

THE LURE OF THE LORELEI, OR SOME THOUGHTS

ON TEACHING THE P.A.S.

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Everyone who knows and practices the Gittinger Personality Assessment System, with the exception, of course, of John Gittinger, has learned it from someone else, and most of us have had the benefit of John's tutelage at some point in our mastery of PAS skills. Furthermore, there seems to be widespread agreement that even should an introductory text be written, there is no effective way to learn the system from a book. Like drawing, sailing, or doing psychotherapy, learning the PAS effectively comes mainly from active participation, in conjunction with ongoing instruction and feedback. But despite considerable interest, there seems to have been little effort to date to articulate effective ways of teaching the system. Yet it seems crucial that such be done, for unless we are able to transmit effectively our knowledge and understanding of how to use the system and how to teach it to others, PAS will become extinct.

There seems to be no problem in attracting students. Indeed, only a superficial exposure to the notions of the system reveals its power and raises considerable enthusiasm in most students. The essentially simple arrangement of three behavioral dimensions operating across three developmental levels appeals to students' expectations of how systems of personality ought to be constructed. Yet the notion of interaction among variables, the possibility of moving up and down on the developmental continua, and the innumerable degrees of adjustment open to a person at any time and in any particular environmental circumstance allow highly individualistic adjustment patterns to evolve. Thus the system has both nomothetic and idiographic elements. It is truly a system which talks about both similarities and differences among people.

Of course the ultimate lure is to take the protocol of a stranger and to begin to describe the person in behavioral dimensions, a feat which often seems like magic to the uninitiated, and which still for me is a measure of the brilliance and elegance of John Gittinger's conceptualizations.

And yet for all the excitement which PAS engenders in beginners, much as the song of the Lorelei bewitched sailors on the River Rhine, attempts to teach students effective PAS skills often founder on the rocks. Knowing the PAS means knowing how to transform data, whether from a Wechsler protocol or from indirect assessment, into behavioral predictions. I have had many students who have understood the theoretical aspects of the system well, and could tell me much about ERU's in general for example. Yet when faced with a protocol formulation, they were completely stymied in attempting to describe this particular NL 13 (Ecc RcuUc+u) M individual.

Over the years I have approached teaching PAS in different ways: in conjunction with the Wechsler; separate from it; individual dimensions first, with compensation and modification; primitive types first. I'm sure other permutations have occurred as well. No matter what approach I have used my students have been excited and grateful; thus I assume that the system withstands infinite assault from this quarter. But in fifteen years or so of experimentation, I have come to some conclusions about ways for effectively developing predictive skills, which for me are the best indication of effective mastery of PAS.

Probably the single most important aspect seems to be to tie instruction as closely as possible to the Wechsler subtests. This is somewhat a paradox on two levels. First, many students have considerable reservation about using a measure of intellectual assessment to predict personality variables. Furthermore, those with some sophistication have a strong wariness about doing what appears to be scatter analysis on Wechsler protocols. I have found that stating Wechsler's notion that intelligence is an aspect of personality (1), and then briefly describing David Saunders' factor analytic data on the WAIS (2) get me by these initial objections, particularly if I encourage scepticism as healthy and ask only that students bear with me before making any final judgment.

On the second level, most of us who use the PAS feel strongly that it is highly viable as an independent system apart from other systems and devices. Thus to teach it with the Wechsler subtest is to go in the opposite direction from our basic bias in this regard. Yet navigating dangerous narrows in rushing river currents often requires tricky maneuvering if we are to avoid the rocks, and so it seems with teaching the PAS. Students initially seem attracted to the abstract, theoretical aspects of PAS. Emphasizing the subtests keeps students focused on behavior. They can easily concretize the specific skill elements needed to do a particular subtest and then transfer this thinking to the relevant PAS variable.

I discuss in some detail, particularly for the primitives, what it takes for a person to do well on each subtest, and then follow with the implications of doing relatively poorly on the subtest. In particular, it seems helpful to stress that while doing poorly on a subtest implies lower ability of a specific sort, it also implies the possibility of a different ability which may well interfere with doing well on the task at hand. For example, the questioning outlook and holistic orientation of the F individual interfere with his or her doing well on Block Design, which requires a focused, organized approach. Yet it is easy for students to understand that a questioning, holistic orientation is useful in many circumstances, and furthermore that R individuals, by virtue of having the ability to do well on Block Design, may not have a

strong degree of global curiosity. By regularly emphasizing the skill elements required to do well on a subtest, not only are students encouraged from the very beginning to think of the behavioral and predictive implications of such skill elements, but doing so practically eliminates the notion which I have found astonishingly common in many beginners that I's are more able than E's, or that R's are brighter than F's. It is particularly effective to read verbatim to students Wechsler's instruction for administering Block Design, emphasizing how correct administration demonstrates to subjects how to do well on Block Design. The examiner simply illustrates how it is done. Subjects who learn by imitation, who can draw their own mental grid lines on the design, who have focused attention, and who proceed in a linear fashion can master block design merely by paying attention to the test administrator. On the other hand, those who learn by trial and error, who pay attention to the designs on the sides of the blocks as well as on the tops, who are distracted by the color or other stimulus variables, or who approach the task in a diffuse, holistic manner will not only not profit much from the demonstration, but will usually not even pay continuous attention to it. I have found it useful to emphasize that nearly everyone of average intelligence will finish most of the designs, but that F's will not be as efficient and will not gather the time bonuses which are critical for a high score on BD. A direct look at the distribution of raw scores on the Wechsler conversion table clarifies that point.

