

The following paper was presented by Allan Pepper to the Russian delegation on 25 November 1991.

This paper is an introduction to and a kind of commentary on the paper titled Basic Concepts, Principles and Processes of George Scott Williamson which you have in your hand and which we have tried to translate into Russian.

There is a coherent biological theory behind the practices and claims/achievements of the Peckham Experiment. It originates in Scott Williamson's hypothesis which led to the actual experiments. Now as we know, if an hypothesis is not put to the test of experiment it remains mere speculation. But Scott Williamson did test his in the Peckham experiment, so what we are able to offer is far more than speculation: it is a set of principles, biological principles, which are derived from what actually happened and which make sense of what was observed in that experiment. Put another way, if these principles are adhered to, then what happened in the Peckham Experiment can happen again.

In this paper I can attempt no more than a brief introduction to these principles but I hope you may feel encouraged to pursue them further in our literature where they are more fully elaborated.

The Peckham Experiment was designed to study health: the basic hypothesis was that health is a positive process to be studied in its own right: it is that quality of growth and development leading to the fulfilment of biological potential.

If we think of health in this way, the first question must be where do we look for healthy people in order to study it? In the absence of any recognisable healthy community Williamson decided that he would have to grow his own healthy people, his own specimens for study.

The second question which arises is 'What is to be the unit of such a community?' The classic Peckham answer was not the individual but THE FAMILY.

The family was carefully defined as the mated pair with or as yet without children. The family was chosen as our basic unit of the process of health because it is possible to see each phase of the life cycle of the family (in contrast to the individual), as an expression of/ a manifestation of some kind of natural power directing growth and development towards the fulfilment of biological potential in courtship, mating, creation of home, begetting of children, nurture – and into middle and old age: natural quite simply in the sense that this power is appreciated involuntarily and appears as inherent in the process of growth and development itself.

We will consider four of these phases as an expression.manifest of this natural directing power:

1. The birth of a new family.

2. The building of a new home.
3. The nurture of children.
4. The family in its community.

1. THE BIRTH OF A NEW FAMILY

Perhaps we are most aware of this natural directing power in the actual beginning of a new family: when the partners choose each other in response to the experience we call falling in love. We call it falling in love to indicate somehow the involuntary nature of this experience: and that it literally takes over in spite of us is further confirmed by the ecstasy of our language in the phrase we use in England – falling head over heels.

Of course the joining together of two partners may be subject to predetermined interference, by subtle forms of human genetics or social pressures like ambition or more overt sanctions on social excursion as, for example, class structure. And of course, any individual may decide to resist the plunge though they cannot anticipate or prevent its advent. But when men and women do respond to this experience (of falling in love) they can be precipitated into a stream of events beyond their wildest imaginings. Such is the potency of its directing power...it can move an individual from one end of the earth to the other, can uproot men and women from the binding tentacles of previous habit and change the tenor of their lives – can release unsuspected potentialities and endow action with immeasurable fortitude.

Let us look at this experience as an expression of a natural directing power inherent in the process of growth and development in the fulfilment of biological potential, i.e. of health.

1. The response to this experience leads to the choice of a partner to whom we feel attracted or pulled. But this is no ordinary choice. We cannot, for example, make up our own minds in advance who to look for as a partner and then go out and find him or her in the hope that they will reciprocate and choose us. In falling in love the response of the partners involved appears to be non reciprocal. It is more properly described as a spontaneous response on the part of each to some kind of directing power – experienced in the pull we feel – but which originates in neither of them.

2. At the same time, this choice in response to Pull, spontaneous and seemingly outwith the determination of either partner, is far from blind. It may indeed exhibit the rarest discrimination. In contrast to the random promiscuity of mere maleness and mere femaleness, falling in love involves a pull not of any man to any woman but of a particular, unique man to a particular unique woman. It is an experience in which personal uniqueness, at whatever level of maturity, is highly significant. (This does not mean that we can only fall in love with one and only one other. Nor does it imply that choice of parental partners always assumes this form – we have already noted the subtle social processes in this connection.) But it does mean that this directing power is related to the personal quality of uniqueness. In falling in love, uniqueness is pulled to uniqueness.

