

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

A SPECIAL UNIT FOR DISRUPTIVE SECONDARY  
SCHOOL STUDENTS : A SOCIAL SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in Education at Massey University

Grant Curtiss Jones

1984

ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative description of the Hutt Valley Activity Centre, which is a special unit for disruptive secondary school students. The writer is the Director of this unit, and he applies the Getzels Guba social systems model to the data which is collected.

The research is essentially concerned with the organisation and administration of the Activity Centre, and the model postulates that social behaviour in a school is affected by institutional expectations, group intentions and individual needs. These three aspects are developed more fully with the institutional element of the model describing the development of the Hutt Valley Activity Centre, the job descriptions of staff, administration and management and community resources and parental links. In the work group element, the following factors which influence the group dynamics are discussed: the composition of the group - the background and values of the students, the referral of new students and assessment of students' progress, organisational procedures, and the Activity Centre programme. The individual element gives a descriptive case-study of two students who attended the Activity Centre.

There is a chapter which describes a typical day in the life of an Activity Centre Director, with all the incidents based on what actually happened. The review of related literature provides a number of source references to special classes or units for disruptive secondary school students in New Zealand and abroad.

The concluding chapter gives a number of recommendations relating to the educational unit which is studied. These include: the need for the Management Committee to include more representatives from community organisations, an increase in staffing, the need for more permanent tenure for the building which is occupied, for increased travel allowances to cover costs incurred by staff whilst on Activity Centre business, and an annual time allowance of up to eight days per annum to be allocated to the Activity Centre staff for the purpose of visiting organisations and departments related to the Centre and its students.

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This investigation was undertaken over a period of two years in the Hutt Valley Activity Centre.

At the time of the study the writer was the Director of this Activity Centre. The study grew from the writer's interest in organisational and administrative theory, and how this knowledge could be applied to doing a descriptive study of the organisation in which he worked.

The first year of the study involved participant observation, and reading in the area of sociology and psychology of divergent and deviant behaviour in adolescents, and the resulting educational and social problems. During the second year, the writer applied the Getzels and Guba systems model to describe the Activity Centre. It is hoped that the description and some of the problems and concerns may provide a useful stimulus for discussion by those involved in a professional capacity with this Activity Centre.

I wish to acknowledge the co-operation and assistance which I received from the students at the Activity Centre, who were an important focus in this study. I would also like to thank Mr Wayne Edwards, Senior Lecturer in Education at Massey University, who helped plan the early drafts, suggested modifications and guided many of the writer's tasks in the refinement process. To Mr Frank Whelan, a fellow teacher at the Activity Centre, for his helpful criticisms, and finally to my wife Moira, for her support and assistance in proof reading, my thanks are recorded.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	(ii)
Preface and Acknowledgements	(iii)
Table of Contents	(iv)
List of Tables	(v)
List of Figures	(v)
List of Photographs	(vi)
<u>Chapter One:</u> <u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter Two:</u> <u>A Day in the Life of an Activity Centre Director</u>	6
<u>Chapter Three:</u> <u>Review of Related Literature</u>	14
<u>Chapter Four:</u> <u>Methodology</u>	24
<u>Chapter Five:</u> <u>Elements of a Social System</u>	34
<u>Chapter Six:</u> <u>The Institutional Element</u>	45
	Activity Centres in N.Z. Historical Development of Hutt Valley Activity Centre Administration and Management Job Descriptions of Staff Community Resources and Parental Links
<u>Chapter Seven:</u> <u>The Work Group Element</u>	88
	Composition of Group Referrals and Assessment Organisational Procedures Activity Centre Programme
<u>Chapter Eight:</u> <u>The Individual Element</u>	126
	Case Study: Derek Case Study: Karen
<u>Chapter Nine:</u> <u>Conclusion and Recommendations</u>	145
<u>Appendices</u>	169
<u>Bibliography</u>	198

