**Delinquency Prevention: Individual Control or Social Development?**

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Prevention is defined as a defensive reaction to an anticipated or expected occurrence. The term 'delinquency prevention' suggests that some precautionary action is taken to limit the likelihood of particular antisocial behaviour from occurring. Acting on the basis of statistical data it is predicted that certain behaviours will occur or recur in a particular section of the youth population.

Generally, programs are devised to be run in schools or community organisations with a view to attracting the interest of such young people and diverting them from other activities which may bring them into conflict with the law. The key ingredients of delinquency prevention programs appear to be a genuine concern for the participants, and development of skills training through activities such as employment programs, social relationships and leisure pursuits.

There appear to be two levels of delinquency prevention programs: one may be called primary prevention and the other, secondary prevention. Primary prevention programs aim to divert 'at risk' youth before they become involved in delinquent acts, whereas secondary prevention programs aim to prevent adjudicated antisocial behaviour from recurring.

In this paper it is argued that the aim of both levels of delinquency prevention programs should be to connect young people to mainstream community life and that the long-term welfare of the community is better served through social development strategies rather than through emphasising individual control strategies. It is conceded that individual control strategies may have measurable positive effects in the short term, but longer term gains may be possible through linking individual control programs to mainstream community life.

**The Difference between Individual Control and Social Development**

Individual control programs are attractive to government departments and community agencies because participants are an identified group and the service can be provided by a single sponsoring organisation with perhaps a little coordination with other agencies. The service can be delivered efficiently and often there is evidence that the undesirable behaviours have been brought under control and diminished (Coates et al. 1978). However, recidivism studies indicate that secondary prevention programs do not have lasting impact on a significant proportion of participants (Lipton et al. 1975).
There is also evidence that primary prevention programs tend to include some participants who may well have succeeded without the preventive program (Empey 1982) and others whose behaviour has deteriorated, possibly as a result of participation in the program (Alder & Polk 1985).

Despite these limitations individual control programs continue to be funded. Perhaps they would be more successful if funding were conditional upon a statement of long-term expected outcomes. Such a statement would show how the program connects with mainstream youth activities and gives access to conventional status and power in society. On the other hand we may care to attempt the even more complex and difficult task of social development, that is the movement towards equal participation of all members of society. In a capitalist democracy, such as ours, this basically means the elimination of poverty and creation of a full employment economy.

Elimination of poverty frees people from the tremendous daily burden of anxiety about food, clothing and shelter and from dependence upon the charity of others. A full employment economy enables people to become financially independent and to gain a sense of personal fulfilment.

While elimination of poverty and the creation of a full employment economy involves structural change and may be expensive, these considerations need to be balanced against the great cost of running individual control programs with limited success.

This paper proposes constructive evaluation of existing approaches and programs with a view to developing programs of lasting value to participants and to the community.

A Social Development Proposal

This proposal is based on the assumption that the ideal delinquency prevention program is directed at primary prevention utilising social development strategies. The first question to be addressed by such a proposal is: what do we want for all young people in our society? One way of responding to this question is to list common sources of gratification and look at these across key social institutions as shown in Table 1, derived from the work of Pearl (1978) and from Elliott, Ageton and Canter (1979).

Through participation in these key social institutions young people gain important gratification and the understanding necessary to contribute positively to the wider political, cultural and recreational arenas of the society. Conversely, the less gratification they gain from key social institutions the more alienated they become, and are consequently less able to understand and contribute to the wider arenas of the society. Gratification is then sought in antisocial ways—generally association with other young people whose ties with key social institutions have become somewhat tenuous or broken.

As the school is the social institution established by the state for the purpose of developing social understandings and personal skills in all young people, it has a major role in strengthening the ties of young people to other social institutions, especially work. The role of the school in meeting important gratification is critical to the present and future participation of young people in their society. This role has become more and more critical with the progressive fragmentation of society, including the family unit, and the weakening of the connection between school and work for many young people over the last thirty years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1984; Stricker & Sheehan 1978). This is not to argue that school should become a youth club or welfare agency. It is simply to take seriously the current catch phrases that are being used in
relation to schooling in Australia—terms such as 'access', 'success', 'equal opportunity' and 'school retention'. In Victoria there is an integration policy which stresses the inclusion of all students in regular schools and points to the catastrophic and lifelong consequences of labelling and segregation from regular schooling.

**Table 1**

*Gratifications across Key Social Institutions*

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<tr>
<th>Important Gratifications</th>
<th>Key Social Institutions</th>
<th>Major Arenas of Society</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Peers</td>
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<td>Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
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<td>Belonging</td>
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<td>Competence</td>
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<td>Hope</td>
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<td>Excitement</td>
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+ = supportive
- = negative
0 = neutral or non-existent

The Victorian Minister of Education's papers and the 'Curriculum Frameworks' documents suggest that at least at the policy level this government is aware of the social developmental role of schools. For example, Ministerial Paper Six states:

*The Government's fundamental expectation of schools is that they further the knowledge, understanding and competencies necessary for young people to:*

a. participate effectively in the life of a multicultural society;

b. undertake worthwhile work; and

c. plan an active role in the processes through which our society is regulated and improved.

The school curriculum is the means by which the government's expectations are to be met. The Framework documents define curriculum to include not only subject material but also the way the school is organised for the teaching and learning process, as follows.

