher manages to solve an irritating chronic problem by acknowledging that his students had good reasons for their behavior and by treating then as good-faith negotiators when they had a relapse. predicting a relapse helped this teacher find a way of talking to students in a friendly and cooperative way. by doing so, the teacher supported and encouraged the positive change in the classroom.

(5) THE SYMPTOM-PRESCRIPTION TECHNIQUE: Walking to Work (see Molnar and Lindquist (1989) pp. 113-116).

Helen was often off task during her work. She was out of her seat frequently. She would then wander aimlessly around the room and engage in conversations with other students. She would also leave the room several times to go to the bathroom and be gone for long periods of time. Consequently, she did not finish

her work in school. I required that work not finished at school be taken home and completed. She did not finish her work at home and came to school with her work unfinished.

We have well defined class rules and a set of consequences for breaking rules. Helen broke the rules often by the aforementioned behaviors, and I responded with warnings, exclusion, writing, and home contact. There was no improvement. I scolded her, tried to reason with her, sent notes home to her parents, and conferred with her parents over the phone and in person. I also tried moving her desk next to mine, but I rarely sit there, so I could not monitor her effectively. Anyone who had not finished their work could not go outside to play at recess. Helen stayed in regularly. I even made her my own prisoner by requiring that she stayed next to me at all times and not allowing her to do anything without my permission. Even this brought only a temporary change.

Since Helen was wandering around aimlessly anyway and frequently leaving the room for long periods of time, I decided I had little to loose in attempting to use symptom prescription. All my efforts to get her to stop walking had not been successful, so I was willing to tell her to keep walking if it would help.

[When first using symptom prescription, some educators are concerned that they will make the situation worse. It can be difficult to imagine how asking a student to perform a problem behavior (albeit differently) will help. For this reason, many educators, like the teacher in this case example, initially use symptom prescription only when they feel there is nothing to lose. This is not surprising. until one has experienced the noncommonsense and sometimes dramatic results of cooperating with someone in a problem situation, it makes sense to be skeptical.]

I said to Helen that I realized she needed to get up and walk around the room sometimes. I told her she should walk around until she was ready to sit down and do her work.

[This symptom prescription is simple and straightforward. The child is walking around anyway. The teacher tell her to go ahead and walk and sit down when ready to do her work. She cooperates with Helen by expressing her awareness of Helen's need to walk sometimes. The change in the problem situation can be understood with the new explanation of the reason the student walks around.

instead of wandering aimlessly, Helen is now walking with purpose; she is someone who needs to walk in preparation to work. The teacher also subtly adds an ending point; that is, the student is told to walk around until ready to sit down and do her work.]

Helen's jaw dropped. She sat down within minutes of me saying she could walk until ready to do her work. She was in no trouble the rest of the week. To be fair, I must add that two of these days were on field trips and she did not usually have behavior problems on a trip.

I have Helen again for summer school. Since it started, she has been sitting and working. I predicted a relapse to her and told her it would be normal if she started walking again. I also said that if she felt it was necessary, she should walk around a bit before starting her work. She came into the classroom and sat down. When I saw her out of her seat, I told her that I understood it was "walking time." She immediately sat down. Once while she was sitting down, I suggested to her that she get up and walk if she needed to. She walked around her desk once and sat down.

[This teacher seems to have overcome her fear of using symptom prescription. She is even suggesting to the student, while the student is sitting, that she might need to get up and walk. Although this may not seem to make sense initially; from a cooperative perspective, it does. If walking around for a while at first helps the student settle down and work, it makes sense for a teacher to encourage this behavior.]

Not only has she been sitting down, but until this past week, her work has been done regularly. For the last two days she has not completed the majority of her work; however, she has still been sitting down. I think I will try reframing with the unfinished work problem. Symptom prescription worked well. Now I am ready to try another technique.

Discussion. Although some educators use the ideas in this book early on problem situations, some, like this teacher, prefer to try other strategies first. With symptom prescription in particular there is at first the concern that asking someone to perform a problem behavior will make things worse. sometimes ecosystemic techniques produce an initial increase in the behavior, as the teacher experienced in the case example "Distant Drums" in Chapter Three. However,

any change - even a temporary increase in the problem behavior - is a change in the pattern of the chronic problem situation that can provide clues leading to alternative solutions.

6) THE STORMING-THE-BACK-DOOR TECHNIQUE: Old Reliable (see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 126-128).

Alex is an eleven year old sixth-grader with average to above average intelligence. He is quiet and shows proper respect to adults and teachers. He is not a disturbance in class. The problem stemmed from the fact that Alex did not do his assigned work, neither class work nor homework. He gave the impression of working but produced little or nothing by the end of the day.

Alex's mother and stepfather had been to school twice to express their concern for Alex's poor work habits. We had initiated a nightly homework sheet to check what Alex had completed during the day. This had limited success, because Alex would 'forget' to do the homework (which are incomplete daily assignments), or his mother would 'forget' to sign the homework sheet.

Thursday I asked Alex for his homework and the signed homework sheet. he had not done his assignment, and the homework sheet had not been signed. Instead of reprimanding him as I usually did, I decided it was time to storm the back door. I took Alex aside and surprised him by saying that when he did his work I liked how neatly it was done. I also asked if he noticed how I always called on him when he raised his hand. I told him I did so because I knew he would have a thoughtful answer. Alex was very pleased. [This is an example of storming the back door in the problem context. The teacher has chosen to talk with Alex about nonproblem (positive) topics in the problem situation.]

The results have been interesting. For the rest of Thursday, Alex worked diligently. He produced more than his usual output of work, but he still had work to take home. Alex seemed to put up his hand more and was extremely pleased when I called on him. He always had the right answer. (We gave each other knowing smiles!)

On Friday, Alex was absent. On Monday, Alex proudly handed in *twenty* overdue assignments. I made a big fuss and praised him for the completed work

he had done. That day he managed to complete all the mornings assignments but still had the afternoon assignments as homework. I told him I knew he would get all the assignments finished and that they would be accurate and neat.

After only two days, it is hard to make a valid judgment, but I think I may be on the right track with Alex. Storming the back door by commenting on Alex's positive qualities has certainly brought about better results than harping on about the problem.

Discussion. In addition to illustrating how the technique of storming the back door can be used in the problem context to change things, this case example shows how teachers can blend ecosystemic techniques with their own style. We do not generally recommend that teachers praise students when they begin to change in a way the teacher finds positive. However, in this instance, the teacher managed to blend a familiar approach (praising students for positive behavior) with a new technique -- storming the back door. The best way for you to find out how such blending of style and approaches might work is for you to try it in a problem situation and see what happens.

(7) THE LOCATING-EXCEPTIONS TECHNIQUE: Structuring Success
(see Molnar and Lindquist, 1989, pp. 137- 139).

Celeste, a child in my morning kindergarten class, presented an ongoing problem. She could well be described as a nonconformist. She preferred to do just as she pleased and tended to behave and talk in a contrary fashion, disrupting the cooperative and harmonious atmosphere that generally exists in the class otherwise.

Despite my efforts to set limits for Celeste, to encourage her sporadic attempts at improvement, and to teach her more constructive social skills, she had become increasingly defiant. She had begun to use bad language in class, to hit others even when she was not provoked, and refused to do what I told her to do.

I became very discouraged about Celeste's behavior and began to dread her arrival in class. I frequently phoned her mother, but this, too, was

unproductive. Her mother said Celeste was fine at home - perhaps "because she and Celeste live alone, and Celeste has her complete attention."

Since I could not think of anything else to do, I began to look at Celeste's behavior in terms of the locating-exceptions technique to determine when her behavior was not a problem. Soon I observed that during some lessons, when Celeste's work assignment was highly structured, she worked like a trouper, followed directions fairly well, and responded positively to reminders and encouragement. The light dawned on me!

Perhaps the rather informal framework of most of the kindergarten activities was not Celeste's forte, and I needed to structure activities much more precisely for Celeste - in a low key fashion.

After identifying the highly structured work period as the situation in which the exceptions to Celeste's problem behavior usually occurred, I was able to develop a surprisingly effective strategy for increasing the nonproblem behavior. I began by discussing with Celeste the fact that she was doing a great job during work time. I wrote notes on her work papers that went home, praising her good work habits that day. I also set up a regime of not only identifying and praising Celeste's increasingly cooperative behavior during work periods but also phoning her mother with the good news. I asked her to tell Celeste I had phoned and to relate the positive nature of our conversations.

This strategy worked so well that I began to feel better toward Celeste and told her so. I praised her improvement and suggested we try to carry it over to other activities in addition to work time. I told her she would need to listen carefully and to follow my very special rules for her for the independent activity (play) time.

Then I set up a highly structured situation for her during play period, defining materials, interactions, and location in the room and giving her directions for use of the materials - just as I had done for the work period. She had her ups and downs with this at first. I responded by focusing my attention on her successes and eliminating some of the variables in the situation to make her framework even more structured.

To summarize, with some setbacks from time to time, I have been able to expand the highly structured environment for Celeste to include most of the kindergarten activities. Every day at dismissal time, I quietly ask her who was her best friend in school that day. Although ten days ago she refused even to answer that question, lately she names someone every day. Celeste is beginning to feel good about herself, and she now smiles occasionally in school. I feel much more warmly towards her now. A feeling of success seems to be contagious. Even her mother expresses her pleasure to at "finally being able to reach Celeste!"

Discussion. In this case example and in our first case example in this chapter, the exception located was the students satisfactory behavior in well-defined and structured situations. It would be tempting to draw the conclusion that when students disrupt during unstructured times, what they need is structure. We see nothing wrong with attempting to structure the time of student who disrupt during relatively unstructured times. This is not, however, an ecosystemic rule of any sorts. ecosystemically, what is important in these two case examples is that in both cases the teacher changed something, and that change was associated with other positive changes in the classroom. We caution you against turning the particular form of successful ecosystemic technique took in one instance (for example, structuring a child's time more closely) into a general rule to be applied under similar circumstances (for example, saying that whenever a child disrupts during transition times, the recommended solution is to make that child's time more structured).

APPENDIX 2.

(The Handbooks)

HANDBOOK 1

Loughborough University Department of Education

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Handbook 1

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January 1995

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Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

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Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

General Introduction

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Whole school behaviour policies

Many schools have behaviour policies which are successful and which have helped to improve the overall ethos in the school and in classrooms.

Most school policies focus on approaches to bullying and approaches to problem behaviour in the classroom. Outcomes of successful policies not only include a reduction in the incidence of bullying and a more positive school and classroom atmosphere but also improved home-school relations and a reduction of stress on teachers.

However, no matter how effective a particular policy is, it is unlikely that bullying will stop all together or that problem behaviour in the classroom will be completely eradicated.

For example, even with an effective school bullying policy, bullying is still likely to occur and teachers need effective ways of dealing with specific incidents. Recent work has shown that the most successful form of intervention is the *No Blame approach,* (which is very similar to ecosystemics) which was developed about thee years ago. However, in these notes, we want to deal specifically with problem behaviour in the classroom.

How does ecosystemics fit in?

You can use ecosystemics alongside any other approach or combination of approaches you use. Ecosystemics is specifically designed for problem situations which have not responded to other approaches. It can help you to deal with problem behaviour which you have not been able to change.

Chronic problem behaviour

Ecosystemics is primarily designed for long-term problem situations - problem behaviour which has become established despite your efforts to change it over a period of time. 'Chronic' behaviour does not mean *extreme* forms of behaviour but behaviour which has persisted over a period of *time* [*Greek: khronos - time*].

Putting ecosystemics in perspective

It should be emphasised at this stage that this approach is not intended for extreme forms of behaviour, which may need a longer term therapeutic approach, or for crisis situations which require an immediate response. It is primarily a pragmatic approach to changing chronic problem behaviour and is **not** a therapeutic technique.We think you will find it a positive and hopeful approach.

Who can use the approach ?

The approach can be used by anyone, it does not replace existing approaches or methods, it does not require any specialised background knowledge - apart from that required for teaching.

However, the technique has not been used in this country before - you are the first! Both Bryn Jones and Ken Tyler have used approaches which are very similar and could in retrospect be called ecosystemic - so we believe that it has great potential.

The technique was developed in the States and has been used in city, suburban and rural schools with children of all ages. However, the technique looks deceptively simple and I need to mention a few general points before we go on to look at the approach in detail.

General points

We have already seen that Ecosystemics:-

❑ can be used alongside any other approach or combination of approaches.

❑ is primarily designed for long-term, established problem behaviour.

❑ is a pragmatic approach to changing behaviour and is not a therapeutic technique.

❑ does not *require* any specialised background knowledge.

However, it does challenge common sense ideas about problem behaviour and is based on some unusual perspectives, so it is worth spending some time looking at the basic ideas. The approach, which is often paradoxical, may be easier to use with some understanding of the underlying philosophy.

Caution and a healthy skepticism

M&L report that nearly all teachers were skeptical when they first heard about the approach. Teachers often find that the method does not make sense, is too positive & unrealistic and not likely to work. But after trying the technique, 80% of teachers solved the problem or produced significant improvements in the problem situation. We think this approach has potential but we have no axe to grind and we will not try to persuade you that this method will work. We want to find out if it will work for you and your particular problem. However ..

The approach does not make sense

Even after using it successfully, many teachers still found that the approach did not "make sense" to them. Many of the interventions cannot be *explained* in the usual way using cause and effect reasoning - and it is very often on this basis that it is difficult to understand.

So - approach the ideas with "caution and a healthy skepticism" but also _try_ the method before you judge its effectiveness. There are two points to bear in mind:

❑ To try the approach you need to put aside common sense points of view (or suspend the natural attitude)

❑ Do not try to understand the approach - or at least, do not dismiss the method if it doesn't appear to make sense to you.

The Ecosystemic Perspective

From an ecosystemic perspective, problem behaviour is seen in terms of the overall system of interpersonal interactions - not in terms of individuals in isolation. The basic model is the social ecosystem, which is analogous to a physical ecosystem.

We are all familiar with the idea of a physical ecosystem where everything is connected to everything else in very complex ways and where changes in one part of the ecosystem can produces changes throughout the system. Ecosystemics considers all groups as social communication networks which act as ecosystems. So, for example, a classroom is considered as a social ecosystem.

Establishing a stable system

We will begin this section by considering the process of establishing a classroom ethos at the beginning of every year with a new class. Many of the behavioural approaches to the management of problem behaviour refer to the importance of establishing clear guidance and classroom rules at the beginning of the year, and most recommend a period where the rules are reinforced regularly. Some teachers prefer to use a so called 'case study approach' where incidents and problems are dealt with when they occur so that a picture of norms and expectations develops gradually over a period of

time. Whichever approach is used, it takes some time to establish the right kind of atmosphere in the classroom, (or in terms of this model) to produce a stable system of interactions.

Once this stable situation has been reached, everyone within the system has his or her ideas and beliefs about appropriate standards of behaviour, the social rules and norms which are in operation. This complex network of ideas, or *ecology of ideas*, constitutes the social reality of the classroom which people experience.

Your behaviour is a crucial part of the system

In such a stable system, all the behaviours, including your own, are integrated into a unified whole. This can be compared to a physical ecosystem: when everything is in place, the system seems to work almost automatically. Everything contributes to the overall stability of the system.

Once this stability has been achieved, your presence is all that is necessary to achieve a positive atmosphere. Your presence within the ecosystem is crucial. This is probably pretty obvious but becomes most apparent when a student or supply teacher takes over your class. Very often the whole social ecosystem becomes unstable, and students find it difficult to maintain the atmosphere or keep control: it looks so easy to students when they visit the school, but the social ecology of the classroom is invisible, as are the skills required to form and maintain it.

Problem behaviour within the system

Whenever problem behaviour develops, most teachers have a range of strategies which they call on to change that behaviour in some way. These strategies may be based on school policies or they may be

individual responses. For most teachers, most of the time, these strategies work and the behaviour is changed in a satisfactory way. Dealing successfully with the problem behaviour increases the stability of the classroom and becomes part of the social ecosystem of the classroom.

Chronic problem behaviour

However, sometimes we come across problem behaviour which we are not successful in changing, no matter how long and hard we try. In this situation the problem behaviour becomes a part of the stable ecosystem. If your responses to a problem are not changing the problem situation, then your behaviour is part of the stable system in which the problem exists.

Changing the system ...

In a stable social ecosystem such as a classroom, just as in a physical ecosystem, a change in one part of the system can produce changes in the rest of the system. You are probably familiar with many examples in the planetary ecosystem of how changes in one part of the world can have global consequences. These changes are often unexpected and unpredictable.

... by changing part of the system

Changing one part of the system can change the whole system. Your behaviour is a crucial part of the social ecosystem system of the classroom. The ecosystemic approach to changing problem behaviour is based on the idea that you can change the system by changing your own behaviour.

*This is the main difference between ecosystemics and other approaches:
the problem behaviour is not changed by changing the other person
directly but by changing the system. You change the system by changing
your own behaviour within the system.*

This is the key to all the ecosystemic techniques: you can change
problem behaviour in your class by changing your own perception of
that problem behaviour and by changing your own behaviour
accordingly:

You change the system by changing your own behaviour within the system

In ecosystemics the change in your behaviour is based on positive
and cooperative interpretations of the problem situation. So -

You change your own behaviour
❏ *by changing your perception of the problem situation*
❏ *by finding positive and cooperative interpretations*

Finding positive alternatives

So, the first stage in ecosystemics is to change your perception of the
problem behaviour, to change your point of view. This is done by
<u>looking for positive alternatives</u> - alternative explanations, meanings,
interpretations, functions and motivations.

The tyranny of truth

In the normal course of events, people only look for alternative
explanations when they no longer believe in the truth of their original
ideas. If someone thinks that a point of view is true, they are likely to
stick with it, even if it doesn't help them to solve the problem, e.g.
explaining problem behaviour in terms of a child's past or their home

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background may help to solve a problem situation - but doesn't always. Ecosystemics takes a different approach as it asks you to look for new explanations for behaviour *without rejecting* old ones. Ecosystemics takes the view that there are many truths in a given situation, a whole range of valid interpretations rather than a single truth. It is essentially a pragmatic approach.

Even though a particular point of view or a particular explanation for problem behaviour may be true, if it is not helping to change the problem, then alternatives can be found which may solve the problem:

❑ 'Ecosystemics offers a framework for thinking differently about a problem that has gotten the better of you, so you have an alternative to doing the same thing "harder" and "louder" when it obviously is not working.' Molnar & Lindquist.

