

## THE NEVER ENDING ALPHABET

A Pilot Project Using Roy Heath's Typology of X, Y, Z, and A

By Justine Harris

Three different interview styles may be readily recognizable to counsellors: the bland, friendly, "one-or-two worder;" the coherent "prepared-statement-man;" and the impulsive "plunger" whose conversation zips from topic to topic without apparent connection. These are interview styles of the personality types presented in Roy Heath's warm, often amusing, and stimulating book The Reasonable Adventurer, (Heath, 1964) a study of young men at college. Although relentless categorizing can lead to abominations of indiscriminate pigeonholing, such a typology as Heath's can be a refreshing stimulant, if taken in moderation, to many aspects of personnel work.

Heath's project involved working closely with about 30 students throughout their four-year stay at Princeton University. He was both a researcher and their faculty advisor. Partway through their freshman year, Heath, in reflecting on the many interviews he had had with them in the fall, discovered that he was thinking in terms of interview styles - he differentiated three: the "non-committers," whom he called Xs; the "hustlers," whom he called Ys; and the "plungers," whom he called Zs. Among a small number of these he detected, in addition to their underlying X-ness, Y-ness, or Z-ness, an unusual reflectiveness, maturity, and autonomy. The few men who showed these traits he called "reasonable adventurers," and in a model of his typology he showed them as high on an "A" dimension.

It was Heath's view that the X led an inner life of fantasy in which he dreamed he could accomplish a great deal if he ever tried.

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But the X didn't ordinarily test this myth, for fear it was not true, and so he seldom became committed to serious learning. Heath found that Xs accomplished most of their positive development in conditions of moderate challenge, and that "growth in X is a matter of reuniting the inner-self of fantasy with the outer-self of world interaction". Sometimes, he says, the humanities act as a stimulation to this — "Art, music, and certain kinds of literature seem to arouse the deeper wishes, unfulfilled human strivings...." (Heath, 1964, pp. 59—60)

Heath found the development of the Y quite a different matter. The Y is attempting to control his impulses by erecting a "defensive super-structure or pseudoself to protect himself." As long as this works, he will probably continue using it without serious consideration of more relevant attainments. Heath concluded, from the evidence of his observation of Ys, that "the reconstruction of a Y.. requires a calamity", or that, through "sustained exposure to love and affection", the super-structure may "melt". (Heath, 1964, pp. 63-64)

The Z, a person with strong swings of mood, is also a strong individualist and needs a tolerant climate in which to grow. But the climate should also be one in which structure and coherence are provided, so that "the poorly intergrated threads of the inner-self" may be provided with a framework. (Heath, 1964, p. 69)

In an attempt to explore Heath's typology among undergraduates at the University of British Columbia, the present writer conducted an informal investigation of persons who had reached the third year of training in the College of Education. The general aim was to see whether Heath's notions have pertinence for the school system in British Columbia. The research was preliminary and exploratory; no generalizations were drawn from the data. From the process, however, it was concluded that Heath's typology is suggestive of ways to look at both learning problems and class and school climates.

Heath's long-term study could not be replicated in the available time, so a drastic shortcut for categorizing subjects as X, Y, Z, or A was devised. A Q-sort composed of adjectives from Heath's book was administered and the results recorded for 53 subjects in a third-year psychology course. The adjectives were descriptive of X, Y, and Z

types in equal numbers. Subjects sorted them into piles like them, unlike them, and "in-between," and then these choices were forced into a 2-3-5-13-5-3-2 distribution. The ten "like" and "unlike" adjective choices were recorded, and were numerically weighted for degree of likeness and unlikeness, with positive values for those like, and negative for those unlike. A subject might choose adjectives which would sum into, for instance, plus 5 X, plus 1 Y, and minus 4 Z -- an X with some Y characteristics.

After the subject completed this section of the Q-sort he re-shuffled his ten "most like" choices with 15 more slips on which were adjectives used by Heath to describe the reasonable adventurer, or A. From these 25 adjectives the subject then choose ten adjectives most like him, having been told that he could amend his original choices. Again, his choices were recorded and weighted numerically, yielding a score on the "A-scale" comparative to others in the group.

Results showed 14 Xs, 25 Ys, and 13 Zs, with A-scores ranging from 3 to 17, with a mean of 9.4.

