

https://dspace.org/

Modern English approaches to adolescent behaviour problems: An appraisal of the problem, and a comparison with their prospect and work in South Africa.

Dodswell, H.B.

1960-09
Johannesburg College of Education
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/24258
Dodswell, H.B. (1960, September). Modern English approaches to adolescent behaviour problems: An appraisal of the problem, and a comparison with their prospect and work in South Africa. Symposium: A Journal for Education in Southern Africa, pp. 26-29.

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Modern English Approaches to Adolescent Behaviour Problems

An Appraisal of the Problem, and a Comparison with their Prospect and Work in South Africa.

by H. B. DODSWELL

IN recent years in Britain the delinquency rate amongst Juveniles has again shown an increase, after a substantial decrease in the early fifties.

The anti-social behaviour has not been limited to just one section of the community — the rowdies with whom every generation must cope. There were two distinct groups, the "Teddy Boys" drawn from the "working class" areas, and the "Angry Young Men" from the middle and upper-middle classes.

Basically, the problem seems to be much the same with both groups — a sense of frustration and a desire to kick over the traces, to rebel against custom and convention, and to seek satisfaction and acknowledgement in some way or other.

Obviously methods of handling adolescents must change with the times, and it is essential that Society should think ahead in order to keep abreast with the challenge each succeeding generation presents.

Scouts in the twenties, merging into large Camps in the thirties, cycling clubs etc., and the development of Youth Centres and Clubs in the forties, have all made their contribution; but in a country where 'security' is the keynote, with provision for everyone "from the cradle to the grave", the 'hard core' who do not want to conform, who seek ways and means of self-expression, have become the "unclubbable". It is from this group that the "Teddies" and the "Angry Young Men" spring.

Working along the lines that young people are tired of finding everything provided, and handed to them on a plate, (and this applies as much to girls as to boys) efforts have been made to break away from "provision" and to substitute "challenge."

In the educational sphere, Lywood, the Headmaster of Finchden Manor School, Tenterden, Kent, has set out to 'challenge' the misfits, who have failed dismally at their Public Schools. Boys labelled 'maladjusted' are admitted, and allowed to work out their problems, without the normal control and regimentation necessary in the conventional schools. The results have been highly successful, and a reasonably accurate account of methods employed can be found in a recently published book, "Mr. Lywood's Answer." Basically the principle employed is to get the boy to say "Can I?" rather than "Must I?" In some cases it is weeks or months before a lad will bring himself round to serious work, but when he realises that no one is worried if he cares to fritter away his time, and that he alone is the loser, then comes the change of heart. Education provided for the maladjusted youngster is of little value, but when he has to make some effort in order to achieve what he desires, and realises that education is an essential ingredient, then a fresh set of values is applied.

Similarly, in the social field, synthetic entertainment is available, through the medium of the screen and the Youth Club. Alas, the satisfaction gained is short-lived, and once again the active adolescent finds himself sinking into boredom, hanging around the street corners, hoping that "something will turn up." Naturally, such an attitude is the breeding ground for rowdyism, petty (and more serious) crime, and general anti-social conduct.

Various efforts have been made to get hold of these youngsters who are looked upon as 'unclubbable' but mostly the schemes were purely variations of the 'club' theme. A scheme which enjoyed success for some time was the "Barge Boys Club." Membership was limited to those who had been thrown out of a number of other clubs, and during the period of creation, considerable success was reported. Alas, once the 'unclubbable' lads had found their feet, had established a club of which they were justly proud (it was an unusual 'club house' namely, an old Thames sailing barge) they were unwilling to admit new

members who might wreck 'their club' thus it became just another club with which the genuine 'unclubbable' was unwilling to associate himself. The Warden had the foresight to see this, and realised that it was imperative to 'pass on' established members to more conventional clubs, to break down all that had been built up, and start again.

Through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, efforts are being made to encourage the individual to test himself, by inviting young men to take part in various types of activity. This scheme is being enthusiastically controlled by Sir John Hunt, of Everest fame, and the boys are expected, over a period of three years, to compete against themselves in improving standards in athletic activities, community service, handicrafts and hobbies, ambitious hikes and expeditions. At present this scheme is still in its experimental stage, and is limited to members of established Youth Clubs, the members of which are co-operating wholeheartedly and setting high standards in the four sections. Administrative problems are such that it is difficult to see how the youth unattached to a club or organisation will be able to compete. However, the ideas behind the scheme have broadened the vista of the Youth Organisations, and already all-night hikes and mass canoe races are becoming popular.

Perhaps the most important development in recent years has been the establishment of the Outward Bound Schools in Britain and Commonwealth countries.

