Aspects of Disruptive Behaviour in Relation to Adam

Disruptive individuals create problems for their teachers, their fellow-students and themselves. Such students may need greater insight into their own self-damaging behaviour and to learn to develop a sense of responsibility for their actions.

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A PICTURE OF ADAM

Adam is what Pinocchio became, a real boy. He is also a composite representation of many boys and their problems are reflected in his. An attempt will be made here to examine some of the implications of Adam's disruptiveness in relation to himself and to others in his environment. These implications may raise more questions then answers.

Adam is fourteen years and six months old. His I.Q. is 65. He was assessed when he was nine and has progressed from primary school via junior special classes to the post-primary special class where he is now. He is a handsome boy. Nothing in his appearance suggests mental handicap.

Adam seems determined to disrupt, misbehaving in a manner "intended to destroy lessons" (Mills 1976). At break-times he is foul-mouthed, rude and destructive. On school buses he is cruel, terrorising smaller children and spoiling their possessions. On the street he is loud and aggressive. With school staff he is intractable and impolite. Very infrequently he briefly shows his other side - charming, helpful and willing. This often occurs during a "putting the room to rights" session, for example after cookery or craft. Adam uses this opportunity to take charge of some operation, such as sweeping, and proves himself thorough and efficient. So long as no one tells him what to do his helpful attitude continues.

DOES CATEGORISING HELP?

The problems Adam creates for himself and others prompt the question, "Has his 'category' been properly defined?" Perhaps his primary handicap is not a low I.Q.

but maladjustment, "showing evidence of emotional instability or psychological disturbance" (Underwood Report, 1955). Perhaps he is unable or unwilling to conform to the school's demands, and is therefore disturbed (Laslett, 1977). Does his indiscipline stem "from deep-seated psychological causes?" (Comber and Whitfield, 1978). Or does his behaviour indicate "the emergence of a new category of child? (Young et al., 1980).

If Adam were given any such labels, he would have all the excuses he would ever need for his behaviour. "I can't help it. I'm disturbed/maladjusted and this is how such people behave". Adam needs to see that ultimately he is responsible for how he behaves (Glasser, 1975, p. 57).

Does it help his school to consider possible causes of Adam's disruptiveness? Can we determine what these causes are? If we knew, could we change them? Can we remove his alcoholic father? Can we excise scars from early beatings? Can we provide him with a new environment? More importantly, do we accept that such past events limit him now? We cannot look for solutions in the past (Glasser 1975, p. 62). What Adam may need most in relation to possible causes of his disruptiveness are coping strategies which might enable him to deal with his problems more constructively in the present.

THE EFFECTS OF ADAM'S BEHAVIOUR ON OTHERS

> **How Adam's Disruptiveness Affects His Peers**
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> 1. He is an additional "handicap" to other pupils, whose learning is prevented by his behaviour.
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> 2. Disrupters are often leaders. Adam lures others into situations where trouble awaits them.
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> 3. He drains energy away from teacher effectiveness. (Glasser, 1975 p. 193).

What might be Adam's view of his own behaviour? He appears to see it as a mixture of macho, "smart", and funny. He is reinforced in this when others laugh or support him. While the teacher may wish to ignore his behaviour in an effort to extinguish it, there is no way his peers are going to ignore it (Gage and Berliner, 1975, p. 644).

Attempting to see through Adam's eyes is difficult. Academic subjects are most frustrating for him due to his failure in basic skills, but he will do a reasonable amount

of his best work during an English or Maths class. Whenever there is discussion, or a talking session of any kind, Adam's disruption can be accepted. Even during favourite class activities, such as reading with a Walkman, his whole attention seems to be directed towards annoying others and breaking up the activity. His rudeness and intractability have surfaced, too, during P.E. and swimming lessons, taken by the P.E. teacher, a man whom Adam otherwise appears to respect.

ADAM'S NEEDS AND THE NEEDS OF OTHERS

Adam, in attempting to fulfil his needs, is doing so in ways that prevent others from fulfilling theirs (Glasser, 1975, p. 15).

