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# Behaviour Problems in School

A Source Book  
of Readings

Edited by  
Phillip Williams

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**a source book of readings**

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# Behaviour Problems in School

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## General Introduction

The purpose of this book is to bring together a collection of readings which have something useful to say about children's behaviour in school. The readings are drawn primarily from the field of educational psychology, where there is a large corpus of published work concerned with children's behaviour. But much of this material is not directly relevant to the behaviour of children in the school setting. Yet it is behaviour in the school and in the classroom which is of specific interest to teachers and to their colleagues in social work, counselling, medicine and child guidance who collaborate with teachers in dealing with children's school problems. This reader selects from published research and enquiry in educational psychology some excerpts which reflect this interest.

For ease of reference the book has been divided into four sections. Section A deals with the nature of children's behaviour problems—not only the sorts of behaviour which concern teachers, but also those aspects of school which children themselves find troublesome. Section B deals briefly with the ways that teachers can use to identify and assess the seriousness of the behaviour which children show, whereas section C looks in more detail at the range of causes which lie behind some of the difficulties. The last section, D, is concerned with the different ways in which behaviour problems can be treated. The first two articles in this section review aspects of the established techniques for coping with problems in schools, whereas the second two illustrate the newer behaviour modification approach for dealing with behaviour problems in the classroom. An introduction to each section contains a commentary on points to be borne in mind in reading the articles.

In bringing together this collection of readings, an important factor has been the level of specialization which is sometimes shown by research articles. These papers have been chosen so that they can be read by persons who are not as yet fully conversant with educational

research design and statistics. Some technical terms and concepts are necessarily retained but in general the reader is advised to concentrate on the principles illustrated by the articles, not the more technical details.

In order to facilitate the use of the material for seminar work, questions for discussion have been listed at the end of the book.

Finally, a word about the terminology used by the writers. Behaviour problems, problem behaviour, maladjustment, maladaptive behaviour and deviant behaviour are all examples of terms used by different authors. The existence of such a variety of overlapping terms illustrates some of the difficulties in delineating the general area of behaviour problems with which the book deals. This is reflected in the section titles—it seems more sensible for each section title to retain the terminology mainly used in the articles of the section, rather than repeat the title of the text. But the reader is alerted to the fact that different authors have different criteria for deciding the kinds of behaviour with which they deal. This issue of definition—which several of the authors discuss—needs to be kept in mind.

The contents are pointed very much at behaviour in school. Although the school is not the sole setting for all the articles, nevertheless they are all of relevance to the behaviour problems that teachers meet in schools and the decisions that they have to take for dealing with them.



SECTION A

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The Nature of Behaviour  
Problems

## Introduction

The first two extracts in this section are taken from one of the classical studies of children's behaviour in schools, carried out by E. K. Wickman in 1928. This is an old study but it is one which has been very widely quoted and has stimulated a lot of interesting work in the field of teacher perception of children's behaviour.

Although Wickman's methodology has been criticized, there is no doubt that most of the workers who have attempted to repeat his enquiry have largely corroborated the order of seriousness of children's behaviour which he found. However, there have been some changes. The article by Ziv, which follows the Wickman extracts, first summarizes another aspect of Wickman's work—the correspondence between ratings made by teachers and by mental hygienists, or child guidance staff. Ziv then examines the extent to which the difference reported by Wickman can be substantiated in Israel today, and finds that the orders of seriousness as given by teachers and psychologists have now moved much more closely together than in the Wickman study. Ziv also examines the seriousness of children's behaviour from a different standpoint by asking the children themselves what they feel about the importance of different sorts of behaviour in the classroom. His comparison between the views of the teachers and the views of children is an interesting one.

This 'consumer reaction' approach is followed in the next paper, by T. Moore, in which the difficulties experienced by children in the school situation are studied in some depth. Not only do teachers find aspects of children's behaviour troublesome: children themselves find aspects of school quite disturbing. This article indicates which of the different aspects of the primary school are worrying to children and also indicates the way in which their dislikes and anxieties change over the years of primary school.