The first of these schools was established during the 1939-45 World War, to train merchant seamen in the art of self-preservation in the likely event of shipwreck. The training then, as now, was designed to test initiative and challenge the individual; making demands upon him which he considered well outside his reach. Principles of Public Service, introduced to Gordonstoun School by her German Headmaster, Kurt Hahn, were incorporated in the Outward Bound training scheme, by means of Mountain Rescue teams, Fire Fighting squads, and Lifeboat crews. Boys under training found themselves making a contribution to the community in which they lived, rather than taking all Society had to offer and giving little in return.

Boys from all walks of life — even young prisoners and juvenile offenders — are attending 26-day courses, all the year round, sponsored by Education Authorities, Industry or by their own parents. Conditions are spartan, especially in an English winter, and the schools are situated in remote areas in North Wales, the Lake District, and the North of Scotland, close to the sea, lakes, and the mountains.

Closely following the principles of the Outward Bound Trust, an experimental home in Surrey, taking boys aged 15-18, who had been in trouble, or who had proved too troublesome for Children's Homes, introduced "Adventurous Activity" into their training programme. The object was to challenge the youngster, and extend him in every way, in the schoolroom, in the workshop and during leisure time activity.

All the boys were above compulsory school-leaving age, and the majority of at least average intelligence. Upon admission they were given a few days to settle down before electing to enter one of the trade training departments (Carpentry, Market Gardening, Poultry Keeping, Catering or Painting and Decorating). Within each department a real challenge was presented to the boy. The would-be carpenter's first job would be the construction of a wardrobe, in oak. It was something he could see growing, knowing it was for outside sale. It was something that made him realise his own limitations. The care taken with dove-tail joints pointed to the fact that the boy was accepting the challenge. Of course, wood was wasted, on occasions, but what is the value of a plank of oak, compared with a reclaimed youth? Similarly, other departments presented a challenge in various ways. A new boy would be made entirely responsible for the control of the incubation of 500 eggs, and the care of the chicks. The boy with only three weeks' experience in the kitchen, would be responsible for the preparation of the food for the entire home, on the Instructor's day off. Things go wrong from time to time, and when the 'lout', full of his own importance, makes a mess of things, and has only himself to blame — and has to explain his shortcomings to his companions, then the boy is well on the way to understanding himself, and his limitations. It is interesting to find that the boy with the most imposing record for "anti-social" behaviour was invariably the lad who would try to avoid taking part in activities which would challenge him as an individual, for fear of failing and losing face in the eyes of others.

One expedition, entailing canoeing and camping in mid-winter, brought this out vividly. Two parties were formed of twelve boys — one party of 15-year-old, immature lads, who were of no consequence in the home, and looked down upon by the self-styled *men*.

These lads undertook a three-day expedition, in severe weather conditions (snow, ice, and heavy frost) and although they completed the course with twelve hours to spare, elected to sleep out an extra night, under blizzard conditions.

The second party, of twelve "men"; 17-18 year old "Teddy boys", full of their own importance, who had inadvisedly volunteered for the expedition, thinking they might be missing something, found conditions very much easier, with sun instead of snow. The first night they were in such a poor way (they were cold, miserable, and unable or unwilling to exert themselves to make a proper meal — each man leaving it to his neighbour) that a farmer offered them accommodation in his barn. By the second evening, although far from their destination, they had had enough and sent an S.O.S. for assistance, and withdrawal. The stock of these boys dropped to zero, displaying "Teddyboyism" in its true colours; a facade of toughness, using group support to hide the inadequacy of the individual.

Provision of interesting tasks, frequently in the form of public service (erecting a log cabin on a remote mountain side, whilst living under difficult conditions, for the use of climbers and forest workers), building, transportation and erection of a Christmas crib in Trafalgar Square, scraping, redecorating and renovating boats for other youth organisations, which entailed outside work in temperatures well below freezing, all gave the boys encouragement and self-confidence. Having broken down the lads' self importance, bolstered by the 'gang' activities, it is essential to substitute real confidence in himself. These difficult tasks provide for just that, and coupled with the fact that it is work for the community, help the deviate youngster realise that he is a wanted and valued member of the community. The boy can be proud of his accomplishment in every sphere — justifiably he can tell his pals that the crib seen on the T.V. the evening before was partly his handiwork, that the climbers brought down to the safety of the mountain hut, *his* hut, was his very real contribution to Society. He is a real man in his own right, rather than a make-believe 'tough' knowing that he is a rather poor one at that.

Instead of providing nice comfortable camps, within easy reach of the Cinema, and Dance Hall, expeditions were arranged to remote areas, entailing considerable demands on each individual. These expeditions invariably start in the small hours of the morning, and the boys are expected to make their own way to their destination by hitch-hiking, unless transport is available. All camps are made from equipment carried by the boys, using ground sheets (not huts) as protection against wind, rain or snow, and moving from place to place nightly. During the day the boys set off, with an experienced adult, working to map and compass, and covering anything up to 35 miles, over sparsely populated hilly or mountainous country.

