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Think Globally, Act Locally

From 1978-80 I carried out a research-training project designed to: (a) study disruptive behaviours in classrooms; and, simultaneously, (b) teach various strategies for managing disruptive pupil behaviour to classroom teachers. In the course of the project I held twenty research-training workshops for teachers in various parts of British Columbia.

In this paper I wish to present some conclusions from my project. I will present them as possible guidelines for future efforts to aid classroom teachers cope with disruptive behaviours in the classroom.

My first conclusion is this: *there is no single method which "works best" with disruptive pupil behaviours.*

My second conclusion is this: *it is much more profitable to spend time and effort promoting positive goals and behaviours than "stamping out" unacceptable behaviours.*

My third conclusion is this: *the prevention of disruptive behaviours should be given much greater priority than it now has. An ounce of prevention, is, in my opinion, indeed worth a pound of cure.*

My fourth and final conclusion is this: *in most instances, the most efficacious strategy to offer teachers and administrators for dealing directly with disruptive pupil behaviour has four elements:*

- (a) Practical training in methods of teacher/pupil relationship enhancement;
- (b) Practice in the use of behaviour reinforcement procedures for maintaining and promoting positive behaviours.
- (c) Practice in the use of consultation between teachers, teachers and administrators, and other special personnel such as school counsellors, psychologists, and non-school personnel such as social workers, police, etc.
- (d) Stimulation of teacher self-knowledge in the areas of self-needs, unresolved conflicts which appear as ineffective interactional patterns, value beliefs about child management, and insight into own behaviours and emotional reactions, especially in conditions of interpersonal conflict, hostility, stress, and humiliation.

Now, if I can summarize the foregoing into a single sentence:
the best approach to take for reducing disruptive behaviour is:
(a) a promotive/preventive program incorporating relationship enhancement methods, positive behaviour reinforcement, consultation and self-knowledge. Hereafter, I will refer to this approach simply as Promotive/Preventive.

Promotion/Prevention

I gave this paper the title "Think globally, act locally". By "Thinking globally" I mean that to the greatest extent possible, one should become informed about how behaviour goes right, and wrong, and what theories and strategies have been developed to aid in the shaping of productive patterns of behaviour, in whatever situation one is concerned with.

Generally speaking, teachers are impatient with this global aspect of promotion/prevention. They are pragmatic and desire to find some recipe and practice which "works" -- quickly, if possible. This desire for the practical is understandable, given the fact that the teacher must do something everyday in the face of difficult behaviour.

Academics, on the other hand, have a penchant for models, theories and "as if" situations. They do not have to face little Johnny who is busy knocking a hole in the back wall while Teacher is occupied pulling Jack and Jill apart in the front of the room.

What needs to be done, I believe, is to bring both attitudes, the practical and the abstract, together in a unified approach. The practical attitude by itself, tends to be self-defeating since it results in using certain techniques to react to crises or to control, but not prevent, unwanted behaviour. The abstract, academic approach can be equally self-defeating since often no one, not even the proponent, can demonstrate how to translate the theoretical abstract concepts and

principles into concrete, practical usage.

Perhaps the most important principle to keep in mind is that no matter what strategy is selected, it must always be adapted to the local situation. This means adapted to a particular school, classroom, pupil-teacher relationship, family, etc., which is the object of our concern.

Four Steps To Promotive/Preventive Strategy

First, it is necessary to develop an awareness and formulation of a preventable problem or a desired goal or potential.

[For example: maintain pupil task attention
during math instruction]

Second, the promoter/preventer (teacher in our case) must have access to and cooperation of, the individuals of concern (since we are discussing teachers and pupils, this step may be simple since the pupils are in the teacher's classroom). Cooperation of gatekeepers or mediators such as family members or other teachers is also required. However, it should not be overlooked that a teacher may have access to pupils in the classroom and not have their cooperation.

Third, the preventer/promoter must be able to establish a work-able relationship with clients (pupils) which is grounded in at least a degree of trust and reciprocal respect.

Fourth, from an array of strategies the promoter/preventer can select specific tactics to be used for achieving promotive/preventive goals. The following list is suggestive, but not conclusive, of such tactics:

1. Positive reinforcement
2. Problem-solving skills
3. Negotiated approach to meeting needs
4. Punishment (aversive conditioning)
5. Stress inoculation
6. Consultation
7. Helping Networks
8. Engineering paths in the physical environment for preventive purposes.

Now I will briefly discuss each of the four promotive/preventive steps with special attention to who does what to whom with which intended results.

