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ABSTRACT

School discipline and behavior management is an area of considerable contest in educational policy formation. Additionally, educators have a greater responsibility to engage in more rigorous theorizing as a first step to more useful research. The first part of this paper distinguishes between "discipline" as a discourse of management and control and educational theories of student discipline and student behavior. By exploring and contrasting the epistemological foundations for classroom management with an educational theory of discipline, the paper proposes a greater range of interventions that free educators from both neo-Skinnerian behavioral straitjackets and from what Basil Bernstein (1996) has referred to as "spurious biology" or "sets of biological metaphors" that proceed from an acceptance that disruption in schools represents a problem of dysfunctional individual pathologies. The second part explores the political economy of surveillance and control in schools, offers observations on shortcomings of traditional methods of control, and considers new forms of student control. The paper suggests, by providing vignettes from two projects, ways of pursuing discipline that eschews short-term behaviorism and provides school communities with greater opportunity for educational progress. (Contains 87 references.) (LMI)

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# Theorizing Discipline - Practical Research Implications for Schools.

**American Educational Research Association  
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## **Introduction: The Political Economy of Classroom Management**

People in this audience will be aware that England is presently in the grip of an unannounced election campaign. Education has assumed center stage in the theater of British electoral politics. Each of the three major parties is attempting to convince the electorate that under their stewardship educational standards, by which they mean academic outcomes (test scores), will significantly improve. In order to secure this target the political focus is narrowed to: raising levels of literacy and numeracy, giving schools greater authority over the selection of students, intensifying the level of surveillance and inspection, and, not surprisingly, restoring discipline in the classroom and school playground. I say that it is unsurprising that school discipline and student behavior are singled out for particular political attention as the issue has occupied considerable media space.

In November of last year the Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Shephard, fell out with the Prime Minister when, en route to another engagement, she conducted a radio interview on her mobile telephone. In the course of the interview she expressed her preference for the reintroduction of corporal punishment. This interview occurred following the closure of the Ridings School in Yorkshire because the school was deemed to be 'failing' by the Ofsted [Office for Standards in Education] inspectors. The General Secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, Nigel de Gruchy, argued that before the school could turn itself around at least 80 students needed to be excluded. Mrs. Shephard's announcement also followed controversy in Nottingham where teachers withdrew their labor in order to have a student permanently excluded from their school. The call for the reintroduction of corporal punishment coincided with the media highlighting the serious escalation in the number of permanent exclusions of students from British schools. What is particularly significant about this blowout in the number of exclusions is its racial character (Parsons, 1996; Gardiner, 1996; Gillborn, 1997). 1996 was also etched into the discipline debate as the year of the killing of a South London head-teacher as he stepped in to protect a student from a 'gang' outside the school gates at the end of a school day.

Consistent with media interest and political debate, teachers' call for behavior management programs is increasing. Subscriptions to in-service education programs that deal with student behavior have risen. Accordingly, I was not surprised to see the flyers in my mail for a series of seminars to be conducted by 'the North American behavior management expert', Lee Canter. I was familiar with his work from my own academic reading (Canter & Canter, 1976), and from the establishment of an offshore cell of his American 'behavior management' parent company in Western Australia. Britain is now playing host to another of his offshore ventures. The Australian behavior management entrepreneur, Bill Rogers has also cashed in on the UK market (1990). On top of the call for more off-site Pupil Referral Units, classroom

management kits and training videos, the UK is now moving, although more cautiously than was the case in either the US or Australia, into the early stages of an ADHD epidemic. Classroom management and the student control industry is robust and thriving. None of this has been surprising to me. Prior to taking up my present appointment at the University of London, I taught in Australia where similar patterns had been established (Slee, 1992 & 1995).

I have also observed an international convergence of the politicization of student behavior. Let me provide an illustration of this point by rehearsing Australian variations on the themes we observed in the UK. Towards the end of 1995 a group of senior high school students were on a school camp on a small island off the coast of Queensland in Australia. In a set of events that reads like a William Golding novel, the students entered into a frenzied slaughter of a colony of nesting sea-birds. This was but a sequel to the frenzied political and media scrutiny that greeted them upon their return to the mainland.

Media reportage was widespread and intense spreading from the original incident to a general moral panic about the decline in standards of behavior in Australia's 'youth' and a valediction for the alleged death of family values. The incident coincided with the run up to a State election. Thenceforth, law and order was resurrected by the conservative opposition to embarrass the Labor government. Students in Queensland, so the reportage went, were out of control. The government, its eye nervously trained on the fickle electorate, sought to re-assert itself as a no-nonsense administration that was tough on disruptive student behavior.

