

REALITY THERAPY AND INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

A SPECIAL REVIEW¹

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Glasser's *Schools Without Failure* is a book of tremendous importance. Its strength lies, first, in the author's theoretical position which informs his diagnoses of our troubled society and our inadequate educational system, and his grasp of the relation between the two; and, second, in the carefully detailed, concrete way in which he has made his theory operational, so that he has already begun to put it to the practical test, and can readily teach it to others.

It will be recalled that Glasser formulated two basic needs in his previous work, *Reality Therapy* (5): the needs for love and for self-worth. In a society deficient in involvement and cooperation, where there is more chance for failure than success, many people cannot satisfy these needs. It is the thrust of the present book to show that they *can* be met in school. Ways of satisfying them for oneself and others can be taught in school in spite of deprivation, poverty, and other disturbing background factors. Furthermore, the first years of school are critical, especially for success or failure, "not only for deprived children but for all children" (p. 26).²

"In the context of school, love can best be thought of as social responsibility . . . Teachers and children . . . must learn to care enough to help one another with the many social and educational problems of school" (p. 14). Loneliness should be overcome in school, and friendship learned. Self-worth can be fostered in school when children arrive at relevant "knowledge and the ability to solve the problems of life successfully" (p. 14). It is Glasser's claim that these goals will be achieved when schools correct their present errors of non-involvement, irrelevance, and "memorizing the right answers"; when, instead, they promote involvement between teacher and pupil, and between pupils; relevance of subject matter to life; and thinking directed to solving problems.

¹Glasser, William. *Schools Without Failure*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969. Pp. xiv + 235. \$4.95.

²Where only a page reference is given this refers to the book under review.

Glasser describes various ways of education which would bring about these changes, but his principal innovation is for classroom meetings. These merge into the more effective ways of teaching subject matter and skills, but are also means, in themselves, to satisfying personal relationships and to increased self-worth.

These are "meetings in which the teacher leads a whole class in a nonjudgmental discussion about what is important and relevant to them" (p. 122). The discussions can be (a) social-problem-solving, concerned with students' social behavior in school; (b) open-ended, concerned with intellectually important subjects; and (c) educational-diagnostic, concerned with how well the students understand the concepts of the curriculum. They should be a part of the regular school curriculum, occurring every day in elementary school and perhaps two or three times a week in high school, through which the children can learn that each class is a working, problem solving unit and that each student has both individual and group responsibilities. Glasser implements his general statements with a wealth of detailed suggestions covering all aspects of conducting such classroom meetings, such as the seating arrangement (always a circle), the most favorable time of day, the length of sessions, ways of calling on pupils, ways of stimulating discussion, etc. He includes a number of excellently informative examples of classroom meetings.

SIMILAR PROJECTS

Possibly paralleling his ahistoric therapeutic approach, Glasser mentions no precedents for his proposals. Similar projects have, however, been reported by other workers, some of which, because of our familiarity with them, are of particular interest. We should like to cite them here inasmuch as their comparison with Glasser's work brings out a mutual reinforcement.

The nearest approach has been described by the Adlerian psychiatrist, Rudolf Dreikurs, in his *Psychology in the Classroom* (3). In his chapter on "Group Discussions" he says:

Group discussion in the classroom is a necessary procedure in a democratic setting. It is the only means by which the children can integrate themselves into the class as a unit with status, responsibility, and active voluntary participation. . . . Every class project requires discussion, every academic venture involving the whole class is such a project. . . . Group discussion provides the teacher with an opportunity to help the children understand themselves and change their concepts and motivations. For this reason one period every week should be set aside for such discussion (3, p. 159).

The group then becomes an exploring agent into factors which make for deficiency, both in academic work and in behavior or social adjustment. Out of

mutual understanding grows willingness to help one another, . . . the recognition of any problem as a common problem of the group, which has to be solved in a spirit of togetherness (3, p. 160).

Though Dreikurs, like Glasser, gives no historic background for this procedure, the class was used as a dynamic group, officially, in the Individual Psychology Experimental School founded in one of the poorest districts in Vienna, in 1931, by Oskar Spiel and Ferdinand Birnbaum. The uses of "the discussion method" and "the weekly discussion hour" are presented in a book by the former, entitled in its English translation, *Discipline without Punishment* (7). The educational philosophy of this school was based directly on the teachings of Alfred Adler, who wrote in 1930 and 1931:

As the family should be a unit, with each member an equal part of the whole, so should the class. When they are trained in this way, children are really interested in one another, and enjoy cooperation. I have seen many "difficult" children whose attitude was entirely changed through the interest and cooperation of their fellow children . . . When a problem arises in the class the teacher can propose that the children talk the matter out. The teacher, of course, would direct the discussion, but the children would have full opportunity for expression. They might analyze the causes of a problem such as laziness and reach some conclusion (1, p. 402).

Without having searched the literature specifically regarding this topic, we recall several other, though not detailed, suggestions for what is today called group dynamics, in high school classes.

It goes without saying that these comparable studies and views do not detract from Glasser's accomplishment. He has formulated his own therapeutic principles; working on the West coast, he has applied them in person within the schools; taught them in classes for teachers and administrators; demonstrated them for all to see—including parents; achieved their acceptance through an entire school in several instances; and, probably most importantly, presented them clearly and completely in the volume under review.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND FINDINGS

A further comparison of Glasser's fundamental concepts with those of Individual Psychology seems worthwhile because it is clarifying as well as supportive.