Awareness and formulation of a preventable problem or promotable goal. It usually falls upon the teacher to recognize and formulate preventive/promotive goals although a program of prevention may be undertaken by a school or even entire school district. Preventable problems are usually systematic. This means that more than the identified client(s) must be taken into account--in fact, the various

linkages between the client (disrupter) and other pupils, the conditions of the classroom and other aspects of his or her life situation that bear on the problem. The teacher can use consultation with other teachers, with parents and with other specialists in the school in formulating preventive/promotive goals.

Gaining cooperation. In general, this step requires that the preventer recognize and show the advantages and disadvantages of the approach advocated in connection with the intended recipients. What actions are to be taken? By whom? Requiring how much time, effort, financial resources? What are the predicted outcomes? Are there safeguards?

Spelling out the details of the proposed preventive/promotive proposal is a first step. However, getting persons to participate in a preventive/promotive project is often quite difficult, and requires both knowledge and persuasive skill. Even when the promotive/preventive approach is being considered by a single teacher for his or her own class, the first step is to develop a conviction that this approach has more benefits than a crisis-to-crisis strategy and then proceed to persuade clients and/or mediators to this point of view.

Acquiring workable relationships. There are some reasons to believe that an individual who seeks to help others must first of all be perceived as trustworthy by the intended recipients of the aid (Fischer, 1978).

The work of Carl Rogers (1959) and his associates (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967) have defined three relationship skills -- empathy, warmth, and genuineness, -- three core skills in the workable, professional relationship. This should surprise no one as these are the three relationship skills found in natural primary groups such as effective families and also found in many self-help groups.

Empathy is perhaps the key skill and may be defined as having four aspects:

- 1] Listening carefully to the content of what a person says;
- 2] Listening carefully to the emotional feeling which accompanies the content message and noticing non-verbal as well as verbal cues given by the speaker;
- 3] Communicating both of these understanding back to the speaker, when appropriate; and
- 4] Communicating hunches about what the other person is expressing beyond what is explicitly communicated as relevant to the problem being discussed, but doing so in a tentative, acceptant manner.

I have had considerable experience in teaching empathic listening to teachers. Many are reluctant to change their listening style from the style which they have learned in teacher preparation to the listening style used by persons who are "helpers". Teacher

listening usually focusses on whether or not pupils give "right" answers while empathic (helper) listening focusses on showing the other person that you understand what he or she means.

There are various training manuals for teaching empathy (Ivey, A. E., and Authier, J., 1978; Peavy, 1977). It requires some practice for a teacher to learn the rudiments of empathic listening, usually with supervision and analysis of tape recorded replies.

Warmth or unconditional positive respect (Rogers) is an essential feature of the promotive effort. By conveying (unconditional) positive respect, the preventer is expressing of respect for the person's potentials and for his or her efforts in trying to reach goals. The use of respect is based on the assumption that persons have within themselves the potential for living as effective human beings; further that respect should be maintained even in the face of disruptive behaviour.

Genuineness refers to the congruence (or lack thereof) of what a preventer thinks and feels on the one hand, and what he or she expresses on the other. Also, whether a self-presentation is made in a phoney or routinized manner or as an involved professional with a sense of personal caring.

It is my conviction that the preventer (teacher, administrator, counsellor) who has incorporated the three ingredients of empathy, genuineness and warmth into his or her own communication style will

have acquired the (workable) relationship capacity for further preventive/promotive tactics, which I will now describe.

Specific Preventive/Promotive Tactics

Positive reinforcement. One variety of positive reinforcement is known as shaping. Shaping involves the reinforcement of small steps toward a goal over a period of time. Small step is an important consideration. Many people who attempt reinforcement attempt too much too quickly. When this fails then they write off reinforcement as "no good" when in fact it was their own lack of knowledge about applying reinforcement which was at fault.

Another type of reinforcement is termed fading. Fading refers to the gradual merging of situations that receive positive reinforcement -- in effect, a generalizing from one established behaviour to others similar to the first and so on.

The steps in using reinforcement include:

1. Identify end goal.
2. Identify intervening behaviours, (steps) that lead to the end goal.
3. Identify appropriate positive reinforcers.
4. Apply reinforcers to naturally occurring behaviours which are approximations of steps or end goals.

5. Keep working one step closer to end goal. As progress to successive steps is made stop reinforcing lesser approximations.
6. Once the end goal is reached (or approximately reached) move from continuous reinforcement to intermittent reinforcement (to maintain the desired behaviour).
7. Even after behaviour is well-established "bolster" shots and evaluation checks are needed to ensure that behaviours are being maintained.

