

BOYS AND EDUCATION - POWER CONFLICT AND WITHDRAWAL

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Introduction:

In this seminar, I explore the findings of my Master's research on power, conflict and withdrawal in the classroom and the implications for boys education.

Teachers are concerned that **students don't listen**. Students are concerned that **teachers don't listen**. Students get angry, frustrated and irritated with the **excessive use of power by teachers**. Teachers get frustrated, angry and irritated by the **withdrawal of students from the educational process**. Boys in particular, are engaged in the power struggles and in withdrawal. **Thus, ironically, the powerful social expectations on teachers to maintain control, in itself, creates a classroom climate hostile to the participatory processes and mutual respect necessary for education to occur.**

The recommendations coming out of the research suggest that alternative views of power are needed. Instead of teachers struggling to maintain **power over** students, it is suggested that the students' need for power should be accommodated rather than resisted by providing them with **power to (self - efficacy) and Power with (social efficacy)**. Such a shift means more negotiated curriculum and more responsibility, accountability and autonomy for students.. It means teachers working towards the **ideal speech conditions** of mutual exchange suggested by critical theorists as a first priority in the classroom.

I have attempted to put the concerns about discipline and boy's education into the theoretical framework of the cognitive rationalist theorists. In the process I examine the attributes of schools and the attributes of boys in relation to the framework to show the sources of power struggle, conflict and withdrawal and therefore to show the possible sources of resolution to some of these concerns.

Theoretical Perspectives on Human Motivation:

The cognitive rationalists suggest that each person constructs their own meaning of each social situation from their own internal belief system. We choose our behaviour to meet our underlying needs. Glasser calls this **control theory**.

1. HABERMAS

Habermas, subsumes to some extent the ideas of the others in his understanding that as humans we operate out of three major cognitive interests:

- **The technical** characterised by a drive for **control and order**.
- **The practical** characterised by **social relations and norms** developed through language in community. (Commonsense is what the community understands to be *normal*.)
- **Autonomy** characterised by a drive to be **free and self directed**. This leads to social critique and the **struggle for justice**.

AT THIS POINT WE COLOUR IN OUR HABERMAS DIAGRAM: BLUE FOR BOYS - PINK FOR GIRLS ACCORDING TO OUR PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CLASSROOM OPERATION.

2. MASLOW/GLASSER

Maslow assumes a hierarchy of human need and Glasser does not but their categories are similar.

- **actualisation/freedom**
- **esteem /success/worth**
- **love/belonging/fun**
- **safety and security**

NOW HIGHLIGHT THE BOYISH GIRLISH DOMAINS ACCORDING TO YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR DOMINANT CLASSROOM OPERATION

3. BALSON'S MISBEHAVIOURS

Balson suggests that there are four types of motivation for misbehaviour:

- **Attention seeking**
- **Power displays**
- **Revenge**
- **withdrawal**

Misbehaviour as a group phenomenon.

While it is easy enough to deal with a student one to one in a discipline transaction using the Glasser ideas, every teacher knows that discipline is a group thing.

"Its that awful 10B class again,"they say.

Professor Maurice Balson in his book "Understanding Classroom Behaviour." suggests that misbehaviour is a performance for an audience. It is triggered by the social setting in conjunction with students unmet need. His argument is that for a cluster of adolescents the most powerful need is the need to belong to the group. If the setting is competitive rather than cooperative or if the student's mind set is tuned to *competitive* as is the case in many classrooms the student will adopt a role as a disrupter to gain status with the group and therefore to have identity within the group even if that means being the class idiot. That is at least better than being a nobody.

CONTINUE THE COLOURING IN EXERCISE

Why Do Teachers (and students) Misbehave?

To meet their perceived need because they cannot meet that need in productive ways in this particular environment.

Key: Refer to this table when interpreting any set of data.

Misbehaviours (Balson)	Recognition by recipients feelings	Maslow/Glasser Unmet Need	Actor's feelings
M1 Attention seeking	irritation	N1 Love, belonging, affection, fun	rejection
M2 Power display	Anger, self defence	N2 Safety, security, order, control	Threat, anxiety
M3 Revenge	Shock, hurt, humiliation	N3 Self esteem, sense of worth	Sense of failure, worthlessness
M4 Withdrawal	Helplessness	N4 Self Fulfilment, Freedom of choice	Boredom, despair, depression

What are the attributes of schools which contribute to misbehaviour?

Schools as institutions need examination through Glasser eyes to see whether they are not themselves major sources of their own discipline problems. Mass schooling is after all a very

constrained environment. How can schools act to overcome their own inner contradictions and meet students needs?

