

Judy Lombardi. LCSW-C, Ph.D.

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Cybernetics

Escalation and De-escalation Continuum **June 2000**

Introduction

As a therapist and consultant for "emotionally disturbed" children and their families, I have explored traditional models for solving problems of aggression and violence as well as a more radical systemic view for describing and understanding human behavior.

The research suggests that there are 3 possible paths for describing the de-escalation of behavior in human systems: Traditional, Systemic and Cybernetic views.

I found that a traditional mechanistic view limits our observations to linear descriptions and rational understandings. This suggests that given enough information, one can predict and control any and all behaviors.

A systemic view is nested in relations and thus focuses on establishing and maintaining connections, including our connection with nature.

A cybernetic view starts with the systemic connection between an observer and observing as the central part of the relational dynamics for being human.

The following is a cybernetic view for preventing and de-escalating violence in our schools, homes and communities.

Human Condition

As long as concepts such as observing, autonomy, self-organization, self-reference and self-observation are left out of conversations about the human condition, we will be lacking in our understanding of us.

Behavioral Cybernetics is nested in these concepts. It is a process for observing behavior as a continuum of escalating behaviors and intervening in an equivalent manner that is more than likely to de-escalate rather than escalate the situation at hand.

Premise

We human beings live immersed in language, while in relations that include emotioning.

Emotioning: any and all body dispositions that specify at any instant the domain of actions = behaviors under which a living system operates at that instant.

Living systems live in relations, relational spaces that reflect a particular class (species) and environment under which they can survive, which has evolved over time.

All behavior arises in the relational space where bodyhood and medium intersect and interact as observed by an observer.

Behavior arises in the relational space of any living system.

Yet with human beings there is something more.

We human beings are observers. Observers, by definition, make descriptions. We bring forth our worlds via our descriptions, a consequence of our living immersed in language.

It is through our observations = descriptions in language, that self, self-awareness and awareness of others is possible.

We human beings live immersed in language, grounded in human emotioning, hence we are languaging beings. That is, human beings live in languaging, language nested in a particular kind of emotioning.

Languaging arises in the relational space of human being.

Desire

If we need peace we want a peaceful language that is nested in an emotional foundation that reflects mutual respect.

There are two primary ways of emotioning under which language occurs:

Social relations: human relations grounded in languaging, which an observer distinguishes as feeling legitimized in the interaction. Social relations are grounded in mutual respect, cooperation, generosity, equality, democracy and peace.

Dissocial relations: human relations grounded in languaging under which an observer feels illegitimized in the interaction. Dissocial relations are grounded in meanness, control, aggression, dominance and war.

It is the languaging...

It is our language + the emotional foundation under which it arises = languaging which determines whether or not a particular relation is social or dissocial.

Social relations invite self-awareness and self-awareness invites awareness of one's relations in his or her environment which includes the other living systems in that environment.

Dissocial relations invite meanness and lack of self-awareness, which entails a lack of awareness of one's environment and the other living systems in that environment.

Behavioral Continuum

One project that oriented my thinking in this manner was a violence prevention project at the Johns Hopkins Violence Prevention Intervention Center. The intervention was nested in the assumption that any child's first grade experience sets the tone for his or her entire educational life. The goal was to generate a positive first grade experience for every child in the classroom by educating and supporting teachers in any way we could. That requires living in social relations with the teachers as much as possible - even during conflict - so that they could live in social relations with their students - even during conflict - as much as possible.

This task triggered the development of a behavioral continuum for observing, describing and addressing any and all behaviors that might arise in a classroom.

Behavioral Continuum in the Classroom Setting

As the behavioral specialist and consultant in the workplace it was my role to assist teachers in dealing with any and all classroom behaviors that may arise. That was to keep children in the classroom learning - not only reading, writing and arithmetic BUT also learning appropriate behaviors for use in and out of the classroom setting.

So I would explore with the teachers what a classroom climate that orients positive learning looks like - behaviorally. To assist each teacher in understanding and responding to classroom behaviors we developed a behavioral continuum for categorizing and evaluating all possible behaviors that could arise in the classroom. We explored appropriate intervention strategies for each category of behavior described.

continuum wheel: Behavioral Cybernetics

Assumption

We human beings need and like to order things. And we often confuse order with control.

Behavioral Cybernetics is a way of observing and ordering that can help any observer establish homeostasis in his or her environment more of the time. When we observe with awareness and thus recognize something (anything is something), we can distinguish and then intervene consciously in a social manner sooner rather than later and possibly prevent escalation, or further escalation=de-escalation.

Assumption

All behaviors arise in daily living. How an observer describes the behavior he or she observes depends on his or her history or herstory of living in languaging.

A behavioral continuum reflects all the possible behaviors that a standard observer can distinguish in his or her environment.

Behavioral Cybernetics in the Classroom Setting

There are four categories for all behaviors:

Comfort - Any and all behavior and languaging we want to see in our environments. What do these behaviors specifically look like? For example: staying on task, following directions, asking permission, talking one person at a time, etc.

Discomfort - Behaviors and languaging that indicate a slight degree of escalation away from comfort toward disorder. What do these behaviors look like? For example: not following directions, talking out, raising their voices, daydreaming,

Disruptive - Behaviors and languaging that indicate a higher level of escalation than discomfort yet are not quite those that fit under the heading of disorders. What do these behaviors look like? For example: getting out of one's seat without permission, entering another's space, refusing to do assignments, yelling out, etc.

Disorder, Chaos or Crisis - Behaviors and languaging that are harmful to self, others and or the environment. For example, throwing, hitting, fighting, etc.

I, Judy Lombardi, decide what my comfort behaviors look like, what my discomfort behaviors are, my disruptive behaviors, and what behaviors distinguish disorder and chaos. Each observer decides for herself or himself, according to our histories of languaging in a historical present.

Where do you see behaviors = emotions = body dispositions, fitting along the continuum?

Summary:

The observer (Every I) can observe the languaging in his or her relational spaces from a behavioral continuum approach and respond, via social relations, in a manner that de-escalates the situation (context).

The art of de-escalation involves being in the now, aware of oneself in the now = observing one's observing, accessing the appropriate intervention strategy and responding with a desire to live in social relations.

And yet there is something more to being human....

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