



Student and

DISRUPTION and unrest in secondary schools has roots deep within the fabric of our society and educational systems. The major problems of the American society are reflected in its schools, and in the lives of its young people. Teen-agers are living with the pressure of an unpopular war and draft, with the pain of poverty and the guilt of affluence, with racism's mutual corrosion of black and white people, and with the constraining effects of adult-run bureaucracies. Young people are naturally restive, with their need for change, for increased liberty, and with the society's frequent estrangement from its own young people.

Student Concerns

Our schools are a vulnerable and accessible focus for some of these disaffections; they also heighten and trigger such issues in particularly volatile ways. Student concerns with society and school are always present, but they gain broad public attention when expressed in ways that disrupt orderly school processes. Student frustrations and anger then create "crises" for school administrators. Any attempt to understand such "administrative crises" must begin with the crises that students feel they face daily; crises that are perpetrated or exacerbated by the character of their educational experience. Among the most generic and potent "student crises" in school are the following:

1. Youngsters have a variety of complaints about the *high school curriculum*. Much of the curriculum is seen as irrelevant for students not going to college; they point out that it does not help them prepare for the noncollege job market. In more affluent suburban schools many youngsters argue that college preparation courses do not prepare them for what is likely to happen in college. Partly this results from an overemphasis on the romantic myths of scholarship and of academic life, but also the nonprovocative and nonstimulating character of most college preparatory courses.

2. Many students resent what they feel are archaic and traditional forms of *classroom instruction*, where teachers lecture and students are expected to listen docilely. In some schools concern over the retention and reward of innovative or "good" teachers and negative reactions to "bad" teachers has become a focus of students' collective attention.

3. The reliance upon *teacher and administrator control* over student behavior generates the high number of rules and regulations by which the school day is organized. It is not an uncommon experience for students who wish to go to the bathroom during class to be required to raise their hands and announce their need to the teacher and their peers. Some students undoubtedly would rather suffer quietly than deal with their need in public. Students who feel the school should not exercise so much control over their personal behavior offer an array of perceived violations of good judicial process and civil liberties by adult school authorities, including personal clothing and locker room searches,

Administration Crises

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dress and hair regulations, arbitrary punishments without appeal, premature judgments of guilt without evidence or proof, etc. Censorship of student newspapers and other controls on student political activities, or the farces of obedient student councils, are especially provocative reminders of students' low status and political impotence.

4. In many schools students argue that *teachers and administrators do not behave in courteous and respectful ways* toward them. This is the reverse of teachers' common complaint that their students often are defiant and disrespectful toward them. Instructional and interpersonal relationships characterized by educators' condescension and paternalism signify adults' disinterest in reciprocal human contact with their students. Professional norms against teacher-student "fraternization" increase the interpersonal distance and mistrust between these two groups. One principal reported that he usually called in a group of 12 or 15 students or went into a classroom when he was about to administer a paddling to a male student. Such circumstances, he argued, made the humiliation he was about to apply much clearer and thus a more effective disciplinary device. However, they also signify his low level of concern for students' dignity or pride.

5. Students' concerns about *racism* focus upon disciplinary or instructional behavior which appears to unjustly single out blacks for differential treatment. A complete lack of, or minimal number of, black teachers, counselors, clubs, and books, and a failure to honor black cultural and political heroes are further student

rationales for labeling a school as racist. Specific examples of these concerns arise in connection with the reluctance of many schools to honor the anniversaries of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X. The lack of courses directly relevant to black experience in America, and the distortion of this experience in "white-oriented" texts and courses, are sources of much student pain and alienation. Whether or not the school makes a uniquely racist contribution to the quality of student life, it is clear that few schools have attempted to overcome the vestiges of societal racism that may be present among the ranks of students, teachers, administrators, service personnel, and within the curriculum itself.