This section ends with a short article which focuses in some detail on one single element of behaviour: nail-biting. The article shows how an aspect of behaviour which is sometimes regarded as rather unusual and indicative of unnecessary anxiety, is in fact widely distributed in

the school population. This is not a comment on the seriousness or otherwise of the habit, but an indication that some knowledge of the incidence and extent of children's behaviour is often enlightening. It provides us with an informative backcloth against which we can set those elements of behaviour with which we ourselves in the classroom may be particularly concerned.

WICKMAN, E. K.

## I. Teachers' List of Undesirable Forms of Behaviour

To enquire into the social dicta on what constitutes undesirable conduct is a necessary starting point for any objective study of the behavior disorders of children. Most textbooks on discipline and child training are written from the point of view of the author's individual judgments about desirable and undesirable, healthy and unhealthy behavior. Relatively few studies are available in which the opinions of a social group have been collected on this subject.

In the studies of behavior problems of children conducted in the two elementary schools in Minneapolis and Cleveland, the investigation was first directed to securing the individual and combined opinions of the teachers on what constitutes undesirable behavior. This was accomplished by means of a schedule on which the teachers were requested to list all the kinds of behavior problems which they had encountered in their teaching careers.

In analyzing the data obtained from these reports with reference to what they may reveal in the way of teachers' attitudes toward children's behavior, we shall first present the tabulated list of behavior problems reported by the teachers in the Cleveland school. This list will then be compared with the reports from the teachers in the Minneapolis school and with the list of behavior problems for which children were referred by parents, teachers, and social agencies to a child guidance clinic.

The twenty-seven teachers in the Cleveland school who reported on this questionnaire submitted a long list of behavior problems which they had encountered in their professional experience. There was a total of 428 items in the reports from these twenty-seven teachers. When

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Wickman, E. K. (1928) 'Teachers' list of undesirable forms of behavior,' in *Children's Behavior and Teachers' Attitudes*. New York: The Commonwealth Fund, Chapter III.

duplications were eliminated, there were 185 separate items of undesirable behavior. Not all the returns will be reproduced here; but an abridged list, wherein many of the individual descriptions are omitted, was arranged by classifying the responses according to similar types of problems. The classification is composed of seven major groups, each containing sub-classifications. These groups are quite arbitrarily determined and were established for convenience in analyzing the results and for obtaining a comprehensive classification of behavior problems in which synonymous and closely related descriptions were combined. It should be noted that this classification was not indicated on the questionnaires to the teachers. By permitting the teachers to make spontaneous replies, it was hoped that they would record freely the kinds of behavior which they considered and treated as undesirable and that thereby they would reveal the nature of their distinctions between wholesome and unwholesome, desirable and undesirable conduct in children.

In the following classified list of problems reported by the group of teachers, the behavior descriptions in *italics* indicate the author's terminology in establishing groupings. In some instances a single descriptive term appearing in the teachers' reports was adopted for the caption of a sub-group; and in that case the term is not italicized. The numbers that follow the behavior descriptions signify the number of times the problems were reported. It will be noted that numbers appear both after the group captions and after the individual descriptions of undesirable behavior within these groups. The former indicate the total frequency with which problems classified within these groups were reported; the latter specify the frequency with which the particular descriptive terms were recorded. In many instances a teacher reported the same general type of behavior problem more than once by describing different ways in which the problem might be manifested; as for example, one teacher described three forms of dishonesty by listing 'lying', 'evasion of the truth', and 'attempt to deceive'; another teacher reported twenty-five kinds of disorderliness in the classroom.

#### GROUP I

##### *Violations of General Standards of Morality and Integrity (76)*

*Stealing* 11: Stealing 9, Theft 2.

*Dishonesties* 44: Lying 7, Untruthfulness 7, Dishonesty 3, Deceitfulness 6, Evasion of truth 2, Cheating 7, Falsehood 1, Bluffing 2, Untrustworthiness 2, Pretense 1,

Fabrication 1, Exaggeration 1, Copying from other's papers 1, Hypocrisy 1, Lack of honor 1, Forgery 1.  
 'Immorality' 12: Bad Physical habits 3, Immorality 4, Obscenity 2, Unclean Thoughts, Glances, Notes 1, Vulgarity 1, Sex problems 1.  
*Profanity* 4: Swearing 2, Profanity 2.  
*Smoking* 2.  
*Miscellany* 3: Unlawfulness, Lack of Ideals, Unjustness.