❑ "You are asked to *entertain the possibility* that other explanations can also be true, and that some of them may help you to solve your problem." Molnar & Lindquist.

Developing empathy
Sometimes it is easier to find positive alternatives by putting yourself in the other person's shoes, and trying to see the problem situation as he or she does. Trying to see the problem from another person's point of view may also help you to see the problem behaviour as more "understandable" or "meaningful" in some way. In ecosystemics this is known as the co-operative perspective - if you can find the right perspective, then the behaviour makes sense:
The ability to regard a person's problem behaviour as understandable, given that person's perception of the situation, is the essence of the

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cooperative perspective in problem solving. Molnar & Lindquist.

Being genuine

So, in ecosystemics, there are many truths about any behaviour and ecosystemic techniques are ways of finding different truths in order to produce change. Because the methods often ignore the "common sense truth" about a problem, they are sometimes confused with reverse psychology and seen as dishonest (i.e. saying one thing and thinking something else in order to trick someone into doing what you want). In using ecosystemic techniques you need to be convinced that you can use them honestly and sincerely, as genuineness is a crucial part of effective interactions with children.

Summary of Ecosystemics

Chronic problem behaviour is seen as part of an overall stable system.

The problem behaviour is changed not by focusing on the individual but by changing the system.

You change the system by changing your own behaviour within the system.

You change your own behaviour by adopting a cooperative and positive perspective on the problem situation.

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Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

The Reframing Technique

1. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The ecosystemic approach views problem behaviour in schools as part of, not separate from, the social setting within which it takes place (e.g. interactions in the classroom, corridor, playground). This means that problem behaviour influences, and is influenced by, your reaction to the problem situation. Taken a step further, a change in your perception or behaviour towards the problem has the potential to influence it. The ecosystemic approach predicts that:

When you change something in an ecosystem, the ecosystem will change.

As a teacher faced with a chronic problem you will want to know how to change the situation so that a positive outcome is reached. There is no guarantee that using ecosystemic techniques will produce a positive outcome. However, ecosystemics is designed to help you see the role you are playing in a problem situation and to change that role in a way that may positively influence the problem. There are a number of procedures that can be followed to enhance your chances of positively influencing a problem situation. They are designed to help you view problem behaviours within an ecosystemic framework, therefore helping you produce alternative perceptions and reactions.

2. PREREQUISITES FOR CHANGE

Before the ecosystemic techniques are put into practice there are a number of 'attitudes' towards your problem situation that you are encouraged to adopt. These 'attitudes' are outlined below in the form of procedures for you to follow. In each, the onus is placed upon you (as opposed to your problem pupil) to change your perceptions of the problem and your behaviour in relation to it. This is because, it is easier for you to change your thinking or behaviour as a way of encouraging change in a chronic problem situation than it is for you to change someone else's behaviour or thinking.

a) *Have a cooperative perspective*

You are asked to entertain the possibility that a person's problem behaviour is understandable, given that persons perception of the situation. Put another way, you need to be *empathic* towards the problem person. A distinction is made here between regarding the behaviour as **understandable** and regarding it as **acceptable**. You are not asked to accept the problem behaviour as it is being expressed now but to try to see the problem situation as the pupil might see it. This will help you to see the rational and understandable reasons for a behaviour you had previously considered irrational and negative. In doing so, you are encouraged to view the problem situation from a perspective other than your own and to find positive explanations for the problem behaviour being expressed.

b) *Be a detective*

You are asked to treat the problem situation as though it were a mystery to be solved. We suggest that you act as 'sleuths', look for clues and gather information that will be used to develop a theory on how to solve the 'case'. You are asked to construct, and try out, new theories until the 'case' is solved.

An unsuccessful theory is not cause for alarm but should be used to provide information about how to construct a more useful one.

One of the best ways of gathering clues about the problem person's perspective of the situation is the use of the person's *figurative language* coupled with the gathering of information about their interests and activities. You are asked to communicate with the problem individual using their figurative language. This has the potential to allow the pupil to reveal more clearly their perspective of the situation. It can also help to change your 'usual' way of discussing the problem situation with the individual concerned.

An important part of being a sleuth is noticing the changes in the problem situation as they occur. Note you are looking for changes in the situation as a whole, not simply changes in the problem behaviour. This will help you shed new light on the problem situation and the people in it.

The following questions may provide some guidance when gathering clues that are pertinent to solving the problem situation.

1. **What is the pattern that keeps repeating itself in this situation?**

2. **How do the various people involved perceive the behaviour in question?**

3. **What are the positive ways of interpreting the behaviour?**

4. **What would be a sign that things are on the way to getting better?**

5. **What will this room, school, playground etc. be like when the problem behaviour has stopped?**

6. **What is happening in the situation that I do not want to change?**

c) *Have a sense of humour*

Being able to think of positive explanations for problem behaviours is central to ecosystemic techniques. However, feeling positive towards a chronic problem situation can be very difficult. The sense of irritation, frustration, anger, confusion and helplessness that can so often accompany chronic problem situations may well serve to inhibit the creativity and flexibility of thought that is helpful in creating change. It is for this reason that you are encouraged, as far as is possible, to be light hearted about a problem situation. Sharing your thoughts, concerns, experiences and successes with someone else (e.g. a colleague or partner) may help to further this end.

d) _Be sincere_

It is vital that all ecosystemic techniques are implemented with sincerity. You must honestly and sincerely believe in the explanations you assign to problem situations and behaviours. The ecosystemic approach rejects the notion that a single cause can be attributed to a problem situation. Therefore, the failure of one of your explanations to solve the problem does not equal an incurable problem. As long as you can come up with another, sincere, explanation then the process of solving the problem can continue.

If, at any time, you find yourself unable to honestly describe the problem behaviour or situation in a new way, then you should not attempt to continue using ecosystemic techniques. The techniques are not mind games used for saying one thing while thinking another.

3. THE REFRAMING TECHNIQUE

a) Introduction

This is the first ecosystemic technique that we ask you to try. Ideally, the technique should be applied to a chronic problem situation. This is an ongoing situation that, despite the use of previously successful interventions, continues to be problematical for you. The aim of this technique is for you to devise an explanation of the problem behaviour that is *positive* and to introduce this explanation into the problem situation. This can be described as the formulation of a new perceptual *'frame'* of the problem behaviour, hence the technique is called the *reframing* technique.

It is hoped that, in doing so, you will select an aspect of the problem person that you would like to enhance and behave towards that person with this new description of them in mind.

Your new explanation of the problem behaviour should be based on a number of essential elements that are outlined below.

b) The Essential elements of the reframing technique

1. Be aware of your **CURRENT INTERPRETATION** of the problem behaviour. It is beneficial to identify the negative interpretations you may have previously applied to the problem because this will allow you to reflect on the inappropriateness of them and develop a positive alternative interpretation.

2. Your new explanation of the behaviour should be **POSITIVE**. You should steer away from negative interpretations of the problem behaviour because these often do little to change the problem constructively.

3. Your new explanation should **FIT THE FACTS**. You are encouraged to act as 'sleuths' and investigate the problem. The aim is to identify patterns of behaviour and the people and situations involved. This will allow your new perception to be both plausible and realistic not only to yourself but also to the individual(s) involved.

4. You should **ACT IN WAYS THAT ARE CONSISTENT** with your new explanation of the problem behaviour. To be able to do this sincerely you must genuinely believe in your new explanation. Remember, failure of this explanation to create constructive change does not mean failure of the technique. You simply formulate another explanation of the behaviour.

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Case Examples

CASE EXAMPLES

INTRODUCTION

We found that our understanding of the reframing technique was greatly enhanced after we had read examples of teachers putting it into practice. The case examples you have been given are designed to exemplify the reframing technique. They do not explain how it *should* be done but give a taste of possible procedures.

As you read through the examples you may find that you can explain some of them from a perspective with which you are already familiar. Some of them may remind you of reinforcement, motivation theory, behaviour management etc. We would ask that you do not try to understand the reframing technique in this way. The danger is that, in doing so, you may strengthen a way of characterising a chronic problem behaviour that has already proven unhelpful to you. You may then misuse the technique by trying to make it conform to the rules imposed by this approach to changing behaviour.

All the case examples are based on true individuals and events. Some of the results may seem a bit too good to be true, all we can say is that for these teachers the reframing technique was clearly a success.

After reading some of these cases we suggest you try the activity provided at the end. It is often helpful to share your thoughts with others because in chronic problem situations your negative feelings about the problem may hinder your creative thoughts.

We will also be available to discuss any issues that arise.

CASE EXAMPLE 1.

Robert insists on spending as much time as possible out of his seat standing next to Pete. They are best friends, and they help each other with everything. Each morning the children come in, sit down, and perform some small task quietly while I collect the lunch money.

Each morning Robert comes in, stands next to Pete's desk and they talk about the events of the previous evening. I tell Robert repeatedly to take his seat, because it is difficult to see around him and to hear the responses of the others while I collect the lunch money. Also, since Robert is talking to Pete, he does not complete the morning work. In the past it has taken three or four pleasant requests and one more threatening request for Robert finally to go to his seat, where he would still talk or flash messages to Pete. At this point I am usually irate, Pete and Robert have not done their work, and because of the confusion, the lunch count is off.

My interpretation of the problem has been that the boys are trying to waste time, get out of doing their work, and cause a rough time for me. I decided to try reframing, and in thinking about the situation, came up with another explanation for their behaviour. My positive alternative interpretation was that *the boys were good friends who wanted to spend time together each morning as a way of affirming their bond of friendship.*

The following morning, as Robert stood next to Pete's desk, I said, *"Robert, I think it is really great to see that you have such a strong friendship with Pete that you want to spend time with him every morning."* He looked at me, raised his arms, and said, "All right, all right, I'm going to my seat." He obviously did not think I was serious.

The next morning, as Robert stood next to Pete's desk and began talking, I said, *"You go right ahead and spend some time with Pete, sometimes a strong friendship is more important than anything else."* He looked at me as though I was being sarcastic, and Pete began to giggle. As I maintained my matter-of-fact composure, their doubt turned to amazement. Robert spoke to Pete for about fifteen seconds more, returned to his seat, and completed his work.

Robert still stops at Pete's desk to chat for two or three minutes each morning, but then he goes to his seat and begins his work.

COMMENTS

The process this teacher went through illustrates some of the essentials of reframing.

a. She identified the negative interpretations she had applied to the problem beahviour. When the teacher explained the students behaviour to herself as the boy's willful attempt to make trouble for her, she responded accordingly, and the chronic problem continued.

b. She thought the problem through and developed an alternative positive interpretation of the problem behaviour, one that was plausible to her so she could say the reframing honestly and not sarcastically. She chose an interpretation that was plausible to the students so they would take her new positive interpretation seriously. By focusing on a positive interpretation of the boy's behaviour, the teacher changed her perception of the problem and was therefore able to change the way she responded to it.

c. By changing her behaviour she influenced the behaviour of the boys.

d. It is sometimes necessary to repeat the reframing. It is not uncommon for the listener, on first hearing a reframing, to be a bit taken back. It may be necessary to repeat the reframing to allow the listener to grasp it.

CASE EXAMPLE 2

Sheree is a five-year-old who pushed and shoved everyone out of line in order to be first every time the children lined up. All the children were given turns to be first, but Sheree thought she should be first all the time.

I had talked to her about taking turns and being fair. I also had let her stand second in line, and if the pushing continued, she would be sent to the back of the line. None of these attempts was successful and Sheree continued her unacceptable behaviour. I had seen her behaviour as unfair to the other children and disruptive to me.

I decided to reframe the situation. As I looked at things differently, I realised that, unlike some of the others, who dawdled and had to be told several times to line up, Sheree was always there immediately after I would tell the children to line up. I decided I could use this enthusiasm, so Sheree became my 'line helper.' I posted a list of all the children's names and gave Sheree the job of choosing the leader and printing their name on the board. As soon as that child had been given their turn to be leader, Sheree crossed out their name, so that every child in the class, including herself, was given a turn. Each day Sheree and I had a little chat about how the line moved in the halls and playground.

Sheree took to this plan like a duck to water. She is now choosing the leader and printing the name on the board. She is co-operating very well, coming along at the end of the line so that she can watch all the children.

COMMENTS

The teacher in this case did not attempt to say anything to the student that reflected the reframing. She let the reframing speak through her actions. She suggested that the reframing was as much for her as it was for thr student. This illustrats the point that all reframings have their initial effect on the person formulating the reframing. It is this new interpretation of the problem behaviour that allows you to say and do things differently.

CASE EXAMPLE 3

Tanya, Peggy and Gail often could not get along. Their behaviour in the classroom was disruptive. Tanya would pout and answer questions by forming words with her lips but not making any sounds. She acted shy and coy. She was often off task, would not listen during instructions, and failed to complete most assignments. Peggy yelled at Tanya in class. She also pouted and refused to sit next to Tanya when doing class activities. Gail often told on Peggy for a variety of alleged misdemeanors.

I had tried a number of approaches with these three in the past. With Tanya I had ignored her pouting, humoured her and given her extra attention. I had tried to reason with her. I had told her she could pout if she liked but that I did not have time to wait for her response. With Peggy, I had tried scolding her for yelling at Tanya and for refusing to sit next to her. With Gail, I had tried to ignore her. I had told her I did not want to hear about other peoples business. I had asked her if what she was going to say was about her business.

Now I will tell you about how I have changed my responses to these children and the results I have gotten.

Tanya began the day by pouting because she did not have a pencil. She pouted for about forty-five minutes. She came up to me and began to speak soundlessly. I told her I could not hear her and she returned to her seat, pouting some more. I went to her desk and reframed her behaviour by telling her that it seemed as though she was having a bad day and that her behaviour was an understandable way of handling things.

I said she might need to keep managing in this way for another fifteen minutes or even half an hour before she felt better.

About ten minutes later She came up to ask for help. I asked her if she was sure she was ready and if she was not, I wanted her to take the time she needed. The class laughed. I asked them why they were laughing and told then I was serious. I said Tanya had figured out a way of handling problems, and if it helped, I thought she should do it. They all stopped laughing. She asked for help again and I helped her.

The next day I reminded her to use her strategy for managing if necessary. She asked why. I told her that it was her unique way of dealing with problems, and if it helped, it was useful. There was no pouting that day.

About two weeks later I commented to Tanya that she had be doing her work and had not had a bad day. I also commented that it would be normal for her to have a bad day some time and when it happened she could use her special way of managing things.

I decided to reframe Peggy's yelling behaviour as concern for Tanya's welfare and a display of friendship. When I said this to Peggy, she looked at me as though I were crazy or did not understand at all. But she has not yelled at Tanya or refused to sit next to her at any time since.

The next time Gail told on Peggy I told her that I appreciated her concern for Peggy and commented that they must be good friends. Gail looked at me with a 'foiled again' look on her face. To date Gail has not told on Peggy again. In general, the others in the class do not tattle on Peggy anymore, either.

COMMENTS

Using the reframing technique helps you to see many aspects of, or truths about, the behaviour of others. It allows you to select those aspects of or truths about others that you would like to enhance or strengthen. You do this by behaving toward that person with this new description in mind.

CASE EXAMPLE 4.

In my year 5 class there were three boys who had been troublesome from day one. Tom, Nolan and Philip were best friends. They enjoyed sitting and working together, but most of all, they enjoyed 'messing about'. Tom and Philip were able to complete most tasks assigned to them in the time allocated and used the surplus to 'mess about'. Nolan on the other hand found it very difficult to balance work and his desire to be with his friends. The result was that Tom and Philip tended to under achieve, while Nolan struggled to keep up with the rest of the class.

From an early stage I had decided to separate the boys. I explained to them why I had chosen to take this action and made it very clear that they would be allowed to sit next to each other once they had proved to me that they would behave. Some weeks the 'positive reinforcement' was a success. However, more often than not, they found it near impossible to control themselves. Typically, once they were seated next to each other they would chat about everything and anything other than the task at hand. They would disturb their neighbours despite repeated warnings from me. Finally, and most annoying to me, they would frequently burst into fits of laughter and disturb the entire class.

I had always tried to be firm but fair with the boys but as time passed, and this was not reciprocated, my responses to this behaviour became increasingly intolerant. They seemed to be 'winding me up' and enjoying it. It was at this stage that I decided to try

something different. I remembered having uncontrollable giggling fits when I was their age. Indeed, given the right company, I still do. I put myself in their shoes and found myself being more empathic with their behaviour.

With this in mind I decided to express my new interpretation to the boys. The next time they began to giggle, I refrained from my customary warning. The boys abruptly stopped, clearly expecting me to reprimand them. I then went a step further and told them that it was good to laugh, it showed that they were enjoying themselves, and they should continue. This was met with utter disbelief. I repeated my acceptance of the behaviour. A quick burst of giggles was followed by silence. I smiled and the giggles began in earnest. To my surprise the rest of the class, who had been sitting in silence, also began to giggle and then I too began to laugh. The relief was wonderful, a tense atmosphere was replaced by one of happiness.

The giggling continued for some time at which point I raised my hand and gestured for quiet. Without delay the class stopped. I told the boys that in the future, should they find themselves unable to control their giggles, we would find time to allow them to do so. That week saw a transformation of the trio, they worked well together, they responded to my instructions and suggestions and they did not giggle. They still find it difficult at times not to be disruptive when they sit next to each other. However, the situation is no longer a problem for me.

COMMENTS

This example illustrates the point that within an ecosystem such as a classroom, a change in the perception and or behaviour of the teacher has the potential to influence the whole class. Clearly, the reframing was strong enough to be believable by the entire class. The teacher did not anticipate the rest of the class would start giggling. However, their inclusion in the event served to strengthen the reframing.

Practice activity: <u>REFRAMING</u>

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a problem you are currently having. Usually problems have names and faces. Think of a real situation with real people that is currently a problem for you. Jot down some notes for yourself.

1. Describe what happens in the problem situation in specific behavioural terms. Who does what? When do they do it? Who else is involved? ....

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2. How do you usually respond to the behaviour, and what is the usual result?...

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3. What is your current explanation of why the person behaves this way?...

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4. What positive alternative explanations might there be for this behaviour?...

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5. Based on one of your positive alternative explanations of the behaviour, how could you respond differently than you have previously? What might you actually say or do based on one of these alternative explanations?...

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HANDBOOK 2

Loughborough University Department of Education

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Handbook 2

Contents

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February 1995

1. THE POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF-MOTIVE TECHNIQUE

a) Introduction

Identifying what motivates an individual to behave in a particular way is often helpful in explaining that behaviour. In many cases the action taken by teachers, as a result of these explanations, can help to alleviate the problem behaviour. However, in chronic problem situations the problem can continue despite your efforts to change it.