6. In a similar vein, some students are concerned deeply with their schools' apparent *disregard for or ignorance of serious social ills*. Youngsters wrestling with problems of the draft, and with their awareness of social issues such as poverty, morality, and powerlessness, constantly seek the wisdom and guidance of their respected elders. The lack of institutional recognition of such issues, let alone their curricular treatment, is a source of much student guilt and discontent. When their elders, and their educational institutions, appear disinterested or powerless in the face of such issues, youth are naturally confused, frustrated, and angry.

7. A final tragedy is that many *teachers*

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and administrators who would and should object to such violations of educational principles through common sense and even decency do not. Some are cowed by their colleagues and by expectations of administrator or parental reaction, others are coerced by a professional fraternity into maintaining a code of silence. An educator who protests too strongly about current "student crises" risks being identified "with the kids," a stigma injurious to good peer relations and professional security. Students often perceive such noninvolvement as evidence of adult hypocrisy and a lack of commitment to the ideas and ideals of a better world. The result is a loss of trust in the persons and institutions established for the welfare and guidance of the young. Without trust, there is only the despair of conformity or apathy and the revolutionary power of anger and desperate hope.

The existence of these conditions constitutes daily and continuing crises in the lives of students attending secondary schools. The expression of such grievances and concerns in protests and disruption creates tremendous student, faculty, and community pressure on school administrators. Some creative responses to these pressures and resultant "administration crises" are suggested below.

Immediate Alternatives in Crisis

Many school administrators see school disruption as a crisis that bodes ill for the educational institution, for the lives of youngsters, and for their own careers. It is our own perspective that these conflicts and crises often may represent opportunities for educators to take a good hard look at themselves, to reexamine their goals, and to use student pressure to develop new and exciting ways of educating youngsters.

Recent events make it clear that repression and suppression, or denial and escape, do not respond to key educational issues at stake in school crises; they do not even offer the hope of rapid de-escalation of tension and conflict. It is the context of seeing disruption as an opportunity for change, and of seeing change as vital, that permits more creative responses to school crises.

Working with several school administrators has indicated some meaningful and immediate responses to school crises that may reduce the level of overt conflict. In the midst of crisis one can often establish *formal mechanisms for social interaction* that crosscut prior lines of status distinction in the school; in this way students and teachers or different social classes and races can be put into immediate interaction around school issues.

A second device is the immediate establishment of a *grievance handling procedure* that has some teeth to it. It is not sufficient to establish a sounding board or to call for administrators to "listen" to students; what is required is a multistatus group that can respond to, and will seek out, student, teacher, and community grievances. A grievance procedure that does not have independent enforcement power, or access to enforcement from other powers in the system, is not worth establishing. Rather, it will be seen by students as another source of administrative deception and control.

Students often complain that teachers and administrators who do not respect them do not listen to any grievance or argument. Many students say that demonstrations and protests have erupted because their other efforts to get administrators and teachers to listen to their concerns and demands were failures.

A relevant mechanism that could be implemented in the midst of crisis is a pattern of *formal negotiation* between conflicting parties. Talk that quickly leads to action is required; for in the long run, change is the only relevant agenda item. Harried school administrators and students will also need to *understand the roots of their own anger and defense* and to gain positive and productive control and direction over these feelings. Our work during the past year is replete with examples of school administrators who escalated and provoked high levels of conflict because of their own righteous indignation, defensiveness, despair, or personal pain and affront. One can sympathize with all of these feelings and yet recognize their deleterious effect on any effort to negotiate and restore order.

The above tactics may be immediately invented or implemented to reduce the level of conflict to proportions that permit experimentation with more powerful change strategies. Prompt and open responses to student concerns, and the implementation of various grievance handling systems or conflict mediating operations, will help deal with the problems of escalation, per se. However, such tactics do not deal with the basic conditions underlying crisis: unsolved social problems, curriculum and instructional irrelevance or incompetence, interpersonal control or disrespect, and the racism which many youngsters feel permeate their lives in school. Only immediate and constant attention to the reformation of our schools will alter these basic conditions; and only such alteration will, in the long run, bring an end to school disruption and progress toward quality education.

