A Submission to the Inquiry into the Education of Boys.

Summary

Successful learning is closely linked to self-esteem and behaviour. This submission will argue that for children experiencing learning difficulties, there is often a related behaviour change. Lack of success at school can also have a negative impact on self-esteem. In the early years of school, boys form the majority of students experiencing difficulties in both Literacy and Behaviour. Schools currently have programs and strategies in place that address each of these three areas independently. Many of these strategies are successful in achieving their aim. For students experiencing difficulties in learning or behaviour, successful intervention can be improved upon by a coordinated approach to learning, behaviour and self-esteem. Such an approach would require ongoing assessment of behaviour and learning, close monitoring of students at risk, and resourcing for schools that allows them to deliver programs in a flexible and integrated manner that meets the needs of the student.

About the Author. I have taught for 18 years in the A.C.T. Education system, mainly in Primary schools, although I have taught in high school, college and at tertiary level. I hold degrees in Science and Education, including a Masters Degree in Teaching and Learning. I am currently completing a Ph.D. at the Australian Catholic University. My area of study is Behaviour Management practice in schools and the implications it has for student learning. This submission is a reflection of personal views.

Table of Contents

Diagram 1 An attachment produced using Publisher 2000 and will be sent as a separate attachment.

Submission to the Inquiry into the education of boys.

Introduction.

Literacy learning is seen as being at its most crucial during the early years of schooling. During the first few years of life the child learns to talk, a process supported by the parents and other persons in the child's life. For many children the development of reading skills begins within four years of birth and for most, formal acquisition of reading skills during pre-school and kindergarten, with most children reading fluently (Reading Recovery level 20) by year 3 (approximately 7 to 9 years old.). Teaching the physical process and structure of writing also begins during these years and continues to be developed throughout primary school. Spelling conventions and processes begin to be learnt as writing and reading skills mature. There is no other time in a child's life when they acquire the skills of communication so rapidly.

In the early years of schooling when Literacy learning is so intense and rapid, any loss of or reduction in, effective learning can have serious consequences later in the child's life. With the curriculum already determined for each successive year, there is little time for support and remediation unless the child enters a special program of some sort, for example Reading Recovery. As the child gets older their willingness to participate in any such programs reduces because as they become more self aware and the peer group becomes more important, they don't wish to accept any sort of label that may indicate they are failing. In these circumstances children are caught in a dilemma between wanting or knowing they need to learn, the importance of their self-image and the feelings they have about literacy. Their attempts to resolve the dilemma may result in negative behaviours, lowered self-esteem or other expressions of internal conflict such as withdrawal from class activities or friends.

It has been well documented that of these children, more boys than girls, experience difficulties with literacy. This is supported by the much higher number of

boys attending reading recovery programs than girls. Research also indicates that the gap between the most and least able students increases as they get older. The widening of the gap does not indicate that students become less able with age, but more likely indicates that low achievers simply give up after a certain point. At the same time boys are involved in a significantly greater number of behaviour related incidents in schools than girls.

This submission will argue that the two issues, literacy levels and poor behaviour in boys are closely linked and that any program that aims to improve one must include the other. This submission therefore, will focus on loss of learning that occurs as a consequence of children who behave poorly and the link between behaviour and decreased or below average literacy skills.

Behaviour management and Learning.

Definition

What is behaviour management? What is learning? And how are they linked?

Behaviour has been defined in many different ways ranging from responses to external stimuli (Skinner) to a response to internal needs (Glasser). However, a useful definition of behaviour in an educational context is:

'The way a pupil relates and responds to fellow pupils, teachers, parents and physical environment. (Self-Discipline and Pastoral Care p10)

Misbehaviour then is a consequence of a child's inability to relate and respond appropriately. Their actions have a negative effect upon themselves or those around them, and are contrary to the school or class rules. The range of misbehaviours begins with minor actions such as interrupting, talking in class or not paying attention and may run to extreme violence, or serious verbal abuse. Behaviour management is the term currently used to describe how a school or a teacher deals with misbehaviour of various sorts. A behaviour management policy includes not only a statement of rules and consequences but also a description of the school or institution's beliefs about what constitutes acceptable behaviour. These are drawn from the wider community and generally reflect

community values. Sometimes the policy may be based on a particular method of behaviour management. For example, many schools in the A.C.T. use a behaviour management practice based on the work of William Glasser (Stoddart, 1992). However, across our diverse community there are many forms of acceptable behaviour, some mutually exclusive to each other.

