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FREQUENCY AND SERIOUSNESS OF DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS IN CERTAIN IOWA HIGH SCHOOLS

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PROBLEM

This investigation grew out of a feeling of need on the part of students enrolled in courses in educational psychology. Many students had confidence in their ability to teach subject matter, but they were uncertain as to the behavior problems that might arise and how they could be met. The study sought to obtain from teachers in Iowa high schools information on the following questions.

1. What behavior problems occur most frequently?
2. Which behavior problems do teachers consider to be the most serious?
3. What remedial or corrective measures are employed to meet these problems?

PROCEDURE

The point of departure for this study was E. K. Wickman's study of *Children's Behavior and Teachers' Attitudes*, published by the Commonwealth Fund in 1928. A check sheet was prepared to submit directly to teachers.

Column 1 of this sheet listed 41 types of behavior chosen from Wickman's list of types of behavior indicative of maladjustment. Teachers were invited to add other types if they wished.

Column 2 was headed *Frequency*. The instructions were: "In Column 2 rank each type of behavior according to its frequency of occurrence during this school year. Use the following symbols: 0 for never; 1 for seldom; 2 for frequently; 3 for very often."

Column 3 was headed *Seriousness* with the following instructions: "Rank the types of behavior according to their seriousness or undesirability in any pupil: 0 for no consequence; 1 for slight consequence; 2 makes for considerable difficulty; 3 an extremely grave problem."

Column 4 was headed *Correction* with the following instructions: "Write in the number of the corrective measure or meas-

¹ The writers gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of teachers and officials in the following schools: Ames, Belle Plaine, Boone, Britt, Nevada, Oskaloosa, Radcliffe, Sac City, Shenandoah, and Webster City.

ures you would employ as each type of problem arose. Add other measures if you desire." These measures, 16 in number, were listed on the right hand margin of the blank with spaces provided for 14 additional measures.

Data were obtained from 60 teachers in 5 Iowa high schools during the second semester of the year 1937-38. During the second semester of the year 1939-40 data were obtained from 64 additional teachers in 5 other schools in Iowa. As a means of checking consistency the data were first worked up as two separate studies. Quite close agreement was found on practically all points. The data reported here are from the combined studies and are based on 124 teachers in 10 schools.

RESULTS

The frequency of occurrence of behavior problems is reported in table I. The total score, by which the rank was obtained, was calculated by allowing 3 points for a report of very often, 2 for

Table I—Frequency of Behavior Problems

	Total Score		Total Score
1. Whispering	234	22. Truancy	97
2. Careless in work.....	227	23. Lying, untruthful.....	90
3. Failure to study.....	205	24. Unhappy, depressed.....	83
4. Inattentive	175	25. Meddlesome	81
5. Physically lazy.....	175	26. Overcritical	80
6. Neglectful	172	27. Stubborn in group.....	73
7. Day dreaming.....	166	28. Domineering	71
8. Shy, withdrawing.....	149	29. Quarrelsome	71
9. Lack of interest.....	148	30. Impertinent, defiant.....	71
10. Acting "smart".....	143	31. Temper outbursts.....	70
11. Unnecessary tardiness.....	137	32. Willfully disobedient.....	70
12. Cheating	136	33. Sissy (or tomboy).....	67
13. Nervous	134	34. Physical coward.....	65
14. Interrupting	113	35. Carrying grudges.....	64
15. Oversensitive	108	36. Stealing articles.....	59
16. Slovenly appearance.....	106	37. Suggestible	59
17. Rude, impudent.....	105	38. Profanity	54
18. Disorderly in class.....	105	39. Cruel, bullying.....	40
19. Destroying property.....	100	40. Imaginative tales.....	34
20. Overactive	100	41. Tattling	32
21. Sullen, sulky.....	99		

frequently, 1 for seldom and 0 for never. The writers do not wish to attach any special importance to small differences in total scores. The facts considered significant are such as these: whispering, careless work and failure to study can be expected to occur very often, while such behavior as stealing, bullying and tattling can be expected to occur relatively infrequently.