Reprisals were exacted swiftly and severely upon the aberrant students. The offending students were tried before a tribunal convened to adjudicate their contravention of the provisions of the Wildlife Act. They were found guilty and ordered to undertake supervised community service work as restitution. This legally constituted body provided a forum for natural justice where rights to representation were protected.

Due process was however an early casualty to the politics of behavior in schools. Public debate was encouraged about whether the students had been dealt with severely enough - about whether or not they had learnt their lesson and about whether the community's appetite for revenge had been satiated. There followed a ceremony of public shaming far exceeding the recommendations of criminologist John Braithwaite's (1989) program of 'integrative shaming' for juvenile offenders. The school principal, together with younger students from the same school, disowned the students on national television. The opposition depicted the outcome as evidence of the soft liberalism of the government. The Minister for Education responded by announcing that these students would now be subjected to an education department inquiry. The 'ring leaders' were excluded from school during their preparations for their final examinations, and were presented with the option of attending adult evening school classes on the other side of town. A departure from legal precedent, the students were tried and punished twice.

I do not defend the actions of the students. Clearly they had transgressed the bounds of acceptable behavior and were responsible for an ecological crime. These students were in need of an environmental education. Schools provide the ideal forum for such instruction. The permanent exclusion of the students from school at this juncture of their academic careers had devastating implications for their educational and social outcomes thereby intensifying their hostility towards school and society. The potential for future cost to the state as a result of their disaffection is significant. We have some choices for the investment of social wealth - we may invest in education which bridges the present with the future, or we can force ourselves into investing in the criminal justice, welfare, or health systems to make up for failings in educational opportunities.

This incident produced collateral damage. At the time the Queensland Education Department had engaged me to advise on the re-writing of its discipline policies and strategies. Pursuant to the goal of more disciplined schooling I placed greater emphasis upon looking at relationships between school processes and outcomes than upon the end-stage sanctions. This was lost on a government that, following the 'mutton bird incident', wanted to reassure the community that:

- schools and teachers were not going to tolerate disruptive students;
- suspensions would be more frequent and longer;
- teachers would be instructed in behavior management skills;
- more counselors would be deployed in schools;
- additional behavior units would be established for excluded students; and
- greater resources would be provided for the 'adopt a cop' scheme.

The political parties then succumbed to a debate, now featuring in the UK as well, over whether it should '3 strikes and they're out' or '1 strike and they're out'. The most troubling aspect of this political pantomime was that the government was moved by populist calls for more punitive approaches to student disruption. Politicians and educators alike collapsed into the reductionist trap of seeking quick fixes for complex social and educational problems.

The purpose of this lengthy introduction is to suggest that school discipline and behavior management represents an area of considerable contest and struggle in educational policy-making. In this paper I will argue that educational researchers therefore have a greater burden of responsibility to engage with more rigorous theorizing as a first step toward more useful research. Research and literature in the field of school discipline are subject to conceptual slippage and reductionism. This discussion will offer clear distinctions between *discipline* as a discourse of management and control (e.g. Canter & Canter, 1976; Glasser, 1986)

and educational theories of school discipline and student behavior (Slee, 1995; Crittenden, 1991; Smith, 1985; Wilson, 1973). By exploring and contrasting the epistemological foundations for classroom management with an educational theory of discipline considerable room is offered for a greater range of interventions which free us both from neo-Skinnerian behavioral straightjackets and from what Basil Bernstein (1996) has referred to as '*spurious biology*' or '*sets of biological metaphors*' which proceed from an acceptance that disruption in schools represents a problem of dysfunctional individual pathologies.

The second part of this paper will further explore the political economy of surveillance and control in schools, offer observations on shortcomings of traditional methods of control, and consider new forms of student control. Finally the paper will suggest, by providing vignettes from two projects, ways of pursuing discipline that eschews short term behaviorism and provides school communities with greater opportunity for educational progress.

## **Part One: What's in a Word? Theorizing Discipline.**

### **1.1 Discipline or Control?**

Educational terminology simultaneously reveals and conceals meaning (Skrtic, 1991:124). Rorty (1989:77) refers to '*local final vocabularies*' which are deployed to reduce complexity and dissuade their authors and readers from pursuing precise definition. Roland Barthes (1972) had earlier written of this as the '*discourse of concealment*'. This applies to discussions about school discipline primarily because of a frequent failure to establish conceptual distinctions between *discipline* and *control*. The result of this failure is theoretical flabbiness - that is, conceptual slippage and reductionism (Slee, 1988). In its most frequent usage discipline becomes a synonym for control or punishment.