The term behaviour management is closely linked with discipline and to many represents the same idea. Discipline has been defined as

'**The functioning of the school community through a system of relationships, rules, rewards and sanctions designed to develop progressively self discipline within pupils. (Self Discipline and Pastoral care, P10)**

It may also be defined as

'**A constraint on conduct in order to achieve certain objectives believed to be worthwhile.'(Lovegrove and Lewis, 1991. p 68)**

Both definitions implicitly state the need for rules if agreed objectives are to be met. In the school context this means that a child 'follows the rules' or 'accepts the consequences'.

Learning may be broadly defined as the process by which various sorts of knowledge are acquired and used meaningfully. The factors effecting learning are many and diverse and will not be discussed at length in this submission. Some that are directly related to behaviour management and literacy learning issues are discussed later in this submission.

Linking learning and behaviour

Both learning and behaviour require the child to understand what is required and to accept these understandings as necessary and important. If a child does not accept rules they may misbehave. If they do not understand why rules are set or what they are learning their chances of achieving success may be reduced. It is essential that children have both understanding and acceptance of why learning and behaviour are important, if they are to see any meaning in what they are doing at school.

For any child lack of success in school activities can have a serious effect upon continued learning. Lack of success can lead to loss of self-esteem, reduced desire to

learn, withdrawal from activities or overt misbehaviour. The central issue of lack of success and its subsequent effects on student attitudes and behaviours at school, is one that can have a significant impact on learning at any time, but particularly in the first three or four years of schooling when language acquisition is at its most rapid.

How then do schools manage students who are experiencing lack of success in school and literacy in particular? This submission will argue that schools tend to treat the issues of behaviour and learning as separate. Students who are failing in their learning are given extra support through a variety of programs both in and outside the school, such as Reading Recovery or Learning Assistance. These programs have the correct aim of supporting the child in their learning so that they can catch up material that they may have lost, or to build skills to a functional level. They are focussed on learning and knowledge acquisition. There is an implicit assumption that as a child experiences success, they will become more self confident, able and resilient in future learning.

Children who manifest behavioural problems follow a different, behaviour management pathway that focussed on their behaviour and its consequences. It is important to note that not all poor behaviours are related to learning success or failure. Children who are very able for example, may experience behaviour difficulties due to other circumstances. These might include, peer pressures, parental discord or cultural differences. However, all poor behaviour will have some impact upon the learning of a child regardless of their place on the academic hierarchy. The impact may be due to the child's lack of attention, talking to others or non-completion of work. The behaviour management policy itself may have an impact upon the child's learning in that many policies explicitly state short or long term withdrawal from class until the child is able to agree to behaviour changes. Further, some schools will use detention, making up work or extra work as logical consequences to poor behaviour. If the child is acting out because they are unsuccessful at their work these consequences either play into the child's hands e.g., withdrawal from class, or ask the child to do more of what is causing the problem.

It is this author's assertion that supporting only one side or the other of the behaviour-learning equation will not achieve the same success as supporting both sides together. If the root cause of a child's behaviour is related to poor learning outcomes,

then any program to improve learning outcomes must address not only academic skills but also behavioural outcomes of learning.

The nature of intervention.

Points of intervention.

As has been described earlier, current models of support for students with poor learning outcomes (mainly boys), focus either on behaviour or literacy skills. Intervention occurs through two different agencies. The classroom teacher and the school executive for behaviour management, and the classroom teacher and support staff, for example, the Reading Recovery teacher, for literacy learning. In both cases most schools would inform parents and involve them to a greater or lesser degree in whatever process is being followed.

