

Impulsive Students

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Abstract

As more and more impulsive students enter the classroom, one observes more disruption to the learning process. One impulsive student in the classroom can learn to self-regulate his impulses from the other healthy students around him. However, when five or more impulsive students are in one classroom, there is chaos and a lack of discipline which interferes with the learning process for all the students. To develop self-regulation requires a relationship and interaction between the caregiver and infant and this process continues throughout life. Self-regulation is the ability to contain and control one's impulses. One needs experiences that push one out of his comfort zone. Children need to be responded to when they are crying. The more the caregiver responds to the child's needs the more one builds a sense of comfort in the child. Children who cannot self-regulate have problems with peers and with learning. For example, a child frustrated with a test will break a pencil. The brains of impulsive students are reactive to any stimulus and these students overreact to any stimulus. They are all over the place. It is a school safety issue because impulsive children are aggressive and intimidate other students. Simple structured interventions are not working when the class contains too many impulsive students. We end up just containing these students. The question arises: What are teachers to do with these disruptive students who have learned to self-regulate their behavior? Many strategies have been suggested yet the strategies are too simplistic for a complex problem. Do Jungian theories or ideas have a contribution to make to help with the problem of impulsive students in the classroom?

Introduction

As a teacher at A. T. Mahan High School in Iceland, I experienced teaching a class of fourteen impulsive students. There were seven males and seven females in the eighth grade class entitled Peer Mediation. The school was located on a NATO base in Keflavik, Iceland. Most of the students had parents who were active duty in the Navy or Air Force. Most of the students had moved around and had attended many different schools. I taught this class during the 2003-2004 school year.

Right after an hour of lunch/gym duty I went right into teaching an impulsive group of fourteen students. I taught them for one hour on Mondays and ninety minutes on Wednesdays and Fridays. . I would begin lunch/gym duty about 11:00a.m. and at 12:00, I would head to a classroom that I had to share with another teacher. After lunch duty and lunch break for the students, the time was probably the worst part of the day to have this group of students because they were all wound up from lunch. I had to calm the group down before we could start the class. At the beginning of each class period, someone

was upset about a lunch incident, name-calling, pushing and fighting. All the lunch break problems were brought into the classroom. If one student was upset about name-calling, he or she disrupted the whole class with his problem. No one in the class could contain any emotions. If a student had to go to the bathroom, he would take the scenic route around the school and would be brought back by another teacher or the principal for wandering in the halls. Every lesson that was attempted was disrupted by a student in the class. For example during our rock painting project, one student took a jar of green paint and threw it at the back wall of the school building.

Each student needed individual attention and it was difficult for the teacher to reach all of them when there were fourteen impulsive students seeking her attention. It was a difficult semester but I survived with creative lesson plans. Impulsive students are those who are not able to focus on the learning process in the normal classroom. Any noise, comment or action constellates a complex within these students and they are ready to attack verbally or physically anyone in the classroom environment. I will explain the lessons I attempted to teach and the observations I made at the end of the lessons. In addition, I will make some suggestions regarding impulsive students.

Method

From my initial observations, I quickly realized that the 8th grade class of fourteen students was not a normal group of students. They could not focus on the lesson and they had difficulty with impulse control even during the first class session. I realized that the class was not developmentally ready to counsel other students. They needed so much help themselves. I decided to focus on the development of self-esteem and socialization skills. I had hoped that if they could learn to relate to one another these skills would transfer to other classrooms as well.

As soon as I realized the composition of this class, I watched Dr. Bruce Perry's video on self-regulation and his suggestions gave me some new insights into working with these students. Dr. Perry (2003) states that a class of impulsive students is like popcorn popping and which is a good description of the class I taught. Self-regulation which is needed in order for students to learn in the classroom depends on a successful relationship between the caregiver and the infant. When a child is cold, he depends on someone coming to relieve him of the cold. When the caretaker responds to the needs of a child, self-regulation is developing in the child. If a child is given inconsistent care, the child cannot develop self-regulation of impulses. Self-regulation is the capacity to contain and control impulses. Self-regulation continues throughout life. Children who cannot self-regulate have problems with peers and the learning process. These students hear one comment and they are ready to lash out physically. Their brains are reactive and they overreact to a minor stimulus. They are developmentally immature (Perry, 2003).

Two of the boys in my class of fourteen were big for 8th graders and they created fear in the other twelve because they were physically intimidating. Impulsive students have a hard time taking turns. They have to learn to sit with discomfort. These students need a class with predictability and structure. They have to be given opportunities to move out

of their comfort zone slowly so that they succeed and feel comfortable. Dr. Perry's video helped me better understand how impulsive students operate.

In addition, I was guided by Jung's words which state "If the personal relationship of child to teacher is a good one, it matters very little whether the method of teaching is the most up to date". "We need not concern ourselves so much with the amount of specific information a child takes away with him from school, the thing of vital importance is that the school should succeed in freeing the young man from unconscious identity with his family and should make him properly conscious of himself" (Jung, 1954). I decided that I would help the students build their self-esteem and I would give them group activities to develop social skills which they were lacking.