Now this clearly means that when we respond to the Pull we act as a unique individuality. Moreover, it would seem that the choice to which we are pulled in some way heralds/indicates a need of our personal uniqueness. In making our choice that need is satisfied and thus represents a step in the growth and development of our unique individuality: that is to say, in the fulfilment of our biological potential.

So the birth of a new family, through the spontaneous response of its partners to the experience of falling in love, may be seen as the expression of a natural directing power satisfying a need in the growth and development of two unique individualities, in fulfilment of their biological potential: in the process of health.

2. HOME

With the birth of the family we encounter another unique individuality: the mated pair themselves. The mated pair begin to act, no longer as two separate individuals, but as a unity. This unity is a unique individuality in its own right, which we recognise and refer to as The Jones and not just the Jones but the Tom Jones...!

From the birth of the family this new unity engages in that activity characteristic of any new family, nesting or building a home of their own. In this activity the family unity begins to choose from their social environment what meets its needs in the way of food, furnishing, activities, friends and so on...Let us note two things:

1. What they choose reflects and expresses the unique needs of the unique individuality of this new family. The identity of homes can be recognised by their uniqueness just as certainly as one person from another: the colours of decoration, the settings of their furnishings, their meals, the people you meet there, and their varied activities are all expressions of the uniqueness of the family unity.
2. This choosing of home exhibits a similar spontaneity to what we saw in the choosing of parental partners. What is chosen is not the mere addition of the choice of one partner to that of the other, nor is it simply the outcome of some kind of competition. It is rather that the partners are pulled spontaneously as a unity to a choice of its own.

In this way, the home, as the spontaneous choice of the family unity may be seen as another expression of our natural directing power, satisfying a need in the growth and development of the unique individuality of the mated pair, a fulfilment of their biological potential.

In the understanding of Peckham, this activity is not confined or limited to the four walls of the house. What Peckham meant by HOME refers to a family's excursion in society and extends throughout its social environment wherever a family finds opportunities to exercise its own unique choice in fulfilment of its needs. Home may be envisaged as a zone of actual or potential family activities and relationships a network as it were, of all

the things, places, interests, and people (the family's "likes and loves") to which they find themselves spontaneously pulled by our natural directing power and which they have chosen to satisfy their own needs of growth and development,, in brief, all the opportunities for action afforded by the social environment in which a family may be said to "feel at home", and to act with the same freedom as they would at home.

Thus the activity of building a home is not restricted to the initial stages of family life but may be conceived as an expression of a family's growth and development in every phase of the life cycle, throughout their life...each phase presenting its own particular needs for growth and development (for parents and children) for which opportunities of fulfilment have to be found.

So at Peckham, family and home in this dynamic sense, were conceived as growing and developing together. Thus the growth and development of the home reflected in every widening social excursion and increasing use of the social environment was regarded in the original experiment, the key indicator of a family's growth and development in health. In Peckham terms the study of health is essentially the study of the Family in its home: a biological unity: a cell in the body of society.

So for Scott Williamson the cultivation of a healthy community entailed the essential provision of the kind of social environment which members could look on and use as home. That indeed sums up the purpose and design of the experimental Peckham Centre.

3. THE NURTURE OF CHILDREN

In one way any new child is the perfect expression of the uniqueness of the family unity. It is equally true that he or she is a new unique individuality in his own right. The family is the origin of a new unique individuality. Perhaps that sounds obvious. What is not so obvious is the Peckham insight that the Family in its home provides the essential context for the growth and development of the new individuality. This we refer to the function of nurture.

Let us consider the nurtural process: first from the perspective of the child and then from that of the family parents.

From birth indeed, from conception, the new child finds himself at home .i.e. in an environment which has already been chosen by his own family – his origin. There as a new member of the family, he finds things, situations, events and people, suited to his taste, his likes and his loves just as he finds his own mother's milk. Herein lies for us the nurtural significance of home. Home is "where" the growing child discovers choices to which he is pulled naturally: where he is sure to encounter the natural directing power of Pull. His home offers him unique opportunities of learning to exercise his own choice as a unique individuality. Home is the nurtural context in which he can learn to fulfil his own biological potential.

The nurtural role of the parents or family lies in the ordering of the things, situations and events of home so that these potential opportunities for action are presented to the child and he introduced to them according to his growing needs and developing abilities.