It is clear that in both instances there is a degree of congruence in terms of staff and parent involvement. The divergence occurs at the level of specific literacy or social skill development where specialist teachers or other support staff, such as the school counsellor, are brought in to provide a concentrated focus on the area of difficulty. It is at this point that there can be a separation of the behavioural and academic needs of the child with each being treated as a separate focus of concern.

Diagram 1 illustrates how learning and behaviour can be linked and the importance of a child's level of self-esteem, social skills and literacy strategies in determining a child's response to learning. It also clearly illustrates the different levels at which intervention occurs at the present time. There may be some cross over as both behaviour, and learning success and failure, are directly related to the child's internal resources. If these are deficient the child can experience academic success but may still behave poorly, and conversely, may not be academically successful but possesses the internal resiliency to manage those outcomes well. In either case, the nature of the initial intervention varies according which problem education system sees as most significant at the time. While many behaviour management strategies note the importance of the linkage between behaviour and learning, none explicitly addresses the ways in which the

two can be managed as a composite in the class. The following is a list of the more common behaviour management strategies currently in use in Australia and overseas. (taken from '*Building Classroom Discipline*' by C.M.Charles. 1989.).

Dealing with the group: Redl and Watenberg Model

Withitness, Alerting, and Group Management: Kounin Model

Shaping Desired Behaviour: Neo-Skinnerian Model

Addressing the Situation with Sane Messages: Ginott Model

Confronting Mistaken Goals: Dreikurs Model

Body Language, Incentive Systems, and Providing Efficient help: Jones Model

Assertively Taking Charge: Canter Model

Good behaviour Comes from Good Choices and Meeting Needs: Glasser Model

Self Esteem

Evidence suggests that a lack of success in academic learning can have adverse effects upon an individual's self esteem. Lowered self esteem can lead to decreased willingness to take risks, to engage in challenging activities and an increased fear of failure. If there is no structured process in place to support an improvement in self esteem then the simple provision of material resources may not be sufficient to break the cycle of poor academic performances leading to lowered self worth and behavioural changes leading to persistent poor learning outcomes. Ultimately, any self-esteem program can only provide opportunity, it cannot of itself, create change. Only the child can change their thinking.

Social skills and status

An additional important factor that links behaviour and learning is the role that a child's level of social skills plays in academic and behavioural success. Children with poor social skills have difficulty making friends, interacting positively with other students and adults and coping with frustrations or failure successfully (O'Neal, 1997.). Many schools explicitly teach social skills to children of all ages as part of their program. However, for the young child who has poor social skills and is learning to read, write and spell, the combination of academic, social and emotional pressures can lead to significant difficulties during the first few years of school.

The importance of social skills has been highlighted by Hepler (1997), as being fundamental to the ability of a child to become a high or low status individual in the class. The status of a child in the class can determine the level and nature of interactions that they will have in the class. Other factors are also important in determining status. These include intelligence, appearance, athletic ability and disabilities among others (Hepler, 1994). The nature of a child's position within the class will impact upon how they respond to educational or behavioural support. For example a boy may enjoy high status in his class because of his excellent athletic skills and cheerful personality. However, he may be performing poorly academically. When faced with the prospect of going to a specialist teacher or class for assistance he may well resist as such a move would be seen as going with the 'losers'. The child sees themselves as being 'labelled', which they are, and as a consequence may actively resist any intervention. As peers play a greater and greater role in a child's life as they grow older then the importance of status assumes greater and greater weight, therefore there will be greater and greater resistance to participation in any support program. This is why intervention of any sort should occur as early as possible.