The motives attributed to a problem behaviour are often negative, therefore the explanations of that behaviour are also likely to be negative. These negative perceptions can do little to break the cycle of events surrounding a chronic problem situation. From an ecosystemic perspective, the motive you attribute to a problem behaviour is a *hypothetical* explanation of that behaviour. Indeed, all attributed motives (positive or negative) are hypothetical and are therefore equally accurate (or inaccurate). Given this, the motive you currently attribute to a problem situation you are facing may well be accurate BUT if it is not changing the situation in a constructive way then it can become part of the problem.

The **positive-connotation-of-motive** technique is designed to be used with problem situations that have not responded to your usual actions. It is designed to break the cycle of events (the stability of the ecosystem) surrounding the problem situation you are facing.

The technique is based on a number of essential elements that are outlined below.

b) The essential elements of the positive-connotation-of-motive technique.

1. Be aware of your **CURRENT EXPLANATIONS** for the *motives* of the problem behaviour being expressed. As the attribution of motives for a behaviour is hypothetical, it is not possible to ascertain whether or not it is accurate. However, if your explanation is not changing the problem situation in a constructive way, it needs to be changed. By evaluating the current effectiveness of your explanation for the motive of the behaviour you can reflect on its inappropriateness.

2. IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE POSITIVE MOTIVES for the problem behaviour. This element is indicative of the ecosystemic idea that many different, but equally true, motives can be attributed to a problem behaviour. Identifying a range of positive motives can allow you to explain the behaviour in a way you may not have considered before.

3. SELECT A POSITIVE MOTIVE for the problem behaviour that you feel is plausible. The selection of a plausible positive motive does not suggest that this particular choice is correct because all motives are possible 'truths'. Given this, failure of the chosen positive motive does not mean failure of the technique, but that, for this problem situation, it is not appropriate for constructive change. In these circumstances you are asked to select further positive motives for the behaviour that you feel are plausible and continue doing so until the problem situation is changed in a constructive way.

4. FORMULATE A SENTENCE or two that describes the new positive motivation for the problem behaviour. You are encouraged to think of ways that your new perception of the motives for the problem behaviour can be expressed to the problem individual.

5. ACT IN WAYS THAT ARE CONSISTENT with the positive motive. To do this effectively you must entertain the possibility that you chosen positive motive is plausible. You must sincerely believe in the positive motive(s) you have chosen because only then can you express this new perception in a believable way to the problem person and to yourself.

CASE EXAMPLE 1.

Abigail did not appear for school until well into the third week of September. Shortly after her arrival, I looked at her school record and found a pattern of chronic absenteeism beginning in year 3. She was absent on average two-five days a week. In addition, she was late as often as two or three times a week. Her records did not show any suggestion of school phobia. The majority of the absentee dates were carefully documented with excuses signed by one or both parents. Also, there was no record of any illness serious enough to warrant such a high degree of absenteeism.

I attempted to discuss the problem with Abigail. She was very defensive, claiming that she only missed school when she was ill. However, in the weeks that followed I could not detect any signs of illness, not even mild cold symptoms. I attempted to solve the problem by identifying the motives for her behaviour. An example of my attempts is contained in the following dialogue, as closely as I can remember it, between me and Abigail.

> ME: Abigail, you must go to school. Attending school is like having a job. Failure to go to school is being irresponsible.

> ABIGAIL: You crack me up. I am sick. I can't come to school if I'm sick. I am not going to infect the whole school with my flu. Call my mum and she'll tell you how sick I really am. Stop pestering me. It's none of your business whether or not I come to school.

ME: (beginning to become somewhat impatient with her flippant response) You are a very lazy little girl, Abigail. You are not too sick to come to school. You just do not want to get up early enough to catch the bus. Look at how often you are late.

ABIGAIL: I am sick. This school makes me sick. It's like a prison. You make me sick.

ME: (very irritated) Young lady, you are becoming very disrespectful. I think its time you saw the head. You can leave this room.

Abigail left, slamming the door loudly and almost breaking the glass. The result of this negative-connotation of her motives was that she did not come to school for the rest of the week.

Shortly after this incident I learnt how to use positive connotation in a problem situation. I decided to positively connotate Abigail's motives for staying at home. I tried this new approach with some trepidation, as the method was slightly unorthodox for the extremely conservative climate of my school. I was determined to give it a chance so as to improve Abigail's attendance.

The following is another dialogue between myself and Abigail following her next absence, which lasted two days. I included some of the phrases Abigail uses to better the communication between us.

ME: Abigail, I am really surprised to see you in class. I am sure that whatever you were doing at home was very important, or you would have come to school. I think its cool that you are mature enough to recognise the importance of priorities. You probably stayed at home so that you could do extra work. Tell me, after studying did you get a chance to see any interesting bits of 'Neighbours' or 'Home and Away'?

ABIGAIL: (her mouth falling wide open and her eyes bulging with disbelief, following a nervous giggle) Yeah, I did, and it was great. Better than school that is so boring - especially the teachers. I had a great time and no homework either.

The class roared. Restraining myself because of my strong feelings about disrespect from students, I continued, hoping that some student would not report me for promoting truancy. But I was willing to try anything to get this child to come to school.

ME: Maybe you can give the rest of the class a report on what's happening on Neighbours and Home and Away, okay?

I did not expect an instant miracle, so I was not too surprised when Abigail was absent the following Monday. On Tuesday I spoke to her again.

ME: Abigail, I see you took some time off to rest after the weekend. You crack me up! I bet by staying at home and studying you were much better prepared for school than any of the other children.

ABIGAIL: (staring at me again in disbelief, but not quite so arrogant as she was in our last encounter) It was great. I may stay home again tomorrow.

I restrained myself from shouting at her, "Oh, no, you won't!" and I dropped the subject.

I was really surprised when she made it through the rest of the week without absence, but I never mentioned it to her. I just kept my fingers crossed. I kept a record of her attendance for the next few months. The problem was not solved immediately. I positively connotated the motive for her behaviour as and when it seemed appropriate, each time pointing out that I was sure she was preparing for school while at home.

Today is the first time since September that she has attended school for three and a half weeks without missing a day.

COMMENTS

a) The teacher was aware that the motives she attributed to the behaviour, prior to intervention, were doing little to constructively change the problem situation. She described Abigail's motives for being absent and late as her being "lazy" and

"irresponsible". Indeed, from the dialogue provided, it is apparent that her responses to the behaviour only served to maintain the problem. Neither student nor teacher were prepared to acknowledge that the other was behaving in an appropriate way. As a result the conflict between the two became more and more embedded.

b) Once the teacher was prepared to entertain the possibility that Abigail's behaviour was positively motivated she was able to begin the process of bridging the rift between them and work in a cooperative way with Abigail.

c) The teacher mentions that she "tried this new approach with trepidation", but that she was "determined to give it a chance". It is often this type of commitment that makes teachers willing to try something different.

d) The teacher used some of Abigail's figurative language, for example "you crack me up", to communicate her new perception of the behaviour. (see Handbook 1, the reframing technique, p.3.)

e) The teacher worked very hard to control her feelings about disrespect from students when the class "roared". Her ability to do this illustrates her commitment to change the problem situation and her willingness to look at it differently. Had she only been interested in manipulating the student she may have reverted back to negative connotations for the behaviour and brought a halt to the constructive changes that were about to take place.

CASE EXAMPLE 2.

Mike is a year 5 pupil who often refuses to take part in classroom discussions or to complete written work. He did not always refuse to participate in these activities. He seemed to do it on a selective basis. His refusals seemed to be based on his mood and willingness to participate rather than the content or difficulty of the work involved. Compared to the other children in the class, Mike has average to above average ability. Mike's teacher felt that there was no valid reason for his not completing tasks and fully participating in class discussions, since he had the ability to do so.

Mike's teacher has tried various techniques to get him back on track. She has discussed the situation with him, explaining the importance of doing his work more consistently and becoming more involved in classroom discussions. She has given him smaller tasks to complete, hoping that he would at least do some of the work. She has had meetings with the parents. Special attention was given to him when he completed work and demonstrated an interest in class discussions. Essentially, these techniques had little or no effect. Any improvements that were made were short lived, and Mike was back to his old refusal behaviour in a couple of days.

The techniques of reframing and positive connotation were explained to his teacher. Although she was somewhat reluctant to try these new techniques, it was agreed that she would positively connotate Mike's motive for refusing to participate in class to see if it might bring about more positive results.

The basic statement that his teacher was to tell Mike was: "I know that it is important for you to consider everything and do a lot of good thinking before you put your hand up and answer questions, so I want you to take all the time you feel you need before you put your hand up." For his classroom work, the positive connotation was: "I also feel that it is all right that you do a lot of good thinking and consider everything before you start to write. You need that time to get your thoughts together."

Mike's teacher reported that, during the next few days, he would *act* as though he was thinking and considering everything but still did not complete his work totally and say very much in classroom discussion. She did feel that during this time he paid more attention to what was going on in the class than he had previously. Four days after the statements had been made to him, Mike finally began to finish his written work and enter into group discussions more consistently. Now she reports that he seldom refuses to do his work and seems much happier in the classroom setting.

COMMENTS

The process this teacher went through highlights some of the essential elements of the positive-connotation-of-motive technique.

a) She was aware of the current explanations she gave for the motive of Mike's behaviour. She felt that there was "no valid reason for his not completing tasks and fully participating in class discussions, since he had the ability to do so. The student was capable of doing the work, so his refusal to do so must mean he was unwilling or

not in the mood. Clearly this hypothesis is negative and therefore the teacher's response to the behaviour was also negative.

b) She identified possible positive motives for Mike's behaviour. She described Mike's not talking and not starting his work as motivated by the desire to "do a lot of good thinking" and "consider everything". This new hypothesis relates directly to the problem behaviour but explains it differently. The behaviour no longer meant *unwillingness* or *not being in the mood* but signified *thinking*. With this new hypothesis the teacher was able to respond quite differently to Mike's behaviour.

c) She formulated a couple of sentences that acknowledged her new interpretation of the problem behaviour and communicated these to Mike through basic statements. She told Mike that she knew it was important for him to "consider everything" and "do a lot of good thinking" before he put up his hand to answer a question. She also told him that he was to "take all the time" he needed. With regards to his written work she told him that she felt it was all right to "consider everything" and "do a lot of good thinking" before he started.

d) The teacher altered her perception of the motives for Mike's behaviour from one that was negative to one that was positive and cooperative. In doing so, she was able to respond to the problem situation in a new way. Her new response had the effect of changing the problem behaviour in a constructive way, "he seldom refuses to do his work and seems much happier in the classroom setting".

e) Since the motive of Mike's behaviour only represents a hypothesis, it is not possible to know if the motivations (both positive and negative) that his teacher attributed to him were accurate. Nevertheless, his behaviour was changed in a constructive way. Perhaps, with her new hypothesis, the teacher created a positive self-fulfilling prophecy. She wanted to see Mike as a student who was thinking before participating, and in describing him in that way, she helped him become it. On the other hand Mike may have always had a positive motive for his behaviour and the change was created by the teachers' willingness to look for and find the positive motive that was there all along.

Practice activity: <u>POSITIVE CONNOTATION OF MOTIVE</u>

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a problem you are currently having. Jot down some notes for yourself about the problem. Be as specific as possible.

1. What does the person do? When do they do it? Who else is involved?..

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2. How do you usually respond and what result do you get?

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3. Why do you think the person does this? What do think the person's motives are for this behaviour?............................

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4. What positive motives might there be for this behaviour?

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5. Based on one or more of these positive motives for the person's behaviour, how might you respond differently than you have in the past? What might you actually say or do based on one of these positive motives?..

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2. THE POSITIVE-CONNOTATION-OF-FUNCTION TECHNIQUE

a) Introduction

Many teachers are accustomed to thinking about the motives for a problem behaviour and using these to explain that behaviour. However, the functions of a problem behaviour are often overlooked. At this point it would be useful to make ecosystemic distinctions between *'motivation'* and *'function'*.

Ecosystemically, the *motivation* for a problem behaviour is a 'truthful' and appropriate perception of a situation that drives an individual to behave in a particular way. In other words, the motivation for a problem behaviour is a possible explanation of *why* an individual behaves in that way.

In contrast to this, the *function* of a problem behaviour is a 'truthful' and appropriate perception of what will be the outcome of the behaviour. Put another way, the function of a problem behaviour is a possible explanation of what will happen as a result of the behaviour. It is important to note that the function of a problem behaviour can be very different from the outcome intended by the person whose behaviour is being described.

Indeed,

> **the function of a problem behaviour can be seen in its influence on the ecosystem in which it occurs. It is the relationship between the behaviour and other elements in the classroom. This is not always the same as the intended result.**
>
> (this point is clearly illustrated in the case examples 1 and 2)

In chronic problem situations the function you attribute to a problem behaviour will tend to be negative. These may well be accurate perceptions of the individual's desired outcome of their behaviour. However, if your perceptions do not constructively change the problem situation then they can become part of the problem.

The positive-connotation-of-function technique is designed to break this cycle of events. The aim is for you to identify a positive function of the problem behaviour you are faced with and introduce this explanation into the problem situation. Remember, the ecosystemic approach predicts that:

When you change something in an ecosystem, the ecosystem will change.

The successful use of this technique is based on three main ideas. You need:

- an ability to find positive functions for a problem behaviour you had previously considered to be negative.

- an ability to entertain the possibility that at least one of these positive functions is a plausible explanation for the behaviour.

- an ability to behave in accordance with the positive function you have identified.

These are elaborated upon below.

b) The essential elements of the positive-connotation-of-function technique

1. Be aware of your **CURRENT EXPLANATIONS** of the *functions* for the problem behaviour being expressed. Evaluating the effectiveness of the functions you presently attribute to the behaviour to constructively change the problem situation allows you to reflect on their inappropriateness.

2. **IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE POSITIVE FUNCTIONS** for the problem behaviour. The technique requires you to identify as many positive functions as possible. In doing so you increase the number of avenues for you to follow when trying to change the situation constructively.

3. SELECT A POSITIVE FUNCTION for the problem behaviour that you feel is plausible. Identifying a positive function that you truly recognise as positive will allow you to behave in a new way that is genuine.

4. FORMULATE A SENTENCE or two that acknowledges the new positive function. This encourages you to think about how you might articulate your new interpretation of the behaviour to the person(s) involved.

5. ACT IN WAYS THAT ARE CONSISTENT with the positive function. This is achieved by ensuring that you have chosen a positive function that you genuinely and sincerely believe to be a possible explanation of the outcome of the behaviour.

Remember, ecosystemically there are many, equally 'truthful' positive functions that can be attributed to chronic problem behaviour. Therefore, an explanation that proves unsuccessful in constructively changing the problem behaviour can simply be replaced by another equally valid explanation.

CASE EXAMPLE 1.

Robert is a very bright boy in year 6. A birth defect has slightly stunted his growth, and he is much smaller than anyone else in the class. What he does not have in size he would make up for verbally. He was an incessant talker. He interrupted me very often, until I reached the point of sheer exasperation, daily. Also since he spent so much time talking, he often did not complete his work. I had focused on reprimands of various types, cold stares, "time-outs" in the hall, and similar negative responses. They proved to be unsuccessful.

I decided to use positive connotation and to focus on the function of Robert's behaviour in the classroom. I chose to look at the function of his behaviour because I did not really know what his motive was for interrupting me so often. I did not know whether he intended to annoy me, but whether he intended it or not, he did. One definite function of his behaviour was to exasperate me. I could think of a lot more negative functions as well.

To find some positive functions of Robert's behaviour, I had first to observe and then think about the circumstances in which he interrupted. I did this and then waited for my opportunity. One day during a maths lesson, Robert began interrupting. I became quiet for a moment and then thanked Robert for helping to make the classroom a more interesting place by breaking up the routine. I said it also gave me the chance to stop talking momentarily.

When I used this intervention Robert was quite surprised and almost amused. I had to positively connotate the function of his behaviour several times during the lesson. Robert seemed to become more self conscious, especially as he noticed how others would begin to scrutinize his behaviour more carefully. During the next few days, I noticed a significant improvement in his behaviour - he was making appropriate responses and attending to his work. Although he has not totally changed his behaviour, it has improved dramatically.

Another teacher who works with him came up to me the other day and was interested in knowing what had happened. It is hard to take credit for what seems such a simple and straightforward solution.

COMMENTS

The process this teacher went through highlights some of the essentials of the positive-connotation-of-function technique.

a) He was aware of the current explanations he gave for the function of Robert's behaviour. He gives us one example, "one definite negative function of his behaviour was to exasperate me", but mentions that he could think of many others.

b) He did some detective work about the problem before he formulated any positive functions of Robert's behaviour. He observed and then thought about the circumstances in which Robert interrupted. Although not explicitly expressed he

clearly used this information to help him find positive functions for the behaviour that were realistic to himself and to Robert.

c) He then identified two possible positive functions for the behaviour. Namely, a positive function for himself ("a chance to stop talking momentarily") and a positive function for the whole class ("breaking up the routine"). While there was no guarantee that his new perception of the problem behaviour was correct he was willing to entertain the possibility that they could be. Furthermore, because he did not assume that his perception was the only correct one to have, he was free to change his ideas (should they not constructively change the problem behaviour) without challenging his beliefs.

d) He used this new perception of the problem behaviour to formulate sentences that reflected them. He thanked Robert for making the classroom a more interesting place by breaking up the routine. He also told Robert that it gave him a chance to stop talking momentarily.

e) He acted in ways that were consistent with the new positive function for Robert's behaviour by articulating his thoughts verbally to him.

f) The teacher's comments at the end of the example are worthy of discussion. He said that it was hard to take credit for such a simple solution. The solution to a problem often seems simple once we have found it. The difficulty is how and where to begin the search for the solution. In this example the teacher has a difficult time finding anything but negative functions for Robert's behaviour. Overcoming this problem was the difficult part. Once he was willing to entertain the possibility that there were positive functions for the behaviour and was willing to look for these, he had a place to begin.

CASE EXAMPLE 2.

Greta, a child of average ability, behaved more like an inanimate object in my classroom than like a child. She did almost nothing. If she wrote two lines in two and a half hours, it was a good morning for her. She rarely participated in class discussions and even less in small groups. She avoided interaction of any kind with both myself and with fellow students. She caused no trouble during class time, she would just sit and do nothing.