This reductionist tendency was identified by Berger (1979) who advised caution when approaching the '*mindless technology*' of classroom management techniques. For Berger the technology of behavior management paid too little attention to issues of context. Rich (1979:25) swam upstream in accusing Glasser of '*glibly*' underscoring the complexity of school-life. Simplification and reduction have been endemic to behaviorist models of classroom management. The language employed by Charles is indicative of the conceptual slippage from *discipline* as an educational process to the pragmatics of behavioral control.

*Teachers' attempts to prevent, suppress, control and redirect those behaviors make up the essence of class control, or as it is commonly called, classroom discipline.*

*(Charles, 1981:4)*

School discipline and classroom management literature has been dominated by different genres within educational psychology. The principal influences have been Skinner's (1968 & 1972) 'science of behavior', Adler's (1930) work on the underlying meanings of behavior, and Carl Roger's (1969) humanist psychology. These intellectual traditions have proven convenient to the task of governance in schools. Education departments and schools throughout Australia and the UK tend to draw from this tradition as they are recognized as providing the rationale and the machinery for student compliance as a precondition for learning. Bagley's (1914:6) somewhat Kantian expression of the project is clear:

*... subservience of the individual will to the will of the teacher.*

For liberal educational thinkers such as Hirst and Peters (1970), Wilson (1971) or Smith (1985) the behaviorist character of classroom management is in opposition to the educational aspirations of teachers and schools. Crittenden presses for a philosophical approach to safeguard the educational aims and values of the school from the myopia of behavioral pragmatism.

*A philosophical approach to classroom discipline, in its turn, cannot be indifferent to specific tactics and how effectively they work. However, its attention is focused primarily on underlying values that practices of classroom discipline explicitly or implicitly reflect. ... the major philosophical questions to be asked about styles of discipline are how they relate to educational values ( and the distinctive educational role of the school) and to moral values.*

*(Crittenden, 1991:67)*

An educational theory of discipline should demonstrate consistency between the goals of the curriculum, preferred pedagogies and the processes of school governance (Knight, 1988). Attention ought to be paid to the cognitive development and the social contexts of the learner (Vygotsky, 1962 & 1978). If 'discipline' is reduced to a euphemism for behavior modification, the educational value of the disciplinary regimen is compromised. The application of exclusively extrinsic methodologies obstructs the considered development of individual and group behavior in favor of submission and subversion. There is nothing new in these observations. Locke had *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) some time ago. He reflected upon the capacity of the tutor 'to create a disliking to that which it is his (sic) business to create a liking to' through the application of control mechanisms. Dewey (1916) expanded on this theme by reflecting upon the capacity of the teacher's control measures to drive aberrant behavior underground, thenceforth ensuring that things appeal to students 'on the side of trickery and evasion'. For Dewey the capacity for discipline to be symbiotic to the pedagogical process is its true measure of success:

*A person who is trained to consider his actions, to undertake them deliberately, is in so far forth disciplined. Add to this ability a power to endure in an intelligently chosen course in face of distraction, confusion, and difficulty, and you have the essence of discipline. ... Discipline is positive. To cow the spirit, to subdue inclination, to compel obedience, to mortify the flesh, to make a subordinate perform an uncongenial task - these things are not disciplinary according to the development of power to recognize what one is about and to persistence in accomplishment.*

*(Dewey, 1916:129)*



Simply put, educational connection becomes a cornerstone for discipline in schools. *Connection between the learner, what they are doing, how they are doing it and where it is leading them is fundamental to the development of an educational orderliness (Slee, 1995:28)*. Pursuing such theoretical clarity is immensely practical for teachers in classrooms as it invites them to draw upon their repertoires of professional knowledge and skills. Mr. and Ms Chipps don't have to make way for a classroom Dirty Harry. We can now put teaching and learning at the center of the frame when focusing upon the problem of discipline in schools.

Connection between the learner and the curriculum and how it is delivered pushes educational researchers to reconsider the context of students, together with their composite identities, and to question the relevance and utility of the curriculum on offer. Stephen Ball (1994) depicts the National Curriculum in the UK as a restorationist 'curriculum of the dead', which fails to engage other than the preferred students. Accordingly teachers are pressed to impose greater external control to compensate for the incapacity of the curriculum. In crude terms, we are simply asking too much of classroom management if we expect it to shield ineffective schooling or structural economic and social problems. If pedagogy and curriculum fail to reach out to students to encourage learning rather than reaffirm failure, we amplify disaffection and disruption. If students are aware that schooling is leading them nowhere and that they have nothing to lose by being disruptive, we have very serious problems that challenge even the most assertive of behavioral management programs. Teachers are cast as Sisyphus straining against the eternal rock of student disruption. My fear is that in the UK and increasingly in a conservative led Australia the emphasis upon narrowing the curriculum and restoring whole class instruction and rote learning immediately places greater numbers of students at risk of failure and increases the potential for trouble in schools.