Middle-Range Strategies for Change

One of the useful strategies that deal with several of the issues just raised is the *decentralization of school decision making*. Specifically, this means the inclusion of students and members of the community in vital educational decisions: recruitment, evaluation, promotion, and separation of teachers; revision of curriculum and textbooks; autonomous student organization and management of extracurricular activities such as newspapers, clubs, honorary offices and events.

It is not farfetched to plan now for the inclusion of elected student representatives on all local and regional school boards and school governing agencies. Students often have an expertise that is to be valued and can be used. Moreover, students often constitute a special interest group, and may best be able to argue their own cases.

The problems of adult-student relationships require *restructuring of the school* so that students and teachers can spend more time in personal conversation and collaboration with one another, whether or not this appears to contribute directly to the transmittal of academic material. The relaxation

of teachers' custodial concerns, and the replacement of their control by caring and by patterns of mutual student-teacher respect, is of the highest priority. Adult fears that such "permissiveness" and "invitations to anarchy" will result in their being taken advantage of may or may not be real; in any event such fears cannot be dealt with effectively by avoiding experimentation.

Clearly a high priority must be placed on *teacher education efforts*. Yet having well prepared teachers does not necessarily lead to a healthful school environment. Well prepared teachers who must operate within the traditional model of the classroom and professional role established in most schools are not likely to be very innovative.

We must develop *new professional role structures* that permit teachers to be learners and students to be teachers; that provide teachers with the time and help to think, plan, share, prepare, and evaluate their activity in meaningful ways; that permit administrators to be true educational leaders; and that allow and encourage students to be inquiring, independent, relaxed learners. This may require changing the manner in which time is used during the school day, shortening the school week, providing more flexibility in the curriculum, generating new curricula, and providing much more substantial released time.

The solution of recurring and escalating school problems requires nothing less than a continuing collaboration of all parties in the school and community. Continuing inquiry into school problems and controversial local issues, and joint efforts to implement new ways of working in the school, call for the formal establishment of a variety of *cross-status, school-community problem-solving teams*. These teams can update and maintain the degree of concern and interest in school change that, at this point, is created by incidents of protest and disruption.

It is essential that the *curriculum* itself be renewed in ways that place less stress on the quantity of time spent being exposed to various materials and more emphasis on students' ability to understand and use the material. This clearly requires a curriculum that is adaptive and flexible enough to be used in

different ways by different schools, and in different ways by different students. Although a variety of exciting curriculum development efforts can be noted in schools across this country, such curricula are being invented at a rate far exceeding their implementation. Further, they are being implemented with haste far more often than with the kind of thoughtful preparation that may guarantee success. New curricula are vital; yet new curricula that require and support new professional role structures, new patterns of student involvement in and out of school, and collaborative preparation and joint decision making are much more imperative.

The combined issues of *trust and power* represent themes that cut across the grievances presented earlier and can suggest other strategies for responding to school crises. Many young people have lost trust in the desire or ability of adults and of school people to serve their interests and needs. Without such faith, youth must seek the power to control their own integrity and growth.

Attempts to rebuild our schools must focus on the redevelopment of educators' practical and moral trustworthiness, and on youngsters' willingness to trust in them.

Curriculum changes, new patterns of communication and interpersonal relations, better economic and intellectual payoff, and administration of the school and classroom in the true interests of students, all point in the direction of increased trust. Changes must also recognize and support the sharing of legitimate and real power among all members of the educational system, and especially with students. Student control of school social arrangements, individualized learning systems, and student participation in curricular, instructional, and personnel decisions increase students' power to affect their own educational careers. Adults' willingness and skills in helping to create and live with new forms of trust and power will be key determinants of our schools' ability to avoid destructive actions and to create educational environments. □

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