But the ART of nurture would seem to lie in seeing that the opportunities for action appropriate to the NEXT stage of growth and development are ready to hand in advance as it were as and when the need for them arises and the ability to use them is present. It is this preventive ordering of the familiar environment – those things which he is sure to take to, according to need and developing ability which furthers the spontaneous expression of choice in response to present need in the growing individuality.

(This principle, the principle of nurtural prevention, is no magic one: it is found throughout the natural world: the cherry stone carries with it to the ground the pulp of its family tree in which it begins to grow...the fledgling gulps down the worm regurgitated by the mother bird, stamped with her own choice.)

When the spontaneity of the child is met by the fulfilment of need then the action of personal choice is confirmed. With every successful choice, every need fulfilled, the child is confirmed in the exercise of his choice as a new individuality and is learning to use his ever widening environment with growing confidence, to further his own unique growth and development in fulfilling his potential.

These principles of nurture are in every sense a continuation of the principles which obtain in the womb.

1. If we think of the womb as the environment of the foetus, situated in the mother's body but nourished in every way by the choices of the family home, then for the foetus the womb may be thought of as the prenatal home in parvo.
2. This environment is matched precisely and exclusively step by step to the needs of the growing and developing foetus. That which will be chosen in the natural order of growth and development is presently at hand at every stage according to need and capability of use.
3. In the womb, the foetus in the natural order of things is beyond any kind of direct intervention, it is only to be approached through its environment. That is to say, it fulfils its own potential without interference.

In the Peckham Experiment, these principles of provision and management of the "uterine home" and of the absence of direct interference with the growing living entity, were found to have a validity far beyond the embryonic stage. Experience at the Centre confirmed that after birth this same process may be continued. Now however it emerges on a voluntary level yet, certainly in the earlier stages of life, apparently guided by an intuitive understanding of the principles obtaining in the foetal life in the womb. There is a nurtural sense spontaneously present in a good mum and a good dad. Mother and father may be described as specialists for the nurture of their own children. They have a kind of

nurtural greenfingers (which we can see, for example, in the sureness and innate confidence with which many a mother manages and copes with her children. She doesn't wait to be told what to do: somehow she "just knows" what they need and provides for it.

It is in this sense that we understand the family in its home as key to the fulfilment of biological potential in the individual. But as we have hinted, the process of nurture is not to be thought of as a one way affair. From the point of view of the parents the nurtural role is far from being a restrictive one. As a new unique individuality in his own right, the child is learning in the context of the familiar environment of his own home to exercise more and more of his own choice. But in doing so he makes his own contribution to the growth and development the enrichment of his family and home. As he pushes out into society as a member of his family, out off his growing experience and social excursion his choices, tastes, interests and friendships the whole diversity of the family environment or home is being extended and enriched. It was for example so often the children who wanted to join the centre (viewed with some caution and suspicion by the parents) and it was the parents who followed! In biological terms, the child acts as a growing point in the natural growth of the whole family organism. In the phase of nurture, the whole family may be expected to move in an ever widening circle of experiences, the child more and more sharing in the direction of the family's choices in which parents and children develop together.

The key to the natural development of the individual lies in the family. The key to the natural development of the family lies in its individual members.

The function of nurture is yet another phase in the life cycle of the family as unity. The response of both mother and father to nurtural needs is no less spontaneous than those other examples of response which we have cited, and may be seen as another expression of our natural directing power of Pull; satisfying a need in the growth and development of the parental unity in the fulfilment of their biological potential as well as that of the growing child.

4. We now come to consider the fourth phase of growth and development: THE FAMILY IN ITS COMMUNITY.

The Pioneer Health Centre was designed as an experimental instrument for the nurture of this spontaneous expression of growth and development of uniqueness through choice which we find focussed in the family and its members. The management of the Centre was based on our nurtural principles (as we hinted briefly above).

As you have heard, it took the form of a family club. But there were no rules. Apart from the agreement to accept a health overhaul at regular intervals and the payment of a small subscription, the members were not told what to do. They were simply told 'Do what you like to do so that others can do what they like to do'. As in nurture, there was no direct interference with member families. As in nurture what control there was lay in the ordering and furnishing of the environment in ways designed to enable the natural inherent energy of families to be released spontaneously. Again as we hinted, the

building could be described as raw material for home making. But there is one obvious question which is raised by such freedom of activity in the Centre.