## **1.2 Discipline and Democracy - the Problem of Authority.**

Let us conclude our brief discussion of the epistemology of the language of discipline by acknowledging the conceptual difficulty surrounding the representation of authority in schools. This too is not an academic indulgence. Our choices have practical implications for the level of engagement of the citizenry in the community (Hirschi, 1969). Perhaps this can be pursued by posing a series of questions:

- *Do we seek the restoration [or endurance] of authoritarian organisational and educational cultures?*
- *Do we prefer to educate teachers to be authoritative or authoritarian?*
- *What is the relationship between the democratic process and the exercise of authority?*

The first point to make is based upon educational principle. Cultures of authority articulate with particular pedagogical choices. To argue for the importance of problem solving, inquiry-based education is in tension with authoritarianism. The sequential development of the autonomous learner and, in turn, the



learning society (Ransom, 1994) invites a democratic education. There exists a strong intellectual tradition (Spencer, 1910; Dewey, 1916; Friere, 1972; Pearl, 1988) which suggests that education for civil society demands a 'democratic apprenticeship' (Knight, 1985) in schools. In his treatise on *The Atrocity of Education*, Art Pearl (1972:147) is persuasive:

*To become expert in democratic citizenship the student must observe leadership that is consistent with democratic principles. Only when seen in action does all of the training the student receives come together. Only then is it real. Cynicism is bred when a student sees a teacher preach one thing while he practices something distinctly different.*

*Democratic principles are confusing. A great many sins are committed in the name of democracy. As with nothing else, democracy has become a game of the name. Educators who prate about it really do not know whereof they speak. And whatever they mean by democracy does not conform to any acceptable standard.*

*(my emphasis)*

Pearl (1988:225) later set out the requirements of a democratic education, which can be summarized as follows:

- *equal preparation for debate of critical social issues;*
- *equal opportunity to participate in meaningful decision-making*
- *universal rights of expression and due process*
- *encouragement of all to succeed*

Democratic education is not a laissez affair! Convention ridden it is respectful of rights and demands responsibility. The teacher does not abdicate authority, she models responsible authority. Spencer made this observation in his reflections on the regenerative power of the excesses of the exercise of authority in British schools and government.

*Instead of being an aid to human progress which all culture should be, the culture of our public schools, by accustoming our boys to a despotic form of government and an intercourse regulated by brute force, tends to fit them for a lower state of society than that which exists. And chiefly recruited as our legislature is from among those who are brought up at such schools, this barbarizing influence becomes a hindrance to national progress.*

*(Spencer, 1910:134)*

What goes around comes around. Schools articulate with the future.

Notwithstanding the growing body of research which suggests that democratic student participation in school governance and curriculum decision-making increases student attachment and corresponds with diminishing levels of disruption (Holdsworth 1988; Knight, 1988; Warner, 1992), researchers in Melbourne, Australia reveal the paradox that primary schools embrace more democratic processes than do secondary schools (Knight & Lewis, 1993). As students become older, and potentially more dangerous, we

grasp at authoritarianism in schools. These are not *'docile bodies'* (Foucault, 1979). Less responsibility is afforded to the student for informed choice. Rule is dispensed through ultimatum. The behavior management gurus are commissioned, quick-fixes purchased by managers of stretched educational budgets.

## **Part Two: Political Economy II, Governmentality & the Quest for Control.**

### **2.1 Failure and the Intensification and Expansion of Control**

Schools have always produced failure and disaffection. Hitherto, the unskilled labor market together with a segregated system of special education colluded with a narrow curriculum and restricted pedagogy to conceal the failure of schools. Failure was not a problem for schools. The underachiever, the slow child and even the disruptive student had somewhere else to go. There was a place for them on the factory assembly line, on the shop floor, in the mill, down the mine, on the farm, or in the building industry. Transition into the paid labor market offered young people a currency with which to negotiate an independent adult life. The collapse of the unskilled youth labor market (Polk & Tait, 1990; Freeland, 1992) has exposed the absence of a link between schools and a meaningful future for an increasing number of students. Responses to the collapse in the unskilled labor market revolve around keeping students at schools longer (Marginson, 1993; Slee, 1995) and expanding special education provision (Tomlinson, 1996). Stuck in school longer, more students appear to be underachieving, more are labeled *'disruptive'*. Students however remain at school not because they are excited by the learning packages on offer, not because they see school as the bridge to a successful future, but because there is nowhere else to go. The extension of student dependency coincides with a world that screams at them to consume, to purchase and give label [designer label] to their identity. This extended period of *'youthdom'* represents a confluence of tensions and uneasy transitions (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996). All of this makes for a powerful cocktail of discontent in our schools.

