

Ministry of Education and Science

Higher Institute of Teacher Training

La Disrupcion en las Aulas: Problemas y Soluciones.

Closing discussion: Alternatives to Classroom Disruption.
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Preamble.

Thank you for inviting me to this conference. Creating a stable, cooperative climate for learning in the classroom is an internationally important challenge. Listening to your discussions and hearing how you're meeting that challenge has been a privilege. It has also been a pleasure to meet colleagues from different backgrounds.

I wish I could give the whole of this talk in Spanish. When I was 18 I spent five months working on an estancia in Provincia La Pampa, Argentina. Many of the gauchos could not read or write, but their language was rich and colourful. They enjoyed teaching the gringo expressions that I know I cannot repeat here! I asked a friend if he thought I could give this talk in Spanish. After hearing me say a few words, he replied: "David, it would be much kinder to your audience, and much more respectful to the beautiful Spanish language, if you were to speak in English!"

Introduction.

Two years ago, at the closing session of an international conference on school bullying and violence, a representative from the Times Educational Supplement in London criticised the "lack of a cogent awareness of ramifications for teachers" among delegates to the conference (Galloway, 2005). Policy makers, Ministry officials and academic researchers had, he suggested, spent three days discussing what teachers should do without regard to the possibility of them actually doing it. That criticism could not be made against this conference.

The presence of the Minister of Education and Science and the General Secretary of the Ministry on Friday showed the importance the government attaches to the social climate in classrooms. The lecture of Sr. Najera, Vice-Director of the Ministry's High Inspectorate, showed the importance of a broad conceptual understanding of disruption, and Elena Ortega reminded us of the central importance of the curriculum. The panel discussion on keys to an inclusive curriculum built on this session. Classroom teaching, though, is also affected in crucial ways by school management, as Sr. Antonio Moreno Gonzalez' panel discussion demonstrated. The importance of the curriculum lies in providing the context for the development of the social skills described by Sr. Morales and for the teaching styles discussed in Maria Paz Soler Villalobos' panel discussion and in Soledad Iglesias Jimenez' panel on students with behaviour and adaptation problems.

You have already discussed "Answers to the problem" in the panels chaired by Sr. Vicente Riviere Gomez and Sr. Mariono Segura Escobar. That makes me feel anxious about my title: "Alternatives to classroom disruption". I hope there will not be too much overlap if I argue that:

- (a) There clearly *is* evidence of alternatives to disruption.
- (b) We already have quite a good understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of successful schools.
- (c) Unfortunately, that knowledge does not show us *how* to reduce disruption and improve educational standards. Moreover, there is a striking lack of evidence that many current approaches to reducing disruption have a sustainable impact. Indeed, achieving sustainable change is a major challenge for the 21st century.

- (d) Alternative approaches should be based on coherent theories of classroom effectiveness, of the management of change, of professional development for teachers, and of classroom pedagogy. I shall explain how these can be operationalised and discuss a small scale pilot project.

There are alternatives to disruption.

The evidence that there clearly are alternatives to disruption lies in the success of many schools, and of some teachers in almost all schools, in creating a stable, trusting climate for teaching and learning. As a young educational psychologist in the 1970s, I realised that different schools were asking me to see children with different problems. Some schools asked for advice mainly about students with externalising problems, and others mainly internalising problems. Slowly, I realised that differences in referral practice reflected differences in the schools themselves. In one school serving a socially disadvantaged inner city estate, children would usually be waiting to see the principal, sent by teachers for offences in the classroom. I frequently heard teachers shouting at children and there was a constant feeling of tension in the air. In another school serving the same estate of high rise tenement flats, it was hard to find any teachers who complained about children's behaviour. Classrooms were busy and peaceful. Teachers and children seemed to enjoy each other's company.

