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What Do We Mean By 'EBD'?¹

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Elsewhere, I have asserted that arguments for special education rest in particular ways of thinking and understanding (Thomas and Loxley, 2007). Those arguments, I suggested, have set on a pedestal certain kinds of theoretical and empirical 'knowledge' and favored particular methodological avenues as routes to such knowledge. The putative character of this knowledge – stable, objective, reliable – has created a false legitimacy for the growth of special education and the activities of special educators. This chapter takes that theme forward, focusing on children who don't behave at school. It makes the point that the metaphors and constructs that are used to generate understanding about such difficult behavior are often misleading, evoking, as they do, all kinds of quasi-scientific explanation – explanation that has popularly come to be known as 'psychobabble'. While 'psychobabble' is hardly a scholarly term to employ in a volume such as this, it is nevertheless an apt one. For the mélange of disparate metaphor and theory around which the understanding of people's behavior is popularly constructed – in both lay and professional circles – rests in the reification of what is little more than tentative psychological theory. Perhaps more scholarly than psychobabble would be Crews's characterization of this knowledge, particularly that which rests in Freudian theory, as an 'ontological maze peopled by absurd homunculi' (1997: 298).

Whatever the register in which one chooses to discuss it, there have been, I argue in this chapter, some unfortunate consequences of this kind of discourse for schoolchildren. Further, in the more recent school-orientated approaches to

helping avoid troublesome behavior at school – approaches that put the emphasis on change by the school rather than the change in the child – are found merely a replication of the exclusionary phenomena of the past. Those phenomena are created by certain kinds of mindsets and professional systems that accentuate rather than attenuate difference – and these mindsets and professional systems themselves rest in the thinking about difference, of deficit and disadvantage.

I contend that a relatively recent concept, that of ‘need’, has come to reinforce these concepts of deficit and disadvantage. Intended to be helpful, to place emphasis on a child’s difficulties rather than simply naming a supposed category of problems, the notion of need has instead come to point as emphatically as before at the child. It has allowed many of the exclusionary practices associated with special education to remain in place.

THE NOTION OF EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DIFFICULTIES: THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

The terms ‘EBD’ (emotional and behavioral difficulties) or ‘SEBD’ (social, emotional and behavioral difficulties) are widely and unquestioningly used in England (and other countries have their own equivalents) as an administrative and quasi-clinical category. Uniquely, it proffers a category that is specific to children, and which combines legal, medical and educational connotations and meanings.

Although EBD is not an official category in England, it exists as one in everything but name. Categories officially ceased to exist following the report of the Warnock Committee (DES, 1978) and the 1981 Education Act. Yet it would be clear to a Martian after five minutes’ study of the English education system that for all practical purposes EBD is indeed a category and that it forms in the minds of practitioners, professionals and administrators one of the principal groups of special needs. It has been used as a category in the local statementing procedures that have followed from Section 5 of the 1981 Education Act and the Education Acts that have succeeded it. It appears unquestioningly in papers in reputable academic journals (for example, Smith and Thomas, 1992), and it appears as a descriptor in official documents and papers (for example, DES, 1989a, 1989b; DfEE, 1995; Mortimore, 1997).

The term ‘EBD’, then, reveals no frailty; indeed it displays a peculiar resilience and this makes it particularly interesting and useful as an example of a special education concept. The resilience it shows is demonstrated in its ability to survive and prosper over the past few years when attention has moved from the child to the institution, with, for example, the Elton Committee’s emphasis on whole-school approaches to discipline (DES, 1989c). Over the last few years, academics and policy-makers have proposed that in tackling the question of difficult behavior at school, attention should be paid not only to analysis and treatment of the child’s behavior, but also to the operations and systems in the school that may cause or aggravate such behavior.

But behind this sensible development in thinking, there resolutely continues a powerful sub-text that the real causes of difficult behavior lie in deficit and deviance in the child. As recently as 1994, respected academics framed their book around section headings such as 'Identification of EBDs' (Chazan et al., 1994: 27) and 'Factors associated with EBDs in middle childhood' (1994: 36). Another entitled their book *Treating Problem Children* (Hoghughi, 1988). Recent discourse stresses attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (see Graham, 2012 for a critical discussion of recent developments). The agenda is of deficit, deviance and disadvantage in the child, and while school systems are usually mentioned in discourse such as this, they seem to appear almost as an after-thought. It is clear that the real problem is considered to be dispositional – that of the child – and the emphasis is thus on individual treatment. The term 'EBD' induces a clinical mindset from which it is difficult to escape.

This mindset operates within more all-encompassing ideas about need. The notion of need is seldom questioned. It is seemingly so benign, so beneficial to the child that it has become a shibboleth of special education thinking and policy. But I contend in this chapter that 'need' is less than helpful, and that it is a chimera when difficult behavior is being considered. The notion of need here is based on a belief that a *child's* problems are being identified and addressed. 'Need' in this context, however, is more usefully seen as the school's need – a need for calm and order. The language of the clinic, though, invariably steers the response of professionals toward a child-based action plan.

This focus on emotional need substitutes a set of supposedly therapeutic practices and procedures for more down-to-earth and simple-to-understand sanctions. It also diverts attention from the nature of the environment which children are expected to inhabit. The ambit of the 'helping', therapeutic response invoked by the idea of EBD is unjustifiably wide, being called on neither at the request of the young person involved (or at least very rarely so), nor because of some long-standing pattern of behavior which has demonstrated that the young person has a clinically identifiable problem, but rather because the behavior is unacceptable for a particular institution. But because these therapeutic practices and procedures notionally constitute 'help', they are peculiarly difficult to refuse.