Freedom and choice: Schooling is compulsory, so passivity and disruption are ways to express freedom. We seek therefore to give choice in curriculum offerings and internal options to meet individual needs.

Fun and enjoyment: The curriculum needs to be as engaging, demanding, involving, stimulating and rewarding as we can make it. Otherwise, students will create their own fun in disruptive activities.

Security and structure: Regular order and predictability and clear expectations of what is required in work and in behaviour, and regular routines all help students to achieve. This is especially important for A.D.D. students.

Belonging and love: For many students, the socialisation opportunities of school are its key value and curriculum is an extra. (For some their exclusion from this socialisation is their greatest source of misery.) This all works against teachers' curriculum intentions. This drive can be harnessed by using cooperative learning strategies and other productive group strategies. It is also necessary to diminish the sort of bullying which acts by deprivation of intimacy. It is very difficult for a child to learn when every social message they are receiving says "You do not belong!"

Worth and respect- Success and personal power: As previously mentioned, success in fellow students' eyes can be gained by clowning around so it is essential that curriculum objectives are attainable and appropriate for each student.

NOW RATE YOUR SCHOOL IN TERMS OF THE MASLOW GLASSER CATEGORIES.

- FUN_____ BOREDOM
- CHOICE_____ COMPULSION
- SECURITY_____ FEAR
- BELONGING _____ EXCLUSION
- SUCCESS/POWER _____ FAILURE /DISEMPOWERMENT

THE ATTRIBUTES OF BOYS:

THIS IS OBVIOUSLY A POLITICALLY INCORRECT THING TO DO!!!!!!!

However as Dean of Students for several years I know and did the stats. To show that eighty five percent of students punished or corrected or counselled in that office for disruptive confrontational behaviour were boys.

Are we to conclude that : **boys are bad**
girls are good?

Some may wish to do that but it actually appears that the disruption arises out of a clash between the culture of schools and the nature and culture of boys. (Girls misbehave in other ways which may not be in their ultimate best interests either. Is conformity to school expectations and a strong work ethic and avoidance of power clashes really the path to high achievement in the wider world outside the school?) Whether the attributes of boys is due to biological hardwiring or social programming, I think the best way forward is to use Piaget's definition of intelligence as a model. He says intelligence is the adaptation of the biological in the social context(- a nice sidestep.) Likewise if we examine the attributes of boys in schools we can make some decisions on how to change schooling to suit boys better and how to train boys better for a productive life in school and in a democratic society. Part of this is a societal

task to broaden the understanding of what it is to be a good man or good men and intentionally allow for broader and deeper options.

BOYS IN TROUBLE:

Some social values and actions -

- Putting others down
- Doing crazy risky things to belong
- Scoring points, acting out
- Harassing anybody different
- Bullying, threatening violence, carrying weapons
- Urging others to fight
- Turning against learning/*Cool to be a fool*
- Struggling with how to be male- to be powerful, to succeed
- Getting abused, humiliated, and saying nothing
- Treating girls as stupid/ only good for sex

Rollo Browne 1995

Outcomes for Boys - Academic

- 10% fewer boys than girls complete Year 12
- 75% of school suspensions are boys
- 60% of school counsellor referrals are boys
- 9 times as many boys as girls in special classes for emotional and behavioural disturbance
- 3 times as many boys as girls in special reading classes
- Boys do considerably worse in basic skills English tests than girls

Richard Fletcher 1995

- 3 times as many boys as girls get A on the core skills test and perform below 4 on their O.P. Geoffrey Butler - 1999

Outcomes for Boys - Life

- Boys die at twice the rate of girls from injuries
- Juvenile males commit violent assaults 9 times more often than girls
- 5 Boys suicide for every 1 girl
- Boys are 9 times more likely to be convicted on drug charges than girls
- Young men are 6 times more likely than girls to be killed at work and 7 times more likely to be permanently disabled
- 97% of those who are HIV positive in Australia are males
- On any one day in Australia there are 1100 boys and 200 girls in custody
- 100% of reported rapes are by males

Richard Fletcher 1995

So what are our responses to this information as individuals, School communities and Lutheran Schools System?

Your Reaction

I knew this

I've wondered about this.....

I'm very surprised to hear this.....

Your Concern

I'm not concerned about this.....

I'm a little concerned about this....

I'm very concerned about this.....

Your School Community's Reaction

We've not talked about this.....

We've talked about this.....

We've instituted systematic social - emotional and self care programmes for boys at our School.....