A rough validation of the instrument was established by comparing scores on X, Y, and Z with hypotheses previously made by the researcher on 22 individuals known to her. They completed the Q-sort previous to its experimental run. Twenty persons were found on the hypothesized dimensions. A brief set of reliability tests were run on this group: ten subjects retested after two to three weeks were all on the same dimension as in the original administration, regardless of their using many different adjectives the second time. An unexpected and rather comical validation of a different sort turned up when nine students in the experimental group forgot the number which identified their results, and had to make a special trip to another building to check their handwritten records. These less organized individuals included four "complacent" Xs, four "erratic" Zs, and only one "reliable" Y, although Ys, as has been shown, outnumbered the others.

Validation of A scores was much less satisfactory than even the foregoing homespun procedures: only in subsequent interviews with some of the subjects did the writer feel she had some clues on degrees

of reasonable adventuring, and such interviews were too few to allow even a guess to be made as to whether the A-scale was measuring A-ness. What clues there were seemed to operate in the direction of validation, but this part of the procedure is in particular need of further study.

To relate Heath's dimensions and his theorizing about how the different types learn to the experiment's results, certain selected individuals were interviewed to see what their school and university experiences had been. A few excerpts from interview notes will illustrate some of the findings:

"Roxane," an X with a very high A score: X-like, Roxane had "always been quiet," and reluctant to speak up in class. Intellectually she was very capable, so that challenges always did appear "moderate" to her. In high school she especially enjoyed English and found delight in writing and in art, at which she was also gifted. She is now training to be an art teacher. Despite some unhappiness because of an outstandingly strict family, Roxane's natural endowments appear to have been augmented by a school climate favorable to the growth of an X, to the point where she now says, "Just learning just makes me happy."

"Constance," a Y who scored near the mean on A, has always been a leader and until this year has drifted along with family expectations, school expectations, and general know-how. But she appears to be undergoing her first crisis--one of deep worry about her chances of using her progressive ideas about teaching if and when she does teach. She fears an inhibiting climate, because she deplors the tradition-bound nature of her own high school and those she has observed during her training. It seems that she has come up against something she feels she may not be able to organize, and despite her academic and social success she is working her way through what Heath may have had in mind when he spoke of "calamity." She reported that for the first time she is seriously considering her aims and abilities.

"Ed," a Z high on the A scale, was something of a surprise: on a questionnaire he wrote very little, and reported that his teaching

major was science. The writer was not prepared for a laconic scientist in the category. The interview, however, quickly cleared up this anomaly. Ed had the Z-like oral fluency, and cheerfully tipped through a wide variety of topics. He wants to teach because of liking young people, really doesn't care what he teaches, and majored in science more through accident than design. He has the insight to see that it may have been a happy accident because it has a natural structure that he lacks. He thought that his warm but firm family had kept him headed in the right direction, and all but wrote off the influence of his "rule-bound" school, as having been a necessary evil -- one which he, in contrast to Constance, thinks he might change.

"Clark," an artistic Z, who was low on A, is in direct contrast to the Z-ness of Ed. Clark has remained impulsive and disorganized, is in danger of failing, has started many vocational projects, is in rebellion and thoroughly troubled about himself. He seems never to have found the framework for his energies -- school was too easy for him and unlike Roxane he didn't enjoy the mildness of its challenges.

From these retrospective glimpses of student life, one can see that use of Heath's categories could suggest how different kinds of educational experiences might help the different personality types. Although it would be ridiculous to imagine that measurement on Heath's dimensions could be used to plan specific training programs, there does seem to be a potential value in the typology in that it might increase awareness of personality characteristics--an awareness that could be used in planning educational experiences by teachers, students, and counselors alike.

Dans son livre "The Reasonable Adventurer," l'auteur Roy Heath parle de trois classes d'hommes: les indécis, qu'il appelle X; les résolus, appelés Y; et les risques-tout, appelés Z. Selon M. Heath, c'est une façon de regarder les étudiants qui arrivent au bureau d'orientation et de consultation. Parmi ces trois groupes l'auteur trouve des personnes plus mûres et réfléchies, qu'il appelle "aventuriers raisonnables." Les trois catégories de M. Heath ont formé la base pour quelques recherches parmi les étudiants de la troisième année au Collège d'Education de l'Université de la Colombie Britannique. Certaines citations des entrevues apportent un appui à l'idée des trois catégories proposées par M. Heath.