We can complicate this picture by considering the implications of the press for selection and the publication of school results in the UK. Not only are students selected for successful academic trajectories, we publicly assign a growing residue of *'undesirable students'* (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995) to failure. This second category of students are moved into a second tier of educational provision; be they the merged non-selective Local Educational Authority schools such as the aforementioned Ridings School, or be they the growing number of Pupil Referral Units [PRU] which had previously been called Behavior Units. Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe's continuing research on choice and markets in education in the UK, demonstrates how choice has proven a *'major factor in maintaining and reinforcing class divisions and inequalities'* (1995:23):

*Well resourced choosers now have free reign to guarantee and reproduce, as best they can, their existing cultural, social and economic advantages in the new complex and blurred hierarchy of schools. Class selection is revalorized by the market.*

Those schools which attempt to develop inclusive programs and cultures for all comers fall victim to the vicissitudes of the market. Choice is illusory as schools emulate likeness in the scramble up and down the league tables. This process is not benign. Social selection is crude and transparent. Gillborn (1997) and Gillborn and Gipps (1996) demonstrate the vulnerability of ethnic minorities in the UK. African Caribbean boys are most at risk of academic under-achievement and exclusion from school. The DFE (1992) reported that African Caribbean pupils were disproportionately over-represented in the data on permanent exclusion from school [8.1% of the total number of exclusions compared with their making up only 2% of the total number of students]. Students with what are loosely referred to as special educational needs too are a liability for the upwardly mobile school (Slee, 1993; Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995).

## **2.2 More Pervasive Patterns of Behavioral Control**

What is apparent is that structural economic change accompanied by changing community and student expectations corresponds with changing patterns of control and surveillance in schools. Foucault (1979) depicts the 'spectacle of the scaffold', emanating from secret judicial processes which were 'the privilege of the prosecution' alone, as meticulously choreographed affairs not simply interested in state retribution, but in the ritualized regulation of the innocent. The turning of the 'disciplinary gaze' from the liturgies of punishment of the body to the control of the mind became the project of establishing new forms of governmentality - for normalizing and regulating the citizenry. Rose (1985, 1989 & 1996) takes up this theme to suggest the normalizing aim of the 'psy sciences' in calibrating and mapping the population was to render it governable.

*... government is dependent upon knowledge. On the one hand, to govern a population one needs to isolate it as a sector of reality, to identify certain characteristics and processes proper to it, to make its features notable, speakable, writable, to account for them according to certain explanatory schemes. Government thus depends upon the production, circulation, organisation, and authorization of truths that incarnate what is to be governed, which make it thinkable, calculable, and practicable.*

*(Rose, 1985:6)*

The deviant is not scrutinized for crude punishment. S/he is pathologized. 'Scholastic identities' (Ball, 1990) are produced to distinguish between who comes into the normal clientele of the classroom teacher and who is to be administered through an expanding raft of special educational categories and provisions (Tomlinson, 1982; Lewis, 1993). Restricting our disciplinary gaze to aberrant individuals simultaneously deflects from other contributing factors. The individual or decontextualized group focus of classroom

management techniques is convenient to the normalizing mission of schools. Perhaps this provides another theoretical entry for researching the emergence and contagion of ADHD?

The relatively recent Australian and American (Kingston, 1995; Lacey, 1996) epidemics of ADHD provides a useful platform for examining the changing patterns of control in schools through the enlistment of the machinery or panopticon of 'special educational needs'. Serfontein (1990:19) describes this *Hidden Handicap* for us:

*In other words these children have difficulty in focusing and sustaining their attention long enough to initiate and complete any set task. They tend to be easily distracted from the task at hand by other stimuli, such as noise or movement. Significant disturbances in concentration may lead to daydreaming and 'switching off'.*

A biological disorder, ADHD adheres to an imbalance or deficiency of one or more neurotransmitters in the brain. Diagnosis is made by a physician or psychologist matching a child's reported behavior against a checklist from the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (1987). In Sydney the Serfontein Clinic enlists the highly contentious neurometrics diagnostic tool. In both cases the diagnoses are random and normative in their disregard for contextualised episodes.

*Attention Deficit Disorder is not a disease, it's just part of the spectrum of children's behavior. The issue is to find the line where abnormality stops and normality begins ... and the line moves according to who's drawing it.*

*(Swan, 1995)*

Movement of the line of child normality is reflected in the geographical variance in diagnostic behavior in Australia. Where we would be struggling to find one in every thousand students in the State of Victoria, there would be ten in every thousand in New South Wales and Western Australia (Swan, 1995).