### LIST OF TABLES

		Page
TABLE 1	Research Planning Schedule	29
2	Enrolments for 1978	60
3	Students attending the Hutt Valley Activity Centre, July 1984. Distribution by Sex and by Ethnic Group.	90
4	Family Status of the Students	91
5	Student Expectations in Twelve Months' Time	95
6	Details on Students who have left	105

### LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Reformulated Elements for a Social Systems Model of Schools	35
2	A Social Systems Model for Describing the Hutt Valley Activity Centre	37
3	Relation of Role Expectation and Personality Needs to Efficient, Effective and Satisfying Behaviour.	40
4	Three Leadership-Followership Styles	41
5	The Dimensions of Morale	42
6	A Day in the Life of an Activity Centre Director	43

PHOTOGRAPHS

PHOTOGRAPHS 1 & 2	Students doing Correspondence School Studies	116
3	Students Sailing	120
4	Putting up Tents at Camp	120
5	Preparation for Rafting	121
6	Campfire	121
7	Student Displays Pottery which she Made	123
8	Mid-day Meal at the Activity Centre	123

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### BACKGROUND

Many people are concerned about disruptive behaviour in schools which has increased dramatically in the last decade. Not only has the number of disruptive pupils increased, but the problems they present have become more severe, especially in secondary schools.

Whatever the reasons are for the increase in concern about disruptive behaviour, three things became apparent to the writer.

1. Children who disrupt their classes arouse strong feelings of anger, resentment and sometimes guilt on the part of their teachers.
2. Nobody is at his most clear-sighted and rational when feeling angry or upset.
3. No plan of action to reduce problem behaviour is likely to succeed if it proposes a simple solution to a complex problem.

In the last thirty years in New Zealand, authorities have begun to recognise the problem and have endeavoured to help the disruptive pupil adjust to the school system. Educational psychologists, visiting teachers and social workers spend a significant proportion of their time working with pupils who have been disruptive at school or with their families. In secondary schools, especially in the last ten years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of trained guidance counsellors who have been appointed. The emergence of guidance networks with posts of special responsibility for deans, has been motivated in part by the need to deal with disruptive pupils and their effect on the supposedly well motivated majority.

When considering the prevalence of disruptive behaviour an immediate difficulty is definition. Galloway<sup>1</sup> (1981) states that a wide definition of what constitutes disruptive behaviour is more appropriate.

"Any behaviour which adults regard as problematic, inappropriate and disturbing to them or other pupils."

---

1. Galloway, D. "Disruptive Pupils," Set No.I New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1981, p.3.



He stated that any pupil repeatedly labelled disruptive could also be described as maladjusted.

Between 1975-1984, the New Zealand Education Department established ten Activity Centres to cater for pupils who could not be contained in ordinary schools and for whom all other alternatives had been exhausted. At the same time the Department funded a small number of classroom intervention programmes, essentially on a trial basis, to help teachers deal more successfully with problem behaviour in ordinary schools. Also, many secondary school principals were exploring new procedures for their potentially disruptive pupils as part of their school's network of special or remedial education facilities.

With developments in New Zealand secondary schools to deal with the problems of 'unmanageable children', the Minister of Education and his advisers were aware not only of the expense involved in creating additional Activity Centres, but also of the importance of encouraging a range of approaches. Following discussion within the Department, they commissioned a major study of recent provisions for disruptive pupils in the N.Z. education system.<sup>2</sup> This research project made a detailed study of disruptive pupils, their assessment and treatment, in school-based and Activity Centre programmes.

In considering Activity Centres, Galloway and Barrett carried out an empirically based but quantitative study of the eight Activity Centres which existed at the time of the review, and thirty pupils attending two Activity Centres, as well as some of their parents, were interviewed. The writer found this study, especially the section on Activity Centres, very stimulating, and this provided him with the necessary stimulus to begin a qualitative study of the Hutt Valley Activity Centre where he had recently been appointed as Director.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study endeavours to provide a qualitative description of the Hutt Valley Activity Centre, of which the writer is the Director, applying the Getzels Guba social systems model to the data which is collected. The research will essentially be concerned with the organisation and administration of the Activity Centre, using a descriptive approach.