In the 1970's, and still today, both government and local education authorities were worried about children's behaviour. In particular they were, and are, worried about the number of pupils excluded from schools because of their difficult behaviour. I was asked to advise on the educational needs of these pupils. They were an astonishingly vulnerable group on constitutional, intellectual and educational grounds, and they were living in discordant, stressful families (**Table 1**). Yet the data also showed that these pupils came disproportionately from a minority of the city's secondary schools (**Figure 1**) and subsequent analyses revealed no association with demographic variables nor with the schools' *formal* organisation (Galloway et al, 1985). It was clear that these exceptionally vulnerable pupils were present in all schools, but that schools varied widely in their success in teaching them.

At about the same time, Michael Rutter and his colleagues were working on their seminal research on school effectiveness. They found that children's behaviour in their final term at primary school at age 11 did *not* predict their behaviour three years later at age 14. Some schools appeared to be strikingly successful in creating stable, cooperative relationships – what you call “convivencia” – but others were significantly less successful (Rutter et al, 1979). A few years later, Mortimore et al (1988) obtained broadly similar results in their study of London primary schools. In other words, whether we are talking about general, relatively low level classroom disruption or about the most extreme forms of violence and disruption, the school's influence is crucial (**Table 2**).

We should not be surprised. It has been known for years that most children can cope with isolated sources of stress – if they really are isolated (e.g. Rutter, 1978). When stressors come in combination they interact with and aggravate each other. Stability and success at school, with interest from a caring adult, may help children to survive the most stressful experiences in other parts of their lives (Quinton and Rutter, 1988).

Conversely, negative experiences at school may be what tips them over the edge into persistent problems of delinquency, social instability and poor mental health.

Distinguishing features of successful schools. With the notable exceptions of Rutter et al (1979) and Mortimore et al (1988) most school effectiveness research has focussed on cognitive outcomes such as examination results and progress in the curriculum. We have known for some time that schools vary widely in the levels of bullying among pupils (e.g. Olweus, 1993; Roland, 1998). Yet relatively little attention has concentrated on the school and classroom variables associated with varying levels of this, and other, problems.

In Norway, Roland and Galloway (2002) found that the social structure of the class, (based on scales measuring informal relations between pupils, concentration on school work and informal class norms,) had a direct impact on aggression between pupils. Classroom management, (based on scales measuring perceptions of caring for pupils, competence in teaching, teachers' practices in monitoring work and behaviour, and their effectiveness in intervening when problems occurred,) had a direct impact on the prevalence of aggressive behaviour towards other children and an indirect impact via the social structure of the class (**Table 3**). Family relations did not explain the differences between classes. A smaller study of two schools with different rates of bullying between pupils found that the professional culture of the school (defined as the principal's leadership as perceived by teachers, professional cooperation between teachers and consensus between teachers, was related to bullying between pupils (Roland and Galloway, 2004) (**Table 4**).

Achieving sustainable change: A challenge for the 21st century.

The fatal limitation of school effectiveness research has always been its inability to show teachers and policy makers how to achieve improvement. An amusing early illustration of the problem was provided by the observation of Rutter et al (1979) that the more effective schools had flowers or pot plants in the public areas. Some head teachers were rumoured to have discovered that school improvement was a more complex process than buying a few pot plants. The question is partly, as in this example, cause and effect: are the characteristics of successful school the cause of their success or the result of it? More important, as the journalist from the Times Educational Supplement quoted above put it, is: "the lack of a cogent awareness of ramifications for teachers". I believe that this is what explains the failure of many programs to reduce classroom disruption and improve social relations in schools.

In the 1970s and 1980s, many school psychologists became enthusiastic about behaviour analysis and modification. With its strong theoretical underpinning in learning theory, this seemed to provide a framework for analysing classroom behaviour and designing programs to improve it. For the first time, we thought, changes in teachers' behaviour could be shown to lead to improvements in children's behaviour. Sadly, these methods did not live up to their early promise. It gradually became clear that they could often achieve short term change, but that evidence on their long term sustainability was conspicuously and consistently lacking.