There is a fundamental conflict between what the child sees as important, his status, and what the school sees as important, his learning. One way around this is to link status with academic performance. Not all children are academically capable but may possess talents in other fields such as the Arts, sport and so on. Most schools emphasise that the whole person should be developed and each person's individual talents valued. Students therefore gain credit for a diversity of abilities or capabilities. It is this author's experience however that there are some activities that bring greater status than others. Of these sports ability is the most notable. Why this is so is debatable, but it could be argued that it reflects a strong trait in Australian society. Certainly both the electronic and print media place a high value on sport and sporting success as evidenced by the number of hours of programming and column inches devoted to all forms of sport per week.

The fact remains every child needs to reach a certain academic standard in literacy if they are going to be able to function successfully in society. If a child cannot reach the standard they are in danger of losing status, not necessarily in the eyes of their

peers, but in the eyes of the school. Which is more important to the child? As suggested previously, in most cases their peers.

In these circumstances how do schools join self-esteem programs, behaviour management strategies and literacy support programs in a meaningful way?

Implementation of intervention.

The Teacher

There are a number of factors that effect the success or failure of programs within schools. It can be argued that the most important of these relate to the teacher and teaching practice. The links between good teaching and successful student discipline have been well documented in a number of sources (Shipman, 1985, Burden, 1995, Charles, 1989.). This submission does not intend to canvas that literature but rather to draw together elements of good classroom practice, successful student discipline and learning. The importance of quality teaching and committed teachers has already been alluded in earlier sections of this article (Gilbert, 1994, Glasser, 1997) and some of their attributes described. Two authors (Galton, 1999, Harris, 1998), talk about the 'art of teaching' when describing teacher practice. Galton sees it as the ability of a teacher to meet the need fit the context and having knowledge about what works and what doesn't

Harris in his review of effective teaching describes the art of teaching as a teacher being creative, sophisticated in practice, reflective and having the ability to link effective teaching with effective learning. Both authors note that teachers exhibiting such behaviours have an increased chance of high student involvement and lowered discipline problems. The Jones model of behaviour management (Charles, 1989), distills out the behaviours of successful teachers and presents them in a way that any teacher can practice and use. For Jones, effective body language, individual help and good incentive schemes are the basis of creating success for children. The importance of student involvement in and ownership of classroom practice and rule setting is also seen as very important to developing a positive class environment (Harris, 1998, Mooij, 1999.).

Ownership can come about through good communication between student and teacher, and a number of authors have stressed the need for clear, effective talking that draws the student into dialogue and not into confrontation (Gilbert 1994,Oswald 1997, Ostrishko 1997). In the instances where this has occurred discipline problems have become more manageable and students have experienced more success in class.

The importance of the child understanding the processes in operation in a class or discipline program is also seen as vital to reducing poor student behaviours. Glasser (Glasser, 1997), asserts that teaching why we behave helps us to understand how we can change behaviour. Oswald (Oswald 1997), and Gilbert (Gilbert 1994), also both emphasise the need for any classroom and procedural practices to be clearly explained, transparent and consistently applied. In the case of literacy learning, omission or incorrect learning of a concept can have serious consequences for future learning. Therefore any intervention program must include the facility for students to check and revisit learning in order to ensure they fully understand. The goals and processes of any program must be clearly stated and subject to negotiation.

Most behaviour management programs assert that the need to value the student (Gilbert 1994, Harris 1998), and have them accept responsibility for their actions (Gilbert 1994, Glasser 1997, Mooij 1999), are valuable parts of successful practice. These attributes play a significant role in building and supporting a student's self esteem, and developing a positive attitude towards school and learning (Charles 1989).

This very brief overview has illustrated a number of characteristics shared by successful teachers: Teachers who are able to provide quality programs while maintaining reduced or low levels of poor classroom behaviour. Importantly, it seems possible that improved or high levels of student discipline are not necessarily related to the form of behaviour management program in operation. They can be related to other factors like ability to communicate, understand student's problems, providing challenging, interesting and relevant programs and the ability to build and maintain a good rapport.

