

FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE BARRACKS

Hugo Keesing

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For Term II, 1971/72 I remained at Bitburg AFB in Germany. Having taught a PSYC 100 class the previous term I was happy to see many of the students sign up for EDHD 460. Called Educational Psychology in the catalog, its general description, "...offers an examination of research and problems in...psychology" left it wide open for an instructor to improvise and experiment. I regarded it as a plus that the course was especially non-directive, even by UMUC standards. It had no suggested syllabus, no assigned textbook.

I had brought several of my favorite texts from my graduate work with me to Europe. They included Edward T. Hall's *The Silent Language* and *The Hidden Dimension*, Eugene J. Webb et al's *Unobtrusive Measures: Nonreactive Research in the Social Sciences* and Neil Postman & Charles Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. Together these four supplied enough ideas and approaches to keep students used to the security of "a textbook," with reading assignments and specific material to be mastered [or at least remembered long enough to regurgitate it on a test] from feeling adrift.

The class started with a review of what research in psychology might mean. Students who remembered that rats ran mazes, that dogs salivated at the sound of bells and that people like themselves might deliver what they believed to be electric shocks when told to do so by someone in a lab coat, were pleasantly surprised to hear about unobtrusive measures. The idea that they could learn from studying physical traces such as evidence of erosion or accretion gave "doing research" new meaning. Similarly using archives or simple observation also suggested not only that research could be fun but they each could plan and execute a research project that they would present in class.

Proposals that I approved covered a wide range of subjects. Two students asked to collaborate on researching "gender-based bathroom graffiti." They received permission to tape paper inside stalls in both men's and women's restrooms in several buildings, collecting it a week later. Their "physical trace evidence of accretion" permitted them to count, categorize, analyze and evaluate results. Their joint presentation addressed everything from who wrote more [frequency and word count], was more prosaic [used more expletives], and was more likely to use illustrations. As I recall, the men in the class were far more surprised at the results than the women. I was given a great lead-in to discussing individual and gender differences, bias, and related constructs.

The project that had the greatest impact involved simple observation. One of my students was a Security Police [SP] dog handler. His dog was trained to detect drugs. Like many of the bases in Germany, Bitburg had a problem with [mostly marijuana] drug use. When SP's were tasked

with making unannounced sweeps of the barracks, word frequently leaked even before the first building was entered. As a result, few troops had ever personally witnessed a drug dog at work. My student handler asked if he could demonstrate his dog's ability as his project.

I cleared the demonstration with his commander and was thus able to obtain a "stash," double-wrapped in canvas, that I was permitted to bring to class. Students had been forewarned what was planned, the information was evidently widely shared outside the classroom, and anticipation was high. While student and dog waited outside, I went over the ground rules: sit quietly, watch, keep your eyes focused on the dog, don't look at the drug's location, etc. I then handed the packet to a student who placed it in the room's pencil sharpener.

When dog and handler entered the room, everyone froze. After a quick circuit the dog went straight to the pencil sharpener, stopped, and looked up. His handler simply said, "he's found it." While the demonstration should have been enough to convince all but the most skeptical, what happened next erased all their doubts. What my SP student did not know was that his commander had agreed to lend me a second "stash" that I would hide in my briefcase. After the dog had been rewarded for his find his behavior indicated that all was not done. The SP and the rest of the class were unsure as to what was happening when the dog stopped next to my briefcase. Someone said, "Make him open it," which I did. When the second packet was found there was an audible group exhale.

The next day it appeared that the entire base had heard about what happened in Keesing's classroom. Simple observation research convinced the Bitburg military community that the drug dog was for real. NOTE: My stay did not allow for any follow-on research to see if there was a decrease in marijuana busts or usage. But then that was not a course objective for EDHD 460.