Although Wickman's data are from elementary school children,

whispering heads the list, with inattentive second and careless in work third. It is interesting to note that tattling was fourth in frequency with elementary pupils, while it was found to be last in our study. Garinger² had principals from 312 schools in 46 states rate twenty specified school offenses. Carelessness in work ranked first and inattention in class third. Whispering was not on his list of twenty offenses which he submitted.

The seriousness of the behavior problems, as rated by the teachers, is recorded in table II. The teachers in this study consider

Table II — *Seriousness of Behavior Problems*

	Total Score		Total Score
1. Failure to study.....	248	22. Whispering	159
2. Cheating	230	23. Quarrelsome	158
3. Destroying property.....	228	24. Shy, withdrawing.....	157
4. Lying, untruthful.....	226	25. Stubborn in group.....	155
5. Careless in work.....	225	26. Day dreaming.....	154
6. Stealing articles.....	221	27. Nervous	154
7. Willfully disobedient.....	219	28. Interrupting	148
8. Rude, impudent.....	217	29. Unhappy, depressed.....	144
9. Impertinent, defiant.....	209	30. Oversensitive	141
10. Acting "Smart".....	206	31. Carrying grudges.....	137
11. Disorderly in class.....	199	32. Domineering	137
12. Lack of interest.....	199	33. Overcritical	136
13. Physically lazy.....	198	34. Slovenly appearance.....	133
14. Truancy	194	35. Meddlesome	129
15. Neglectful	186	36. Suggestible	109
16. Temper outbursts.....	181	37. Physical coward.....	104
17. Unnecessarily tardy.....	176	38. Overactive	102
18. Profanity	172	39. Sissy (or Tomboy).....	91
19. Inattentive	170	40. Tattling	84
20. Sullen, sulky.....	169	41. Imaginative tales.....	82
21. Cruel, bullying.....	167		

failure to study a very serious and undesirable matter. Wickman found this characteristic to be rather common among children who were dishonest or disinterested in their work. Cheating, lying and destroying property were rated serious in the studies of Garinger and of Ellis and Miller.³ Table II suggests that the teachers in this study have not been radically influenced by the mental hygiene point of view. Such behavior as shyness, day-dreaming and oversensitiveness are rated near the bottom of the list.

The use which the teachers would make of the corrective measures suggested are reported in table III. The private conference is by far the most widely used of these techniques, while corporal punishment is used the least. Other practices, showing the principal use of the measures are as follows: 1. A look or a pause for

² Garinger, E. H., *The Administration of Discipline in the High School*, Teachers Coll. Contrib. to Educ., No. 686, Columbia Univ., 1936.

³ Ellis, D. B., & Miller, L. W., *Teachers' Attitudes and Child Behavior Problems*, *J. Educ. Psychol.*, 1936, 27, 505.