Likewise, it is difficult to refute the kindly, child-centred, humanitarian tenets on which they supposedly rest. The tenets on which therapeutic practice rest may be all these good things (kind, humanitarian, child-centred), but they have developed during an era when the intellectual climate eschewed – or, rather, failed even to consider as meaningful concepts – ideas about the rationality and rights of the child. In such a climate, it was considered appropriate and necessary for decisions to be made about and for children by concerned professionals. Whereas systems for rule-breaking adults have come to incorporate strict procedures to protect rights, systems could develop in schools to deal with rule infringement that would incorporate no such protection because the protection was considered to be automatically inherent in the beneficial action of the professionals acting on the child's behalf.

But those actors and advocates would often be the very same people who were offended by the child's behavior. In the adult world, political and legal systems are particularly sensitive to the boundary between wrongdoing and mental illness, and it is commonplace that in certain circumstances in certain political regimes, it is only too convenient to brand wrongdoers and rebels 'mad'. In more favorable political circumstances, by contrast, fastidious care is taken to differentiate between law breaking, rebellion and mental illness. Alongside this fastidiousness, there is a range of protections for both the wrongdoer and for the person who is depressed or schizophrenic – sophisticated protections against unfair conviction or the too-convenient attribution of mental illness to unwelcome behavior.

But for children and young people at school, because of assumptions about their vulnerability and their irrationality, and presuppositions about the beneficial actions of professionals acting on their behalf, those protections do not exist. Their absence has allowed a label like 'EBD' in education to be compiled out of a range of disparate ideas about order and disturbance. Those ideas are elided, yet their elision is rarely acknowledged or addressed.

The elision of ideas represented in the notion of EBD has done little, I contend, for the individual child, yet it also exercises an influence, even on supposedly whole-school approaches to behavior management at school. The notion of EBD distorts the way that management or organizational issues at school are defined and handled. A whole-school approach to behavior difficulties existing in the same universe as a thriving notion of EBD means that behavior difficulties are invariably seen through a child-centred, clinical lens. This clinical lens is more convenient for everyone: it offers immediate response (often the removal of the child) rather than the promise of an improvement in a term or a year; it offers ready-made routes into existing professional systems that distract attention from possible shortcomings of the school; and it avoids the large-scale upheaval and expense of whole-school reform. Following episodes of difficult behavior, traditional child-focused professional responses therefore tend to follow.

The language of need, out of which we build ideas about problem behavior, therefore induces procedural responses whose main function is the appearance of doing something constructive. The mantra of need mechanically induces a set of reflexes from the school, but these are often little more than rituals – bureaucratic shows of willing. They constitute what Skrtic (1991) calls 'symbols and ceremonies'.

A different view about how to respond to difficult behavior at school can emerge out of current thinking on inclusion. The inclusive school should best be seen as a humane environment rather than a set of pre-existing structures and systems for dealing with misbehavior. These traditional structures and systems inevitably invoke already-existing professional responses. But my contention is that schools contain such an odd collection of rules and practices that unless these are themselves addressed and altered, misbehavior from children is an almost inevitable consequence.

WHOSE NEEDS?

The blanket ascription of ‘need’ when behavior is found difficult at school requires some examining. Whose needs are being identified and unravelled here? The route taken is nearly always to assume that the child needs something, and the assumptions about need proceed to imputations of intent, weakness and problem in the wrongdoer.

Foucault (1991) analysed this process as it has taken place in juridical practice over two centuries. According to his analysis, modern times have seen a transformation in society’s response to wrongdoing. Because, historically, responses to wrongdoing were often so shockingly cruel, new ‘kinder’ techniques of control have supplanted them. Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1991) begins with an example. It begins with a picture of a savage punishment in pre-revolution France where a prisoner, Damiens, has his limbs carved from his body. But it is not principally condemnation of this cruelty that follows from Foucault. Rather, he has drawn the picture to contrast it with the kinds of punishment that have come to succeed it. Because of the conspicuous savagery of punishment regimes in Europe until the mid-19th century, Foucault says, a backlash forced attempts to be more gentle, to have ‘more respect, more “humanity”’ (1991: 16). It is these successors to the punishment of Damiens for which Foucault reserves his sharpest critique. For these systems – this ‘gentle way in punishment’ (1991: 104) – are quieter, more insidious. These new techniques, relying on the constructs and knowledge of the new social sciences, constructed various forms of understanding of the wrongdoer that made imputations of intent and assumptions about motive. This would not be so bad were it not for the fact that the understandings provided by the new sciences depended on tentative, fallible theories, which were treated as though they were scientific fact.³ In fact, they were merely making new kinds of judgement about misbehavior, but judgements that were given added credence and respectability by their association with supposedly scientific thinking and understanding – understanding that had been so successful in the natural sciences. In short, what has occurred, the analysis of Foucault suggests, has been a movement from simple judgement and punishment of someone’s disapproved-of act to complex and unjustified judgements about his or her ‘soul’.

EBD provides an excellent case study of this elision from punishment to judgement. It provides a clear example of a category created from an intermingling of certain systems of knowledge (like psychology and medicine) on one side and of a need for institutional order on the other.

To make this proposition, represents perhaps not too sparkling an insight because a critical recognition of the place of the medical model in special education is hardly new. My specific focus here though, is on the almost explicit conflation of administrative need with quasi-medical category, of the transition from naughty-therefore-impose-sanctions to disturbed-therefore-meet-needs. It is the nature of the transition that I wish especially to examine: the gradient from

Table 2.1 What is meant by 'need'?