These expeditions last for five days. Rules of no smoking and a daily dip in the nearest stream or lake are faithfully observed and many young thugs experience for the first time real adventure, as they battle against the elements. One 15-year-old lad remarked to me, as we trudged back to base in the pouring rain, after a day on the mountains in North Wales, "This is much more thrilling than being chased over a factory roof by a copper."

Observations such as this suggest that modern Society is inclined to stifle the youngsters' desire to seek adventure, and he is forced to break away from the protection offered by considerate adults. A recurrent explanation for delinquency is "I was bored — had nothing to do." A risk produces excitement, but alas, it entails anti-social behaviour in the urban areas. Introduction to the countryside, the thrills of canoeing, sailing, or battling against the elements, all cost little or nothing and are within easy reach of even the Cockney youngster.

This form of activity is being adopted quickly, and already Boarding Schools are running holiday expeditions on these lines, the Navy, Army and Air Force Boys' service stations are running 'battle courses' and Children's Homes, and correctional establishments for youngsters, are also beginning to send those on the point of leaving the shelter of the Institution on such schemes, to encourage initiative, and self-reliance, in order that they may be better fitted to stand on their own feet in the work-a-day world.

* * *

South Africa is a young country and has had the advantage of learning from others' experience. All her educational establishments are comparatively new, and the majority are magnificently equipped. Provision is made for the Youth of South Africa to benefit from the best of everything. It is interesting to see that the young South African White is just as reluctant to attend his school, as his counterpart in Europe; yet the

Native child, for whom education is not compulsory, is prepared to run miles daily to his comparatively poorly equipped school, only showing reluctance on the journey home.

The problem in South Africa would seem to be much the same as in Europe, namely, that we are trying to provide too much for our youth — we know what is good for them, and we want to make it as easy as possible for them — eliminating as far as possible the pitfalls into which we fell. Alas, there is a great danger that we will make life for the adolescent so comfortable and uninteresting that he will either become passive, unresponsive, and generally lazy — waiting for kind adults to help him over his difficulties, or the youth with spirit (and his ancestors were all men and women of spirit, blessed with a desire to pioneer new territory) will kick over the traces, break away from his parents in some manner. and generally show society his resentment of their lack of consideration for his natural desire to find things out for himself, and prove himself in his own sphere.

A tour of residential establishments in South Africa confirmed that educationally and vocationally, provision is of a very high order, but efforts to guide a boy socially, or fit him to cope with his leisure time pursuits, are in so many instances practically non-existent. There is far more to life than education or vocational aptitude. and some responsibility for guiding a lad's social development must rest with the educationalist. particularly in the residential schools. Organised games are all very well, but in the concrete jungle of modern cities, facilities for such are not always available for youngsters leaving school. Unless things are made easy for him, he cannot be bothered to explore for himself. Such explorations would be something almost outside his experience.

Life is a challenge, and the earlier a child can be presented with this, the better equipped will he be to cope with the situations he will meet in life.

Only those things for which we have striven, and which have made demands upon us, in time, or effort or adaptation, are really valued. The higher the standard demanded, whether it be for academic award or physical requirements for a specific expedition, the end product becomes more valued and sought after. If the standards required for Matriculation were lowered, it would become as valueless as the Standard Six awarded "on age."

The youth of today is NOT decadent, but when they find life simplified for them, they must find an outlet in some other direction. Can the principles outlined here be introduced successfully in South Africa? Personally, I am sure they can, with modifications to meet local needs. Challenge need not be confined to the open air, airy mountains, or wild seas, but even in the classroom situation there is an opportunity to turn the emphasis upon the child, placing responsibility for progress more squarely upon the shoulders of the youngster. Discipline in the schools here is good, but appears to be *imposed*, rather than springing from the pupil. Self-discipline, rather than imposed discipline is a far greater challenge, particularly to the adolescent. This does not mean that the child is allowed to get away with bad behaviour but rather, that punishment only follows when the student has failed to make an effort, rather than when in the process of failing. It has been said "we learn by our mistakes" and yet adults have fallen into the trap of trying to shield their charges from pitfalls. Self-discipline will certainly mean that the youngster will fall far short of the standards expected, but from that there will be this opportunity to learn from the mistakes made.

Contributions from young people in the local community can also be of great value to the individual concerned, so long as the contribution is real ,and not necessarily followed by reward. Duty as ushers at public meetings, or manual work on projects proposed by Parent-Teacher Associations readily spring to mind.

In the outdoor field, developments are already taking place over here along adventurous activity lines. The Veld and Vlei Trust is running two adventure courses annually for young men, and the Y.M.C.A. have also introduced week-end expeditions on similar lines. Young South Africans have accompanied me on expeditions into the hills, taking the barest essentials for the two or three day camp, and have certainly shown that they are just as capable, keen and enthusiastic as their counterparts in Europe.

Trevelyan said "Without the instinct for adventure in young men any civilisation must wilt and wither." Are we as adults accepting the challenge to provide opportunities for our young men to satisfy their instinct for adventure?