A very similar picture emerges from research on reducing bullying. The evidence that bullying can be reduced by specially designed programs is now quite strong (e.g.

Olweus, 1991, 1993; Whitney et al, 1993). However, there are major questions about their sustainability (Thompson, 2004; Roland and Munthe, 1997; Roland, 2000). To date, no study has been traced that shows reduction in rates of bullying being maintained for more than one year after termination of the program. Schools have to respond to other initiatives; they cannot continually give priority to disruption (Galloway, 2004).

The picture may appear deeply depressing, but by understanding the reasons for it we may find a way forward. Classroom teachers *cannot* concentrate on pupils' behaviour in isolation from teaching the curriculum. Managing behaviour and social interactions between children is an integral part of teaching and therefore should not be divorced from it. Similarly, it is irrational to try to create a social climate that minimises disruption in isolation from the curriculum and assessment. It is illogical to expect children to talk willingly to teachers about problems they have with other children if they cannot talk freely and easily about their learning in the curriculum and about the results of assessment. In other words, behaviour and learning are inter-related parts of the same picture, and attempts to separate them, for example in programs that focus only on disruption, are unlikely to succeed.

It is striking that studies of effective teaching and learning seldom, if ever, attribute successful practice to teachers having taken part in programs to improve behaviour. A more wholistic approach is needed. This acknowledges the central importance of children's learning in the curriculum, and sees cooperative, stable relationships as a necessary condition for learning.

Planning for sustainable improvement. This section argues that programs aiming to improve the psycho-social climate of classrooms require a more broadly based theoretical framework than is usually the case in England. This framework has five components, each of them grounded in teachers' day to day work and priorities (**Table 5**).

Component 1: A theory of classroom effectiveness. At national level, in England the Department for Education and Skills identifies priorities and targets. These are translated via the local education authorities into targets for each individual school. Whatever the process, it is important that school principals have a clear picture of what they regard as high standards *for their school*. These standards refer not only to behaviour but also to pupils' educational progress and attainments.

Component 2: A theory of change. Whether in the curriculum or in social behaviour, every new initiative – indeed every program of professional development – requires change. Change, however, is stressful and elicits resistance. The greater the teacher's feeling of stress, and the greater the need for change, the stronger the resistance it may provoke. This is why schools with the greatest problems are often the most resistant to improvement programs. In an important article, Hargreaves (2001) points out that teachers can be persuaded to cooperate in a new initiative, but because they are already busy, it will not be sustainable unless teachers can incorporate it into their day to day thinking and classroom practice. He argues that new initiatives are unlikely to have a sustainable impact unless introduced with a *low* energy level (**Figure 2**). This is because high profile initiatives lead to burn-out and exhaustion. Low profile

initiatives, in contrast, stand a greater chance of becoming incorporated into the teacher's thinking and regular classroom routines.

Component 3: A theory of professional development and leadership. Teachers learn most readily and most effectively when three conditions are met. First, they have opportunities to learn from each other, enabling them to share experience and explore solutions. Second, they can focus on their own immediate professional problems and interests. Third, they discover that this form of professional development leads to their pupils making better progress, to better relationships with their pupils and to better relationships with colleagues. These, of course, are the main sources of job satisfaction for teachers (Galloway, Boswell, Panckhurst, Boswell and Green, 1985). I must add one word of caution here. We cannot *only* learn from each other as that runs the risk of re-cycling poor practice. Research on teaching and learning in Higher Education shows that formal lectures are the least effective of all teaching methods – which makes me distinctly uneasy in giving this paper! But they can play a useful part in professional development if they form the basis for subsequent discussions in which teachers relate the content of the lecture to their own professional experience in the classroom.

An important aspect of professional development is leadership. That includes the teacher in her / his classroom, responsible for creating a climate in which all pupils can live and work together. Yet it also includes more senior teachers with leadership responsibility for some part of the curriculum, or for the school's guidance and pupil care network. These teachers are central to any comprehensive program to reduce disruption.

