

Home-Like School Atmosphere Aiding Disturbed Children

Ottawa school boards have been paying more and more attention recently to emotionally disturbed children and how to cope with their special problems. This is the first of two articles describing the Separate School Board's program specially designed for emotionally disturbed children.

By CAROL PARTRIDGE
of The Journal

A few years ago schools had one solution to the problem of the rebellious, resentful child who was a constant trial to his teacher and a disturbing element in the classroom: expel him.

The child who was thus disposed of often had above average intelligence. But because his teacher had neither

the time nor training to cope with him and because of his unsettling influence on the rest of the class, he was not permitted to finish school.

Often as not, he grew up to join the ranks of the unemployable and became a blight on society.

Only recently have educators realized these children are often more disturbed than disturbing and psychiatric treatment can enable them to finish their education, face life — and make a contribution to society.

MANY FORMS

Emotional disturbance in children has many forms: defiance, fear, social withdrawal, exhibitionism, depression, cruelty, or rebellion against authority.

The Separate School Board

cited cases where children so withdrawn sit for weeks without uttering a single word to the teacher or other pupils. Other children tear their clothes, pull hair, kick, bite, and make animal noises.

Some have even been known to attack the teacher, to say nothing of fellow classmates — and these are children between six and 12 years old!

The causes of their disturbances are just as varied as the symptoms: broken homes, death of a loved one, quarrelsome or cruel parents, a drunken father, over-indulgent parents, or sometimes even a new baby whose presence causes resentment and jealousy.

SPECIAL SCHOOL

In 1965 the Separate School Board, in co-operation with

the Ottawa Children's Aid Society, opened a special bilingual school for children residing at Mount St. Joseph Centre.

In charge of the school is Bernard Poulin, a young teacher who has worked with the children since the program began. The school is actually an old house and very little has been done to change it.

"The bells, ranks and silence maintained in a regular school only adds to their frustration," says Mr. Poulin. "Here we try to maintain a home-like atmosphere where the children can relax and work."

Though classes appear at first very informal, there is certain underlying structure to everything done in the school.

For instance, Mr. Poulin

has the children rehearsing a radio play and each child has a part in which he uses his hostility in a constructive sense.

MAIN SUBJECTS

Emphasis is placed on mathematics, grammar, and reading; three subjects that require reason.

"These are the most difficult subjects for these children," says Mr. Poulin. "They are used to responding emotionally and not reasonably which a subject such as mathematics demands."

At the moment there are 12 children attending the school ranging in age from six to 12 years old. There are two full-time teachers as well as one part-time teacher.

What the teacher tries to do with the children is make

them face reality—understand their problem and then try to overcome it.

"If we get the children early enough we can do a great deal with them and return within a year they can return to regular classes," says Mr. Poulin.

PROBLEM PARENTS

If, as is sometimes the case, parents refuse to acknowledge their children need help until their child is in real trouble (one child had been caught stealing 47 times by police) or the child's problem is not recognized soon enough, these children carry their hostilities into adulthood.

"We don't produce angels from this school," says Mr. Poulin. "But we can change hostile, rebellious youngsters into happy, healthy individuals."

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