An important point to note here is that by definition most teachers are not necessarily gifted teachers. They have varied abilities as do the employees in any job. Given this basic fact, together with the equally basic fact that the best results can be

achieved using skills often associated with exceptional teachers, effective intervention will work best if every teacher can be given the tools or shown how to act, as though they were exceptional. This means that however intervention occurs it has to be easily implemented by the existing staff. It needs to be practical, flexible and effective to achieve acceptance by the teachers and the pupils.

Blending Literacy learning, social skills and behaviour management.

The model proposed by this submission is intended to demonstrate how programs that are already part of the school support system can be integrated in a way that improves the outcomes for students. As has been described above students who are experiencing difficulties with learning may exhibit poor behaviour or lack social skills. The three areas are linked in such an involved way that there is little chance of pointing to one and saying here is the cause. If social skills are lacking, behaviour is affected. If behaviour is poor then learning is affected. At the present support programs target each of these areas as separate, although there is some presumption that improvement in one will lead to improvement in the others.

Profiling

In this integrated model, existing programs will be combined and streamlined to focus attention on the individual needs of the child in ways that address specific needs. Fundamental to the program is the need for accurate assessment of the child's literacy, behavioural and social needs. This assessment should occur early in the first year of school, perhaps within the first four weeks. This is similar to a process that already occurs in Victoria for Literacy assessment. The assessment should be carried out by the class teacher and contain information from the parent and from the pre-school teacher. A profile of the child should be constructed which indicates strengths and areas of need in learning, behaviour and social skills (Many school report formats would provide an excellent basis for child's 'profile.). These profiles should follow the child throughout their schooling and could form the basis of reporting to parents. Being mindful of the amount of work involved in writing assessments on a class of children, they would be as user friendly as possible. The accurate assessment of rate and level of learning should be an ongoing task and rely on work done as part of the normal class process, rather than

additional testing. Behaviour and social skills assessment would be based on observational data from the class and playground and would be backed up by information from the parents or other agencies where available. These profiles would then form part of the planning process for providing support to children in need.

Updates of these profiles should be made annually or when the need arises. For example a student may experience behavioural changes halfway through the year that have significant effect upon their learning. In such a case an additional assessment would be undertaken prior to further action. Emphasis would be placed on determining which one, or combination, of learning, behaviour or social skills requires support.

Creating an individual program

Once a child's needs have been determined then a support program tailored to those needs could be implemented. The aim of the program would be to meet the central need of the child, whether it is learning, behaviour or social skills, and also to address the related issues. The teachers or support personnel involved in this process would be working toward shared goals on the basis of accurate information. Rather than having programs that focus on only one aspect of the problem, there would be a holistic approach to helping the child. This form of support provision has significant consequences for schools. Although existing literacy, behaviour management and social skills programs in the school would retain the same content they would need to be implemented in a different way. Instead of having discrete reading or peer support programs that last for a defined period of time for example, there would need to be an ongoing facility within the school to provide the programs as needed. Not only would the programs need to be available at all times but they would need to be flexible enough to allow students to enter and leave them as needed. This has consequences for classroom practice.

The burden of supporting this program

Who is going to oversee individual programs within a school. The first point to make is that there will be a relatively small number of students who would fall into such programs. Most students will continue their studies in the normal school programs, while teachers facilitate the learning process using techniques and strategies they feel are most

effective. For those who exhibit the need for a special program, whether it is for literacy, social skills or behaviour, there should be some person or persons who are responsible for program initiation, maintenance and evaluation. The obvious candidates for this task are the classroom teacher, school executive or the school counsellor or specialist teacher.

There are difficulties associated with nominating any of these individuals. A school counsellor or specialist teacher may only be in the school part-time, the classroom teacher and the executive already have a full schedule and additional work will only place more pressure on them. Therefore the answer is to rearrange existing tasks so that the same amount of work is done but in a different way.