With Picture Arrangement, I find it useful to conceptualize the subtest as offering a double task. First, the subject needs to understand the nature of the pictured situation, utilizing the social cues found on the stimulus cards. Secondly, he or she must identify the protagonist of the story and be able to implement the social role which the protagonist is playing. Most role adaptive people, by virtue of their cultural attractiveness, have been approached by other people in social situations on a lifelong basis, and consequently have had frequent opportunities to learn appropriate social role functioning. Often, in fact, they have been strongly pressured to acquire social role behavior, and to recognize when such behavior is most appropriately used. The analogy of social roles to items of wardrobe seems a useful one for students. A+'s have closets full of social roles, all worn with style at exactly the right occasion, while U+'s may have only one rumpled gray suit worn everywhere. In terms of the Picture Arrangement subtest, A's seem able by virtue of their experience to recognize the task situation while the test administrator is still laying out the cards, and consequently can arrange them correctly very quickly, gaining the necessary time bonuses to earn a high score. The U individual, however, who has had relatively less opportunity to learn social roles, must figure out the situation logically, a more

time consuming approach. Furthermore, the U may recognize the nature of the situation from the cues, but be unable to play the role of the protagonist. U's, for example, often recognize the embarrassment of the man in the taxi holding the manikin, and may show spontaneous and even empathic amusement at his discomfort. Yet they may not be able to solve the task, despite the apparent evidence to the examiner that they "understand" the situation.

Since they are not intrinsically as culturally attractive as A individuals, U's learn to be noticed by virtue of achievement. They are not as distracted by the social expectations of their environment as are A's, and consequently are freer to pursue more individualistic endeavors. Those who do well on Picture Arrangement, on the other hand, have high social stimulus value, and are therefore regularly confronted with expectations which others place on them, expectations which they cannot always fulfill. Because they are socially reactive and must try to be many things to many people, tacit promises frequently impossible to keep, the A individual ultimately disappoints others and may be rejected, or must move on to other situations. Most beginning students interpret being an A as much more desirable than being a U, a notion subtly reinforced by the fact that A's do relatively well on PA, while U's do relatively poorly. But emphasizing the skill elements needed to do well on PA and the implications of a low score helps them understand that each orientation has both advantages and disadvantages, depending on the particular environmental demand at any given time. I have found it particularly helpful to emphasize that our society is as much achievement oriented as socially oriented. Despite their relative distress from the lack of social success early in life, the development of an achievement orientation which U's experience has many positive advantages which A individuals, for all their initial attractiveness, may never acquire.

To introduce the Digit Span subtest, I begin with the terms reality and fantasy as they are commonly used in personality psychology and relabel them external reality and internal reality, respectively. It is important to stress that both realities are environments in which we all function from time to time. Some people, who we might label experiential, are more comfortable and function more easily in an external environment. Others, whom we might label conceptual, are more comfortable and function more easily in an internal environment. Since digits are arbitrary abstract symbols of quantity which in themselves have no concrete meaning, they have a conceptual rather than an experiential quality. Consequently, the ability to do well on the Digit Span subtest, particularly digits reversed, is a measure of the extent that a person functions well in an interior landscape. On the other hand, the more a person is oriented toward such external aspects of

the task situation as the examiner, the pictures on the wall or extraneous noises in the room, the more these factors will be distracting to that individual and will interfere with his or her ability to do well on the Digit Span task. Contrary to much of what is taught about the Digit Span subtest, people who do well do not have better short term memory than those who do not. They have better memory for abstract material. Logically, then, the low digit span person should have a better memory for experiential material.

Students find it amusing and hopefully enlightening when asked which of them must write telephone numbers down quickly, which were upset when exchanges like Locust or Republic were changed to 56 or 73. E's are often incredulous that some people may find the numbers even easier to recall than the named exchanges. On the other hand, asking them to take a piece of paper, to close their eyes, and then write the answers to such questions as how many people are in the class, where are the windows, what am I the lecturer, wearing makes the opposite point. At this time I introduce the concept that Digit Span indicates a considerable amount about the nature of an individual's thinking and its relation to his or her activity. The substance of E's thought comes from what they have done, while the substance of I's activities comes from what they have thought. Put another way, the cognitive functioning of the E individuals organized around cores of symbolized experience, while the activity of the I individual is a concretized outflow from his or her thinking processes. I's think about things and then perhaps act on them, while E's act and then perhaps think about what they have done.