Problem-solving skills. Children (and adults) frequently turn to maladaptive behaviour because they do not know how to do what is expected of them. This suggests that one approach to reducing unwanted behaviour is to teach children not what to think, but how to think. This point of view is expressed clearly by Shure and Spivack (1980):

We believe (and the data support our belief) that individuals who develop the habit of problem-solving thinking can better evaluate and choose from a variety of possible solutions to a problem, turn to a different one in case of actual failure, and experience less frustration and fewer signs of maladaptive functioning. They are less likely to make impulsive mistakes, become frustrated and aggressive, or end up evading the problem by entirely withdrawing.
(pp. 160-161)

In teaching problem-solving skills to children, teachers can help children think of consequences which may result from practical events and build up a range of "what to do in case of's". For example, what might happen if a girl gets her brother to let her push a grocery cart in the store?

Negotiated approach to meeting needs. This tactic rests on the assumption that children and teachers both have needs which are met in one way or another in classrooms. By this, I mean needs to be recognized, respected, successful, liked, helped, and so on. Meeting needs is often a matter of negotiation and the skills of negotiation can be learned by teachers, used by teachers, and taught to pupils by teachers.

The more important negotiation skills are:

- a. Empathic listening
- b. Making interpersonal requests
- c. Stating common goals
- d. Speaking concretely
- e. Indexing one's own statements
- f. Expressing affect.

I have already mentioned empathic listening earlier in this paper. Making interpersonal requests refers to stating what you wish another person to do -- in a manner which encourages rather than discourages their doing it. For example, "What I want you to do is..." instead of "For the last time...". Stating common goals refers to

techniques such as saying "You seem to want to enjoy what you are doing and I want that for you too, now what will make that better is...". Speaking concretely refers to stating things specifically instead of vaguely or ambiguously. For example, "Billy, when you drop your book, the rest of the children and I find it hard to do our lesson," instead of "Oh Billy, will you never learn -- how many times have I told you not to be so naughty?"

Indexing refers to taking responsibility for one's own opinions, beliefs, ideas, etc. This means saying "In my opinion, you will get the correct answer if you..." instead of "You should do it this way."

Expressing affect means linking how one feels to what one thinks or believes. For example: "Jim that was a very good job you did with your math assignment, it makes me feel happy to see your improvement."

These six skills used together are a basis for negotiating needs in the classroom. They represent a straight forward, clear, and positive communication style which minimizes defensiveness and accusation.

Punishment (aversive conditioning). Punishment may be direct and physical, i.e., strapping; direct and symbolic, i.e., threatening or making feel guilty; indirect, i.e., removal of a positive experience such as not letting a child watch TV if he or she fights, or "time-out", that is, removal of a pupil from a classroom situation where he or she is being reinforced for undesirable behaviours.

Punishment is difficult to use effectively since its effectiveness requires the infliction of pain. Further, punishment works best on those who least need it and has virtually no effect on really difficult children. The teacher as a model of "might makes right" is a questionable model for children--at least for children who live in families with a very different value system, i.e., democratic.

Teachers sometimes resort to punishment when "nothing else works". In this way they are able to "survive" challenges to their authority. The use of punishment may be viewed as a failure of teachers, parents, and society to transcend brute nature. Its use raises sticky ethical and legal issues.

Social Skills training. This is similar to problem-solving but on the level of behaviour as well as thinking. Using a strategy to prevent unwanted teen-age pregnancies, as an example, a four-stage preventive/promotive program can be outlined (Schinke, Gilchrist, and Small, 1979).

1. Provide access to information in an appropriate time and manner.
2. Make sure the information is perceived, comprehended and stored. Group "teaching" where adolescents teach other adolescents might be one way to achieve this goal.

3. Transform general, abstract information into personal information for use in existential decision-making.

For example, the general statement: "Unprotected intercourse frequently results in pregnancy" means, in personal translation, "When Ann and I have sex together and neither of us uses a contraceptive, she is likely to get pregnant. Since neither of us wants her to get pregnant, we had better use birth control when we have sex."

4. Provide interpersonal skills necessary to make the decision. A girl may need to be taught how to be more assertive with her partner so that she can insist upon contraception before intercourse. The more general rule is that if people don't know how to do what is expected or necessary for them to do to achieve a certain goal, then it is up to responsible persons to see that they have an opportunity to learn. Often it is more profitable to use peer instruction (certainly in sex education, this may be the case) since that is where the reality lies.