School's needs	Children's needs	
'Juridical' needs (but expressed as children's psychological needs)	Educational needs (but 'identified' using psychological constructs and instruments)	Physical needs (which may sometimes result in educational needs)
Category:	Category:	Category:
EBD	Moderate learning difficulty (MLD)	Physical disability hearing impairment visual impairment
Characterized by:	Characterized by:	Characterized by:
Questions of order for the school	Questions of how best to help children who are having serious problems with their work at school	Questions of how best to help children who have physical or sensory impairments

punishment to 'help', down which the child tends to descend once 'need' has been established.

There are taken-for-granted assumptions of 'help' in the 'meeting need' mantra of contemporary special education protocols, and these 'needs' have been silently transmuted with the assistance of the constructs of academic and professional psychology from the *school's* needs for order, calm, routine and predictability to the *child's* needs – supposedly for stability, nurture, security, one-to-one help or whatever.

In the unspoken assumptions behind special education procedures, there is no acknowledgement of the manoeuvre that has occurred here – no recognition of the frailty of the idea of an 'emotional need' – and no willingness to entertain the possibility that emotional needs may be a fiction constructed to escape the school's insecurities about failing to keep order.

Table 2.1 distinguishes between two kinds of need: that of the school and that of the child. My intention is to point to the conflation of ideas and knowledge used in the notion of need and to suggest that the umbrella-use of the construct disguises different kinds of problems that school staff confront. But unacceptable behavior is rarely a problem of the child. While this behavior is a problem for the school, it rarely constitutes a clinical problem. Neither does it point to some abnormality or deficit.

An elevation in the status of psychological knowledge has meant that simple understandings about what is right or wrong have, in themselves, become insufficient to explain difficult behavior. A new epistemology has emerged wherein a lexicon of dispositionally orientated words and phrases govern and mould the way unacceptable behavior is considered. Thus, if children misbehave at school, education professionals are encouraged to examine the background, motivations and supposed traumas of the students, rather than the simple humanity of the school's operation – its simple day-to-day processes and routines.

Foucault (1991) warns against the assumption that the knowledge of disciplines like psychology and sociology can inform the working practices of staff

in schools and hospitals. It is not disinterested knowledge; in the context of prisons he says that it has acquired the status of an “epistemological-juridical” formation’ (1991: 23). It is the same, perhaps, as what Bourdieu calls ‘doxa’: a kind of taken-for-granted knowledge, naturalized knowledge, ‘things people accept without knowing’ (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1994). In other words, the knowledge of psychology and psychiatry have infiltrated our everyday understanding of disorder and deviance so that they are now almost as one: disorder has somehow become melded with disturbance in such a way that thought about behavior, which is out-of-order at school, can hardly be entertained without the collateral assumption of emotional disturbance and special need. This symbiosis of order and understanding is nowhere clearer than in the contemporary term ‘EBD’.

MEETING NEED

In education, this last reconceptualization occurs under the cloak of *meeting individual need*. The ‘meeting need’ notion satisfies two conditions for the educationist. First, it enables the labelling of madness (a Bad Thing) to be transformed into the identification of a need in the child (a Good Thing). Thus, the educator, with a stroke of a wand, is changed from labeller (this child is maladjusted) to benefactor and helper (this child has special needs and I will meet them). Second, an institutional need for order is transformed to a child’s emotional need. The child who misbehaves has special needs that are rooted in emotional disturbance, the vocabulary at once invoking psychological, psychoanalytic and psychiatric knowledge. Once need is established, the psychological genie has been released.⁴

It is strange that psychologists and educationists should have managed to pull off such a feat of alchemy because a moment’s thought discloses the fact that the things which children habitually do wrong at school rarely have any manifest (or indeed covert) association with their emotional makeup. They concern the school’s need to regulate time (punishing tardiness and truancy), activity (punishing lack of effort or overactivity), speech (punishing chatter or insolence), and the body (punishing hairstyles, clothes, the use of makeup or the tidiness of the individual).⁵ As Cicourel and Kitsuse put it, ‘the adolescent’s posture, walk, cut of hair, clothes, use of slang, manner of speech ... may be the basis for the typing of the student as a “conduct problem”’ (1968: 130).

But being unpunctual, lazy, rude or untidy were never, even by early 20th-century standards, qualifications for madness, or even emotional difficulty. They concern, as Hargreaves et al. (1975) point out, rule-infractions. They have little or nothing to do with an individual’s emotional need, but everything to do with the school’s need to keep order. Maintaining order through the upholding of these codes is necessary, school managers would argue, for the efficient running and indeed for the survival of the school.

Few could disagree. Institutions that require collecting groups of 20 or 30 in classes, and hundreds in assemblies, need ways of keeping order. The energy of young people must be kept in check if these assemblages are not to descend into scrums. To maintain order, there is a need for disciplinary methods through the regulation of the use of space and the control of activity. Mostly these work.

It is when they don't work, when children fail to conform and fail to respond to the 'gentle punishments', that the manoeuvre occurs in which need is passed from school to child. Unable to understand the stubbornness of the individuals concerned and fearful of the consequences for order, those responsible for order in the school, following the precepts learned in teacher education and reinforced by authority range of support systems, then reconceptualize the students as having emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Although recent changes in discussion about policy (DfEE, 1997) have stressed the importance of an inclusive ethos in schools (that is, one in which the comprehensive ethos of the school is clearly articulated, and the systems of the school are established to ensure inclusion), there remains a firm resistance to such an ethos. Croll and Moses (2000: 61), for example, found that more than half of the 48 headteachers they interviewed felt that 'More children should attend special schools', and in the case of 'children with emotional and behavioral difficulties', this figure rose to two-thirds (see also Mousley et al., 1993). More serious, there is an unspoken acceptance of need as a means of securing the removal of the child – an unthinking collusion with the process of need attribution. It is the 'doxa' that is troublesome: the establishment almost without thinking of the child as having needs. In the language of attribution theorists, the problem is that of 'fundamental attribution error' (Ross et al., 1977) – the easy over-attribution of events to the disposition of individuals rather than to the failings of institutions. (It is worth noting that of Croll and Moses's sample, less than 1 per cent of headteachers and only 2 per cent of teachers attributed 'emotional and behavioral difficulties' to 'school and teachers'.)

