

5. Where does the bully mentality come from?

The problem with most discussions about bullying is that it is concerned with the immediate 'first aid' problem of how to deal with the latest outbreak of persecution. There are now plenty of books, booklets and articles that try to deal with this, (see Kidscape details that follow), so I intend to look beyond the symptoms to the causes of the disease.

The root causes of bullying are usually overlooked or passed off as some weakness of character. Alice Miller, in books like *For Your Own Good*, however, proposes that people **learn** the bully mentality. She concludes from her research that 'every persecutor was once a victim'. She shows how every member of the Third Reich had the same kind of upbringing and education based on unrelieved domination, and she calls this 'the poisonous pedagogy'.

But, I want to come closer to home than Hitler's regime. School in UK, based on the current model of the compulsory day-confinement centre, is itself **a bully institution**. In a democracy, nobody is supposed to be detained against their will unless they have committed an offence. So, what is the offence that children have committed to justify detention? It would appear to be that their 'offence' is that they are young.

Having confined children by compulsion, apart from those who opt for home-based education, schools employ **a bully curriculum** - a compulsory National Curriculum or some other imposed programme. We could employ a democratic curriculum if we wanted to, and the catalogue curriculum, which offers a more-or-less unlimited range of learning possibilities and is learner-driven, is just such an approach.

Just how ingrained is the idea of adults imposing their ideas of 'proper' learning is indicated when a school does it differently. Sudbury Valley High School in USA has no timetable and no lessons until the learners request them or set about organising them. It operates a learner-driven curriculum.

The bully curriculum is enforced by the increasingly favoured **bully pedagogy** of teacher-dominated formal teaching. Alice Miller's view that this is a 'poisonous pedagogy' is supported by others. Rosalind Miles entitled her book *The Children We Deserve*. Paul Goodman chose the title of *Compulsory Mis-education* and Chris Shute used the idea of *Compulsory Schooling Disease*.

In another book, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling*, John Taylor Gatto, has the following to say: "*I began to realise that the bells and the confinement, the crazy sequences, the age segregation, the lack of privacy, the constant surveillance, and all the rest of the national curriculum of schooling were designed exactly as if someone had set out to prevent children from learning how to think and act, to coax them into addiction and dependent behaviour.*"

He decided to change his style of teaching, to give children space, time and respect and to see what happened. **What happened was that the children learnt so much that he was nominated teacher of the year for the New York State several times.**

Gatto recognised that what he was really paid to teach was a hidden or unwritten curriculum. He decided it was made up of seven basic ideas. The first was *confusion*. He was required to teach disconnected facts not meaning, infinite fragmentation not cohesion, and a tool kit of

superficial jargon rather than genuine understandings. The second basic idea was *class position*. Children were to be taught to know their place by being forced into the rigged competition of schooling. A third lesson was that of *indifference*. He saw he was paid to teach children not to care too much about anything.

The fourth lesson was that of *emotional dependency* for, by marks and grades, ticks and stars, smiles and frowns, he was required to teach children to surrender their wills to authority. The next idea to be passed on was that of *intellectual dependency*. They must learn that good people wait for an expert to tell them what to do and believe. The sixth idea follows on from this - the teaching of *provisional self-esteem*. Self-respect is determined by what others say about you in reports and grades. People learn to be told what they are worth and self-evaluation is ignored. The final, seventh lesson is that *you cannot hide*. You are watched constantly by teachers, parents and other students and privacy is frowned upon.

Responses to his analysis are predictable, Gatto says, the assertion that there is 'no other way': *"It is the great triumph of compulsory government monopoly mass-schooling that among even the best of my fellow teachers, and among even the best of my students' parents, only a small number can imagine a different way to do things."*

School, Gatto concludes, is a twelve year jail sentence where **bad habits** are the only curriculum truly learned. School 'schools' very well but it hardly educates at all. All this schooling, however, is good preparation for being gullible to the other institutions that control us, e.g. television,

Currently the school system in UK is reinforced by the bully compulsory assessment system and an aggressive school inspectorate. The unwritten, but powerful message of this package, is **adults get their way by bullying**. There are at least three types of outcome to this model of schooling. The 'successful' pupils grow up to be officially sanctioned bullies in dominant authority positions as assertive politicians, doctors, teachers, civil servants, journalists and the like, and start their own career as persecutors.

Next, a majority of the 'less successful' learn to accept the mentality of the bullied - the submissive and dependent mind-set. Such people need someone to tell them what to think and do, because they have been prevented from learning how to do 'joined-up' thinking.

A third outcome is the production of a group of free-lance bullies who become troublesome and end up in trouble of varying degree of seriousness. Until we replace this domination model with a different model, the root causes of bullying will continue. As Jerry Mintz reports from the USA scene: *"American kids like watching violence on TV and in the movies because violence is being done to them, both at school and at home. It builds up a tremendous amount of anger... The problem is not violence on TV. That's a symptom... The real problem is the violence of anti-life, unaffectionate, and punitive homes, and disempowering, deadening compulsory schooling, all presented with an uncomprehending smile."*

We can do better than schooling based on domination and I applaud the work of those teachers like John Taylor Gatto who begin to move away from domination towards participation, power-sharing and democratic relationships (see also Trafford below). They organise schools councils that work. They have parental involvement that is genuine. They devise lesson and classrooms based on co-operative principles. They make it possible for

children, in the words of my son, "*to find bits of treasure in the wreck.*" But, knowing it is a wreck is crucial to positive survival in it. As one young person said after reading a book of educational quotations, "*Now I know that there are other people who think school is crackers, I can cope with it.*"

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- Parents faced with problems of bullying at school can find help in: *Preventing Bullying: A Parent's Guide* by Kidscape. Send large SAE for a free copy from Kidscape, 152 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9TR
- The Co-operative College, Stanford Hall, Loughborough, has been running weekend courses for many years on co-operative learning in schools and the next one, 'Developing Co-operation in Education', will be May 15th-17th 1998 (Telephone Alan Wilkins on 01509 857220)
- Bernard Trafford's book is *Participation, Power-sharing and School Improvement* and costs £9-95 (p.&p.included) from Educational Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ

This piece was published in *Natural Parent* in June 1998, as the Roland Meighan column, entitled 'Where the bullying starts'