Consultation. One method used to prevent difficulties from arising in the classroom, to promote desirable goals and also to get help with crisis situations is to use consultation. Educational consultation for the classroom teacher may be defined thusly:

Educational (classroom) consultation is a problem-solving or problem preventing process in which help, purely advisory in nature, is offered by the classroom consultant to a consultee faced with a classroom related difficulty. Consultants may include: (1) other teachers who have had more successful experience with the problem at hand; (2) school specialists like school counsellors, school psychologists or instructional specialists. Administrators can also serve as consultants. However, this arrangement is often not satisfactory since the administrator has power over the classroom teacher and the teacher may feel threatened (sometimes advisedly so) at receiving advice from the principal or other administrator; or (3) the consultant may be an outsider to the school system such as a university professor or other behavioural specialist.

Consultation may focus on:

- a. Clients, i.e., the concern is with pupil characteristics,
- b. Consultee, i.e., the concern is with the committee's knowledge, skills and procedures,

- c. System, i.e., the concern is with the structure of the classroom (or school) and with making policy changes which increase the system's effectiveness with pupils,
- d. Some combination of a, b, c.

The result of consultation effectiveness are somewhat ambiguous, Mannino and Shore (1975) reported positive change in about 70% of 35 studies on the effectiveness of mental health consultation. However, the better controlled evaluations tended to show poorer results (Bloom, 1975).

Helping Networks. Paradoxically, the very social conditions which cause some people to suffer great stress and turmoil seem hardly to affect others at all. In a school, for example, certain teachers may be at their wits end while others not only survive, but thrive. Often, the thrivers have helping networks of family or friends who offer the right type of support and encouragement at the right time and place.

Teachers may form support groups or self-help groups-the functions of which are to provide emotional support, material aid, advice, a place to talk things over and a context to learn coping methods from supportive partners in a collective enterprise.

Helping networks can be extended to include parents, police, social service workers, and pupils themselves. Peer counselling is a growing form of helping network which capitalizes upon the natural helping tendencies of people. Peer counselling is being applied in schools to children and youth, in corrections, in community life (lay counselling societies, re-evaluation counselling) with older people as well as in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Engineer patterns in the physical environment for preventive/-promotive purposes. The planned arrangement of objects in space has an unquestionable impact upon persons who use or live in the space. Surely no classroom teacher can remain unaware of the difference in pupil behaviours that different physical arrangements in the classroom can make.

Three types of environment can be distinguished with reference to complexity of decision making required to change the environment: micro-environments have one level of authority, for example, one's home where one is personally in-charge-of the environment; mezo-environments such as a classroom where there are two levels of authority--teacher and principal; and macro-environments which have three or more levels of authority.

Unfortunately, many physical aspects of the environment are taken for granted or are arranged according to habit, cultural norms, economy, or personal predisposition--all without regard for the

impacts upon inhabitants of the space. Colour, for example, is known to stimulate or depress, physical objects become endowed with personal meaning and their removal can engender feelings of loss and separation and so on, yet such considerations are often overlooked.

Arrangements in space may be made to benefit one group of space inhabitants while disadvantaging other inhabitants. For example, neat lines of chairs in a classroom benefit custodial staff and teachers with a strong penchant for orderliness; while clearly disadvantaging pupils who need to cooperate, communicate or discuss with other pupils in groups. Asphalt and cinder playground surfaces benefit maintenance crews but are decidedly disadvantageous to students, and so on. A hooked rug looks great in the apartment of youthful Jack and Jill but will become a distinct hazard for them at age seventy.

Assuming that the classroom is a mezo-environment (two levels of authority) then a six step process can be identified for altering it in the service preventing difficulties and promoting desirable pupil interactions and performance.

First, identify the arrangements, objects, object uses, etc., and the possible behaviours influenced by these environmental aspects. For example, a teacher may wish to have a "free space" somewhere in the room or a "music-corner" to use as a reward area for pupils who finish their lesson satisfactorily and have time to spare in the lesson

period. The teacher may guess that keeping a pupil at his or her seat after the lesson has been completed leads to unwanted behaviour. The teacher may also search in literature or by talking with other teachers for possible ideas on how best to make a spatial adjustment.

Step 2 involves a plan for risk reduction, or positive behaviour promotion. Third, the teacher must gain the cooperation of the principal in order to remove, or circumvent, any barriers to the plan (Step 4), and then take Step 5 which is placing the plan in operation. Step 6 is orienting inhabitants (pupils) to the new promotive/preventive arrangement. Both levels of authority (teacher and principal) should work in concert on steps 4, 5, and 6.