Once established as having emotional difficulties, children are diverted along a new path that separates them, and which ends in their being 'helped'. It shunts them sideways from a comprehensible and predictable system of practices and procedures that result in rewards and punishments, to an alternative set governed by alternative professional personnel – psychologists, counsellors, social workers, psychiatrists – who listen, analyse and understand.

The new world is stripped even of the procedural certainties of the mainstream school as groundrules change and parameters invisibly move. The arcane paraphernalia of assessment procedures confirm the diagnosis of emotional difficulties. Once so labelled, your every word becomes untrustworthy. Your complaints can be ignored because the response to increasing irrationality is to pile on more and more 'help'.⁶

The result is incarceration by smothering: the entrapment of the child in a cocoon of professional help. One is launched on what Goffman (1987: 79) calls a 'moral career' in which both the individual's image of self and his or her

'official position, jural relations, and style of life' change in sequence as the child graduates through his or her career as sufferer and victim. Escape comes only by 'acknowledgement' and 'acceptance' of one's problems.⁷ It helps if one can learn the vocabulary and the semiology of the therapeutic system and parrot it back to the therapeutic agent.

FROM SIMPLE WRONGDOING TO DISTURBANCE AND TREATMENT

How does all this happen? Not by a process of judging the act or the behavior in simple terms but by the judgement of what Foucault calls the 'passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment ...' (1991: 17). The impedimenta, vocabulary and constructs of the new professionals have come to invade the simple systems of judgement that preceded them. The act itself ceases to be condemned in simple terms; instead, it is an estimation of the *student* that is made. As Foucault puts it: 'behind the pretext of explaining an action, are ways of defining an individual' (1991: 18).

The delineation of emotional disturbance interrupts the procedure of simply judging whether an act is right or wrong, good or bad. Simple moral judgement is suspended. It is displaced by a morass of half-understood ideas about disturbance, a jumble of bits and pieces from psychoanalysis, psychology and psychiatry, a bricolage of penis envy and cognitive dissonance, of Freudian slip and standard deviation, of motivation and maternal deprivation, regression and repression, attention-seeking and assimilation, reinforcement and self-esteem – ideas corrupted by textbook writers and mangled by journalists and the writers of popular culture. Ideas, which, as Crews puts it, make 'an ontological maze peopled by absurd homunculi' (1997: 298). But these ideas are only half-understood. Even if those who use the ideas in defining 'need' understood them as well as it is possible to understand them, they would be on shaky ground epistemologically and empirically (Nagel, 1959; Cioffi, 1975; Macmillan, 1997) because the models which stand behind notions of emotional disturbance are, as Crews points out, characterized by faulty logic, the manufacturing of evidence and facile explanation; they construct 'a cacophony of incompatible explanations' (1997: 297).

Explanatory and therapeutic currency is widely lauded by the psychological community in a small rainforest of 'scientific' journals, yet there is little sign of a diminution in unhappiness resulting from these supposed advances in understanding. Indeed, Smail asserts that 'There is certainly no evidence that the wider availability of psychological theories and techniques is leading to a decrease in psychological distress' (1993: 13). He suggests that in the burgeoning of psychological techniques to alleviate distress, there is far less a breakthrough in enlightened understanding, and more 'the success of an enterprise' (1993: 13). The mass of techniques make a bazaar in which plausible homily, mixed with large portions of psychoanalytic and psychological vocabulary, take the place of a rational consideration of children's behavior at school.

It is strange that the therapeutic mindset behind notions of maladjustment and EBD should have been so resistant to suffocation in the absence of supporting evidence. Smail suggests that an ostensibly therapeutic approach survives first because people want it to, and second because it is impossible to demonstrate that it *isn't* effective. The result of this mock-scientific approach to behavior is the sanctification of the agent of therapy (and even the agent of assessment), so that the whole assessment–therapy process surrounds itself with what Smail calls ‘an aura of almost moral piety’, in which to question putative benefits ‘comes close to committing a kind of solecism’ (1993: 16).

It is not only ‘abnormal’ psychology (as a sub-area of psychology) that plays a significant part in the ‘clinicizing’ of unacceptable behavior. For educationists, the notion of need *in the child* is reinforced by key psychological theories, such as those of Piaget. Important for reports, such as the influential Plowden (DES, 1967), these theories have stressed the genetic determinacy of development, leaving explanation for behavior problems or learning difficulties to be made in terms of developmental defect or emotional deprivation, the vocabulary again invoking psychological or social explanation for behavior at school.

Many have pointed not only to the tenuousness of the theories on which such educational and social policy is based (for example, Elkind, 1967; Gelman, 1982; Bryant, 1984; James and Prout, 1990; Rutter, 1995), but also to the way in which attention is distracted from the nature and significance of the school environment in itself constructing the difficulties (for example, Walkerdine, 1983; Alexander, 1984). But frail as these theories are, they are perennially attractive (as the persistence of Piaget’s theories in teacher education syllabuses demonstrates) and it is the ideas which stem from them that influence the professional as he or she works with the reconceptualized child: the child with needs.