RIGHTS OF OTHER PUPILS

1   to attend school without being threatened, bullied or abused, and without violence to their persons;
2   to enjoy peaceful bus journeys;
3   not to have their property taken or destroyed;
4   to progress at school in a pleasant classroom atmosphere.

As Adam frequently denies such rights to others, what are the implications of his behaviour for himself?

HOW ADAM FAILS HIMSELF

1.   He is failing to fulfil his needs, e.g. "the need to love and be loved, and the need to feel that we are worthwhile to ourselves and others" (Glasser, 1975 p. 10). Glasser makes the distinction between genuine love and acceptance/rejection of behaviour. He says that to be worthwhile we must maintain a satisfactory standard of behaviour.
2.   Adam inhibits his own learning.
3.   He attracts punishment, such as repeated suspension.
4.   He spoils his own future prospects, and has in fact already been refused a place in the training centre to which boys from this class normally proceed.
5.   He reinforces his own self-image as incorrigible.

WHAT CAN THE SCHOOL DO FOR ADAM?

Is Adam still at a crossroads, where he can change direction? Or does society,

through the school, begin to write him off? Will he proceed through maladjustment to delinquency? When old enough, will he be deemed criminal? Will his future be in special units for the maladjusted, in residential schools for delinquents, and finally in prisons? What can the school do to improve Adam's present behaviour and to steer him away from such a doleful future? While the iron fist of school discipline must exist, it is the velvet glove that stands a greater chance of changing the apparent immutability of Adam's course.

The thwarting of Adam's needs may not result solely from his own misconduct. It must also be questioned whether the school is fulfilling the "special needs" of this wayward pupil, or whether Adam's frustrations are being compounded by school shortcomings. For example, does Adam thrive in circumstances of minimal integration? The isolation of this special class may need remediation, to allow more normal interaction between its members and the rest of school. Can Adam deal with a day which is spent mainly at desk work, or would more opportunity for practical subjects relieve his problem? Would the prestige and practical advantages of "doing woodwork", or metal-work or building studies, go some way to enhance Adam's bruised self-image? Contact with other staff members, and not almost exclusively with the special-class teacher, might be effective in lowering Adam's frustration level. Perhaps the school, itself with strong academic orientation, is unconsciously making demands on the "Adams" in its ranks, demands to conform in dress, speech and manner, to subscribe to the school's behavioural norms, to live daily what is basically an alien and possibly an unsuitable life-style. When a square peg sticks in a round hole there are two possibilities (a) the peg can be pared down to fit the hole (b) the hole can be eased to accommodate the peg.

EDUCATION TOWARDS RESPONSIBILITY

Glasser (1973, p. 68) prefers the terms "right" and "wrong" in reference to behaviour. If these seem too moralistic, there is always the concept of socially acceptable behaviour. Whichever term is used, Adam needs to learn that his present conduct lacks self-responsibility and therefore maturity, in so far as he cannot fulfil his basic needs in a way that does not deprive others of the ability to fulfil their needs.

The term "school" in relation to discipline can be very abstract. Adam regards, "school" intervention as punitive or restrictive rather than supportive. The basic question is, what can Adam's class teacher do for him? He spends about 90% of his school attendance with this person. "School" back-up may be necessary sometimes, but the day-to-day interaction with the class teacher can be the most telling factor in

the development of self-responsibility in Adam.

According to Glasser's views, the teacher "must become involved with a child, reject his irresponsible behaviour, and then teach him better ways to behave" (Glasser, 1975, p. 195). He sees the classroom as the best place for this intervention, and he sees personal involvement as the key to dealing with the problem.

"A child's ability to live a successful life depends upon a series of personal involvements with responsible people, and teachers are among the most important people a child encounters". (Glasser, 1975, p. 196).

However, "if the education of other students suffers too much because of the misbehaviour of one or two, your (the teacher's) responsibility is to do what is needed, including punishing, to make effective teaching possible" (Gage and Berliner, 1975, p. 666). In this case "school" back-up may be necessary sometimes.

How will Adam respond to these attempts to meet his needs? In the last analysis, it is really up to him. He can decide to take control of his own behaviour, or he can continue to avoid doing so.

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