I had tried both positive and negative reinforcement techniques. These had basically no effect. I decided to examine the possible positive functions of her behaviour. I found that Greta's behaviour of doing very little work had the function of saving me the time that I would otherwise have used correcting her work. I used this time to plan and help other students.

I told Greta that by giving up her share of my time, she was allowing me to spend more time helping other children and that it was rare for a child of her age to make such a sacrifice for her friends. I repeated this throughout the day as appropriate. That day Greta spent most of her time giving me incredulous looks. As usual, she did no work. The following day, the problem disappeared completely - along with Greta. She was absent for the next six school days. Needless to say, I wondered if I had anything to do with her absence.

On her return, Greta sat down as usual but got right to work. An assignment that would have previously taken her two days to complete was finished in thirty minutes. She participated actively in group discussions. When I marked her work I told her, "Good work." Greta returned back to her seat and did nothing for the rest of the day.

Since that day I have guarded my natural tendency to use positive reinforcement. When needed, I have repeated my description of the positive function of her behaviour with a slight alteration. Her work habits have improved, but what is most interesting is that she is participating more actively in class, answering questions correctly, relating to her peers in a positive way, and even taking a leadership position in small groups.

The sullen, 'inanimate object', has turned out to be a likable, even enthusiastic, girl named Greta.

COMMENTS

a) By looking at Greta's behaviour in the wider context of the classroom, the teacher was able to identify a positive function for the problem behaviour (she saved the teacher time that would otherwise have been used helping Greta). Seeing Greta's behaviour in this light allowed the teacher to respond to her differently.

b) The teacher expressed her new perception of Greta's behaviour by formulating a sentence or two that acknowledged the positive functions she had identified. These sentences suggested to Greta a function for her behaviour that she may or may not have intended. Indeed, Greta's surprised reaction, "that day Greta spent most of her time giving me incredulous looks", suggests that the teacher identified a function for her behaviour that Greta was unaware of. This illustrates the point that a problem behaviour can have many ecosystemic functions, some of which may not be intended by the person.

Nevertheless, the positive function defined her as contributing to the class and teacher through this behaviour. Defining her as a class contributor helped create a class contributor.

c) The teacher knew from previous experience that positive reinforcement had failed to change the situation constructively. When she resorted to her "natural tendency to use positive reinforcement" and praise her for doing "good work", Greta responded as she had in the past. She did nothing for the rest of the day. The stability of the ecosystem returned as did the problem. In the example the teacher caught herself and changed her behaviour. As she did so, Greta's behaviour also changed back to the desired outcome.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.

Brenda is a year 1 student who lacked self-control and was uncooperative when working with ancillaries. She had a history of behavioural problems in her reception class, but she had been exhibiting appropriate behaviour under my year 1 teaching style. Unfortunately, her positive behaviours under my direction were not reflected in her work with the ancillaries.

Brenda's responses were usually silly and annoying when working with an ancillary. For example, when asked to produce a rhyming word for "can", Brenda might say "like" and then laugh and look around at her peers, seeking their responses. Sometimes they would laugh, too. At other times they ignored her, because her response did not surprise them. Another annoying behaviour was Brenda poking her hand at another student and asking or telling them something funny.

The ancillaries were frustrated by her uncooperative behaviour because they were unable to carry out their responsibilities in a way that they would have liked. It was also distracting for me because while I was instructing one group, I would be half attending to what Brenda was doing.

Attempting to solve this problem led the ancillaries and I to look at Brenda's needs as we saw them expressed by her behaviour. We decided she needed a lot of attention, so we tried to use positive reinforcement techniques such as:

(1) Stickers on a card when Brenda answered appropriately.

(2) Verbal praise and letting her know the progress she was making.

(3) Personal comments before work began with her.

(4) A note home when she worked well.

At times negative reinforcement was also used, and Brenda was removed from her group.

These attempts were only minimally successful. She continued to work well with me but slipped back into old patterns when working with the ancillaries. I wanted to see what impact positively connotating the function of her behaviour might have when used by the ancillaries, as well as myself.

I looked at the functions of her behaviour in the classroom. I had previously only seen the negative function of her silliness (the disruption of the class). However, when I looked for a positive function of this behaviour I saw that it added humour and variety to the learning environment.

I talked to Brenda and said, "I have noticed that when you work with the helpers, you often act funny and give silly answers. I guess that is your way of giving fun to the other children and the helpers. Am I right?" Brenda grinned very broadly and said "Yes." I responded, "Well, that is what I said to the helpers when they talked to me. They were worried that you often did not know the correct answers, and they think maybe you cannot do the work. I told them I was sure you knew the answers, because

you knew them during the lesson with me, but that you wanted to surprise everyone with a funny answer." I said, "I think that you would rather be funny than give the right answer. So I have told the helpers not to worry so much about your answers, because you are just trying to make things fun for everyone." I said very little more and Brenda said nothing.

The next day, one of the ancillaries commented before working with Brenda's group, "Brenda, you really are a funny person." During the activity Brenda stayed on task and gave correct responses. The other ancillary made a similar comment when working with Brenda, "You really know how to give some of the funniest answers!" Once again, Brenda's behaviour was appropriate and her answers correct.

The ancillaries have continued to work with Brenda and usually make a brief comment to her about being funny like, "I wonder if this is a funny day?" They are amazed at the improvement in her behaviour, and they no longer have to wonder if she knows the material.

COMMENTS

a) The teacher initially saw the function of Brenda's behaviour as being only negative, disrupting the class. She decided to view the problem situation from a new perspective and found that the behaviour was having a positive function for the classroom, it brought humour and variety into the learning environment.

She was then able to use this positive function to suggest a new way for the ancillaries to respond to Brenda's silliness.

b) Based on this new perception the ancillaries provided Brenda with a straightforward acknowledgment that she was funny. "Brenda, you really are a funny person." and "You really know how to give some of the funniest answers." This was in sharp contrast to their attempts to get her to stop being funny. Thus, the cycle of events was broken by using a cooperative perspective.

c) The example illustrates how an individual's behaviour is influenced by the context in which it takes place. Brenda behaved quite differently when working with the teacher than with the ancillaries. Keeping in mind that behaviour occurs in a context and that this context includes the interactions of those within it, can help you to see where you might begin to change the problem you are facing.

In this example, the teacher's awareness of this allowed her to change an aspect of the context in which the problem behaviour occurred. By altering the context, she influenced Brenda's behaviour in a constructive way.

Practice activity: <u>POSITIVE CONNOTATION OF FUNCTION</u>

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a problem you are currently having. Jot down some notes for yourself about the problem. Be as specific as possible in describing the problem behaviour.

1. Who does what, when, to whom, and so on?......................

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2. How do you usually respond, and what result do you get?

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3. What are some of the functions of this behaviour that you presently see?..

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4. What are some positive ecosystemic functions of this behaviour? (remember, a function is not necessarily an intended result)...

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5. Based on one or more of these positive functions, how could you respond differently than you have in the past? What might you actually say or do based on one of these positive functions?...

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3. THE SYMPTOM-PRESCRIPTION TECHNIQUE

a) Introduction

The symptom-prescription technique is the epitome of the paradoxical method that ecosystemic techniques use to constructively change problem behaviour. Simply put, the technique involves asking for the problem behaviour to continue. However, it is asked to continue for: *a different reason* and/or *at a different time* and/or *place* and/or *in some modified way*.

It can be difficult to imagine how asking a student to perform a problem behaviour (albeit differently) will help to constructively change a problem situation. For this reason, many teachers initially only use symptom prescription when they feel there is nothing to lose. Until you have experienced the noncommonsense results of cooperating with someone in a problem situation, it is understandable that you will be skeptical. What we ask is that you do not dismiss this technique until you have tried it.

The technique is closely linked to the concept of cooperation and can have positive effects on both the student and teacher.

When you *prescribe* the *symptom* by asking the student to continue behaving the way they are, but differently, you acknowledge that their behaviour is appropriate and deemed necessary for them. In doing so, you will also communicate to them that life in school involves the negotiation of mutually acceptable behaviours. Indeed, the person who's behaviour has been 'prescribed' often reacts by indicating that for the first time she or he feels understood. People often change when they feel it is no longer necessary to convince others of the validity of their behaviour in the problem situation.

Furthermore, one of the characteristic experiences described by teachers when they use this technique is that they no longer feel like they are struggling with the student to get them to change. Instead, they feel that they have created a new situation in which they can agree with the student about what should be done.

In effect, using symptom prescription has the potential to allow an exchange of perspectives between teacher and student. As the teacher cooperates with, instead of struggles against, the problem person's behaviour, the problem person reciprocates.

The symptom prescription technique is based on a number of essential elements that are outlined below.

b) The essential elements of the symptom-prescription technique.

1. Be aware of your **CURRENT ATTEMPTS** to convince the person to stop their problem behaviour. Ecosystemically, the behaviour of a person is meaningful and appropriate for that person regardless of the implications (positive or negative) of that behaviour. Attempts to stop the problem behaviour fail to acknowledge this point and can contribute to the continuation of the problem situation. By evaluating the current effectiveness of your attempts to convince them to stop their problem behaviour you can reflect on their inappropriateness.

2. **IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PERFORMING** the problem behaviour **DIFFERENTLY** (i.e. for a different reason, at a different time, place or in a modified way). You are encouraged to identify as many ways as possible that the behaviour can be performed differently. This is because, with this technique in particular, you are likely to be concerned that asking the person to perform the problem behaviour will make things worse. By identifying many different possibilities you will provide yourself with many possible avenues to follow.

3. SELECT ONE (OR MORE) ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PERFORMING the problem behaviour and **POSITIVELY REGARD IT** in some way. You are encouraged to adopt an attitude that: acknowledges that the person engaged in the problem behaviour is doing so with good reason and/or that the problem behaviour may be useful in the problem situation. As with all ecosystemic techniques, you must choose an alternative that you feel you can articulate to the problem person in a genuine, sincere way.

4. ACT IN WAYS THAT ARE CONSISTENT with your new perception of the problem behaviour. You are asked to request that the behaviour continue in the chosen modified, positive way.

CASE EXAMPLE 1.

Helen was often off task. She was out of her seat frequently. She would then wander aimlessly around the room and engage in conversations with other students. She would also leave the room several times to go to the bathroom and be gone for long periods of time. Consequently, she did not finish her work. I required that work not finished at school be taken home and completed. She did not do this.

We have well defined class rules and a set of consequences for breaking these. Helen often broke the rules, and I responded with warnings, exclusion, writing, and home contact. There was no improvement. I scolded her, tried to reason with her, sent notes home to her parents and had meetings with them. I tried moving her desk next to mine, but I rarely sit there, so I could not monitor her effectively. Anyone who had not finished their work could not go out to play. Helen stayed in regularly. I even made her my own prisoner by requiring that she stayed next to me at all times and not allowing her to do anything without my permission. Even this brought only a temporary change.

Since Helen was wandering around aimlessly anyway and frequently leaving the room for long periods, I decided I had little to loose in attempting to use symptom prescription. All my efforts to get her to stop walking had not been successful, so I was willing to tell her to keep walking if it would help.

I said to Helen that I realised she needed to get up and walk around the room sometimes. I told her she should walk around until she was ready to sit down and do her work.

Helen's jaw dropped. She sat down within minutes of me saying this. She was in no trouble the rest of the week. The following week I predicted a relapse to her and told her it would be normal if she started walking again. I also said that if she felt it was necessary, she should walk around a bit before starting her work. She came into the classroom and sat down. When I saw her out of her seat, I told her that I understood it was "walking time." She immediately sat down. Once while she was sitting down, I suggested to her that she get up and walk if she needed to. She walked around her desk once and sat down.

Not only has she been sitting down, but until the past week, her work has been done regularly. For the last two days she has not managed to complete most of her work, she is still sitting down though. If the problem of not completing work continues I think I will try reframing. Symptom prescription worked well. Now I am ready to try another technique.

COMMENTS

The process this teacher went through highlights some of the essential elements of the symptom-prescription technique.

a) She was aware of the attempts she had made to convince Helen that her behaviour should stop. She had warned, scolded, reasoned and excluded her. She had contacted her parents and had meetings with them, as well as with Helen. None of these attempts proved to be successful. It is clear that the teacher was aware of the ineffectiveness of these attempts. It was due to this awareness that she decided to try symptom prescription.

b) She identified an alternative *reason* for Helen to perform the behaviour and positively regarded it. Instead of Helen "wandering around aimlessly," she became someone who walked around with purpose. She was someone who needed to walk in preparation for work. Although the teacher only identified one way that the problem behaviour could be performed differently, there are others that she could have identified. Helen could have performed the behaviour at a different time, at a different place, or in some modified way.

c) She acted in a way that was consistent with her new perception of the problem behaviour by asking that Helen, "should walk around until she was ready to sit down and do her work."

d) The teacher in this example cooperated with Helen by expressing her awareness of Helen's need to walk sometimes. Although it may not initially make sense to encourage Helen to continue her behaviour, from a cooperative perspective it does. If walking around for a while helps Helen to settle down and work, it makes sense for the teacher to encourage this behaviour.

e) The result of this cooperation was that, Helen reciprocated by, "sitting down within minutes." This constructive change in the problem situation continued for the rest of the week. At this point the teacher used the predicting-a-relapse technique to ensure that these changes remained in place, as indeed they did.

CASE EXAMPLE 2.

Chris is a ten year old who demanded constant attention. He would regularly come to my desk and make suggestions about how I should do my work. He would question most directions and assignments, asserting that his alternatives were better. He did not attend to directions and always asked to have them repeated. He procrastinated. He constantly sharpened pencils, shuffled papers, made frequent trips to the coat hangers, crumpled papers, opened the window, and so on. When he finally began work, he would almost immediately complain or ask unnecessary, repetitious questions. If I took time to answer, he continued to find more to ask until I finally refused answer. When I did this and insisted that he got on with his work, he would sulk, mumble loudly, throw down his pencil, and proclaim, "I can't do this, and its your fault. You won't tell me how to do it," and continue to make a scene. He interfered in interactions between other students and between the students and me. He would voice his opinion and attempt to impose solutions to problems that did not concern him. His behaviour ·prevented him from accomplishing much work and was affecting his achievement as well as disrupting the learning environment of the classroom.

My previous strategy was to deal with each outburst as it occurred. I had many patient counseling sessions with Chris, as well as meeting his parents. I also often kept him in at playtime. All of these attempted solutions proved ineffective and I developed the following strategy, which involved symptom prescription and reframing.

I told Chris that there were only a few weeks of school left and that I was concerned that the class would not have time to do all the work I had hoped they would. To complete the work, everyone would have to concentrate and stay on task. I said, "You always have so many comments and suggestions, but I cannot stop teaching to give your ideas the attention I would like. So, for the rest of the year, you may ask any questions about your work immediately following directions when the rest of the class does. You may not speak out at all at any other time, but please write down all of your thoughts and comments. I will have a meeting with you at the end of each day, when I can really give your ideas the attention they deserve. I expect that you will forget and speak out quite often at first, because you have done it for so long. That's all right - it's to be expected. I will help you by reminding you with a glance - you know, by lifting my eyebrows.

It has only been a week since that talk. The first day, Chris threw himself into writing pages of complaints and suggestions, all of which I treated seriously when we met at the end of the day.. He did little else - but the rest of the class and I did brilliantly. However, the novelty wore off, he began to lapse into his old behaviours. I laughed and said, "Aha, I think this is one of the relapses I predicted." Chris's response to this was to quiet down. Further lapses were short-circuited with a raising of my eyebrows. He said, "I know, I know," and went back to work. He complained that writing took too long and he could not do his work. I told him that he had an excellent memory and could stop the writing, and just remember the important things. I agreed with him that his work came first.

A few days later, when we were going to play a game outside, I called Chris aside and said that, although we were having a football game, I would end it early so that we could have our meeting. He said, "No way" - nothing too important had happened that day, so we could miss our meeting. Hopefully, the strategy will keep working for the remaining six weeks. By then I should be ready for the eyebrow Olympics.

COMMENTS

a) The teacher first reframed Chris's interruptions, complaints and interferences in a positive way as "comments," "suggestions," and "ideas". She then prescribed his behaviour in a positive way by asking for his comments and thoughts, but in a different way (written) and at a different time (at the end of the day).

b) This change in the pattern of interaction between Chris and the teacher allowed the teacher and class to accomplish their work. (When you change something in an ecosystem , the ecosystem will change)

c) When Chris began to complain about the initial symptom prescription (writing down his ideas) taking too long, the teacher modified the symptom prescription to fit his changing behaviour.

d) The teacher is trying to have a student who complains less and does more work. As there is movement in that direction, she does not rigidly adhere to the original stance but modifies it to fit the improvements in Chris's behaviour and Chris's new view of the situation. It is Chris who decides that writing his ideas takes too long. The teacher cooperates by agreeing that his work comes first.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.

Heather, who is very good at math's, refused to do any computation in her head. She refused even to do the simplest problem or steps in the process, such as six multiplied by two, in her head. She insisted on breaking every problem into separate problems and writing them on scrap paper. Consequently, she was spending an exorbitant amount of time on her math's at the expense of the other subjects. When I encouraged her to do the work in her head, Heather would get very angry and say that she could not do that, had never been able to do that and would never be able to do that. I tried putting a time limit Heather could spend on math's. This resulted in it not being completed and her being angry.

I decided to reframe Heather's writing everything down as being a sure method of having all the problems correct. I decided to combine this with symptom prescription. I told Heather that I understood that she was very concerned about doing perfect work, and that perhaps she really did have to write everything down and should continue to do so.

I said that I had changed my mind because I too wanted her to get every problem correct. I told her that in order to help her, I wanted her to get a notebook where she could keep all her workings out. As a matter of fact I told her that she should show me her book, so that when she was not finished with her math's I would know that it was certainly not because she had not done a lot of work. Heather said, "Good, then you will know how hard I work."

For the next three days, Heather wrote every segment of every problem in her notebook but kept "forgetting" to show it to me. On the fourth day, I noticed she was not writing out every problem. When I asked her, she said, "Takes too long." I said, "That's all right, if you are sure you can do it in your head. However, you may need to write out some steps as you go along. In fact, I would be surprised if you did not need to occasionally. So please be sure to write down when you need to."

When I checked her notebook, I found that she had made only a few entries over the past two weeks. She is now doing most of her computing in her head.