An illustration of the clinicizing of unacceptable behavior is given in Figure 2.1, which shows some of the vocabulary used to describe difficult children in one secondary school. Recorded by a teacher participant–observer (Sayer, 1993) in private settings (in informal conversation) and public settings (at a staff meeting or with parents), the recordings reveal not only a set of highly ‘psychologized’ labels about pupils, but also ones that are entirely focused on the disposition and character of the pupil.

Those labels used on the left of the figure (namely, ‘disruptive’ to ‘impaired’) are ones which the user is comfortable about using in public and in private, while those on the right (‘vandal’ to ‘mental’) may have been used more frequently, but generally in private rather than in public. The public acceptance of terms such as ‘disruptive’, ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘disabled’ in the discourse of school life shows the extent to which the psychiatric and the psycho-social have become fused and converted into acceptable psycho-educational labels. ‘Disturbed’ and ‘disruptive’ supplant ‘nutter’ and ‘mad’. These labels merely make the sentiments and beliefs revealed by the words used privately for the same pupils (‘vandal’, ‘thug’, ‘mad’, ‘nutter’, ‘mental’) more palatable for public consumption. The substitution of the former set for the latter set does nothing, however, to displace an even more

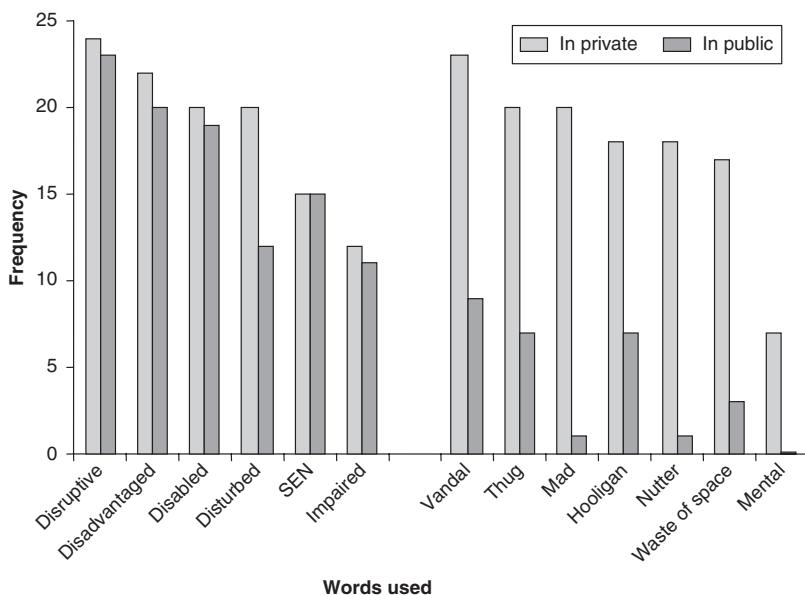


Figure 2.1 Vocabulary used to describe children

firmly ingrained set of beliefs about the origins of these young people's difficulties at school. For aberrant behavior to occur, there has, in Foucault's words, 'to be something wrong with him, and this is his character, his psyche, his upbringing, his unconscious, his desires' (1980: 44).

CATEGORIES FOR CHILDREN, NOT ADULTS

Ideas about psyche, motivation and background form the substrate out of which these new descriptors emerge. They also contribute to and exaggerate the unequal power balance between adult and child, for in no *adult* system is the official process of packaging and labelling aberrant behavior as well-formed, sophisticated and widely accepted as it is in EBD for these minors. Concomitantly, the rules, punishment regimes and labelling tolerated within schools would not be tolerated within any adult organization (other than the prison). It is perhaps significant that although 25 years ago a ferment of discussion under the leadership of Laing (1965) and Szasz (1972) surrounded the issue of whether difficult behavior constituted mental illness, little of the significance of that discussion was assimilated into debate about what was then called 'maladjustment' – perhaps because a central pillar of the superstructure of children's services and special education has been the taken-for-granted assumption of doing good, of acting in *loco parentis*, of guardianship. These ideas have flourished partly because of a tradition of seeing the child as not only vulnerable and helpless, but also as irrational.

The process of understanding children to be not only irrational, but also emotionally disturbed, effectively condemns them to voicelessness. Being seen as

irrational (rather than simply stupid) is particularly damning, for it means that you are deemed unworthy, even of consultation about what is in your best interests.

The system of soft categories (like EBD), spongy quasi-legal procedures, such as in the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994), quasi-medical diagnoses (like ADHD, recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association) and mock-scientific assessments, though it doesn't stand up to rigorous scrutiny, has its effects insidiously. Partly because children are taken to be not only irrational, but also in need of protection, it has been possible for a network of special procedures – supposedly protective and therapeutic – to grow around them, in a way that they have not grown around adults.

For adults, unacceptable behavior is punished – but a comprehensible (if less-than-perfect) system of procedures and protocols protects them. Even if the protection is written in legal jargon, it is at least in the language of straightforward relations: you have done wrong, we will punish you with x, but you are entitled to y. For children, by contrast, repeatedly unacceptable behavior leads them into a set of arcane official and semiofficial procedures (detention, exclusion, referral to the psychologist, statementing, placement in special education) in which their rights are unclear, not only to them and their parents, but also to the administrators and professionals who work with them. Ad hoc collections of people, such as governors in exclusions panels, decide about their rights to attend school, and decisions are made by teachers, psychologists and administrators about their lives. For children, protection takes on a wholly different meaning from the protection that the law gives to the adult suspected of law breaking. The protection given to the child is a paternalistic protection, for example, in the 'protection' of a statement (or the replacement 'EHC plan' – see CMND 8438, 2012) where supposed 'needs' are constructed and then met. It is far harder to argue against someone who is meeting your needs than someone who is accusing you of breaking the rules.