Table III—Corrective Measures for Behavior Problems

The measures are as follows: 1. A look. 2. Pause in speech. 3. "Bawling out." 4. Private conference. 5. Ignore situation. 6. Send to principal. 7. Stay after school. 8. Denial of privileges. 9. Assigns more work. 10. Ask a question. 11. Move about the room. 12. Tell a story. 13. Sarcasm. 14. Corporal punishment. 15. Lecture on conduct. 16. Note to parents.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Whispering	83	75	15	22	4		13	8	6	21	8					1
2. Inattentive	22	56	13	34	7		3	1	2	53	5	8	1			2
3. Disorderly in class	23	18	27	58	1	14	21	14	2	6	2	1	4		7	1
4. Careless in work	3	2	3	98	2	3	14	2	3	1	3	2	1			5
5. Interrupting	28	37	21	39	12		2	2		2	2					7
6. Failure to study	2		3	74	1	11	47	12	12	13				1		13
7. Overactive	10	3	5	18	8	1	8	8	44	9	4	2			2	1
8. Neglectful	1	2	5	62	1	1	18	23	9	4		1			4	6
9. Lack of interest	1		2	62			1	1	3	30	6	19				4
10. Tattling			2	42	34		2	2	2			1		1		4
11. Acting "smart"	13	12	21	47	17	11	8	11	4	1	2	5	27	3	9	
12. Cheating	5		2	53		6	6	14	4		15	4		3	21	
13. Meddlesome	8	5	9	42	15	1	1	6	8	4	4	3	2		6	
14. Lying, untruthful	1		1	70		9	2	13	1			4	1	4	18	6
15. Physically lazy			4	49	9		14	8	17	4	3	5	4		4	10
16. Domineering	7	2	7	49	14	1	1	4	4	1		2	6	1	8	2
17. Rude, impudent	7	5	22	57	3	19	11	10				1	4	1	15	3
18. Willfully disobedient	1	1	6	42	4	39	18	24	3	1			3	7	5	6
19. Day dreaming	10	13	3	22	8		3		8	44	11	5	4			2
20. Impertinent, defiant	2	3	10	41	1	36	10	20	2			1	1	6	5	7
21. Destroying property		1	7	37	3	36	3	10	3	1		2	1	4	14	6
22. Slovenly appearance	1		2	73	8	1						9	1		3	4
23. Quarrelsome	5	2	2	51	8	2	8	11	2	1	1	1	2	1	14	1
24. Overcritical	2	3	5	49	19			1	2	5		1	9		8	
25. Sullen, sulky	1		1	55	28	3	2	1	3	4		1	1	1	8	2
26. Stubborn in group	1		3	53	19	2	9	13	3	1		4	2	1	8	2
27. Unnecessary tardiness	1	1	2	34	6	21	25	10	5			1			4	12
28. Suggestible	1	3		35	15	4		3	3			1	1	4	4	2
29. Stealing articles				51	5	39	2	10	1			3		3	11	11
30. Imaginative tales	2	2		30	33	1			1	1	1	3	3		1	2
31. Oversensitive				64	27						4		5			4
32. Cruel, bullying			12	39	5	17	7	15	1				5	4	7	
33. Shy, withdrawing				59	16				1	15	2	2	1			4
34. Nervous	1	1		46	26	2				3	2	3				7
35. Truancy				26	2	44	19	16	4	1					2	14
36. Carrying grudges	1			60	22	1	1	1	1			2	1		6	
37. Physical coward				37	20	2					1	4	2	2	1	3
38. Profanity	2		5	56	6	15	5	7	1			2		3	11	3
39. Temper outbursts	4	2		65	17	6	8	8	2			1	1	1	6	3
40. Unhappy, depressed	1			67	9							3	2			4
41. Sissy (or Tomboy)				35	42							2	1		3	2
Totals	250	249	220	2003	477	348	292	289	167	230	73	113	93	45	230	152

whispering; 2. A pause for inattention and interrupting; 3. Private conference was used predominantly in careless work, failure to study, neglect, lack of interest, cheating, and many others; 4. Sissy or tomboy would be ignored; 5. Destroying properties and truancy were treated most often by a trip to the principal; 6. Assigning more work was the treatment for over-activeness; 7. Asking a question for day dreaming; 8. Sarcasm for acting smart. The other measures were not preferred for any particular type of behavior.

A number of teachers took opportunity to suggest additional remedial measures. These are recorded in table IV in order of frequency.

Table IV — Corrective Measures Added by Teachers

1. Quiet talk.....	18	11. Squelch	8
2. Pay for damage.....	18	12. Friendly take-off.....	7
3. Vary assignments.....	17	13. Find out why.....	6
4. Give special work.....	15	14. Give quiz, extra work.....	5
5. Remove from class.....	14	15. More responsibilities.....	4
6. Talk (teachers, parent).....	14	16. Group decision.....	4
7. No grade.....	12	17. Medical check-up.....	3
8. Praise, encourage.....	11	18. Change seating.....	3
9. Lower grade.....	9	19. Do something unusual.....	2
10. Lecture (single, class).....	9	20. Be friendly, smile.....	2

SUMMARY

The purpose of this investigation was to study the frequency and seriousness of disciplinary problems in certain Iowa high schools, and to discover the corrective measures commonly used. A check list adapted from Wickman was administered to 124 teachers in 10 Iowa high schools. The most frequent problem was whispering, the most serious was failure to study, and the most common remedial device was the private conference.

The writers feel the study is fairly reliable since both halves of the data, when computed separately, gave about the same picture. As to validity, similar studies by Wickman, by Garinger, and by Ellis and Miller indicate general support of our findings.

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