The work of Dr. Allan Guggenbuhl gave me invaluable insights and understanding of the eighth grade class that was entrusted to me. Dr Guggenbuhl (1996) states that teenagers who are neglected, socially damaged, or slightly uninhibited, take over power. They steer the direction of the group. I had two males who did try to steer the class. When we made the class video, I put the two males in charge of the video presentation because I knew they would like to be on stage and they would be focused.

I will discuss some of the lessons I created to work with these students in the classroom. I tried to build lesson plans that had structure yet would allow some creativity on the part of the students. Each day I wrote a warm-up exercise on the board and the aim for the day. The students wrote that information down in their notebooks to be turned in for a grade at the end of the quarter. This would give them a sense of structure and predictability. I gave the students the Keirsey Temperament Sorter and helped them score the test. We discussed the different personality types and how they interacted. Some of the concepts such as extraversion and introversion were difficult for the students to grasp. I gave examples of the different personality types and we made a class type chart. I had one introvert in the class.

I introduced a guest speaker project. The project suggestion was shared by an English, Ms. Albie Clemmer. Each student had to bring a guest speaker to address our class. The student had to contact the speaker, arrange the appointment, introduce the speaker and write a thank you note. The security police came and spoke to the class and used a Power Point presentation. One of our guests had just returned from Iraq and shared his experiences in Iraq. He also gave each student some Iraqi money. Other speakers invited us to their places such as the base prison so they could address the students in their own environment. While the students listened to the speakers, they were required to take notes on a worksheet. They handed in the worksheet after each presentation for a grade. Two of our guest speakers had the students do art projects and the art project was what they turned in. The guest speaker project took fourteen class periods and additional trips were taken to work places on the base.

Another project was the reading of Touching Spirit Bear by Ben Mikaelson. We discussed the symbolism of the bear and other animals. We studied and learned about various Native Americans. Each student selected a different tribe and did research on

that tribe. We learned how to do a Native American dance. The students enjoyed the dance movements. The students painted rocks outside of the school building.

During the final weeks of school I took the students on trips to the Icelandic museums and to various cultural events. We took a trip to an Icelandic waterfall which is located near the first government seat in Iceland. We made a video during one of our class sessions and we compiled a notebook with a picture of each student and his creative work. The notebook became a project that was tangible and could be shown to other students and teachers.

Results

The class of fourteen students was a very difficult group for any teacher to handle. I had to use every creative idea I could come up with to survive with this group. They had a great deal of difficulty staying focused. During every class someone displayed impulsive behavior and time had to be spent calming the person down in order to proceed with the lesson. The write-up of the lesson on the board and the keeping of the notebook worked for seven of the students and the other seven came to class without a pencil, paper, or notebook. At times I would give them a paper and pencil to get them to write down the notes.

All the students were interested in the Keirseley Temperament Sorter but one male changed his personality type letters to match those of his friend. That gave me another clue that he could not accept himself for who he was. All of the students had difficulty accepting their personality types. No one wanted to be an introvert because that carried a negative connotation for teenagers.

The guest speaker program had positive and negative aspects. When the guest of a particular student was addressing the class, that student was attentive and well-behaved. When a stern military person addressed the students, they were attentive.

When an Icelandic artist came and the students were to paint, two of the male students painted in one solid color-black or blue. Many did not know what to paint and needed individual attention the entire period.

The students enjoyed learning about Native Americans. The rock painting was exciting for most of them but five of the students threw paint at one another. One male student threw a jar of green paint on the wall of the school building. The rocks were painted with bright colors but several of the students just spilled paint on the rocks. They missed the point of the sacredness of rock painting.

On the trips the students were loud on the bus and off the bus the males and females would make critical comments to each other. I had an adult male chaperone on the first trip and he refused to come on any more trips because of the student behavior. I continued to take the students on trips alone and they did start to improve their behavior.

We never did get to the process of peer mediation because the students were not ready and could not focus enough. The students did thank me for taking them on trips outside the base because many had never been off base. The students appreciated my acceptance of them and my willingness to help them develop the talents they had. I tried to capitalize on each student's strong areas and helped them to use their strengths when they worked on a project. I had the artistic students work on the class notebook. I had the singers lead the singing of Native American songs that we learned. The students did experience a sense of acceptance in my classroom and that was a strength of the class.

Conclusion

To place 14 impulsive students in one class and expect one teacher to work with them is a very very difficult assignment. I was fortunate to have a Jungian background and to have Dr. Perry's videos to help me. I believe that teachers who have these classes need help. My class was not unique but an example of what is going in the American Public School Classroom. I would like to see Jungians go into the public schools to use their skills and help teachers work with these difficult students. These students need professional help and no one is trained to help them. Sand Play works well with impulsive students and I would like to see trained Sand Play therapists work with impulsive students so that they could learn to self-regulate and become productive citizens of our country.

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