MAKING SCHOOLS MORE HUMANE AS ENVIRONMENTS: COMMON TALK IN HUMANE SCHOOLS

Lest it appears that I am endorsing misbehavior, violence or abuse, let me stress that I am not. I do not seek in any way to condone violence or to romanticize difficult behavior. Nor do I seek to play down or underestimate the school staff's need for disciplinary techniques to keep order. Instead I am seeking to point out that misbehavior seems to be an endemic part of institutions that organize themselves in particular ways, and that if we seek to reduce such behavior we have to recognize its provenance. We must recognize the possibility that the origins of misbehavior lie less in children's emotions or even in their 'disadvantage' and more in the character of the organization which we ask them to inhabit for a large part of their lives. For ever, it appears that school students have resisted the environment of school, as

we can see from the kinds of punishment imposed consistently and relentlessly down the ages. Leach (1915) divines from stray passages in Horace and Juvenal that even two millennia ago, schools were almost defined by the presence of punishment: 'The edification or cult of character ... was effected by beginning school at dawn and shouting at and flogging the boys with the rod or cane (*ferula*), the tawse (*scutica*), and the birch (*flagellum*), very much as in the English schools down to 1850.' Punishment seems to have developed almost as an art form to accompany schooling.

As you look at schools down the ages, you are forced to the conclusion that the consistency of physical punishment is surely connected with what was being expected of the young people who attended them. If children wanted to do what teachers were asking of them, would they need to be beaten?

The beating, though, has now become transmuted into a different form of control. School is now an organization staffed by professionals whose response when faced with trouble is necessarily a professional one. Here, Skrtic (1991) suggests, is its main problem because it operates as a 'professional bureaucracy' (Weatherley and Lipsky, 1977 and Wolfensberger, 1990 point to similar processes). Professional bureaucracies are organizations, which, far from being designed to think creatively about how to change for the better, think rather about how to direct their 'clients' toward some existing professional specialism. Or they may consider how the problem can be absorbed in the professional procedures defined in a local policy document. The mindset induced by the notion of disturbance fits happily into such a system, encouraging the view that specialized sets of professional knowledge exist to deal with misbehavior.

It is odd that Skrtic's analysis occurs at a time when there has been optimism about the potential of school to influence 'outcomes' for children. For more than 30 years, academics and policy-makers have proposed that in tackling the question of difficult behavior at school, attention should be paid not only to analysis and treatment of the child's behavior, but also to the operations and systems in the school that may cause or aggravate such behavior. The positive arguments for such a shift in emphasis from child to institution rest in evidence and analysis from diverse sources. They rest in evidence about the significance of the school's role in influencing behavior and achievement (for example, Edmonds, 1979; Neisser, 1986; Hallinger and Murphy, 1986; Rutter et al., 1979; Mortimore et al., 1988; Jesson and Gray, 1991; Sammons et al., 1993; Levine and Lezotte, 1995). They rest in recognition of the potentially damaging effects of labelling (in the work of theorists such as Cicourel and Kitsuse, 1968). And they rest in arguments about the invalidity of interpreting aberrant behavior as disturbed (in the ideas of Szasz, Laing and others). Resulting models for intervention and help, which thus attach significance to the impact of the wider environment, and particularly that of the school, have been given added impetus by the development of thinking in areas such as ecological psychology (following pioneers such as Kounin, 1967; Barker, 1968; Doyle, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and systems theory (for example, Checkland, 1981).

In fact, though, only a small amount of the school effectiveness research has related specifically to behavior (for example, Galloway, 1983; Galloway et al., 1985; McManus, 1987). The *Fifteen Thousand Hours* work (Rutter et al., 1979) looked at attendance and ‘delinquency’ but conceded that the process (independent) variables – that is, the school factors supposedly responsible for influencing outcomes – can contribute only in small measure to predictions concerning those outcomes. The authors say that other (unidentified) variables must be playing an important part in differences between schools on attendance and behavior.

The tenuousness of the research evidence here has not prevented a widespread acceptance of the idea that schools make a difference when it comes to behavior. Despite the clear caveat provided by Rutter and his colleagues about the generalizability of effectiveness findings when it comes to behavior, there has been a near unanimous acceptance of the message, which it appears policy-makers want to hear.

Optimism in the face of lack of evidence is interesting and perhaps related to the laudable desire to do whatever can be done to make schools more congenial places for all who inhabit them. The persistence of difficult-to-manage behavior must, as I have noted recently (Thomas, 2012), operate through the damage done to individuals’ sense of worth and identity, where they see themselves, through major differences between themselves and their peers, conspicuously excluded from the expectations, the activities, the resources, the worlds of those peers. In such circumstances, people are likely to abdicate, withdraw or resist, as a range of research about ‘deviance’ has indicated (eg Cohen et al., 1999). Where it is clear because of the degree of putative difference between themselves and others that any kind of equivalence of achievement is impossible, people will create their own identities, even if the process involves resistance, discomfort or ‘deviance’.

The general body of school effectiveness literature and research has pushed such analyses and whole-school responses in the wrong direction. Consistent with the conclusions that follow from Skrtic’s (1991: 165) analysis, the particular professional vocabularies – psychological and psychiatric – induced by the label ‘EBD’ discourage a move to the necessary creativity. They induce merely what Skrtic calls ‘an assortment of symbols and ceremonies’, which look and sound like sensible action – things of the sort that appear in the *Elton Report* (DES, 1989c), like writing a bullying policy or improving liaison procedures – but in fact shift attention from characteristics of the environment to what Skrtic calls aspects of the ‘machine bureaucracy’: things that have the appearance (but only the appearance) of rational reaction to a problem (see also Weatherley and Lipsky, 1977, in this context).⁸

The system ‘bureaucratizes deviance’ (Rubington and Weinberg, 1968: 111), with a hierarchy of defining agents – and one may note how this hierarchy has been formalized over the years in the English system from Circular 2/75 to the 1981 Education Act to the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994).