To begin with, while Glasser acknowledges that basic needs should be fulfilled early in life, he implies that all of a man's life is not determined in infancy, nor are the nuclear family and the home the only possible media for experiencing loving care and cooperation. This is obviously a most important assumption basic to changing and re-

vitalizing the schools, and it is clearly in contradiction to commonly held psychoanalytically-oriented views. It does, however, reflect a few views in the recent past, one of which is well expressed by Helene Papanek:

The social setting within which the individual develops contributes greatly to his mental health or disease. The family and the relationships within the family are part of this social setting, and a very important part at that. But the family is neither the only existing nor the only possible social milieu in our complicated modern society. Similarly, family interaction alone, whether observed or inferred, particularly if seen exclusively as a variation of the Oedipal theme, does not provide a workable model to explain behavior . . . (nor) to alter delinquent behavior, . . . alleviate consequences of discrimination, . . . provide humanitarian values, etc. . . . Our need is for a comprehensive psychological and sociological theory applicable to the treatment and prevention of mental illness and disorder (6, pp. 120-121).

A basic finding of Glasser's is that children enjoy participating in the classroom meetings. Furthermore, "No child has ever objected to having his problem discussed" (p. 94); and children are in no way inhibited by an audience or visitors to their circle. This may still surprise many psychotherapists, but it is appropriate to mention here that Adler was the first to break the rule of one-to-one privacy, by counseling children and their families before an audience (1, p. 393). Glasser has found, further, that "group counseling is almost always more effective than individual counseling, and that groups of ten to twenty are more effective than groups of five to ten" (p. 224).

He also found that treating unsuccessful students in a group by themselves is usually ineffective, and that they should be intermixed with successful students. He presents cogent evidence for preferring the heterogeneous class. Adler had similar views: "If the class is a unit, the successes of one member are an advantage to the others. Where there are brilliant children in a class, the progress of the whole class can be accelerated . . . It will help the slow child if the other pupils cooperate in helping him" (1, p. 402).

Glasser points out that in working toward success, the emphasis must be on the present; failures in the past must not be permitted to carry over into the present. "We must realize that a person who has failed all his life can succeed if he can become involved with a responsible person" (pp. 19-20). Individual Psychologists also avoid backward-looking explorations (except as these may serve to clarify for the individual the mistake he is making in the present). The ever-present possibility of responding in a way different from the past is, of course, also particularly emphasized by the existentialists such as Sartre, Hazel Barnes, and Frankl.

This leads directly to another emphasis, namely, on behavior—as over against feelings. Glasser states simply: In working with students in the present, “we must deal with their behavior because only their behavior can be changed” (p. 20). “When behavior is improved, it leads to good feelings that in turn snowball toward better behavior . . . If a child misbehaves in class, the teacher must ask, ‘What are you doing?’ ” (p. 21). This brings to mind the similar question which Dreikurs puts to his clients—be they children, parents, or spouses—when they describe unsatisfactory situations in their lives: “And what did *you* do?” Both Glasser and Dreikurs follow the response by asking, “And does it help?” And both then ask the client to suggest alternatives. Usually Dreikurs also asks, “Why do you do it?” and when the client claims not to know, Dreikurs suggests the reason. This step also facilitates finding alternative behavior. Glasser points out that by leaving the decision of the course of behavior to the child, we teach him responsibility. He then must commit himself to this choice. After he does so, “No excuse is acceptable for not following through. This is discipline” (p. 23).

Both Glasser and Dreikurs reject punishment, and invoke the discipline of natural or logical consequences. In *Logical Consequences: A New Approach to Discipline*, Dreikurs and Grey write: “The adult should always give the child a choice. The child should be asked to choose between behaving in the correct manner or continuing with his misbehavior. If he decides to continue it, then the consequences should immediately follow” (4, p. 78). Glasser writes with regard to school children and rules, in the making of which they have had some part (and Dreikurs also pleads for such participation), “They may choose to disobey the rules; this choice is open to all. But they then have to accept the consequences of their choice” (p. 200). “Neither school nor therapist should attempt to manipulate the world so that the child does not suffer the reasonable consequences of his behavior” (p. 21).

CONCLUSION

Many more similarities, theoretical and practical, are to be found between Glasser’s system of Reality Therapy and Individual Psychology. Their positions even seem to be coming closer in the present work, for Glasser develops his earlier thought regarding the *two* basic needs for love and worthwhileness in this way: “We may say that *the single need* that people have is the requirement for an identity:

the belief that we are someone in distinction to others, and that the someone is important and worthwhile" (p. 14, italics added). We are, of course, important and worthwhile only to the extent to which we are so to others. This then is not very different from Adler's concept of a unitary dynamic which in mental health is a striving for significance on the socially useful side—striving with a well developed social interest. The behavioral expression of social interest is cooperation, through which both love and worthwhileness are achieved as well as expressed. Adler held that to teach true cooperation is the schools' foremost task. "Whether they know it or not, all who propose some school reform are seeking a way to increase the degree of cooperation in social life" (2, pp. 157-158). As if in confirmation, Glasser says in one instance: "Our society . . . will survive only through cooperation. But cooperation, a product of an intelligent appraisal of one's social situation, is poorly taught in modern competitive education" (p. 43).

If we can teach cooperation in the schools, if we can promote loving involvement with others and a feeling of self-worth in children, then we would be doing much to change our world. *Schools without Failure* would seem to show the way and furnish a method. That is why it is such an important book.

The fact that both way and method are so similar to what Adler advocated and Dreikurs has so well implemented, would make it appear that the two approaches can be used together to strengthen each other for their own support and adoption and, most importantly, for the general welfare.

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