Treatment typically takes the form of chemical intervention. Amphetamines are administered, the most popular of which is Ritalin. A stimulant, it acts on the central nervous system to sedate the child. Govoni and Hayes (1988:778-779) draw our attention to the side-effects of the drug for a small number of users which include nausea and giddiness, growth repression, impeded cardio-vascular function and the development of twitches and ticks. To my knowledge the treatment is experimental in that no long term tests have been undertaken using placebos. Swan (1995) cites estimates that some 2.5 million children in the US are using ritalin.

ADHD is a beguiling syndrome and a powerful agent for a self-regulating population. It provides a much more respectable explanation for teachers and parents for their children's errant behavior. The child is no longer bad - s/he is pathologically deficient. Neither parenting nor teaching is called to account. Moreover

it promises relief and possibly a cure. The pervasiveness of this disciplinary technique is most apparent in the rapid formation and spread of parent self-help groups where parents offer up their children for diagnosis and treatment. Schools are finding that those children who do not lapse into a teaching induce sedation may now be quieted by other means. The purpose in this discussion is to neither prove nor disprove the clinical veracity of the condition. I am concerned that we exercise caution so that we do not witness what C. Wright Mills (1959) referred to as the reconstruction of profound social and educational issues as the personal troubles of individual students.

The deployment of special educational categories to deal with disruptive behavior in schools is not restricted to ADHD. In Australia there is an escalating demand for integration or inclusive education resources to be allocated to the constellation of emotionally / socially disordered and disturbed children (Slee, 1996). Classroom management and student control is assuming new forms to contain the rise in disruption.

### **2.3 The More Traditional Technology of Control**

Notwithstanding the British Secretary of State for Education's attempt to resurrect corporal punishment, I resist the opportunity for extended debate preferring to leave the final word to Richard Chiswell's proclamation in 1669:

*But when our sufferings are of that nature as makes our schools to be not merely houses of correction, but of prostitution, in this vile way of castigation in use, wherein our secret parts, which are by nature shameful, and not be uncovered, must be the anvil exposed to the immodest eyes, and the filthy blows of the smiter ...*

*(Chiswell, 'A Modest Remonstrance of that Intolerable Grievance Our Youth Lie Under, in the Accustomed Severities of the School Discipline of this Nation', in Freeman, 1966:217)*

Prior to considering schools that have responded in educational ways to disruptive behavior, let us consider two traditional forms of control and the lessons we may draw from existing research.

#### **2.3.1 Suspension and Exclusion**

Suspensions and exclusions have escalated dramatically, both in Australia (Slee, 1995; Edwards, 1996) and in the United Kingdom (Slee, 1995; Gardiner, 1996; Parsons, 1996). Existing research into suspension contends that unless applied as a measure of last resort it is a largely ineffective measure (Dettman, 1972). Frequent usage provides a fillip to greater levels of disruption (Neilsen, 1979; Wu et al, 1982; Hyde & Robson, 1984). As a reformative measure suspension is found wanting according to data on rates of recidivism (Edwards, 1996). Once suspended, students are more likely to be suspended again. Add to this Edwards' finding that students who are suspended more than once are unlikely to complete their schooling,

and there exists cause to reconsider our use of this measure. The need for reconsideration also should be driven by recognition of the racial and cultural character of suspensions (Gillborn, 1996; Vickers, 1993).

Following Hyde and Robson's (1984) work in Western Australia, my own research in Victoria and Queensland heightened my interest in the varying rates of suspensions between schools, problems in advocacy for suspended students and the stages of a child's schooling when suspension occurs (Slee, 1995). A major change in the volume and rate of suspension across Victorian public schools occurred when students transferred from primary to secondary schools. What this suggested was that while individual children may have idiosyncratic problems and issues which generated trouble, a constant across the cohort was the institutional change. Consequently a more practical line of inquiry was found in analyzing the educational, organisational and experiential differences between primary and secondary schooling. In doing so, possibilities emerged for ameliorating stressors within the curriculum, teaching and learning methods, and organisational process and culture.

Research into varying rates of suspension between schools has long suggested the potential value in attempting to determine the 'school effect' in suspensions and exclusions (Reynolds, 1976 & 1985; Grunsell, 1980; Wu et al, 1980; Galloway, 1982; Lawrence et al, 1984). It is important to quickly add that this is not a *de facto* endorsement of the problematic school effectiveness research and recipe approach to school improvement (Hamilton, 1996; Ball, 1995). This paper is not racing to join in the very political enterprise of blaming schools and teachers for the very complex problem of disruption. The lesson from the research is that ameliorative policy will have to be multi-dimensional and dynamic.