The professional systems operating in schools to manage deviance in fact bureaucratize deviance as reliably today as they did when Rubington and Weinberg wrote about them 30 years ago. They now do so perhaps more sensitively and with more emphasis on the whole-school options suggested by Elton. However, the professional systems encourage and reinforce professional responses, thus diverting attention from ostensibly more mundane, but potentially more significant aspects of the world that children have to inhabit. Thus, while a welcome move from the left-most column of Table 2.2 to the middle column has occurred in many circumstances, this move still represents attention to a narrow band of practices and activities that are professionally related. They ensure that the discourse is that of professionals, communicating in their habitual constructs. Discussion and debate about, for example, 'professional liaison' has more cachet than discussion about fair queuing systems at lunchtime, but the bullying policy thus engendered may be little more than an ineffectual sop, doing little to address the actual problems faced by pupils in the school. And liaison with the educational psychologist may do little to address the routine unfairnesses committed every day at school. As the great educator Rousseau (1993) noted more than two centuries ago, some observations are considered too trivial to be true.⁹ They have to have a theoretical or professional spin to make them seem significant.

A nice example of simple, non-theoretical,aprofessional thinking is given by Clarke as headteacher of a large urban comprehensive school. He notes:

Some years ago, having taken issue with a teacher (male) for shouting at a student (female), I was invited at a staff meeting (under any other business!) to outline my 'policy on shouting'. Three points occurred to me:

- 1 if mature adults disagree, they generally don't shout at each other;
- 2 it is hard to ask students to keep their voices down if the teachers shout;
- 3 it is impossible to say, hand on heart, that we do not have bullying if big, powerful men verbally assault small, powerless young women. (1997: 154)

This kind of intervention emerges from Clarke's values and beliefs as a teacher and as a person. It has nothing to do with any professional knowledge, theoretical archive or government code of practice. It is only this brave kind of thinking and action that emancipates one from the machine bureaucracy of which Skrtic writes.

An analogy can perhaps be drawn with successful action currently being taken on housing estates to manage the behavior of unruly youngsters. This involves a deliberate move away from the pattern of response which would usually have taken place 5 or 10 years ago – a response which involved 'understanding' the 'problems' of the young people involved, an understanding predicated on the theoretical assumptions of certain professional groups that imputed 'need' to certain kinds of behavior. The move is toward more community action, which involves, on one side, increasing the likelihood that the perpetrators of misdemeanours will be caught, disapproved of and, if necessary, punished, and on the

Table 2.2 Approaches to misbehavior

Therapeutic emphasis	Whole-school emphasis	Humane environment emphasis
Counseling	Updating the bullying policy	Having more pay phones for students to use
Behavior modification	Ensuring better liaison with school psychologist	Having more carpeted areas in the school
Groupwork	Rationalizing report card systems	Ensuring that litter is regularly cleared
Drugs (e.g. in ADHD)	Establishing clearer and more explicit guidelines for transfer from Code of Practice stage 3 to stage 4	Ensuring that there is a plentiful supply of drinking fountains and that they are maintained regularly
Family therapy	Setting up a governor link with the learning support department	Taking steps to discipline teachers who bully students Staggering playtimes and school start and end times in large schools Ensuring fair queuing systems at lunch in which staff don't automatically go to the front and older students can't routinely push in Ensuring that the minutes of the School Council are routinely taken on the governing body agenda Reducing the number of assemblies Ensuring toilets are regularly cleaned and refurbished

other making systematic efforts to provide activity for the young people involved. It is through an engagement with the political (and a corresponding disengagement with the patronizing psychobabble of ‘understanding’) that the patent truth of Postman’s statement can shine out:

There is no question that listlessness, ennui, and even violence in school are related to the fact that students have no useful role to play in society. The strict application of nurturing and protective attitudes toward children has created a paradoxical situation in which protection has come to mean excluding the young from meaningful involvement in their own communities. (1996: 103)

It is only by thinking in this way – outside the boundaries presented by the school walls – that genuinely inclusive solutions can emerge to the routine challenge presented by children’s difficult behavior. The champion of children’s rights, Eric Midwinter, said something similar more than a quarter of a century ago:

I gaze half-benignly on cuts in public expenditure. If those cuts can mean (it is a large ‘if’) the properly directed deprofessionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of our public services and the controlled mobilisation of community resources, then I am convinced the overall quality of services would be improved. (1977: 111)

The reflex response of education cannot, in other words, be a unilateral one using its familiar constructs and professional routes. Those constructs and routes inevitably involve separate action and, sometimes, segregated provision.

CONCLUSION

In the use of the term 'EBD', there is an indolent espousal of a term that too conveniently packages together difficult, troublesome children with emotional disturbance. In its use is an insidious blurring of motives and knowledges, which imputes problems to children that in reality are rarely theirs. In the dispositional attributions which are therein made, unnecessarily complex judgements about putative need take the place of simple judgements about what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior for a particular institution. Use of the term 'EBD' enables the substitution of the former for the latter – of the complex for the straightforward – and this, in turn, perpetuates a mindset about behavior that distracts attention from what the school can do to make itself a more humane, inclusive place.

Recent understandings about the rights of the child have made little impact on the processes which formalize these attributions, fraught as those processes are with difficulties concerning the extra-judicial judgements being made on children's aberrant behavior. Neither have questions that have been posed about the effectiveness and appropriateness of 'helping' services in adult clinical psychology and psychiatry been addressed to anywhere near the same extent in children's services. In fact, the professional services, which exist notionally to support children, exist often in reality to support the institution (a distinction sometimes overtly and unselfconsciously made) and may set in train routines and rituals that have the appearance of effective response, but in practice do little other than distract attention from significant aspects of the environment which children are being asked to inhabit.