COMMENTS

a) The teacher in this example had unsuccessfully tried a number of ways to convince Heather that her behaviour should stop. She, encouraged her to "do the work in her head," and "tried putting a time limit Heather could spend on math's." These are both examples of the teacher trying to change the problem behaviour based on her view of the situation. She felt that it was not necessary for Heather to write up everything. She had not taken into account Heather's view of the situation, which was that it was necessary. The teacher's perception of the problem behaviour led her to try to convince Heather that she was right and should change her behaviour.

b) The teacher first reframed the problem behaviour in a positive way. Her new perception of the problem was that Heather was writing everything down to make sure all the problems were correct. This new perception allowed the teacher to behave in a different way towards the problem situation.

c) The teacher then combined the reframing with symptom prescription. Instead of attempting to convince Heather that she did not have to write everything down, the teacher agrees that perhaps she does. In doing so the teacher cooperates with Heather's view of the problem. It then makes sense for the teacher to ask for the behaviour to continue.

d) Heather's reaction to the teacher's request that she be shown her workings out, "Good, then you will know how hard I work," suggests that Heather thought all along that it was necessary for her to do so. She was not doing it for fun, it was a lot of work. It also illustrates that Heather felt understood.

e) The teacher's cooperation was reciprocated and the problem behaviour was changed in a constructive way. "She is now doing most of her computing in her head."

Practice activity: <u>SYMPTOM PRESCRIPTION</u>

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a problem you are currently having. Jot down some notes for yourself about the problem. Be as specific as possible about the problematic behaviour.

1. Who does what, when, to whom, and so on?.......................

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2. How do you usually respond to get the person to stop the behaviour? What result do you usually get?.........................

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3. What are some ways the behaviour could be performed differently, for example, at a different time or place, in a different way, or for a different reason?...............................

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4. How might you request that the person perform the modified behaviour so that it can be regarded in a positive way?...

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Predicting and Handling Relapses

As we have seen, ecosystemics is concerned with changing chronic problem behaviour - that is, it deals with problem behaviour which has become *established over a period of time* and has become part of a stable system of interactions. In other words, the problem behaviour and the teacher's responses to it form a pattern which occurs over and over again. So, it is not surprising that after an initial change the problem behaviour often reappears.

The Predicting-a-Relapse-Technique is specifically designed to prevent such an occurrence or, alternatively, to counter a relapse once it has occurred.

There are two main situations where the problem behaviour returns. The first one is when the teacher reverts to old, familiar ways of interacting, after the successful use of a particular technique. In this case, the pupil often responds by reverting to the original problem behaviour. The second situation is when the original problem behaviour reappears, even though the teacher maintains the new way of interacting with the pupil.

It is very easy to become disheartened when problem behaviour reappears after a successful intervention. This is understandable as we often put a lot of time and effort into changing problem behaviour and when we are successful there are obvious benefits for everyone involved. This is particularly so when we have been successful in changing *chronic* problem behaviour, as it can be a relief not to have to worry about an ongoing problem day after day.

The trouble is that chronic problem behaviour has a tendency to recur, and we often interpret this as a failure. It may seem that, despite our best efforts and despite using a new technique, we have failed to change the situation and are stuck with the problem. This technique can help us to see such a recurrence of problem behaviour differently, so that we do not give up. The basic idea is that we should *expect* a relapse of chronic behaviour to occur.

Reframing a Relapse

By anticipating a relapse in this way, the ecosystemic approach considers the reappearance of the problem behaviour as a *part of the normal progress towards a solution* rather than as a failure. Thus a relapse becomes a sign that the normal process of positive change is occurring, rather than a cause for alarm or despondency. In essence, describing the reappearance of the problem behaviour as a temporary relapse is a reframing in itself.

The technique is very simple and straightforward. There are two main ways in which it can be used - (i) to predict and prevent a relapse of the problem behaviour and (ii) to handle a recurrence of the problem behaviour. In each case the approach is used in conjunction with one or more of the other ecosystemic techniques. These approaches will now be considered in turn.

Predicting a Relapse

Although it is not necessary to predict a relapse in advance, some teachers have found it useful to be sceptical of a pupil's new non-problem behaviour. This technique is also useful if for some reason you are anticipating a relapse or feel that you can detect early signs of a return to the problem behaviour.

The predicting-a-relapse technique is used to support the changes that have already occurred after an initially successful ecosystemic intervention. Although there is no prescribed way to formulate the prediction of a relapse, the communication must contain two important features. The teacher:-

❑ **repeats the original intervention** perhaps in a slightly modified way;

❑ tells the student that **it would not be surprising** if he or she relapsed into an old problem behaviour and that **a relapse would be normal.**

Case Examples

As this approach depends on the above formula, most interventions of this type follow the same pattern. For this reason, we have not provided detailed case examples, but hope to demonstrate the technique by considering a few cases briefly.

Many of us will be familiar with the child who always calls out answers in discussions or when we are working with a group. With most children, reminding them that they need to put their hand up during a question and answer session is sufficient. There are other approaches, such as ignoring the problem behaviour as far as possible and reinforcing required behaviour. In many cases these approaches will produce the desired results. However, some children seem to have real difficulty in not calling out, and this can become a chronic problem situation.

Many of the techniques we have looked at could be used to try to change this behaviour. For example, if a teacher had used *positive connotation of motive* to interpret the calling out behaviour as an *expression of interest* in the lesson, then predicting a relapse might sound something like this: "It's good to have someone in my class who is so interested in my lessons *(repeating the original intervention)*. I would not be surprised if you called out answers sometimes *(it would not be surprising)*. After all, given your interest, that would be normal *(a relapse would be normal)*.

The main ingredients have been indicated in parentheses in the above example; of course, the particular intervention could have been phrased differently, but would still need to contain the important

features indicated.

This particular problem could have been changed by using the *reframing* technique. For example the teacher may have changed her interpretation of the calling out behaviour by considering it as a sign of the child's energy and enthusiasm. In this case predicting a relapse could be phrased as follows: "I expect that your enthusiasm will show itself from time to time in all sorts of ways, like calling out answers *(this combines repeating the original intervention with "it would not be surprising")*. That would be normal from a person as energetic as you *(a relapse would be normal)*. Besides, if you do call out answers from time to time, it will help me to remember how enthusiastic you are to become involved."

In all cases of predicting a relapse, the teacher is able to reaffirm her positive focus and encourage the constructive changes. As the initial intervention has already changed the problem behaviour, using the-prediction-of-relapse technique is likely to reinforce that change.

Practice Activity:
The Predicting-a-Relapse Technique

The Predicting-a-Relapse Technique is used to support the changes that have already occurred after using other ecosystemic techniques.

1. What was the original problem situation? Which technique did you use to change the problem behaviour?

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2. How did you communicate the new positive interpretation of the behaviour to the pupil concerned? What did you actually say? What phrases did you use?

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3. Use this page to help you to decide what you will say to the person or people concerned in your prediction of a relapse. Think about each aspect of the communication in parts (a) and (b) below. Then put the ideas together to produce the complete statement in part (c).

(a) repeat the original intervention using the information from part two above:

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(b) use such phrases as *it would not be surprising ... it is to be expected ... a relapse would be normal ...*

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(c) try to combine these elements in a way which is comfortable for you.

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Now look back to the cases on pages 4 and 5 above. Does your planned intervention correspond to the examples? Try to keep a note of the results of your intervention if possible.

Handling a Relapse

When a recurrence of problem behaviour takes place after the successful use of an ecosystemic intervention, then we can use the handling-a-relapse technique. There are two important factors to bear in mind. First, you have to be clear about the messages you need to communicate to the pupil - that what has happened is an understandable but temporary setback which could have been predicted. You could also mention that it is difficult to change old habits, that such temporary setbacks are normal, that other setbacks may occur, but that the process of positive change is moving ahead.

Although there is no prescribed formula for what you say, the communication must contain three important features. Although there are similarities with the predicting-of-a-relapse technique, the order has now changed. The teacher:-

☐ tells the student that **it is not surprising** that he or she has relapsed into an old problem behaviour, that it is to be **expected** and that **relapses are normal**.

☐ acknowledges that **it is difficult to change** old habits

☐ **repeats the original intervention** and tells the pupil that because of the positive reframing of the behaviour, the relapse **could easily have been predicted**.

Second, you have to be particularly aware of your non-verbal communication for the interaction to be successful. It is important that your tone of voice and body language do not suggest in any way that you knew that the person could not really change for the better. In using this technique, we need to focus on and encourage the positive changes that have occurred, not to call them into question. Your tone in such a situation needs to be mild and understanding.

Case Example

In this section, I want to focus on the last step, as the first two are fairly straightforward and very similar to the previous examples, except that in this case the relapse has actually occurred.

In the previous section we considered the case of a teacher who had used *positive connotation of motive* to interpret the calling out behaviour as an *expression of interest* in the lesson. Assuming that the problem behaviour actually recurred, then the handling-a-relapse technique might sound something like this: "It is normal to fall back into old patterns of behaviour once in a while. It is very difficult to change old habits. As you are so interested in our discussions, I could have predicted that you would call out sometimes. In fact, when you call out like that, it reminds me that you really are interested." The teacher would also be careful to ensure that her non-verbal communication was positive and did not suggest in any way that she thought that the person could not really change for the better.

This teacher had used *positive connotation of motive* to interpret the calling out behaviour as an *expression of interest* in the lesson. In this example of the handling-a-relapse technique, this positive interpretation of the behaviour is given as the very reason why the relapse could so easily have been predicted - "As you are so interested in our discussions, I could have predicted that you would call out sometimes." The occurrence of the relapse has now confirmed the original intervention, that calling out is an expression of interest. This example also anticipates that further calling out behaviour in the future will also reinforce the positive interpretation - "In fact, when you call out like that, it reminds me that you really are interested."

All of the ecosystemic techniques for changing problem behaviour are based on a radical reinterpretation of that behaviour. In effect, the handling-a-relapse technique is a way of *reaffirming* the new interpretation despite the fact that the problem behaviour has returned. We could even go so far as to say that, by using this technique, the original reinterpretation of the problem behaviour is not only confirmed when the problem changes *but also* when it recurs.

Practice Activity:
The Handling-a-Relapse Technique

The Handling-a-Relapse Technique is used to support the changes that have already occurred after using other ecosystemic techniques and after a relapse has occurred.

1. What was the original problem situation? Which technique did you use to change the problem behaviour?

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2. How did you communicate the positive interpretation of the behaviour originally? What did you actually say? What phrases did you use?

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3. Describe the relapse in specific terms. What happened?

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4. Use this page to help you to decide what you will say to the person or people concerned after the relapse has occurred. Think about each aspect of the communication in parts (a) and (b) below. Then put the ideas together in part (c).

(a) use such phrases as *it is not surprising ... it is to be expected ... a relapse is normal,* and also acknowledge that *it is difficult to change old habits.*

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(b) repeat the original intervention using the information from part two above, and by linking it to the positive reframing, say that the relapse could have been predicted:

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(c) try to combine these elements in a way which is comfortable for you. Remember the note on non-verbal communication on page 8.

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See if your planned intervention corresponds to the example on page 9 above. Try to keep a note of the results of your intervention if possible.

HANDBOOK 3

Loughborough University Department of Education

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Handbook 3

Contents

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1. THE STORMING-THE-BACK-DOOR TECHNIQUE

a) Introduction

The storming-the-back-door technique is very different from the previous techniques to which you have been introduced. Where as previous techniques have focused on changing the problem behaviour or situation *directly*, this technique attempts to change the problem *indirectly*. Storming-the-back-door is a metaphorical way of saying that the problem is like a strongly bolted door standing between you and a more constructive relationship. Instead of finding a battering ram strong enough to break down this door, the technique offers you an opportunity to walk around to the frequently unlocked back door and just walk in.

The technique was devised for use with problems that had not responded to any of the ecosystemic techniques previously described. Once teachers had tried the technique it was often their first choice thereafter. The reason for this preference is that you are asked to identify positive aspects of the problem individual that present themselves as being innately positive. As such, the technique requires little paradoxical reasoning. Clearly, it is much easier to identify positive aspects of an individual if they are presented to you as being 'obviously' positive.

The basic idea behind the technique is that, by focusing your attention on the nonproblem aspects of the ecosystem in which the problem behaviour occurs, you can change the ecosystem in a constructive way.

This encapsulates the idea that all elements of the ecosystem are related and that change in any part of the ecosystem has the potential to change problem situations in a positive way.

The storming-the-back-door technique is based on a number of essential elements that are outlined below.

b) <u>The essential elements of the storming-the-back-door technique.</u>

1. **IDENTIFY NONPROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF THE ECOSYSTEM** that involve the person whose behaviour is perceived to be a problem. You are asked to ignore the problem behaviour and focus on the positive, nonproblematic, characteristics, relationships or aspects of the person(s) involved.

2. **IDENTIFY SEVERAL POSSIBLE POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OR BEHAVIOURS** of the problem person. By identifying several possibilities you are given a variety of options to choose from when attempting the third essential element below.

3. **SELECT A POSITIVE ATTRIBUTE OR BEHAVIOUR.** Once again you must choose one that you sincerely believe to be positive. Only then can you articulate this to the pupil in a believable way.

4. FORMULATE A WAY OF COMMUNICATING POSITIVE COMMENTS about the chosen positive attribute or behaviour. Here you are asked to think of ways to articulate, to the problem pupil, an acknowledgment of your chosen positive attribute or behaviour.

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5. COMMUNICATE THE POSITIVE COMMENT to the problem person. The key to the successful implementation of this final essential element is that whatever your behaviour towards the individual, it should be *new* or *different*, and is *not connected* to the problem behaviour. Ecosystemically, whether the change of your behaviour takes place in the setting of the problem situation or outside should be unimportant. All parts of the ecosystem are related, so that, a change in the nonproblem part has the potential to influence the problem part.

It is worthy of mention that, changes in one part of the ecosystem do not effect all parts with the same magnitude or in the same way. It is often the 'ecosystemic boundary' that determines the scope of influence felt by the changes made. There are examples of ecosystemic techniques, implemented at school, having knock on effects outside the problem situation (e.g. at home).

However, as a practical guide the boundary of an ecosystem is often the same as the setting in which the problem occurs. This suggests that you focus on communicating your behaviour within the setting of the problem situation (see case example 1) - BUT, you should also be aware of the possibility that communication outside this setting can also change the problem constructively (see case example 2).

CASE EXAMPLE 1.

Alex is an eleven year old with average to above average ability. He is quiet and shows proper respect to adults and teachers. He is not a disturbance in class. The problem stemmed from the fact that Alex did not do his work, neither class nor homework. He gave the impression of working but produced little or nothing by the end of the day.

Alex's mother and stepfather had been to school twice to express their concern for Alex's poor work habits. We had initiated a nightly homework sheet to check what Alex had completed during the day. This had limited success, because Alex would 'forget' to do the homework (which are incomplete daily assignments), or his mother would 'forget' to sign the homework sheet.

On Thursday I asked Alex for his homework and the signed homework sheet. Neither had been done. Instead of reprimanding him as I usually did, I decided it was time to storm the back door. I took Alex aside and surprised him by saying that when he did his work I liked how neatly it was done. I also asked if he noticed how I always called on him when he put his hand up. I told him I did so because I knew he would have a thoughtful answer. Alex was very pleased.

The results have been interesting. For the rest of Thursday, Alex worked diligently. He produced more than his usual output of work, but he still had work to take home.

Alex seemed to put up his hand more and was extremely pleased when I called on him. He always had the right answer. (We gave each other knowing smiles!)

On Friday, Alex was absent.

On Monday, Alex proudly handed in *twenty* overdue assignments. I made a big fuss and praised him for the completed work he had done. That day he managed to complete all the work set for the morning but still had the afternoon work to do for homework. I told him I knew he would get all the work done and that they would be accurate and neat.

After only two days, it is hard to make a valid judgment, but I think I may be on the right track with Alex. Storming the back door by commenting on Alex's positive qualities has certainly brought about better results than harping on about the problem.

COMMENTS

1. Instead of reprimanding Alex for his problem behaviour, (not doing work at home and in school), the teacher chose to talk about the nonproblem parts of the problem situation. He identified some of Alex's positive qualities and commented upon them.

2. This is an example of storming the back door by commenting on positive qualities of the problem individual *inside* the problem situation.

3. In the example a simple change in the ecosystem was sufficient to produce a positive outcome. As the teacher explained, 'storming the back door by commenting on Alex's positive qualities has certainly brought about better results than harping on about the problem.

CASE EXAMPLE 2.

The problem was that Josephine, a very capable pupil in an accelerated reading group, was not following directions to head her work with her full name and the date. She did this on a regular basis, and I found it most annoying.

The problem occurred during my reading class. Jo would complete her work neatly and accurately but refuse to 'head' her paper. I expected this occasionally from all my pupils; however Jo did this on a regular basis. I had placed a sample heading on the board as a reminder, Jo ignored it.

Initially, my response to an unheaded paper had been, 'Whose paper is this?'
Response: 'Oh, that Jo's!'

I would say, 'Jo, I will need your name and the date on this,' which resulted in a snappy, sassy response and a hastily scribbled heading. As the weeks progressed, this continued to be a problem. Needless to say, it became a growing irritant.

Besides the above attempts to solve the problem, I tried reminding Jo at the beginning of every written activity; this usually got me a first name only and no date. I threatened to throw out unheaded papers and have then redone, which was an empty threat made in anger, because I do not agree with doing this. I had seriously considered having the girl come in after school and head perhaps fifty or sixty papers for practice.

I chose against this, not wanting to deal with her resulting 'attitude' that would surely follow. With nothing to lose, I decided to try storming the back door with Jo and her unheaded papers. I decided to capitalize on Jo's pride in her personal appearance.

Jo arrived early on Tuesday, and I proceeded with my plan.

> 'And who is this in a new purple outfit? That colour looks good on you,' I said
> with sincerity.
>
> 'Thanks,' she replied (nothing more).

I continued with the lesson, set them to work and at the end collected the papers (and held my breath). Sure enough, she turned in a perfect paper with a neat heading. Can't be, I thought. The next day, I tried this:

'New shoes, Jo? Lovely, they suit you!

Again without any reminder, Jo headed her paper. I began to 'welcome' her appearance in class every day, sometimes just saying, 'Hi, Jo! And how are things this morning?'

About eight days passed smoothly, with the usual morning greetings. Then, one morning before class began, I was preoccupied with other members of the class, and failed to acknowledge Jo's presence. When I collected the papers (you guessed it) there was no name on Jo's. As we had come so far, I was unwilling to resort to our old pattern. So I said, 'Jo, your name, please. You know, I often forget to put my name on things when I have something else in my mind.' Her pleasant response was, 'Silly me, I just wasn't thinking. Sorry.'