In this paper I have tried to introduce the reader to a number of possible strategies for dealing with disruptive behaviour in the classroom. I have concentrated on tactics for preventing difficulties and promoting positive behaviours and attitudes. I have intended this paper to be a consultant document. I have not presented any of the strategies in great enough detail to serve as a point-by-point practical guide for the educator. Instead I have announced a number of options. If and when any particular option is chosen for implementation, then more advice and procedural detail would have to be secured.

I will close this paper with a self-help test that suggests how preventive-promotive thinking in fact impacts upon each of us, even though we may not be conscious of impact. I suggest that you use the test to check-out your attitude toward yourself and those with whom you closely associate in reference to preventive/promotive thinking.

Preventing/Promoting Personal Quality of Life: A Checklist

- + - 1. Can you say that you knowingly and planfully eat a balanced
- -
healthy diet which avoids excesses of saturated fats, cholesterol and salt? If you can say "Yes" then chalk up a plus, if "No", give yourself a double minus. If you don't know give yourself a single minus.
- + - 2. Considering your age, height and body frame can you say that
- -
your weight is about right? If yes, give yourself a plus. If you are overweight or excessively underweight give yourself a double minus. If you don't know give yourself a single minus.
- + - 3. Do you get regular, fairly rigorous physical exercise
- -
(bowling or golfing won't do) every week? If yes, give yourself a plus. If no, a double minus. If you don't know, give yourself a single minus.

- + - 4. If you smoke cigars, cigarettes or pot at all, give yourself
- -
+ + a double minus. If you smoke only a pipe give yourself a
single minus. If you smoke nothing at all, give yourself a
plus. If you have never smoked anything in your entire life,
give yourself a double plus.
- + - 5. Drinking alcohol is complicated. If you do not drink any
- -
+ + type of alcohol give yourself a plus. If you drink only
lightly, for example, a glass of wine at dinner, give your-
self a double plus. If you drink in excess of an occasional
glass of wine or glass of beer, give yourself a minus. If
you are a regular drinker, i.e., nightly cocktail, weekend
bash, etc., give yourself a double minus.
- + - 6. Do you regularly use your seat belt for both in-town and
out-of-town driving whether driving your own car or riding
with others? If yes score a plus, if no, chalk up a minus.
- + - 7. Modern living is stressful for many people--at work, at
home, even while vacationing. If you frequently feel pres-
sured by stresses, either pleasant or unpleasant, at home,
or work or at leisure, then mark yourself a minus. If your
life is zestful, but not pressured, give yourself a plus.
If you don't know whether you are stressed or not, give
yourself a minus.

- + + 8. If you have deliberately learned techniques for dealing with stress and pressure, and, as a result, you feel basically relieved from stress, give yourself a double plus. If you have tried to learn techniques for reducing stress, but you still feel pressured give yourself a minus.
- + - 9. Do you know how to get your fair rights in everyday matters? If you are reasonably assertive in standing up for yourself and obtaining your rights on the job, as a consumer, and as a family member, then give yourself a plus. If you are aggressive--or passive--score a minus.
- + - 10. Have you developed a reasonably clear picture of major goals which you wish to obtain in your life? If you have such a life-plan (subject to some change, of course) then give yourself a double plus. If you are just drifting along subject to current pressures give yourself a double minus. If you have goals which seem to dominate your life and you don't feel free to deviate from them, or if you have never even thought about a life-plan, then give yourself a single minus.
- + - 11. Do the socio-demographic groups in which you have membership seem to get their fair share of the "good" life? For example, women only earn about 6/10 of what men do for the same job given the same qualifications. Schools do not have the same "holding" power for indian children as for non-indian

children. Economic disadvantage and social injustice are experienced in differing amounts by various minority groups: refugees, gays, the handicapped, the elderly, etc. Are you involved in some reasonable action against social injustice? If yes, score a plus; if no, a minus.

- + - 12. Do you engage in some activity or practice which gives you
+ + a sense of creating (for example, a craft, such as wood working or knitting or writing poetry) or a sense of being at home in nature (for example, hiking, canoeing, or mountain climbing) or some other practical or contemplative activity which gives you a definite feeling of personal meaning and wholeness? If yes, regularly, give yourself a double plus; if yes, occasionally, give yourself a single plus; if no, give yourself a minus.

Each of these twelve "test items" can be documented as contributing (or detracting) to the quality of life--yours and others. Each is, to some extent, controllable by you. Each implies preventive/-promotive behaviours. After you check yourself out on this list, talk your reactions over with a friend or colleague. Use this experience as a tool to investigate your own promotive/preventive orientation as it applies to yourself and your close associates.