By retaining and using the label 'EBD', sight is often lost of the fact that schools for many children present an environment with which it is difficult to come to terms. By packaging this difficulty as a problem of the children, we divert our own attention from ways in which schools can become more congenial and inclusive places.

The legacy of the thinking behind special education is a set of ideas that perpetuate exclusion. In this chapter, I focus on 'emotional and behavioral difficulties' (EBD), which I suggest represents a confused collation of notions. It rests on an unsteady foundation – a mélange of disparate ideas, which nevertheless share one feature: the attribution of behavior problems to the disposition of the child and his or her personal circumstances. Out of this mix of notions and attributions has emerged EBD – a category that substitutes quasi-clinical assessments about putative need for more straightforward judgements about right and wrong. It enables and legitimizes clinically orientated judgements about the causes of misbehavior – 'emotional difficulties' which allow the school to evade serious scrutiny of its own routines and procedures. Moreover, the judgements made about children occur in the absence of the panoply of protections that exist for adults who behave oddly or unacceptably. This difference between the way adults and children are treated is an increasingly untenable anomaly at a time when policy debate correctly pays more attention to children's rights. The predominantly clinical and child-centred mix of notions and attributions behind EBD also influences supposedly whole-school

approaches to behavior difficulties and distracts attention from ways in which schools can be made more humane, more inclusive places.

NOTES

- 1 This chapter is a development of a paper first published in *Discourse*, 21(3), and I am indebted to the editor of that journal and its publishers, Carfax Publishing, members of the publishing group Taylor & Francis, London, for permission to use it in its amended form.
- 2 *The British Journal of Special Education*, the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, the *European Journal of Special Needs Education, Support for Learning* and the *British Educational Research Journal*.
- 3 Popper makes a similar point about the nature of psychoanalytic theory, saying, 'psychoanalysts of all schools were able to interpret any conceivable event as a verification of their theories' (1977: 264). The knowledge thus formed on such non-theory masquerading as theory is dangerous, disguising hunch and guesswork in the clothes of well-grounded science.
- 4 'Need' presents, in Corbett's thinking, far from a helpful idea but rather 'sugar-coated poison' (1996: 3). Carson has also had something interesting to say about 'special needs', asserting that ordinary needs, concerned with children's humanity, are 'sacrificed on the altar of identifying and meeting their special needs' (1992: 217). Drawing from Murray, Fromm and Maslow, he points out that we all have needs to do with affection, security, belonging, fun, self-esteem and self-identity. These are ignored or downplayed in the obsession with special needs. The setting of the latter above the former can lead to the kind of 'solutions' to supposed learning difficulty, which result in segregation.
- 5 Apologies to Miller (1993) for the paraphrase of his analysis of Foucault's position here.
- 6 It is worth noting the results of an increased willingness to listen to the child. The public enquiry into abuse at children's homes in Wales has disclosed 300 former residents who are now willing to testify in cases of abuse against 148 adults (Davies, 1998; Waterhouse, 2000). The abuse was physical and emotional, including sexual abuse, hitting and throttling children, bullying and belittling them. Punishments included being forced to scrub floors with toothbrushes, or to perform garden tasks using cutlery. The fact that these young people did not consider it worth complaining at the time attests to the fact that they themselves perceived the extent to which they were disenfranchised, to which they were considered not to be rational, believable people – not people who would be taken seriously. The scandal was exposed only after Alison Taylor, a children's home head in Gwynedd, pressed her concerns at the highest levels. When the police first investigated Ms Taylor's concerns in 1986–87, the authorities constructed a 'wall of disbelief' at the outset. The subsequent decision not to bring prosecutions was greeted, the Waterhouse enquiry concludes, with 'inappropriate enthusiasm' by social services. The fear must be that this was not an isolated incident; that it was not a pocket of evil in an otherwise broadly satisfactory system. The fear must be that such is the invalidity accorded to the child's view that it represents the tip of an iceberg. According to the Association of Child Abuse Lawyers, there are 80 police investigations into institutional abuse. It says each one should prompt a public inquiry of its own. But the cost of the North Wales inquiry is put at £13.5m, and it is therefore almost certain to be the last of its kind.
- 7 The idea in the popular mind that acknowledgement and acceptance help in the process of 'healing' is linked to many and varied contributory ideas stemming from psychoanalysis in particular. But, as Macmillan (1997) indicates following a painstaking analysis of the original case notes of Breuer and Freud in the case of Anna O's talking cure, there was no empirical evidence for its success even in this bedrock case. One of the cornerstones of the almost universally held assumption that facing one's problems helps, is therefore on shaky ground.
- 8 Interestingly, Skrtic's analysis is similar to that of Toffler (1970: 364) who, before Skrtic, wrote of the need for a shift in schools from 'bureaucracy to Ad-hocracy', and likened the organizational system operating in schools to 'the factory model' (1970: 368), rather like Skrtic's analysis of it as 'machine bureaucracy'. The diagnosis of the likely consequences is similar, too. Nothing will change, asserts Toffler, if the basic machinery doesn't change – if the systems operating are not

- dismantled. As he puts it, '... much of this change [currently going on in schools] is no more than an attempt to refine the existent machinery, making it ever more efficient in pursuit of obsolete goals' (1970: 366).
- 9 Rousseau's comment was: 'There is nothing so absurd and hesitating as the gait of those who have been kept too long in leading-strings when they were little. This is one of the observations which are considered trivial because they are true' (1993: 49).

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