More about Glasser-based school management and discipline

As described in the text (Box 13.6), William Glasser changed his approach to classroom management. He later described his theory of choice (1996; 1997; 1998) that is based on the argument that individuals control their own behaviour. Teachers must recognise that students are motivated to learn by the four basic needs of belonging, power, freedom and fun, and will behave appropriately if these basic needs are satisfied. Glasser argues that changes in behaviour must be made freely, not in response to the possibility of a reward or the threat of punishment. By satisfying students’ four basic needs, teachers will be able to reduce their use of external controls in the classroom while, at the same time, increasing the likelihood that students will enjoy being at school, succeed academically and choose to behave in socially appropriate ways (Bucher & Manning, 2001/2; Glasser, 2000).

A classroom or school discipline system based on Glasser’s principles is likely to involve the following elements (adopted from Balmain High School, 2003):

- **What is happening now?** Objectively assess what the student is doing, what the teacher is doing and what is happening in the immediate environment (including the curriculum, the classroom setting, others students) that might be triggering the inappropriate behaviour.

- **Are current strategies working?** What is currently being done to reduce inappropriate behaviour? Are these effective? What should be changed?

- **Making a plan.** Talk with students and find out how their needs can best be met. Encourage them to identify alternative choices that are likely to be successful and are within the rules. Remember that individual students may have distinct needs that may require a different set of choices. Keep the plan simple, achievable, able to be implemented immediately and able to be implemented by a student without support from another person (Gordon, Arthur & Butterfield, 1996, pp. 143–144).

- **If a student disrupts a class.** Ask: “What are you doing?” in a quiet, business-like tone. Do not accept “Nothing” or “I don’t know” as an answer. Next, ask “Is it against the rules?” Do not argue about the rules. The student must understand that the rules are necessary and to be obeyed.
Now, tell the student that the behaviour cannot continue and that a solution to the problem must be found. This may involve a contract or agreement involving an offer and an acceptance by the two people involved.

In devising a contract, the teacher will agree that the child remain part of the class with all the rights and privileges that entails, while the child will agree to make behavioural choices that are within the class rules.

Both teacher and student sign the contract and agree to fulfil their side of the bargain (Gordon, Arthur & Butterfield, 1996, p. 144).

- **Withdrawal.** If the misbehaviour continues, the student is asked to move to a designated place where the student can continue to work but is not part of the class. Return to the class is dependent on renegotiation of an agreement between student and teacher.

- **Time out.** If the misbehaviour persists, the student is moved to a designated time out area apart from the class until a plan to behave appropriately is formed and agreed by both student and teacher.

- **Suspension.** If the student continues to misbehave, suspension must occur following official guidelines. The student must be treated with courtesy and politely told that he or she will be welcomed back “when you are ready to follow the rules”.

- **Referral to an appropriate support service.** If there are signs of serious emotional or behavioural disturbance and parents are aware of the problem, it may be appropriate to refer the student to a specialist counsellor or other support service.

The Balmain High School (2003) discipline plan finishes with the following points for teachers to remember:

- One student cannot be allowed to prevent the rest of the class from working.
- Withdrawal and time out are not to be used as punishment but as opportunities to work things out.
- Keep calm and in control.
- Administer the rules fairly, consistently without fear or favour.
- Have a sense of humour, be kind, be firm.

**Activities**

1. Would you feel comfortable using these strategies in a classroom?
2. What interpersonal skills would a teacher need to develop in order to use these strategies?
3. What benefits for students might arise from this approach?
References