### **2.3.2 Pupil Referral Units [PRUs]**

There has been substantial research into problems with this type of off-site provision for 'disruptive students' in the UK (for example: HMI, 1978; Newell, 1980; Topping, 1983; Mongon, 1988). They can be summarized:

- unit referral processes are typically smooth, re-integration into regular schools is equally as unsuccessful;
- particular groups of students are at greater risk of referral because of factors such as race, class, ethnicity, gender and perceived ability;
- units beget their own need - having referred one student out of the classroom, we tend to find others who represent our renewed source of irritation and frustration;
- provision grows exponentially and represents a major financial drain on the regular school system;
- the curriculum on offer narrows consistent with the skills, knowledge and abilities of the staff;
- teachers, inside and outside the units, narrow their view on who is suited to receive their education in the regular classroom.

Since the evidence exists to suggest that units fail in their basic promise of reforming disruptive students in order to return them to the regular classroom, Denis Mongon (1988) felt compelled to point out that PRUs are actually provided for those students who will never cross their entrances. Simply put, they are there for the improvement of classrooms by removing troublesome individuals. Therapeutic claims are for Mongon window dressing. While this debate is ongoing (Lloyd-Smith 1995; Cooper, 1995), the immediate lesson from research into off-site provision for disruptive students is that teachers and education administrators and policy makers need to be very cautious and resist the growing temptation to establish a second tier of educational provision which constitutes little more than a holding operation for those who were never allowed to make it in traditional forms of academic schooling.

### **Part Three: Practical Lessons From Theoretical Engagement**

In this last section of this discussion I wish to draw on a couple of projects which draw on the epistemological foundations outlined in the first sections of the paper to demonstrate the practicality of hosting a more careful theorizing of disruption as a requirement for substantive change which accounts for the complexity and specificity of context. These vignettes, which constitute very partial descriptions of encounters in the field, are not laid out as a manifesto for school improvement. My intention is to illustrate thoughtful responses to complex theoretical and practical dilemmas in 'schooling in hard times' (Lingard, Knight & Porter, 1993).

#### **3.1 Struggles in 'Olympia'**

'Olympia' was a troubled technical school in a disadvantaged community in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Regarded as 'non-academic', it was seen as a place to send students who weren't any good at traditional school work and ideal for 'behavioral problems'. Staff morale was low, staff turnover high. Truancy, for students and teachers, was rampant. The majority of students left school before graduation. Many teachers transferred after very short periods at the school - many on 'compassionate grounds'. Violence was no stranger to the school, suspensions were frequent and the case-load of guidance personnel was reportedly 'unreasonable'. Conversations with the school principal left little room to be sanguine.

When transferred to the school, the principal; who became the catalyst for changing the character, operation and performance of the school, immediately declared his opposition to corporal punishment. His opposition pre-dated the formal abolition of corporal punishment in the state of Victoria. This was not well received in some quarters. His argument was simple and powerful. Diminishing violence in the student cohort is impossible if teachers model it as an acceptable means for the resolution of conflict.



Subsequently, any teacher recruited to the school was questioned on their position with regard to punishment.

As a first priority 'Olympia' devoted time to the development of a clearly articulated educational philosophy as the basis for casting the school's aims and priorities. The principal seized the initiative to engage the community in this task. Knowing that parents didn't attend school meetings, he went to a local 'bingo' game and, prior to the commencement of the game, took to the stage to tell parents that he was concerned about the school and invited them to call him if they wanted to talk about his concerns after the game the following week. The call was returned and the deliberations to write a new future for the school commenced.

The school was determined to encourage practices that included rather than marginalized 'failing' or 'disruptive' students. The concern for these students was linked to the school's status as a referral point by the more academic schools in the district. 'At risk' students represented a major section of 'Olympia's' cohort. Rather than refer students away from the school or label the students as 'special needs students' to be administered to by outside experts, adjustments were made to the school curriculum, to teaching methods and to the organisation of classrooms and school procedures to include students and encourage success. Academics from a local university were invited to help with the task of preparing an alternative curriculum. The activity of constructing a new school program was negotiated as the basis for teachers' professional development and resulted in the university providing an inquiry based graduate program for teachers on the school premises. A supreme opportunist, the principal used this relationship to negotiate direct entry for some of his students to the university. This was the foundation for similar negotiations at other universities and colleges.

Democratic decision-making structures were developed which established broad representation as a habit rather than a goal. All students served on Council. It was not a forum for the most popular, the most articulate or the most respectable students. Learning how to participate in meetings and articulate dissent became an educational requirement. Dissent was legitimized and given a forum for expression. Parents were enlisted into school support activity by a phone call seeking assistance in their areas of competence. From there they found a principal or teacher moving them into other activities which would once have been extremely daunting. During the course of our research we had conversations with women who described the way in which they had been encouraged back into formal learning through their contact with the school.