Since then I have kept simple records of the responses to these techniques, and I must say that they work, and I really feel good about it. The girl does not always need a compliment now, sometimes a nod or a wink is enough. Our rapport has improved 90%.

COMMENTS

The process this teacher went through highlights some of the essential elements of the storming the back door technique.

1. The teacher had spent considerable time and effort trying to work out what to do with Jo. As each attempt failed so the problem became more entrenched and the teacher became more annoyed. In the end the teacher expressed a sense of powerlessness to change the problem behaviour.

2. The turning point occurred when the teacher decided to identify aspects of the ecosystem that involved Jo BUT were not a problem. This was a radical alteration in the cycle of interaction that had previously accompanied the problem behaviour.

3. The teacher selected Jo's pride in her appearance as a positive attribute and articulated this to her by complimenting her outfit and shoes.

4. This is an example of storming the back door by commenting on the positive qualities of the problem individual *outside* the problem itself. The teacher did not refer to the problem but looked outside the situation for clues to Jo's positive qualities.

Practice activity: <u>STORMING-THE-BACK-DOOR</u>

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a person (or group) whose behaviour is currently a problem for you. Make some notes for yourself.

1. Describe the behaviours or attitudes of that person (or group) or situations involving that person (or group) that are not a problem.

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2. Select the behaviour, attributes, or nonproblem situations that you believe you can most easily and genuinely comment on positively.

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3. Based on the behaviour, attribute, or nonproblem situation you have selected, what might you say to the person whose behaviour is a problem for you? What time and place do you think it would be most natural for you to make your positive comment?

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2. THE LOCATING-EXCEPTIONS TECHNIQUE

a) Introduction

This technique is an extension of the storming-the-back-door technique. However, there are subtle differences between the two. As has been seen, the latter is an *indirect, nonspecific* technique that helps you to behave differently and positively towards behaviours that are not associated with the problem behaviour. Locating exceptions goes one step further and asks you to consider closely the problem person and find ways to encourage their nonproblem behaviours without making reference to the problem. The idea is that by drawing your attention to the nonproblem behaviours of the problem person you will alter your perspective of that person and thus your perspective of the problem.

The focus of the locating-exceptions technique is the entire ecosystem. It aims to influence the ecosystem (and therefore the problem) by moving the emphasis from unacceptable behaviours to anything that involves the problem person BUT is not a problem. Doing this can have a twofold effect. Firstly, by identifying what is currently happening that you do not want to change, you can begin to find exceptions to a problem that has been frustrating you. Secondly, it gives you the opportunity to think about what *you* are already doing that works. What is it that you do with the pupil when the problem behaviour is not present? How can you use what you are already doing that is effective, to learn how to become even more effective?

Thinking about those behaviours of a problem person you do not want to change, and the behaviours you use effectively with the problem pupil, can allow you to begin to see the differences between the problem situation and other situations. Often identifying these differences is the first step towards positive change.

It is important to point out that this technique should not be confused with positive reinforcement techniques. While these tend to focus only on the behaviour of the problem person, the focus of locating-exceptions is the whole ecosystem. This includes the problem situation and nonproblem situations, the behaviours of the problem person and of yourself.

The essential elements of the locating-exceptions technique are outlined below.

b) <u>The essential elements of the locating-exceptions technique</u>

1. **IDENTIFY SITUATIONS WHEN THE PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IS NOT OCCURRING**. You are encouraged to draw your attention to nonproblem behaviours of the problem person and note the situations where these occur. This will help you to identify what the problem person does that is positive. It will also help you to realise that your behaviour towards the problem person is not always destructive but is effective when that person is not causing a problem.

2. **DISTINGUISH BETWEEN SITUATIONS** where the problem does occur and where it does not. This will help you to identify what behaviours, qualities, and characteristics of the problem person you would like to encourage. It will suggest to you what situations do not need to be changed. It will also help you to identify precisely where and when your behaviour works well with the problem person.

3. **SELECT A NONPROBLEM BEHAVIOUR OR SITUATION** that would be easiest to increase in frequency. Two questions can be asked to help you with this selection. Firstly, how do you behave differently towards the problem person in nonproblem situations? Secondly, what are you already doing to encourage their nonproblem behaviour?

4. Think of ways to **INCREASE THE TIME** spent in the nonproblemic situation **OR THE INCIDENCE** of nonproblem behaviours. Here you need to use your knowledge of the nonproblematic situations to identify which of your behaviours work well with the problem person and which of their behaviours you wish to encourage. You will need to act as a detective (see Handbook 1, The reframing technique, pp. 3-4) and gather clues pertaining to these issues. Your aim is to identify what you and the problem person do well that can be used as a foundation to do even better.

CASE EXAMPLE 1.

Celeste, a child in my reception class, presented an ongoing problem. She could well be described as a nonconformist. She preferred to do just as she pleased and tended to behave and talk in a contrary fashion, disrupting the cooperative and harmonious atmosphere that generally exists in the class.

Despite my efforts to set limits for Celeste, to encourage her sporadic attempts at improvement, and to teach her more constructive social skills, she had become increasingly defiant. She had begun to use bad language, to hit others even when she was not provoked, and refused to do what I told her to do.

Since I could not think of anything else to do, I began to look at Celeste's behaviour in terms of the locating-exceptions technique to determine when her behaviour was not a problem. Soon I observed that during some lessons, when Celeste's work was highly .structured, she worked like a trouper, followed directions fairly well, and responded positively to reminders and encouragement. The light dawned on me! Perhaps the rather informal framework of most of the reception activities was not Celeste's forte, and I needed to structure activities much more precisely for Celeste.

After identifying the highly structured lessons as the situation in which the exceptions to Celeste's problem behaviour usually occurred, I was able to develop a surprisingly effective strategy for increasing the nonproblem behaviour.

I began by discussing with Celeste that she was doing good work, I wrote notes on her work, praising her good work habits that day. I also phoned her mother with the good news. I asked her to tell Celeste I had phoned and to relate the positive nature of our conversation.

This strategy worked so well that I began to feel better toward Celeste and told her so. I praised her improvement and suggested we try to carry it over to other activities. I set up a highly structured situation for her during play time, defining materials, interactions, and location in the room - just as I had done for the work time. She had her ups and downs with this at first. I responded by focusing my attention on her successes.

To summarise, with some setbacks from time to time, I have been able to expand the highly structured environment for Celeste to include most of the reception activities. Every day at home time, I quietly ask her who was her best friend in school that day. Although ten days ago she refused even to answer that question, lately she names someone every day. Celeste is beginning to feel good about herself, and she now smiles occasionally in school. I feel much more warmly towards her now. A feeling of success seems to be contagious. Even her mother expresses her pleasure to at 'finally being able to reach Celeste!'

COMMENTS

The process this teacher went through highlights some of the essentials elements of the locating-exceptions technique.

1. She began by looking for situations when Celeste's problem behaviour was not taking place. In doing so, she soon observed that, 'when Celeste's work was highly structured, she worked like a trouper.'

2. She then made a distinction between these situations and when the problem behaviour occurred. She suggests that the difference was, 'the rather informal framework of most of the reception activities.'

3. The teacher then developed a strategy to increase the frequency of the nonproblem behaviour. She began with simple positive comments, positive notes on Celeste's work and positive home contact.

4. Later the teacher broadens the strategy to include non-work activities. She started simple and worked her way up.

CASE EXAMPLE 2.

Joan often got into problems by poking others or calling others silly names during 'in-between' times in class. These are times when we are finishing one activity and going onto another - collecting exercise books, putting materials away, lining up and so on. I wanted to use an ecosystemic technique to try to change this pattern of behaviour. I decided that instead of focusing on the problem, I would try and identify what Joan did well. After some thought. I realised that when Joan was busy with her assignments in class, she was only occasionally a problem. I realised that I needed to keep her occupied to have her stay out of trouble, and that I knew how to do it.

In the past I had gotten into the following pattern with Joan:

1. Work activity ends and a new one is about to begin;

2. Joan 'acts up';

3. I discipline her. Although I usually restore order, Joan's behaviour has never changed for very long.

Once I had realised that when Joan was occupied or busy, she was seldom involved in disruptive behaviour, I knew I had located a useful 'exception'. I wanted to increase the times Joan could be kept busy, even if at these times we were not doing an assignment in class.

I decided that I would tell Joan that I had noticed how well she had attended to her school work and asked her to nod to me when she was ready to begin a new activity. I also decided to acknowledge her readiness in some way.

While 'locating exceptions' for Joan this week, these were some of the interactions that occurred.

1. When I was collecting reading books, Joan's group was finished, and the children were moving on to another activity. Joan nodded she was ready, and I asked her to straighten the exercise books on the shelf for me and then go on to the next activity. She did this, and there were no discipline problems at this transition time.

2. In lining up for PE this week (a time when there is a lot of activity going on - putting books away, getting changed), Joan nodded that she was ready, and I let her line up first. Others were still getting ready at their desks, and Joan seemed pleased at being the first person in line. This transition time again went well for her.

Joan seems happy at my acknowledgment of her readiness for a new activity, and I am happy I can encourage this cooperation from her rather than have to discipline her. Transition times are much smoother for us now that Joan is 'busy with an assignment'.

COMMENTS

1. The teacher in this example recognised and built upon both Joan's strengths (Joan was a good worker and did not disturb others often if she was busy on a definite task) and those of her own (she knew she already had the ability to keep Joan occupied to have her stay out of trouble).

2. The teacher used this knowledge, and her own professional ability, to devise ways to keep Joan busy during transition times.

3. She asked Joan to 'nod' to her when she was ready to begin a new activity. This is a good example of cooperation between teacher and pupil. It increased the incidences of this behaviour occurring by giving Joan the opportunity to let her teacher know when she was ready to move on.

4. Joan reciprocated the acknowledgment of her readiness for a new activity by cooperating with her teacher's suggestions about how to spend the transition times. The teacher says, 'I am happy I can encourage this cooperation from her rather than have to discipline her'. It is not hard to imagine that Joan is happy that she is no longer told off by her teacher and would be willing to invest some effort into maintaining the cooperation.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

In both these case examples the exception located was the pupils behaviour in highly structured situations. In case example 1, highly structured lessons were identified as situations in which exceptions to Celeste's problem behaviour occured. Similarly, in case example 2, the teacher located an exception to Joan's problem behaviour when she realised that disruptive behaviour seldom occured when she was kept busy or occupied.

It is tempting to conclude from this that pupils who disrupt during unstructured times, need more structure. Indeed, for many this may well be a successful intervention. However, this is not an ecosystemic rule. Had the teachers in the 2 examples located different exceptions and acted accordingly to them, equally positive changes are likely to have occurred.

Practice activity: <u>LOCATING EXCEPTIONS</u>

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a person whose behaviour is currently a problem for you. Write your responses to the following.

1. Identify the situation(s) in which this person does not exhibit this problem behaviour. Identify the differences between the problem and nonproblem situations.

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2. What behaviours, qualities, characteristics, and so on of the problem person whose behaviour is a problem would you like to see more of?

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3. Describe how you are different in nonproblem situations. Identify what you are already doing to encourage nonproblem behaviours that works in relation to this person.

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4. Formulate a plan for increasing the nonproblem behaviour by using these questions as a guide:

a) How can you increase the characteristics of nonproblem situations? (STEP 1)

b) Which specific nonproblem behaviours do you want to encourage? (STEP 2)

c) How can you increase your own 'nonproblem' behaviour? (STEP 3)

What will you say or do to articulate these thoughts to the problem person?

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3. GUIDELINES FOR TRYING THE ECOSYSTEMIC

TECHNIQUES AGAIN

Now that you have been introduced to all the ecosystemic techniques we would like to offer you some advice on what to do if your efforts at a particular technique have appeared to be unsuccessful.

1. **WAIT**. Ecosystemic techniques will, by their very nature, allow you to respond to chronic problem situations in a very different, and often paradoxical, way. You may need to allow time for these changes to take effect on the pattern of behaviour you wish to change constructively. As we discussed in Conference 1 (see page 6), chronic problems develop over time and become a stable characteristic of the ecosystem. It would not be surprising if it also took time to break the cycle of events that surround this stability.

2. **OBSERVE**. It is only natural to expect that when you are faced with a chronic problem behaviour your attention will focus on this behaviour and its characteristics. Indeed, the ecosystemic approach encourages a close examination of the problem behaviour and situation. However, you should also try to be aware of the small signs that signal changes in the ecosystem. It is often these initial changes that let you know of the success or failure of your intervention.

3. <u>REPEAT THE INTERVENTION</u>. Firstly, check that you are using your chosen technique properly. Review the literature we have provided in the handbooks and repeat the practice activities. If you are confident that you are using the technique properly, then repeat the intervention. Just as it may be necessary to allow time for the intervention to break the cycle of events that surround the problem behaviour, it may also be necessary to repeat the intervention.

As has been illustrated by some of the case examples, sometimes people are taken aback, confused or disbelieving of the intervention. Your new way of responding to the problem person is likely to be very different from your usual response. As such, the person may need to hear the intervention or experience your new response more than once to fully grasp it.

4. <u>TRY ANOTHER TECHNIQUE</u>. The ecosystemic techniques are not problem specific. They all revolve around the idea that, when you change something in an ecosystem, the ecosystem will change. Furthermore, the success of the techniques depends on:

    a) Your interactions with the problem person(s).

    b) The people with whom you use the technique.

    c) The context within which the problem occurs.

Should your chosen technique seem not to be changing the problem behaviour constructively it might be time to try a technique that:

   a) You can more readily articulate to the problem person(s), and/or

   b) Is more readily acceptable to the problem person, and/or

   c) More readily suits the context of the problem behaviour or situation.

5. <u>HAVE YOU USED FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE</u>? Your ability to use the problem person's figurative language to communicate the intervention can effect how quickly and to what extent they grasp it. If you find that the problem person(s) misunderstands your communication, repeating it, but in their language, can make the difference between initiating change and having little or no effect.

6. <u>HAVE YOU BEEN EMPATHIC</u>? Being able to place yourself in the problem person's shoes is fundamental to the ecosystemic approach. There are a number of ways to enhance this ability.

   a) Try to imagine how that person would describe your behaviour.

   b) Try to imagine how that person would reframe your behaviour.

   c) What might they find as a positive motive for your behaviour?

7. HAVE YOU BEEN HONEST AND SINCERE? If you believe your intervention is a lie, it is unlikely to work. In these instances you will need to choose a different technique that you feel more comfortable with and that will allow you to act honestly and sincerely.

8. DID YOU REVERT TO YOUR OLD PATTERN OF RESPONDING? The stability of chronic problem behaviour within an ecosystem is such that, reverting to old responses is likely to re-establish that stability. It often does not take much for the cycle to repair itself, even if it has been initially broken.

9. IS THERE ANOTHER PART OF THE ECOSYSTEM THAT CAN BE INVOLVED? It is often enough to work with one part of the ecosystem. However, it may be useful to include other parts, for example, ancillaries, a group of pupils or the whole class. It can also be useful to look at a larger ecosystem such as the school, and include the headteacher, or the home and school, and involve a parent.

CONCLUSION

The experience of American teachers suggests that the more they used ecosystemic techniques, the easier it was for them. They also found that they began to think about problem situations and potential solutions differently. It is our hope that this will be your experience.

4. <u>REFINING YOUR SKILLS</u>

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Each of the ecosystemic techniques that you have been introduced to represents a different way of helping you change a problem situation by changing *your* perspective and/or behaviour. There is little doubt that changing yourself is not always the easy option to take. After all, it is much more difficult to overturn an existing belief about ones-self and the world around you, than it is to sustain it.

<u>WHY ARE CHRONIC PROBLEMS SO DIFFICULT TO CHANGE?</u>

The difficulty in changing ones perspective and/or behaviour is compounded when it takes place within a chronic problem behaviour context. Your perspective of, and behaviour towards, a chronic problem behaviour will have developed over considerable time. At each stage of this development your explanation of the behaviour is likely to have been confirmed and reinforced until you perceived it to be <u>the</u> *'truthful'* explanation. Some of the ways confirmation can take place are discussed below.

Each time the problem behaviour emerges this perceived *'truthful'* explanation is reinforced. Typical thoughts might include,

- 'There goes Helen, pushing in line again. She is always so aggressive',

- 'What a surprise, Tom is shouting out again. He is such an attention seeker' or

- 'Matthew hasn't done any work again this morning. It must be because there are 'family problems'.

Pupils often carry with them a label that haunts them throughout their schooling. A hypothetical scenario might be;

A pupil's aggressive behaviour in a reception class is discussed amongst fellow teachers, an explanation is formed and a 'label' given. At the end of the academic year teachers exchange information about pupils. Profiles of 'problem' pupils are passed onto their future teachers, as is the 'problem' pupil's label. By the time the new academic year begins the year 1 teacher may be acutely aware of, or sensitive to, the potential problems they will face with this pupil. After all they have been warned by their peers. In extreme cases they may expect trouble even before it happens.

Furthermore, should the anticipated problem behaviour emerge, then not only has the teacher been warned about the problem pupil, they have also experienced the problem at first hand. Both experiences are likely to confirm the perceived explanation of the problem behaviour, therefore perpetuating the 'labeling' of the pupil.

It is not uncommon for teachers, at the start of a new year, to express their anxiety over potential 'problem' pupils, an anxiety that has been passed down by the pupil's previous teacher. You may have heard, as we have, staffroom discussions about, 'Who will be in your class next year?' and the negative comments that accompany the names of 'problem' pupils.

CONCLUSION

We are not suggesting, by any stretch of the imagination, that such explanations, and the ways they are confirmed, are wrong or incorrect. To do so would not only be to criticise fellow teachers but also ourselves. This is neither our purpose nor our wish. What we *are* suggesting is,

> **If your explanations (and the ensuing behaviours) are not changing**
> **the problem constructively, then others may need to be found.**

A powerful way of initiating this necessary change is by reflecting on the history of your own development and the social context in which you work. This can help you to begin to see why you are finding it hard to change in a given problem situation. It can also help you to put your perspective of the problem behaviour into perspective. One of the ways you can help yourself become more aware of your perspective is by asking the following questions.

1. How might my behaviour be interpreted from the problem person's perspective?

2. What is the difference between my interpretation of my own behaviour and the problem person's interpretation of it?

3. What different behaviour(s) on my part (that are acceptable to me) might be interpreted as a positive change by the problem person?