Firstly the load must be shared. The classroom teacher with the prime responsibility must assume responsibility for the profile. Any child presenting with problems needs to be assessed by a committee. This already happens in many schools through the intervention of a school special needs committee. After assessment of the child by the committee a program is devised and persons responsible for each aspect assigned specific roles. For example for a child having reading difficulties and misbehaving in class, the executive teacher may commence a behaviour modification program that incorporates teaching specific social skills. At the same time the classroom teacher may implement a modified reading program that teaches the child the skills they are lacking. Regular contact between all parties is essential.

The difference between current practice and the proposed practice lies in the coordinated approach towards the child's needs. All aspects of behaviour, learning and social skills learning are addressed in such a way as to give the child specific support in these areas.

For the teacher the difficulty in maintaining one or more of these programs in the class lies in their ability to teach a whole class while meeting individual needs. Although there is a number of ways of teaching to diverse needs within a classroom, such as cooperative learning, small group strategies and autonomous learning, they all require teachers to be familiar with these techniques of management and to have the opportunity to practise them. In classes where these practices are in operation the inclusion of a coordinated support program would complement class practice. However, not all teachers are able or willing to implement these strategies in their classes. In these circumstances

support from outside the class would be beneficial. This could come from school executive or support staff such as the counsellor.

Recommendations.

1. That all students are assessed annually in terms of their behaviour, learning and social skills and an ongoing profile compiled.

2. That this profile is updated as necessary.

3. That current literacy, behaviour management and social skills programs are reviewed and coordinated so a more flexible delivery can be achieved.Created by Default

4. That any child who presents as needing support in any of these areas be evaluated through a school based committee and a coordinated program drawn up for that child.

5. That any program that is drawn up for a child contains processes that support learning, behaviour and social skills development in an integrated manner.

6. That programs such as peer support or reading recovery be made flexible enough in delivery so that children can enter or leave as their needs require.

Reference List.

Burden, P. R. (1995) Classroom Management and Discipline. Methods to facilitate cooperation and instruction. Longman U.S.A.

Charles, C. M. (1989) Building Classroom Discipline. Longman. N.Y.

Galton, M., Hargreaves, L., Comber, C., Wall, D., & Pell, T. (1999). Changes in patterns of teacher interaction in primary classrooms: 1976-96. *British Education research Journal. 25*(1), 23-37.

Gilbert, M., & McInnes, M. (1994) Pathways for change. In J, Izard & M Tainsh (Ed), *widening horizons (pp109-120).*Melbourne, Victoria. The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd.

Glasser, W. (1985) Control Theory. A new explanation of how we control our lives. Perennial Library. Harper and Row. New York.

Glasser, W. (1997). A new look at school failure and school success. *Phi Delta Kappan 78*(8), 596-602.

Harris, A. (1998) Effective Teaching: A Review of the Literature. *School Leadership and Management 18*(2) 169-183.

Hepler, J. B. (1997) Social development of children: The role of peers. *Social Work in Education.* Washington.

Lovegrove, M. N., Lewis, R.(Eds.). (1991) Classroom Discipline. Longman Cheshire. Australia.

Mooij, T. (1999). Promoting prosocial pupil behaviour: 1-A multilevel model. *The British Journal of Educational Psychology, 69*(4), 469-475.

O'Neal, G. (1997) Focusing on strengths in a special education class: A primary prevention approach. *Social Work in Education.* 19(4)

Ostrishko, G. (1997). The Reality of Experience. In Deeply Rooted, Branching out, 1972-1997. Annual AEE International Conference proceedings, North Carolina, U.S.

Oswald, M., Johnson, B., & Whitington, V. (1997) Classroom discipline problems in South Australian government and independent schools: Is there a difference? *Research in Education, 58, p59-70*

Self Discipline and Pastoral Care (1981). A report of the committee of inquiry into pupil behaviour and discipline in schools. Government printer. N.S.W.

Shipman, M. D. (1985) The Management of Learning in the Classroom. Hodder and Staughton. Great Britain.

Stoddart, J. (1992) School based discipline policies and procedures in the Australian Capital Territory. *In Discipline in Australian Public education: Changing policy and practice.* Ed. R Slee. ACER. Victoria.