The invitation to do what you like and the emphasis on unique individual choice may look like a recipe for conflict and chaos. The more diversity one may think, the more conflict only to be solved by compromise, regulation or some other imposed limitations. Certainly the diversity under the one roof was extraordinary. One could observe young couples newly come together to form new families; couples pregnant with new life; parents engaged in the nurture of infants and young children; mature couples – and individuals – whose energies were not or were no longer focussed on rearing the next generation and who had their varied contribution to make to society – not forgetting grandparents with their special contribution out of their own experience. We watched the movements of infants, of children beginning to explore in the Centre nurseries; of toddlers, of children beginning to explore the world beyond the intimate parental home; of adolescents and freemoving young adults embarking on a search for partners and on courtship and penetrating more widely into the social environment; of mature men and women with all their variety of character and of interests.

(In one week in April 1948, when the membership was about 600 families (a little more than 2000 people), the daily average number of people using the Centre was 771. This is taken from a table in the Peckham Experiment. An account was made of all the members entering the building during that week.)

All had contributions to make to the diversity of family and social activity and all had needs to be met from that same diversity. But no observer was in any doubt that provision for development at each stage lead to enrichment not only of individual lives but also to enrichment and integration of the community as a whole. How was this achieved?

When we were discussing nurture we made the point that the nurtural role of parents for from being restrictive opened up a new dimension of fulfilment and enrichment not only for the children but for the parents as well: the development of the one furthering the development of the other. Peckham had its own word for this: they called it MUTUALITY – biological mutuality.

So too there is a mutuality in the unity of the mated pair in their own home. Tom and Jean are still individualities in their own right now they live and act as part of the JONES. This is not to say that their individuality has been lost or sacrificed by compromise or some other convenient compact, but rather that each has found a new dimension through sharing in the wider excursion opened up to their family unity – wider than either could have achieved by themselves. Far from being restrictive, the unity of the family offers a further step in the unfolding of individual potential.

There is a mutuality of home and society. Far from being parasitical on society, the building of a home, (in our terms), enriches not only the family but, as we have just seen in our picture of the diversity of the Centre, it contributes also to the diversity and

enrichment of its social environment – creating through its own actions in the fulfilment of its own needs, new actional opportunities for others. The fulfilment of the needs of a family or individual at any one stage of development constitute potential actional opportunities for neighbouring families at their own stages of development.

This principle of mutuality points to some kind of order – “altruistic” rather than self centred – which seems to arise in and with/or out of spontaneous action. It is an order quite other than that which we might expect to be imposed or legislated for by authoritarian means. It is simply the case that such a natural order was glimpsed in the life of the Centre, not just by the members themselves, not just by the biologist observers, but by thousands of people who came from all parts of Britain, and, through the British Council, from all parts of the world to visit the Centre.

It was this feeling of order and of ease in going about one’s business in the midst of so much diversity which they found so striking in the absence of any authority or direction such as might be found in other community centres. This is what they recognised time and again but found hard to put into words and which remained a lasting impression.

It was an order which pervaded the whole community, children included, from toddlers to grandparents.

“...it seemed to me that at the same time as they were learning balance and control of their minds and bodies, they were learning a primitive but very important kind of sociability, the art of fitting themselves and their individual purposes into the whole formed by the activity of all the others. They were learning how to be their own original and creative selves and an active part of a harmonious and creative whole.” (quoted from a paper by Allison Stallibrass)

It was this order which they sensed which we tried to understand in terms of mutuality: as an order of community integration of families growing together in their homes in mutuality, perhaps a supreme manifest of health.

To do as you like so as others can do as they like, need not be a recipe for conflict, but a description of something that seems to happen in a field of spontaneity. Somehow the spontaneous expression of choice carries with it an intuitive sense or awareness of the whole situation of which one is a part and of acting as a part of that whole. Indeed it may be that the whole or wholeness is the ultimate source of our natural directing powers which evokes our spontaneous response. Be that as it may, to have glimpsed such a natural order of wholeness or health among its family members as something worth exploring is perhaps that greatest achievement of Peckham.