Responding to these questions may not suggest an immediate solution. It will, however, increase you potential to see more possible routes to follow than you had previously considered. This can be very useful because people involved with chronic problem situations often feel there is no way out. They believe they have tried everything they know and feel trapped. Anything that helps to alleviate these fears, and to think of new possibilities will make a big impact.

5. <u>BEING CREATIVE WITH WHAT YOU</u>

<u>ALREADY DO AND DO WELL</u>

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The ecosystemic approach assumes that you have the knowledge you need to solve your problems. When you are faced with a seemingly unsolvable problem you may have temporarily forgotten what you know, or you may not have put together the pieces of the problem situation in a helpful way. Never-the-less you know you already have the ability to solve your problems. Try thinking about a situation in which you tried everything you know but that still refused to change, then you did something different and the situation changed for the better.

<u>REMINISCING CAN HELP</u>

Reminiscing about past successes can have several positive effects. Sometimes, simply remembering previously successful interventions results in you using that approach again, with similar successful results. It can help you to feel hopeful (as opposed to helpless) in your current problem situation and help you regain your creative thoughts about how to solve the problem. Finally, it can help you formulate entirely new and different solutions.

CONCLUSION

In the past you will have solved numerous problems. You will have a personal and professional style that gives you a foundation for solving chronic problem situations. The ecosystemic techniques are designed to be used in conjunction with what you already know how to do and do well. They are intended to enhance the capacity you already have.

6. <u>START SMALL AND GO SLOWLY</u>

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

We very much hope that you will continue using ecosystemic techniques, not just with your current problems but also with future ones. The following are some hints and reminders to help you to do so.

a) <u>START SMALL</u>.

By definition changes, no matter how small, have the potential to change the entire ecosystem within which your 'problem' occurs. For this reason you might like begin using ecosystemic techniques by addressing the smaller, easier problem behaviours in your class.

b) <u>GO SLOWLY</u>.

After selecting a problem that you feel is the easiest for you to start with, select a technique that you feel comfortable with and use it. Give the intervention time to work, wait, and look for changes. Look for changes that relate directly to the problem behaviour. Also look for indirect changes, changes in others in your classroom and changes in yourself. You are more likely to face difficulties if you try to move on too quickly than if you move too slowly.

c) DEVELOP A PLAN.

The American experience has found that the people who most consistently use ecosystemic techniques are those who have found ways to keep introducing and reintroducing ecosystemic ideas into their daily routines. Various methods have been used by teachers to help them to remember and use ecosystemic ideas. Here are a few examples:

1. Keep a diary.

2. Make up cards outlining various ecosystemic techniques.

3. Make signs such as, "Don't Frame them, RERAME yourself".

4. Listen to negative descriptions of the problem person and practice positive connotation.

5. Make deliberate attempts to find humour in difficult situations.

6. Make tape recordings describing memorable incidents involving ecosystemic ideas, and play them back when it seems appropriate.

7. Put key words (e.g. refaming, positive connotation, predict relapses) on each month of you calendar.

d) INVOLVE OTHERS AS CONSULTANTS.

One of the best ways of reminding yourself of how to use ecosystemic ideas is to form a group of interested people. In the group you can share experiences and help each other to find creative ways of changing in problem situations. The group can help you to avoid the trap of seeking single causes for problem behaviours and help you discover the many possible, equally true, and positive explanations for the problem.

APPENDIX 3.

(The Research Proposal)

INTRODUCTION

As an introduction to this proposal I would like to provide a very brief outline of the ecosystemic approach to behavioural problems.

All primary schools contain individuals whom are labeled as having '"behavioural problems". For some, problem children are a source of stress and worry. They demand a disproportionate amount of time and distract from what the teacher sees as being her role as the educator. Teachers try to explain why problem behaviour occurs, in the hope that such explanations will help to alleviate the problem.

Often the explanations given are based on perceptions of a child's history. Their behaviour may be the result of a broken family or economic deprivation. Other explanations may be based on perceptions of the child's deficiencies. Their behaviour may be the result of low academic achievement, aggression or anti-authoritarianism; the negativity of these perceptions is self evident.

An ecosystemic approach does not reject the notion that individual circumstances may play a role in problem behaviour, but seeks to provide alternative interpretations of that behaviour (Cooper and Upton, 1990) these interpretations actively move away from negative perceptions. Such perception may provide justification for a continuation of the problem (Tyler, 1994). Instead, the ecosystemic approach focuses on finding a positive perceptual 'frame'. Molnar and Lindquist (1989) identify this 'divergent explanation of problem behaviour' as being characteristic of ecosystemic intervention.

RESUME OF WORK THAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR:

This discussion will be split into two parts. Firstly, work that has been done in the USA. Secondly, work that has been done in Britain.

1. The ecosystemic approach in the USA has originated from three main areas of study, as outlined by Cooper and Upton (1990), namely:

> 1. Epistemology and Psychiatry.
> 2. Family Therapy.

3. General System Theory.

Probably the most important and comprehensive research done on the ecosystemic approach to behavioural problems in schools has been carried out by Alex Molnar and Barbara Lindquist. They suggest that teachers can be 'trained' to use the ecosystemic approach. Indeed, their ideas have been put into practice by individuals who have taken their "Making schools work" course at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. The results are well documented in the many case examples found in their book, *'Changing problem Behavior in Schools'* (1989). They found that, '... more often than not, problem situations were changed for the better' (Molnar and Lindquist, 1989).

2. Interest in the approach in Britain has been seen in a small number of academic reviews. They have included articles by Cooper, P. and Upton, G. (1990) and Tyler, K. (1994). However, to date no research has been done in Britain. It is widely accepted that there is a real need for research into the practical applications of the approach in our schools. Currently we can only speculate on its appropriateness.

THE AIMS OF THE RESEARCH:

This research hopes to address the above shortfall. It aims to obtain baseline data on the practical applications of the ecosystemic approach to behavioural problems in local schools. The research is seen as a pilot study from which, it is hoped, future research can develop.

OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH:

This is very much a preliminary outline: however, where possible clear stages of the research have been identified and have been placed in chronological order.

1. Literature search -

Initially approximately 4-6 weeks have been allocated. However, it will be an ongoing aspect of the research. In addition, it is hoped that links will be established with researchers in this country and in the States.

2. <u>Selecting a range of local primary schools</u> -

The local branch of the National Association of Pastoral care in education (NAPCE) will be approached and interested schools contacted.

3. <u>Preliminary fieldwork in primary schools</u> -

This aspect of the research hopes to gain information on current strategies for dealing with problem behaviour. Both individual teachers' perceptions and school policies will be examined. The information will be gathered using semi-structured interviews.

4. <u>Conference for primary teachers on the ecosystemic approach</u> -

Teachers from the schools visited will be invited to attend a 'ecosystemic workshop'. Ken Tyler will assist. The workshop will include:

(a) An introduction to the approach, including an acknowledgment that the teachers will be part of this research.

(b) Examples of case studies from the States to illustrate the practical application of the approach.

(c) A period of open discussion where teachers will be able to discuss the issues and ask questions.

5. <u>Obtaining feedback from those who attended the conference</u> -

The teachers will be asked to provide comments on the conference. This will be done using semi-structured interviews. They should illustrate any shortfalls of the conference. It should therefore identify changes that may need to be made for future conferences. For this research the feedback will identify those who may be interested in continuing with the research (and why) and those who are not (and why).

6. <u>Follow-up work in schools</u> -

It is hoped that some teachers will wish to continue with the research. On this premise, visits will be made to these teachers and the implementation of the approach in their classrooms discussed. Teachers will then be asked to carry out ecosystemic techniques and record their results. A simple record sheet will be designed to minimise their workload. Regular meetings between researcher and teacher will take place during this period. This is seen as an opportunity for both parties to address any issues that may be arising.

7. A review of the research -
After a given deadline, a final meeting with the teachers involved will be held and is seen as an opportunity to discuss the results of the implementation.

8. Formulation of case studies -
On the basis of the work carried out in schools a number of case studies will be written. The information used will be gained from the teachers' accounts and the observations made by the researcher.

9. Proposal for future research -
On the basis of the findings of this research, its strengths and weaknesses, proposal for future work in the area will be drawn up.

10. Potential outcomes of the research -
These will include:

(a) Meetings to disseminate findings to teachers and interested departments at Loughborough University.

(b) A number of papers will be submitted to professional journals, including:
- Introducing the ecosystemic approach to primary teachers. Educational Psychology.
- Primary teachers' response to the ecosystemic approach. Research in Education.
- The Ecosystemic Approach: Case studies from primary schools. Educational Studies.

PERSONAL DETAILS:

My interest in this area of study originates from personal teaching experience. I have unwittingly used ecosystemic techniques in my classroom and found them to be very successful. I did not have a clear understanding of this "success" until I was introduced to the ecosystemic approach by Ken Tyler. Through discussions and reading my desire to learn more about ecosystemics developed. It soon became very apparent that there was huge potential for research into this area.

I see this research as having three purposes. firstly, it will satisfy a personal desire to further my education in a field in which I an greatly interested. secondly, addressing behavioural problems in this framework may have positive implications for many primary teachers and their pupils. Finally, the future potential of the ecosystemic approach to behavioural problems can only be evaluated through research. The American experience would suggest that the approach can be successful. By supporting this initial step towards a clearer understanding of the approach, I feel the Education department at LUT would benefit greatly.

REFERENCES:

Cooper, P. & Upton, G. (1990) An Ecosystemic Approach to Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in schools, *Educational Psychology*, 10, 4, 301-321.

Molnar, A. & Lindquist, B. (1989) *Changing Problem Behavior in Schools*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Tyler, K. (1994) The Ecosystemic Approach to Personality, *Educational Psychology*, 14, 1, 45-58.

APPENDIX 4.

(The Initial Contact Letter and Conference One

Letter)

INITIAL CONTACT LETTER

LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY
Department of Education

Ken Tyler,
Department of Education,
Loughborough University,
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU

Direct line: 0509 222764
Fax: 0509 231948

11 January 1995

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Dear Colleague

I am writing to invite teachers to a series of conferences on a new approach to changing problem behaviour in primary schools. This approach has proved to be successful in the States and we would like to see how effective it can be in this country. Interested teachers will be invited to three morning workshops at the university but unfortunately our funding does not allow us to pay for supply cover. Ideally we would like to involve teachers who are in a position to put the techniques into practice in their own classrooms.

We hope that you will be able to support this project and would ask you to display the enclosed information sheets on your staffroom notice board. Interested teachers will need to return the form on page 5 as soon as possible.

Your sincerely

Ken Tyler

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

An Invitation to classroom teachers to attend a series of conferences to find out about a new approach to changing problem behaviour.

There will be three morning conferences, in January, February and March 1995, which will introduce you to the technique and provide you with support through the various stages.

At this stage we are only inviting schools in this area. There will be no charge for the workshops but there are only a limited number of places available. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide supply cover for teachers attending the conferences.

We believe that this approach holds a great deal of promise. It is specifically designed to help with long standing problem behaviour where other approaches have failed.

If you are interested, then read on .....

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

This approach, known as ecosystemics, was developed in the states by Alex Molnar and Barbara Lindquist. Anyone who is prepared to consider an alternative point of view can use the techniques to change problem behaviour which has not responded to other approaches. Molnar and Lindquist report that after attending one meeting to introduce the technique, 80% of teachers had either successfully changed the problem or made significant progress.

Whatever approaches we use for dealing with problem behaviour in our day to day work with children, we sometimes find that some children do not respond and that the problem behaviour continues despite our best efforts. This is where this approach is so effective. If you are encountering problems with a particular child or with a group of children then you will be interested in finding out about this technique.

We will be offering a series of conferences and workshops to introduce a small group of teachers to the ecosystemic approach. The conferences will be led by Ken Tyler, lecturer in education, and Bryn Jones, a research student in the department. We do hope that you will be able to join us in this work. If you are interested, would you please complete the form on page 5.

Changing Problem Behaviour
in Primary Schools

Conference 1

This will be held at the end of January and will introduce you to the research programme, the ecosystemic approach itself and the reframing technique. We will provide you with a starter pack which will enable you try out the technique in your own classroom.

Conference 2

Having tried the technique in their own schools, many teachers have reported successful outcomes. This conference, at the end of February, will allow you to share your own experiences and hear how successful others have been. It will also introduce you to ways of dealing with a relapse of the problem behaviour, which often happens at this stage of the process, as well as to other useful techniques.

Conference 3

This conference, at the end of March, will help you to continue using the technique whenever the need arises by offering further support and by reviewing and elaborating on the method. Participants will be provided with a handbook of ecosystemic techniques which will hopefully support their continued use of the method.

What are we asking you to do?

- We are asking you to become co-researchers into a new approach to changing problem behaviour. This will entail attending a series of conferences that will introduce you to the approach and provide material to support your work.
- We would like to know your response to the technique and, if you feel it is suitable to your needs, we would like you to put the technique into practice.
- We would like you to keep a record of your work with children and its effect on the problem behaviour.

What will we do?

- We will plan and present three conferences to introduce you to the ecosystemic approach.
- We will provide you with booklets on the method to help you put the approach into practice.
- We will be very pleased to offer you support throughout the duration of this project.

What will you get out of it?

Of course this is impossible to predict - and the answer to this question will have to wait, but you will at least be familiar with a new approach to changing problem behaviour and, hopefully, have some experience of putting it into practice. This in itself will make all the effort worthwhile.

What will we get out of it?

An understanding of how effective this approach is for teachers in primary schools and an opportunity to develop this work in future. We intend to publish articles in academic journals about this work.

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

If you are interested in becoming involved in this work please complete this form and send it to:

Ken Tyler
Department of Education
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU

Please note: as numbers are limited, places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

The conferences will be held at the university on the following Thursday mornings: 26 January, 23 February and 23 March. Further details will be sent to you when your place is confirmed.

Your details:

Name ....

School ....

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Please give brief details about the long standing problem behaviour in your class which you hope to change using this new technique.

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Please reply as soon as possible. We will write to confirm your place by 20 January.

LETTER FOR CONFERENCE ONE

LOUGHBOROUGH
UNIVERSITY
Department
of Education

Ken Tyler,
Department of Education,
Loughborough University,
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU

Direct line: 0509 222764
Fax: 0509 231948

18 January 1995

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Dear Colleague

     I am pleased to be able to confirm your place for the conferences on Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools. The first conference will be on Thursday, 26 January in the Primary Centre, Room ZZ.00.07 from 9.30 to 12.00; coffee will be available from 9.00 am.

The Primary Centre is in the Matthew Arnold Building next to the Towers on the East Campus, shown as ZZ on the enclosed map. You should enter the University at the Epinal Way entrance and use car park 9. The new barrier system is not yet in operation, so you will be able to drive in without any difficulty. For security purposes, please display the enclosed A5 information sheet on your dashboard when you have parked your car so that it may be clearly seen by security officers.

I look forward to seeing you on the 26th.

Your sincerely

Ken Tyler

LOUGHBOROUGH
UNIVERSITY
Department
of Education

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Conference 1: Thursday, 26 January 1995

Matthew Arnold Building, Room ZZ.0.21, 9.00 - 12.00

APPENDIX 5.

(Letter for Conference Two)

LOUGHBOROUGH
UNIVERSITY
Department
of Education

Ken Tyler,
Department of Education,
Loughborough University,
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU

Direct line: 0509 222764
Fax: 0509 231948

8 February 1995

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools
Thursday 23 February, ZZ.0.21, 9.30 - 12.00

Dear Colleague

I am writing to let you know about the second conference on Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools. This time we will be meeting in room ZZ.0.21 and coffee will be available as before from 9.00 am. Room ZZ.0.21 is easy to find as it is next door to the room we were using last time. Please use Car Park 9 and display the enclosed A5 information sheet on your dashboard as before.

Thank you if you have already sent in your beige form - we have received some very interesting comments so far and are keen to see the rest. If you haven't done so yet, could I give you a gentle reminder to send us your comments in the next week or so. We are very pleased to see that many of you will be trying the technique in your own classrooms, so could I also remind you to bring along the Reframing Activity sheets to the next session. I know that this may not apply to everyone, but if you have kept a diary of events perhaps you could bring that along as well. In the second conference we will be introducing further techniques as well as reviewing the work you have been doing in schools. I look forward to seeing you all on the 23rd.

Yours sincerely

Ken Tyler

LOUGHBOROUGH
UNIVERSITY
Department
of Education

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Conference 2: Thursday, 23 February 1995

Matthew Arnold Building, Room ZZ.0.21, 9.00 - 12.00

APPENDIX 6.

(Letter for Conference Three)

LOUGHBOROUGH
UNIVERSITY
Department
of Education

Ken Tyler,
Department of Education,
Loughborough University,
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU

Direct line: 0509 222764
Fax: 0509 231948

15 March 1995

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools
Thursday 23 March, ZZ.0.21, 9.30 - 12.00.

Dear Colleague

I am writing to let you know about the third conference on Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools. We will be meeting in room ZZ.0.21, as before and coffee will be available from 9.00 am.(hopefully!). Please use Car Park 9 as before and display the enclosed information sheet on your dashboard.

Thank you if you have already sent in your comments sheet - we do find your comments very useful indeed. If you haven't done so yet, could I give you a gentle reminder to send us your comments in the next week or so. We were so pleased to see that many of you were able to try the techniques in your own classrooms, and have found the notes you provided for us invaluable. Also, another thank you to those who have sent details of the case studies which were described at the last conference.

As so many of you found the first part of the last conference so useful, we are again asking you to bring along any activity sheets describing any work you have done, and we will start the morning by sharing our experiences. I know that this may not apply to everyone, but if you have kept a diary of events perhaps you could bring that along as well. So, in the third conference we will start by reviewing the work you have been doing in schools and then introduce further techniques. Some people have suggested a follow up session next term - perhaps an afternoon (1.30 - 3.30 or 1.00 - 3.00?) so that we can follow up on any further work you have done and try to evaluate the techniques more fully. We will also be in a position to let you have copies of your case studies by then. Maybe we can discuss this on the 23rd. I look forward to seeing you then.

Yours sincerely

Ken Tyler

LOUGHBOROUGH
UNIVERSITY
Department
of Education

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Conference 3: Thursday, 23 March 1995

Matthew Arnold Building, Room ZZ.0.21, 9.00 - 12.00

APPENDIX 7.

(Initial Problems Encountered by Teachers)

Please give brief details about the long standing problem behaviour in your class which you hope to change using this new technique.

(1) Refusal to do as told by teacher.