## GROUP II

*Transgressions Against Authority (27)*

Disobedience 13, Disrespect to authority 4, Defiance 4, Impertinence 1, Slowness in obeying instructions 1, Refusal to do things when asked 1, Wilful misconduct 1, Refusal to do anything that is right unless forced 1, Insubordination 1.

## GROUP III

*Violations of General School Regulations (30)*

Truancy 16.  
 Tardiness 11.  
 Irregularity in attendance 1, Taking articles home 1, Destroying materials 1.

## GROUP IV

*Violations of Classroom Rules (70)*

Disorderliness 33 (Many individual descriptions of petty behavior annoyances or failure to comply with school routine, e.g. playing with pencil, disorderly lines, unnecessary noise, etc.)  
 Restlessness 4.  
 Interruptions 16.  
 Too social 9; Whispering 6.  
 Lack of supplies 2.  
 Miscellaneous 6.

## GROUP V

*Violations of School Work Requirements (41)*

*Inattention* 13: Inattention—inattentiveness 11, Lack of concentration 2.  
*Lack of Interest* 4: Indifference 3, Lack of interest 1.  
*Carelessness* 11: Carelessness 6, Irresponsibility 2, Unreliability 1, Lack of pride in work 1, Inaccuracy 1.  
*Laziness* 13: Laziness 4, Lack of effort 1, Idleness 1, Dawdling 1, Procrastination 1, Refusing to form habit of preparedness 1, Indolence 1, Lack of initiative 1, Shirking 1, Evades duties 1.

## GROUP VI

*Difficulties with Other Children (38)*

*Annoying Other Children* 24: Annoying 11, Cruelty 3, Roughness 3, Fighting 4, Bullying 2, Punching 1.  
*Tattling* 6.  
*Miscellany* 8: Disregard of rights of others 2, Getting others into trouble 1, Quarrelsomeness 1, Coloreds and Whites fighting 1, Laughing at others' mistakes 1, Imposing on others 1, Interfering with the work of others 1.

## GROUP VII

*Undesirable Personality Traits (136)*

*Negativisms* 27: Stubbornness 16, Sulkiness 3, Sullenness 1, Contrariness 2, Obstinacy 2, Disposition to argue 1, Hectoring 1, Persistency 1.  
*Unacceptable Social Manners* 19: Impudence 6, Impoliteness 5, Rudeness 3, Discourtesy 3, Uncivil 1, Sarcastic 1.  
*Self-Indulgences* 15: Selfishness 9, Unsportsmanship 2, Jealousy 1, Greediness 1, Not altruistic 1, Lack of loyalty 1.  
*Arrogance* 14: Overbearing 2, Forwardness 2, Overconfidence 2, Domineering 1, Feeling of superiority 1, Boastfulness 1, Dictatorialness 1, Always wants to lead 1, Pride 1, Conceited 1, Too independent 1.  
*Diffidence* 14: Bashfulness 4, Shyness 3, Sensitiveness 2, Too dependent 2, Self-conscious 1, Too timid 1, Failure to join group 1.  
*Evasions* 11: Evasiveness 1, Lack of forthrightness 1, Insincere 1, Sneakiness 1, Failure to confess fault 1, Over-critical of others to hide faults 2, Evades punishments 1, Thoughtlessness 2, Forgetting 1.  
*Interferences* 12: Destructiveness 5, Curiosity 2, Meddlesomeness 2, Gossiping 2, Inquisitiveness 1.  
*Lack of Emotional Control* 13: Temper 6, Lack of Self-Control 5, Crying 2.  
*Undesirable Mental States* 3: Dissatisfied 1, Unhappy 1, Resentful 1.  
*Miscellany* 8: Uncleanliness of habits and personal appearance 2, Lack of pride in self 2, Listlessness 1, Silliness 3.

Not all of the twenty-seven teachers recorded items in each of the seven groups of problems. The items under the classification of violations of classroom rules were reported by sixteen teachers; transgressions against authority, by seventeen; evasions of school work requirements, by eighteen; difficulties with other children, by twenty; infractions of general school regulations, by twenty-one; violations of general moral standards, by twenty-two; but all twenty-seven contributed one or more items under the classification of undesirable personality traits. Only four of the teachers enumerated items in all of the seven major

groups of problems. No single teacher's report approached the range of problems described by the entire group.