Component 4: A theory of pedagogy. At least in England, pedagogy is a somewhat elusive concept, referring less to teaching methods than to a teacher's general approach, irrespective of the method used. For example, science can be taught by following a tightly specified syllabus, or by problem based methods that emphasise learning to apply scientific principles. In either case, pedagogical approaches that encourage questioning, group exploration and project work are possible, though they are more likely in problem based methods. More important, a high level of teacher responsiveness to individual needs and interests is possible irrespective of the methodology.

Component 5: A theory of behaviour change. It used to be thought that children's behaviour in school was determined largely by their family background and, to a lesser extent, by constitutional or genetic factors. Indeed this is still the prevalent belief in English schools (see Croll and Moses, 1985). It is, however, clearly wrong. The easiest way to see the overwhelming importance of the teacher is to observe a group of secondary pupils for one day. In England they are likely to be taught by about six different teachers. Typically, pupils' behaviour varies widely, depending on whose lesson they are attending. Hence, far from being dependent on factors in the home or community, behaviour in the classroom depends on the stability and learning climate that the teacher creates in the classroom. A theory of behaviour change does not specify how teachers should teach. Rather, it is based on three underlying assumptions. First, pupils' behaviour, as well as their educational progress, is the teacher's responsibility. Second, teachers need active guidance and support from

colleagues in maintaining stability. Third, interest and concern for pupils is as central to their behaviour as it is to their progress in the curriculum.

Testing the theory: A small scale preliminary study.

The closest we have come to testing this theoretical framework is a small scale project in Norway (Galloway and Roland, 2004). Forty teachers of first grade classes took part in a professional development program with four elements: caring for children, managing movement in the classroom, assessment (of social interaction as well as progress in the curriculum), and intervention when problems occur (**Table 6**). In the evaluation children taught by these teachers completed a short questionnaire about their experience at school and their responses were compared with those of a comparison group of children whose teachers had not taken part in the program. On all items the experimental group gave more favourable responses (**Table 7**). With regard to bullying, this professional development program achieved a broadly similar reduction to those reported by programs that aim specifically to reduce bullying.

Evaluation. Haargreaves (2001) would predict that the kind of professional development program described above would be more sustainable than a program targeted specifically at disruption in the classroom or problems of interaction between pupils. That, though, remains a question for future research. It is also likely that this kind of broadly based approach, seeking simultaneously to improve behaviour *and* progress in the curriculum, would have a greater impact on pupils' learning, but that, too, remains a matter for future research. Astonishingly, no one appears to have investigated directly the probable links between improvements in classroom climate during a professional development course and improvements in children's educational progress.

To summarise: We know that there are alternatives to disruption. We know much less about how they can be achieved. The current evidence points strongly to the need for a broadly based approach that sees social and cognitive development as inter-linked. The necessary research is not technically or methodologically complex, but until it is done, teachers will continue to work in the twilight, if not the dark.

Conclusions.

How we conceptualise problem behaviour is important. The French refer to "la violence". Many other countries talk about school bullying and violence. Both terms seem to me negative and misleading – negative in their exclusive focus on problem behaviour and misleading in not recognising the success of so many schools and teachers in creating positive climates. That is why I wish that English had an equivalent word for convivencia. Living together implies working together. It implies a commitment to the cognitive as well as the social aims of education in schools.

I have suggested criteria for programs that aim to provide sustainable alternatives to disruption. I am sure you will not regard these uncritically. Undoubtedly they will require review and development. Nevertheless, I remain confident of three things. First, we must build on the existing skills and knowledge of teachers and school principals. Second, progress in this field depends on rigorous evaluation, with an adequate follow up to see if improvements are maintained after the program has

finished. Third, contributors to this conference – Ministers, officials, school principals, inspectors, teacher trainers and academics - have demonstrated the progress that has already been made; Spain is well placed to meet the internationally important challenge of finding long-term sustainable alternatives to disruption.

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