(2) A statemented child with learning difficulties. He only does what he wants to when he wants to and can be aggressive and totally unco-operative for no apparent reason.

(3) Child with socialisation problems. Other children dislike her. Concentration and work output very poor though not lacking in ability. Works well in 1:1 adult supervision; with other children becomes involved in disputes very rapidly. (finds writing very difficult).

(4) Challenge to teacher, not accepting guidance and then "throwing wobblers" - cheek and tears. Fists "up" too readily to each other in class.

(5) Lack of motivation. Conflict between home/school values.

(6) Attention seeking behaviour. Generally disruptive i.e. shouting out, refusal to do work, disturbing others who are working well, answering back to draw attention to themselves.

(7) There is a six year old boy in my class who shows extreme attention seeking behaviour. he often refuses to listen, sitting with his back to me or hands over ears. If this behaviour is ignored he begins to make noises, disturbs others, climbs on furniture - in extreme moments objects and furniture are thrown, cupboards emptied. He can refuse to workand does so if other children receive attention or even if other adults are present and take up my time. Although always a little difficult such extreme behaviour is a recent development. Whgile various techniques have maintained control improvement has been temporary.

(8) There are no outstanding, current behaviour problems in my group, but some minor ones. These mainly revolve around a small group who, once off task will become disruptive. Within the school are a number of very

disruptive children so we are very interested in these conferences for our whole school approach.

(9)   I am the behaviour co-ordinator in our school and we have an element of problem children throughout the school. I would hope to use these conferences to experiment with a new approach to problem behaviour.

(10)   Two boys new to school this academic year. Poor attendance (approx 40%). Poor self- esteem. Poor parental support. Lack of continuity of their education plus low self-motivation leads to opting out of following rules, behaving appropriately etc. - therefore disruptive to other in class.

(11)   Very short concentration span. Cannot sit for any time. Physical distraction of others i.e. touching, cuddles. Sharing my time - limited ability therefore seeks attention therefore needs more adult attention. Over-reaction to small incidents. Inability to follow instructions. Immaturity resulting in lack of friends.

(12)   Physical and psychological bullying involving manipulation of other children

APPENDIX 8.

(Evaluation\Comment Sheets)

CONFERENCE ONE

CHANGING PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

We hope you have found the conference interesting and potentially useful. As this is the first time anything like this has been done in Britain we are open to any constructive criticisms of Conference 1 that you may have. Do you have any suggestions for the following conferences? Please let us know your feelings on the comment sheet provided.

Obviously we would want all of you to go away and try the reframing technique in your own schools. We would also like to know how you are getting on. As we have neither the time nor the resources to observe you in your classrooms we will be relying on you to help keep us informed. We suggest that you keep a diary of events as they progress. Exactly how you decide to do this and the detail you decide to include is up to you. For our purposes a completed copy of the 'reframing activity ' sheets (found at the back of your handbook) would be very useful. Please bring it, along with your diaries, to CONFERENCE 2.

We would like to offer you, should you feel the need, a chance to talk to us about your progress. We can negotiate times and places to suit both our needs. Feel free to contact Ken Tyler at Loughborough University, on (0509) 222764.

Should you not wish to continue with this research we would still like to know why . This is not because we believe that everyone should try the ecosystemic approach. Indeed, we anticipate that the approach may not appeal to some teachers. We would, however, be very interested in your views as to why this is so. Please write your comments on the sheet provided.

For your convenience we have included a SAE in which to send your replies.

We hope to see you in the near future or at the very least at the second conference. Thank you once again for participating in todays conference.

COMMENT SHEET

Do you have any comments on CONFERENCE 1 and any suggestions for the other conferences?..
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Do you intend to continue with the research? and Why?..
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CONFERENCE TWO

CHANGING PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Once again we hope you have found the conference interesting and potentially useful. As with Conference 1, we are open to any constructive criticisms of today that you may have. Please let us know your feelings on the comment sheet provided.

We would be most grateful if you would fill out the 'activity' sheets, provided at the end of the conference, as and when applicable. Again, we suggest that you keep a diary of events as they progress. Please bring the completed 'activity' sheets, along with your diaries, to CONFERENCE 3.

We would still like to offer you, should you feel the need, further advice and a chance to talk to us about your progress. We can negotiate times and places to suit both our needs. Feel free to contact Ken Tyler at Loughborough University, on (0509) 222764.

For your convenience we have included a SAE in which to send your comments.

We hope to see you in the near future. Thank you once again for participating in todays conference.

COMMENT SHEET

What are your feelings about CONFERENCE 2? What did you find most useful? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

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If you do not intend to continue with the research after CONFERENCE 2 please tell us why you reached this decision.

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CONFERENCE THREE

CHANGING PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

We make no apologies for thanking you once again for attending the third and final conference. We have been pleasantly surprised by both your positive response to the ecosystemic approach and your feedback on the previous conferences. As you are aware, you are the first teachers in England to try these ecosystemic techniques. We feel you have started the ball rolling on a new and potentially very useful approach and given us invaluable information that will undoubtedly be used in the future. For this we are very grateful and sincerely hope that the experience has been as useful to you as it has been to us.

Although this is *your* last conference *our* work on the approach, and in particular this research, continues. As such, we would be most grateful if you would fill out the 'activity' sheets, provided at the end of the conference, as and when applicable. Your comments on CONFERENCE 3 will continue to play an important and integral role in our research, so please complete the comments sheet below. For your convenience we have included a SAE in which to send your activity sheets and comments.

After the previous two conferences we have offered our help and support during the intervening periods. Although we have, as of yet, not been taken up on this offer we would like to do so again. We do not necessarily see our work with you coming to an end at this stage. Indeed, should we use any of your work in our write up of this research we will need to check with you before hand. Not only is this necessary for ethical reasons but also to ensure that our information does not misrepresent your findings.

COMMENTS

What are your feelings about CONFERENCE 3? What did you find most useful? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

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If you do not intend to continue with the research after CONFERENCE 3 please tell us why you reached this decision.

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THE FOLLOW-UP MEETING

Loughborough University Department of Education

Changing Problem Behaviour in Primary Schools

Feedback Sheet

We would be grateful for any feedback on the series of conferences, particularly any comments which will help us to evaluate this first attempt and to improve it in the future.

Things I would have liked more of –

Things I would have liked less of –

Any other suggestions for improvements –

APPENDIX 9.

(Conference Timetables\Contents)

CONFERENCE ONE:

Date: 26.01.95

Timetable:

9.00 - 9.30   Coffee.

9.30 - 10.00   General introduction to research and the ecosystemic approach.

10.00 - 11.00   Prerequisites for change and introduction to the Reframing technique.

11.00 - 11.30   Break.

11.30 - 12.00   Group discussion and conclusion.

CONFERENCE TWO:

Date: 23.02.95

Timetable:

9.00 - 9.30   Coffee.

9.30 - 10.00   Group discussion.

10.00 - 11.00   Introduction   to   Positive-Connotation-of-Motive;   Positive-Connotation-of-Function; and Symptom Prescription techniques.

11.00 - 11.30   Break.

11.30 - 12.00   Introduction to the Predicting-a-Relapse technique and conclusion.

CONFERENCE THREE:

Date: 23.03.95

Timetable:

9.00 - 9.30   Coffee.

9.30 - 10.30   Introduction to the Storming-the-Back-Door and Locating-Exceptions techniques.

10.30 - 11.00   Group discussion.

11.00 - 11.30   Break.

11.30 - 12.00   Summary of guideline for trying again; being creative with what you already do; start small and go slowly and conclusion.

APPENDIX 10.

(The Activity Sheets)

<u>REFRAMING ACTIVITY</u>

Think of a problem you are currently having. Usually problems have names and faces. Think of a real situation with real people that is currently a problem for you. Jot down some notes for yourself.

(please feel free to photocopy these 'reframing activity' sheets should you require more)

1. Describe what happens in the problem situation in specific behavioural terms. Who does what? When do they do it? Who else is involved? ....

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2. How do you usually respond to the behaviour, and what is the usual result?...

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3. What is your current explanation of why the person behaves this way?...

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4. What positive alternative explanations might there be for this behaviour?...

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5. Based on one of your positive alternative explanations of the behaviour, how could you respond differently than you have previously? What might you actually say or do based on one of these alternative explanations?...

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6. What was the result of your reframing? Was it successful? If so, what were the changes that took place? If not, how might you use this result be used to inform your next reframing?

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(please continue on another sheet if required)

POSITIVE CONNOTATION Of MOTIVE ACTIVITY

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a problem you are currently having. Jot down some notes for yourself about the problem. Be as specific as possible.

(please feel free to photocopy these sheets should you require more)

1. What does the person do? When do they do it? Who else is involved?...

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2. How do you usually respond and what result do you get?

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3. Why do you think the person does this? What do think the person's motives are for this behaviour?...........................

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4. What positive motives might there be for this behaviour?

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5. Based on one or more of these positive motives for the person's behaviour, how might you respond differently than you have in the past? What might you actually say or do based on one of these positive motives?..

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6. What was the result of positively connotating the motive of the problem behaviour? Was it successful? If so, what were the changes that took place? If not, how might you use this result to inform your next positive connotation of motive?..

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POSITIVE CONNOTATION OF FUNCTION ACTIVITY

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a problem you are currently having. Jot down some notes for yourself about the problem. Be as specific as possible in describing the problem behaviour.

(please feel free to photocopy these sheets should you require more)

1. Who does what, when, to whom, and so on?.......................

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6. What was the result of positively connotating the function of the problem behaviour? Was it successful? If so, what were the changes that took place? If not, how might you use this result to inform your next positive connotation of function?..

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(please   continue   on   another   sheet   if   required)

2. How do you usually respond, and what result do you get?

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3. What are some of the functions of this behaviour that you

presently see?...

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4. What are some positive ecosystemic functions of this behaviour? (remember, a function is not necessarily an intended result)..

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5. Based on one or more of these positive functions, how could you respond differently than you have in the past? What might you actually say or do based on one of these positive functions?..

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SYMPTOM PRESCRIPTION ACTIVITY

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a problem you are currently having. Jot down some notes for yourself about the problem. Be as specific as possible about the problematic behaviour.

(please feel free to photocopy these sheets should you require more)

1. Who does what, when, to whom, and so on?.........................

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2. How do you usually respond to get the person to stop the behaviour? What result do you usually get?...........................

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3. What are some ways the behaviour could be performed differently, for example, at a different time or place, in a different way, or for a different reason?...............................

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4. How might you request that the person perform the modified behaviour so that it can be regarded in a positive way?..

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5. What was the result of symptom prescribing the problem behaviour? Was it successful? If so, what were the changes that took place? If not, how might this result be used to inform future symptom prescriptions?.....................................

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LOCATING EXCEPTIONS ACTIVITY

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a person whose behaviour is currently a problem for you. Write your responses to the following.

(please feel free to photocopy these sheets should you require more)

1. Identify the situation(s) in which this person does not exhibit this problem behaviour. Identify the differences between the problem and nonproblem situations.

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2. What behaviours, qualities, characteristics, and so on of the problem person whose behaviour is a problem would you like to see more of?

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3. Describe how you are different in nonproblem situations. Identify what you are already doing to encourage nonproblem behaviours that works in relation to this person.

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4. Formulate a plan for increasing the nonproblem behaviour by using these questions as a guide:

a) How can you increase the characteristics of nonproblem situations? (STEP 1)

b) Which specific nonproblem behaviours do you want to encourage? (STEP 2)

c) How can you increase your own 'nonproblem' behaviour? (STEP 3)

What will you say or do to articulate these thoughts to the problem person?

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5. Did you successfully locate exceptions to the problem behaviour and did this change the problem situation constructively? If so, what were the changes that took place? If not, how could this information be used to inform your next step?

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STORMING-THE-BACK-DOOR ACTIVITY

(reproduced from, Molnar and Lindquist, 1989)

Think of a person (or group) whose behaviour is currently a problem for you. Make some notes for yourself.

(please feel free to photocopy these sheets should you require more)

1. Describe the behaviours or attitudes of that person (or group) or situations involving that person (or group) that are not a problem.

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2. Select the behaviour, attributes, or nonproblem situations that you believe you can most easily and genuinely comment on positively.

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3. Based on the behaviour, attribute, or nonproblem situation you have selected, what might you say to the person whose behaviour is a problem for you? What time and place do you think it would be most natural for you to make your positive comment?

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4. What was the result of you storming-the-back-door? Were you successful in changing the problem situation constructively? If so, what were the changes that took place? If not, how could you use the information from this to suggest other ways of changing the problem?

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Practice Activity:
The Predicting-a-Relapse Technique

The Predicting-a-Relapse Technique is used to support the changes
that have already occurred after using other ecosystemic techniques.

1. What was the original problem situation? Which technique
did you use to change the problem behaviour?

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2. How did you communicate the new positive interpretation of
the behaviour to the pupil concerned? What did you actually
say? What phrases did you use?

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3. Use this page to help you to decide what you will say to the person or people concerned in your prediction of a relapse. Think about each aspect of the communication in parts (a) and (b) below. Then put the ideas together to produce the complete statement in part (c).

(a) repeat the original intervention using the information from part two above:

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(b) use such phrases as *it would not be surprising ... it is to be expected ... a relapse would be normal ...*

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(c) try to combine these elements in a way which is comfortable for you.

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Now look back to the cases on pages 4 and 5 above. Does your planned intervention correspond to the examples? Try to keep a note of the results of your intervention if possible.

Practice Activity:
The Handling-a-Relapse Technique

The Handling-a-Relapse Technique is used to support the changes
that have already occurred after using other ecosystemic techniques
and after a relapse has occurred.

1. What was the original problem situation? Which technique did you
use to change the problem behaviour?

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2. How did you communicate the positive interpretation of the
behaviour originally? What did you actually say? What phrases did
you use?

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3. Describe the relapse in specific terms. What happened?

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4. Use this page to help you to decide what you will say to the person or people concerned after the relapse has occurred. Think about each aspect of the communication in parts (a) and (b) below. Then put the ideas together in part (c).

(a) use such phrases as *it is not surprising ... it is to be expected ... a relapse is normal,* and also acknowledge that *it is difficult to change old habits.*

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(b) repeat the original intervention using the information from part two above, and by linking it to the positive reframing, say that the relapse could have been predicted:

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(c) try to combine these elements in a way which is comfortable for you. Remember the note on non-verbal communication on page 8.

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See if your planned intervention corresponds to the example on page 9 above. Try to keep a note of the results of your intervention if possible.

<u>APPENDIX 11.</u>

(The Consent Form)

LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY
Department of Education

Authorisation for use of Case Study

For the purposes of our research and publications in academic journals we would like your authorisation to use your attached case study. We would like to ensure that the account represents a fair and accurate representation of your case study in all essential details. You may make any changes on the attached copy if this is appropriate, or you may request substantial modifications if you so desire. You may, of course, decide not to give your permission to use this case study in any publication. Bryn Jones and Ken Tyler, May 1995.

Please tick ☑ the appropriate box and sign below:

☐ I give permission for this case study to be used for publication in the form presented.

☐ I give permission for this case study to be used for publication with the indicated and initialed modifications.

☐ I would like to make substantial modifications before I give permission for this case study to be used for publication.

☐ I do not give permission to use this case study in any publication.

Acknowledgment

☐ I would like to be acknowledged by name and school in any publication which uses this case study.

☐ I would <u>not</u> like to be acknowledged by name and school in any publication which uses this case study.

Signed .... Date................................

APPENDIX 12.

(Revised Conference Timetable - as recommended

for future research)

CONFERENCE ONE:

Date: January

Timetable:

9.00 - 9.30   Coffee.

9.30 - 10.30   Introduction to research and ecosystemic approach.

10.30 - 11.00   Prerequisites for change in chronic problem situations.

11.00 - 11.30   Break.

11.30 - 12.00   Introduction to the Reframing technique.

12.00 - 12.30   Case examples illustrating the Reframing technique and discussion.

12.30 - 1.30   Lunch.

1.30 - 2.00   Introduction to the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive and Function techniques.

2.00 - 2.30   Case examples illustrating the Positive-Connotation-of-Motive and Function techniques and discussion.

2.30 - 3.30   Conclusions, guidelines for attempting techniques (i.e activity sheets) and completion of questionnaire.

CONFERENCE TWO:

Date: February

Timetable:

9.00 - 9.30   Coffee.

9.30 - 11.00   Group discussion - co-researcher's attempts at the Reframing, Positive-Connotation-of-Motive and Function techniques.

11.00 - 11.30   Break.

11.30 - 12.00   Introduction to the Symptom-Prescription technique.

12.00 - 12.30   Case examples illustrating the Symptom-Prescription technique and discussion.

12.30 - 1.30   Lunch.

1.30 - 2.00   Introduction to the Predicting-a-Relapse technique.

2.00 - 2.30   Case examples illustrating the predicting-a-Relapse technique and discussion.

2.30 - 3.30   Conclusions, guidelines for attempting the techniques and completion of questionnaire.

CONFERENCE THREE:

Date: March

Timetable:

9.00 - 9.30   Coffee.

9.30 - 11.00   Group discussion - co-researcher's attempts at the Symptom-Prescription and Predicting-a-Relapse techniques and other techniques introduced in Conference One.

11.00 - 11.30   Break.

11.30 - 12.00   Introduction to Storming-the-Back-Door technique.

12.00 - 12.30   Case examples illustrating the Storming-the-Back-Door technique and discussion.

12.30 - 1.30   Lunch.

1.30 - 2.00   Introduction to the Locating-Exceptions technique.

2.00 - 2.30   Case examples illustrating the Locating-Exceptions technique and discussion.

2.30 - 3.30   Conclusions, guidelines for attempting the Storming-the-Back-Door and Locating-Exceptions techniques and completion of questionnaire.

CONFERENCE FOUR:

Date: April

Timetable:

9.00 - 9.30   Coffee.

9.30 - 11.00   Group discussion - co-researcher's attempts at the Storming-the-Back-Door and Locating-Exceptions technique and other techniques introduced in Conferences One and Two.

11.00 - 11.30   Break.

11.30 - 12.30   Guidelines for trying the techniques again if first attempts have not been successful and being creative with what you are already doing.

12.30 - 1.30   Lunch.

1.30 - 2.30   Conclusions, the focus group, consent for case examples and completion of questionnaire.

THE FOCUS GROUP:

Date: May

Timetable:

9.00   - 9.30   Coffee.

9.30   - 10.30   Group discussion.

10.30 - 11.00   Break.

11.00 - 12.00   Group discussion.

12.00 - 12.30   Conclusions.