On first reading, the above may appear to be a rather impressive list of kinds of undesirable behavior and may arouse sympathy for the child who must run the gauntlet of these teachers' inspections of his behavior as he passes through the grades. If we can take these declarations of behaviour problems at their face value, it would seem that the child who escapes the frowns and disapprovals of the teachers must be the exception. A child entirely free from all of these behavior disturbances might very well be regarded with some alarm. The extensiveness of this list of problems raises the question whether the teachers who declared it were an unusually 'strict' group of disciplinarians.

However, when we compare these reports obtained from the teachers in one representative school in Cleveland with the responses secured by similar methods from the teachers of another representative school in a city 600 miles distant, the two lists are found to be in essential agreement. With some differences in terminology the items of problem behavior reported by the teachers in the Minneapolis school covered all of the seven major groups and their sub-headings in the above classified list. There is only one minor exception. The list prepared by the teachers in Minneapolis contains no item describing the 'dissatisfied' or 'unhappy' child; but this exception is negligible inasmuch as both of these items were declared only once and by the same teacher in the Cleveland school. A few additional descriptions of behavior problems appear in the Minneapolis teachers' list which are here presented with the numbers indicating the frequency with which they were reported by the twenty-nine teachers in this school:

Nervousness 4; Inferiority complex 1; Fatigue 2; Stupidity 1; Unwillingness to work at hard tasks 1; Poor posture 1; Naughtiness, a form of impatience 1; Dreamer 1; Inability to conform to the group 4; Ill-breeding 1; Hereditary criminal tendencies 1; Self-abuse 3; Clashing of personalities 1; Forming of gangs 1; Desire to be center of attraction 1; Speech defects 1; Religion 1; Dislike for school 1.

For a further check on the adequacy of the above list of recognized behavior problems in children, we may utilize the records of behavior clinics to which parents, teachers, social agencies, and juvenile courts refer behavior-problem children. A search through these records (the records include 367 cases referred to the demonstration child guidance clinic in Minneapolis during 1924, and 756 cases referred to the demon-



stration child guidance clinic in Cleveland during 1925-6) reveals that all of the items of undesirable behavior designated by the teachers in the two schools in Minneapolis and Cleveland were variously reported in the cases of children referred to the clinics. There were, of course, minor differences in terminology and many of the individual descriptions of problems were reported for only a few of the thousand clinic cases; but all of the major groups and sub-groups of problems, as classified above, were richly represented. In addition some problems were designated in the clinic cases which do not appear in the teachers' lists. These additions for the most part appeared in cases referred to the clinic by parents and it is interesting in this connection to observe the differences between the general types of behavior disorders for which parents referred their children and the problems reported by our teachers.

In making this comparison it appears that both parents and teachers recognize problems involving violations of standards of morality and integrity, disobedience and disrespect for authority, overactivity and lack of concentrated interests, temper outbursts, quarrelsomeness and difficulties with other children, as well as certain undesirable personality traits, more especially contrariness and obstinacy. Parents, however, seem to be much more concerned than teachers with neurotic habits of children, such as enuresis, nail-biting, thumb-sucking, fears, nervousness, tics, problems of eating and sleeping.

Parents also add to the teachers' list the following: suspicious attitudes, not confidential, being easily influenced by companions, fearlessness, lack of appreciation of danger and harm, cowardliness in physical activities, muscular inability and incoordinations.

It is probable that parents are in a better position than teachers to observe most of these problems, and perhaps they are more concerned with such conditions in their children; but it is noteworthy that none of the teachers in either school listed neurotic habits or the particular difficulties in social adjustments. As might be expected, teachers seem to be more aware than parents of problems relating to the school situation such as truancy, tardiness, inattention, laziness, and especially disorderliness. They also stress the problems of impoliteness, selfishness, and boastfulness in children. There is a suggestion that parents may be more concerned than teachers with the oversensitive and unhappy child.

These suggestive differences between the teachers' and parents' recognition of behavior disorders in children require more extensive