---

2. Galloway, D., Barrett, C. "Unmanageable Children? A Study of Recent Provision for Disruptive Pupils in the N.Z. Education System" Report on Research carried out from Department of Education, Victoria University of Wellington from May 1981-July 1982, under contract to the New Zealand Education Department, 1983.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

With reference to the Hutt Valley Activity Centre the writer sought to describe:

1. The 'institutional element' of the model, and factors which influence the organisation and management of the Activity Centre;
2. The 'individual element' of the model, which is based on two case studies of former students;
3. The 'work group element' such as the composition of the group, the Activity Centre timetable, organisational procedures, and the referrals and admittance of new students; and
4. To draw conclusions and make recommendations on aspects of the organisation and administration which may be of use to the staff and Management Committee of the Activity Centre.

FIELD SETTING

The Hutt Valley Activity Centre is a special unit which is attached to Naenae College for administrative purposes, and which is concerned with meeting the educational needs of disruptive students who have had difficulty in coping in a main stream secondary school. The unit caters for up to twenty pupils aged between fourteen and sixteen years of age, and its educational philosophy could be identified as being 'education for survival', with a special effort being made to meet the individualised needs of each student.

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The results of the Galloway study indicate that the annual rate for indefinite suspension of secondary pupils of compulsory school age is approximately 1,250 or about six per thousand.<sup>3</sup> It is shown that Activity Centres cater for only a minority of students who cannot be contained in ordinary schools. It could be said that, apart from Social Welfare Department institutional care, Activity Centres in New Zealand provide the only form of structured education for pupils under 15 years of age who have been suspended indefinitely from secondary schools, and for whom there is no mainstream secondary school option.

This study was felt to be of significance to the writer because, after taking up the appointment, he felt the need to make a number of changes to the programme and methods of administration. After completing one school year at the Centre he began critically assessing

---

3. Ibid, p.45.

each aspect of the programme and the administration and management of the Hutt Valley Activity Centre. This study is based on the critical assessment which was done in the second year of the programme. It then became necessary to decide on an appropriate classification scheme or typology. Such typologies are primarily descriptive rather than explanatory; the organisations are described and compared on a given list of typological features.

It was decided to base this study on a social systems model, using the Getzels-Guba systems model. This model emphasises the need to study relations rather than entities, with process and change variables considered to be of vital importance. The model postulates that social behaviour in a school is affected by institutional expectations, group intentions, and individual needs. In the social systems model it is the relationships between these elements which is considered to be relevant and important.

It was decided that this three dimensional approach would become the basis for describing each aspect of the Hutt Valley Activity Centre.

#### ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 2 describes a typical day in the life of an Activity Centre Director. Although Ted is a pseudonym, all of the incidents related are actual incidents based on the recordings made during one typical day. Although some minor details have been slightly altered to make the chapter more readable, the substance of each incident remains the same.

In Chapter 3, the writer reviews related literature. This is done in two sections: overseas and N.Z. It will be seen that there has been only a limited amount of empirical research in N.Z. relating to special classes or units for disruptive secondary school pupils.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology used in researching the Hutt Valley Activity Centre.

In Chapter 5, the "Elements of a Social System" are considered. The writer outlines and discusses this with particular reference to the Getzels-Guba model, as this becomes the basis for discussing the administration and management of the Hutt Valley Activity Centre.

Chapter 6, 'the individual element', gives a descriptive case-study of two students who attended the Activity Centre. These are written up under three headings: educational and social background prior to attending the Activity Centre, personality and performance at the Activity Centre, and a self-evaluation by each student five months after leaving.

In Chapter 7, the institutional element of the social system model describes the development of Activity Centres in New Zealand, the development of the Hutt Valley Activity Centre, administration and management, job descriptions of staff, community resources and parental links.

Chapter 8, the work group element, involves a description of the composition of the group, referrals and admittance of new pupils, organisational procedures, the Activity Centre Programme and a consideration of group norms and values.

Chapter 9, the Conclusion, includes some recommendations.

The study concludes with relevant appendices and bibliography.