The examples of progress go on. The above is indicative rather than exhaustive. The most remarkable aspect of the changes at 'Olympia' is that the evidential base supported our sense that improvement was

more than cosmetic. Retention rates had increased - staff and students (this was in part the case for all schools because of demographic and policy changes). Reported rates of serious disruption, truancy and suspensions diminished. 'Olympia' was now graduating more students into higher education, training and work than were the surrounding academic high schools that steadfastly refused to change their curricula, organisation or pedagogies and referred their dysfunctional students to 'Olympia'. 'Dysfunctional students' were graduating and continuing their studies. 'Olympia' had *disciplined* the students according to our earlier educational theorizing of *discipline*

There was a sequel to our research. A change in government in the state of Victoria resulted in a dramatic 'down-sizing' of the teaching force. Some schools were merged with each other and others were closed. 'Olympia' was targeted for closure. Students, teachers and parents 'occupied' their school and conducted lessons as normal. police were deployed by the state to throw these kids out of school! 'Olympia' had developed a very successful Koori education program for Aboriginal students which celebrated the indigenous culture, language, knowledge and skills of that community. Parents took the government through the Supreme Court and won the right to re-open the school through race discrimination legislation.

### 3.2 Finding Voice

Some years ago I was invited to conduct an action research project to identify the educational needs of 13-15 year old students in an inner urban community. This was a part of a larger project to evaluate the work of a welfare agency and its off-site education unit for disaffected students. Believing that the world had already amassed adults' perceptions of the educational needs of 13-15 year olds, I contended that enlisting young people in the establishment of the research interest, the process of data gathering and the extraction of meaning from that data might generate fresh accounts of educational needs and of life in schools. There was nothing new in this approach (Knight, 1982; Coventry et al, 1984; Holdsworth, 1988); however, this was not typical of educational research (Walford, 1991) or policy-making. Student voices in educational policy-making and research have long been muted.

Students in Year 11 from two high schools were invited to form a research team. It was negotiated that one of these schools would play host to the project and that the school would give academic credit to the students' work. Students gathering data from other students seemed consistent with the aim of expressing an authentic student voice within the data. The research team enlisted, they were taken to Melbourne University where they entered into intensive discussions to establish what they saw as the critical areas to be addressed by the survey instrument. Time was also put into teaching the team about research methodology. The students constructed and piloted their survey. They conducted the survey in other schools and then went about the business of manually collating the voluminous data and interpreting that data for reporting and dissemination.

The students presented their research findings to senior bureaucrats in the Victorian Ministry of Education and were subsequently invited to speak at teachers' professional development seminars. The remarkable fact is that the students who formed the research team were students who had been siphoned into a terminal stream at the school. They were 'non-academic' kids and regarded as troublesome. Their application to this task, which they regarded as purposeful and challenging was staggering. It was the team who decided that the project should run a parallel set of interviews with kids who had fallen out of schooling if we wanted to get a more complete picture of life in schools.

The research findings revolved around two foci:

- school and work;
- school climate.

In order to evaluate the project I invited a colleague from another university to have a group of teacher trainees film the project while following the student research team and conduct their own interviews of the team to gauge the effectiveness of the conduct and outcomes of the research. The project had a number of direct outcomes and a host of additional benefits:

- students were engaged in meaningful work which expanded their knowledge, skills, competence and confidence;
- a range of people including teachers, academics, students, school support personnel and administrators were brought together to talk about schooling and young people;
- the host school incorporated the findings of the research into its own development plans;
- the students' work was celebrated outside of the classroom and has been the basis for other projects;
- the project demonstrated the centrality of meaning, utility and recognition of different learning requirements in the production of disciplined learners.

## **Epilogue**

There is no conclusion for this discussion. The task we are engaged in goes on. The discussion aims to dispel reductionist approaches to the complex task of educational discipline. Quick-fix behavior management programs have short shelf lives because they seek to bleach complexity from the colorful life of classrooms. This is not to say that behavior management skills have no place in the classroom. Simply put, my argument revolves around a belief that discipline is far more than the imposition of someone else's order.

Improving discipline in schools requires from us a careful theorizing of our educational intentions and the incorporation of many voices in our theory making. Relationships between educational theories, education policy, social and political context, particular models of learning and teaching and the vision for the future articulated in and through curricular are fundamental disciplining agents. Greater effort expended on these challenges may contribute to diminishing reliance on developing new approaches to management. The frustrating fact about this discussion, and 'Olympia' is indicative', is that an educational theory/practice of discipline is slow and must be multi-dimensional, calling all of the elements of schooling [curriculum, pedagogy, school organisation ....] into the reformative frame. The Chinese have recorded their healthy suspicion of easy solutions for complex problems as noted by Paul Theroux (1988) in his travel chronicles:

*A peasant must stand on the side of a mountain with his mouth open for a long time before a roast duck flies in.*

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