In a similar fashion it is possible to focus on skill elements needed to do well on each of the other indicator subtests, and to emphasize the behavioral aspects, both directly and by implication of these subtests as they are introduced as compensators and modifiers.

I have found it important to point out on a regular basis that we are dealing on each dimension with a continuum of behavior, not a dichotomy. Drawing a normal distribution curve on a blackboard, with E+ at one end and I+ at the other makes the notion concrete. I also emphasize that even an I+ person walks, talks and otherwise exists in the external world some of the time, and therefore shows some E behavior on occasion. The progression of points across the I-E continuum can then be explained as differences in the ration of I to E behavior. An I+ individual might show a ration of 80% I: 20% E, while an E- might show a ratio of 40% I; 60% E.

The second strategy I have evolved is the use of exercises to clarify to the instructor how well students are understanding the material presented, and to offer to students concrete evidence that they are in fact progressing out of what often seems a sea of confusion. Initially I give them a list of be-

haviors and have them label these behaviors as I, R, U, etc. This takes only a few minutes, and going over them in class not only is immediately reinforcing, but allows misunderstandings to be clarified on the spot. The hardest part of this task for the instructor is coming up with unambiguous behaviors for any particular dimension. I continue to use such exercises throughout the learning process, but they seem most useful during instruction on the primitive and basic levels.

The third point I stress is the interactive aspects of the system. While we talk about variables as though they could be isolated, the real strength of the system is that behavior on each dimension is constantly facing contingencies, both behaviors and situations, which involve other dimensions. I have found it most helpful to present this concept as early as possible. As soon as students show an understanding of single dimension behavior on the primitive level I begin combining dimensions. How I behavior is modified by an R orientation as contrasted by an F orientation is easily understood at this point, and the 12 combinations can be presented rather quickly. I introduce an exercise of two-dimension behaviors, and as soon as students are ready I proceed to primitive types.

The introduction of primitive types represents a plateau, and I always expect to remain quite a while at this stage. One reason seems to be that some time is needed for the type of conceptual maturation which occurs in assimilating the notion of primitive types. The second is that there is a lot of material in John's descriptions of the primitive types, which I distribute to students at this point. I suggest that they run through the whole manuscript quickly to emphasize the continuity and logic of his ideas, and then suggest frequent short, perusals. I usually shift temporarily to an overview of the developmental levels and introduce the concept of compensation/modification during this period, and sometimes introduce the computation of normal level here as well.

In general, there seem to be two useful concepts to emphasize during this period of mastery of primitive types. The first is that primitive types are just that--behavioral types, not individual people. The second is the powerful role of environmental influence on the developmental adjustments individuals make. To the extent that an individual's environment allows and supports his or her primitive adjustments there is little external pressure for the individual to compensate. Concrete examples here, often exaggerated ones, seem to be useful and this focus on the power of the environment is a helpful bridge into learning the role of compensation and the whole basic level of adjustment.

When teaching the basic level, I generally repeat the same strategies which I used with the primitive, but with two new additions. The first is

that compensation is a broadening of an individual's skill repertoire, with a differential emotional valuing for the newly acquired abilities as contrasted to the old ones. The second is the notion of tension as a behavioral indicator of compensation, with the implications of self-discipline and immaturity as compensation relates to them.

Two more points can be made briefly in this discussion. The first is my feeling that the basic level is the principal focus for both effective teaching of the PAS and indeed for any meaningful evaluation of individuals. Once students have mastered the conceptualizations of the basic level, the surface level seem to come relatively easily. The second point is that mastering the basic level doesn't happen for a long time. During the three week workshops I teach I have found that we can begin to talk about surface adjustments about the middle of the third week. Yet one of the most rewarding aspects for students is that any level of mastery gives them new perspectives and skills which they can use effectively. This immediate payoff seems enormously sustaining, and not only seems to give students patience to keep working through the confusions which constantly present themselves, but motivates them to want to go farther, regardless of the effort involved. I have never taught students who work so hard or who are so laudatory as those in my PAS workshops.

One final note. I find it not only a helpful variety but also an ethical responsibility to share with students the research which PAS has engendered. I have a fairly complete collection of reprints which I make available to them, and encourage them to take time away from the mastery of the system to familiarize themselves with the general nature of the research and even to think of questions they would like to see answered in future research.

I'm not sure that it hasn't been somewhat presumptuous for me to have shared my own experience about Rhine River navigation with so many experienced boatmen. But I feel that it is very important for us to begin collecting and recording our teaching efforts and techniques. To the extent I have initiated some effort in this direction the risk of presumption will have been worth it to me.

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