It would seem fairly obvious that a shift in thinking is required in society but particularly in schools. This shift is from information transmission and processing to explicit training in the social - emotional skills as a necessary conjunction with academic training especially for boys. The thesis here is that **academic achievement is dependent on social - emotional development in boys and that schools have a significant role to play in cooperation with parents in this social - emotional development.**

To attend to these needs, schools, parents, teachers and the boys themselves need some understanding of the social emotional development of boys and the structures and resources and strategies necessary to deal with various phases of boy's development.

Boys Need

- Affection
- Organising
- Reasonable control
- Adventure, Action, Creativity
- Fun, Freedom, Personal Power
- Adult Male Mentors
- Hope, Patience
- Training in speaking, listening and reading

Steve Biddulph - 1997

School Discipline and Boys Culture - M. Ed. Research

The conflict with boy's culture and boy's nature is particularly obvious in discipline transactions in schools and in the operation of classrooms. In my recent research, I simply asked students **what teacher behaviours make you angry, frustrated or irritated?** and I asked teachers **what student behaviours make you angry, frustrated or irritated?**

Such a question is like asking Boarders if they would like to complain about the food so the results are not an indication of perpetual classroom climate but rather, an indication of what behaviours operate to break down good classroom climate in those instances when the classroom is not operating well.

The findings of this research can be summarised in quite a tight manner.

Teachers are concerned that **students don't listen**. Students are concerned that **teachers don't listen**. Students get angry, frustrated and irritated with the **excessive use of power by teachers**. Teachers get frustrated, angry and irritated by the **withdrawal of students from the educational process**. Boys in particular, are engaged in the power struggles and in withdrawal. **Thus, ironically, the powerful social expectations on teachers to maintain control, in itself, creates a classroom climate hostile to the participatory processes and mutual respect necessary for education to occur.** If boys are programmed to fight for autonomy and pride, then confronting them in a power struggle is more or less bound to produce defeat for the classroom, the teacher and the boy or boys concerned. Either the classroom is constantly disrupted by power misbehaviour or the self-defeating misbehaviour of student withdrawal.

Recommendations

The recommendations coming out of my research suggest that alternative views of power are needed. Instead of teachers struggling to maintain **power over** students, it is suggested that the students' need for power should be accommodated rather than resisted by providing them with **power to (self - efficacy) and Power with (social efficacy)**. Such a shift means more negotiated curriculum and more responsibility, accountability and autonomy for students.. It means teachers working towards the **ideal speech conditions** of mutual exchange suggested by critical theorists as a first priority in the classroom.

Self - efficacy for boys would mean explicit training in the particular skills needed for school success such as speaking, reading, listening and cooperation and personal organisation. (How often as teachers have we bemoaned the fact that so many of our year 9 boys are disorganised and offered no persistent direction and training and reinforcement in the organisation necessary to survive at school.) We need to offer boys constant opportunities to speak, to read silently or aloud and to cooperate and take responsibility without belittlement. Such education fits with their need for autonomy and personal empowerment.

Social - efficacy would involve programmes which:

- legitimise feelings and build emotional literacy (the ability to recognise and name feelings.)
- manage anger and develop moral reasoning
- develop awareness of gender construction and provide good information on sexuality and help boys and girls to relate to each other respectfully as different but O.K.
- teach the difference between assertiveness and aggression.
- use positive classroom techniques like cooperative learning to build interactive classroom relationships
- raise the profile of the expressive arts like Art, Drama, Music and Dance because these give boys the opportunity to engage in emotional expression and explore issues that matter rather than suffering in silence or lashing out.

In addition to this sort of specific social - emotional training, Rollo Browne:229 - 233 suggests that schools need to:

- **supply appropriate external constraints** such as clear discipline policies related to student welfare,
- **involve** the parent body, **especially fathers**
- **structure** the school day and spaces to reduce bullying interactions.
- **provide successful role models** on how good men get their needs met without violence.
- use **collaborative use of power** within the school structure as one especially effective method of modelling.
- **challenge dominant stereotypes of masculinity** - tough, power - seeking, status - seeking and unemotional - need to be challenged in contextual classroom discussion and in the kind of men who work in the school.

Habermas can have the last word. It is the balance between order, freedom and social relationships which needs to be established in schools in their structures, processes and curriculum if boys are to be successfully educated to become good men. There is an arguable

case for a shift away from **power over** in the direction of **power to** and **power with**. This is a shift from the authoritarian model of operation to an educative model. It is a shift towards the reduced power differentials and open communication of the **ideal speech situation**. Is this really Lutheran?

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