The term 'curriculum' covers all the arrangements the school makes for students' learning and development. It includes the content of courses, student activities, teaching approaches, and the ways in which teachers and classes are organised. It also includes decisions on the need for and use of facilities.
Critics may well ask why this approach to schooling has not yet made apparent inroads in the area of delinquency prevention, and some suggestions for further work at the implementation level can be made:

- while state schools have opened up to local community participation, some communities have been slow to respond, so connections between school and community are not as strong or as cooperative as they could be;
- the importance of student participation in the governance of their schools is not clearly understood in some schools, particularly in traditional working-class areas and amongst migrant populations where the Australian culture is strange and the language difficult;
- the number of hostile 'experts' who are critical of school performance in the areas of literacy, numeracy and behaviour control. These pressures make it difficult for teachers to support moves to open up schools further to community participation and to feel that they have an educative role as well as a training role;
- the traditional style of teacher training does not enable young teachers to fully comprehend the Ministry’s definition of curriculum. In order to understand school organisation and classroom climate as integral aspects of school curriculum, trainee teachers need more exposure to schools, possibly through school-based projects throughout their training period;
- the links between school and industry need to be strengthened so that:
  - the drain of good teachers to industry is arrested and reversed, or at least the possibility of exchange remains a lifelong option;
  - students can move from school to work and back again and gain credits for work experience more easily;
  - all state schools need to be equipped as a community resource so that people of all ages can identify with their local school;
  - the increase in funds allocated to private schools has increased the competition for 'bright' students and this has the effect of eroding the image of the local school as an instrument of community cohesion and cooperation.

There may be other pressures at work but the above list of factors working against government policy for social development at the primary prevention level serves to illustrate some of the barriers that still need to be overcome. Until they are overcome, we, as a community will continue to fund delinquency prevention projects at the secondary level and possibly using individual control strategies rather than social development. Unfortunately, despite the quality of worker employed in these types of remedial and correctional programs, the barriers to success are far more formidable than those just outlined in relation to achievement of social development goals in schools because, for example, correctional institutions are outside the mainstream social institutions.

These barriers become apparent upon observation of examples given in Tables 2 and 3. The Tables illustrate the differences in strategies that could be employed in relation to the key social institutions by individual control and social development approaches to primary and secondary prevention. It will be seen that the central theme of the individual control approach is 'person blame', whereas the central theme of the social development approach is situational improvement through education and cooperation. The major barrier to success for individual control programs, where there
is no alternative to their establishment (for example in correctional institutions), is how
to design such programs so that they connect to social development programs at the
primary prevention level. By designing individual control programs in this way,
'redemptive' pathways to full membership of the community are created through
reversing negative gratification and/or by developing gratification in other key social
institutions.

Table 2
Examples of Primary Prevention Strategies

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<th>Social Institution</th>
<th>Individual Control</th>
<th>Social Development</th>
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| Family             | 1. Developing proposals that some people should not have children (but no implementation due to human rights concerns)  
2. Identify 'at risk' families and offering counselling and welfare benefits | 1. Family support - guaranteed minimum income - housing  
- health  
- child care  
- legal aid  
- equal access to education |
| Peers              | 1. Diversion from court programs  
2. Separation of 'troublesome' youths, e.g. court order: 'do not associate with . . .'  
3. Curfew | 1. Encourage youth contribution to their local community—interesting things to do with people of all ages  
2. Youth cooperative initiatives recognised |
| School             | 1. Hierarchy of disciplinary sanctions  
2. Privileges conditional upon 'good' behaviour | 1. Code of behaviour established for and by teachers, students and parents  
2. Cooperative, inclusive teaching, e.g. cross-age tutoring, student action research projects, mixed ability groups  
3. Relevant 'negotiated' curriculum—see 'Frameworks' |
| Work               | 1. Restricted entry through raising pre-requisite qualification  
2. Part-time casual work with no written contract  
3. Unemployment benefit | 1. Full employment economy  
2. Industrial democracy  
3. Combine work with study |
| Community Organisations | 1. Restricted entry through: a. high membership fees  
b. credentials  
c. recruiting competitively, e.g. football clubs that recruit all over Australia, thereby losing their local identity | 1. Inclusive of local community members  
2. Self-help neighbourhood programs through Local Government  
3. Advocacy for disadvantaged groups |
Table 3

Examples of Secondary Prevention Strategies

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<tr>
<th>Social Institution</th>
<th>Individual Control</th>
<th>Social Development</th>
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</table>
| Family             | 1. Return to family with counselling and welfare benefits  
2. Supervision order | 1. Family support (see primary prevention strategies) |
| Peers              | 1. Separation from peers through detention (with other delinquent peers)  
2. Individual skill development programs in detention  
3. Strict parole conditions re self and peers | 1. Project which involves identified youth taking responsibility in community organisations and activities, e.g. reading to aged people; responsibility for organising a community project; peer tutoring and counselling |
| School             | 1. Re-entry on restricted conditions  
2. Remedial classes, separate from other students | 1. Integration into mainstream school classes and activities  
2. Inclusive teaching styles (see primary prevention strategies)  
3. Negotiated curriculum (see primary prevention strategies) |
| Work               | 1. Work-release programs  
2. Work pre-requisite for parole | 1. Job creation programs that lead to permanent employment and career paths—including previously uninvolved youth |
| Community Organisations | 1. Relaxation of entry restrictions for outstanding sponsored individuals  
2. Special organisations for ex-offenders | 1. De-institutionalisation  
2. Community education |

Conclusion

According to the old saying, prevention is better than cure. This paper has argued that delinquency prevention is dependent upon curing some social ills and for this reason individual control strategies must be linked to social development policies and programs. While the individual must be held responsible for his or her behaviour, membership of the major social institutions and participation in the major arenas of community life, are a group responsibility.

References


