

THE GLASSER & QUALITY SCHOOL

*A Combination of
Choice Theory and the
Competence-Based
Classroom*

Johnnie* is an only child, 7 years old. He is very happy, and he gets along well with other students and with his teachers. His parents tell his teacher he is a delightful child and has never been a problem at home. He enjoys reading and takes books out of the library to read at home. He has quickly learned to do what is assigned in the classroom, and his classwork is up to date.

But since he started school, Johnnie will only do his homework if it interests him. When it does, he does it well. His parents are not concerned. They ask him to do all his assignments, even offer help, but they are not willing to do any more than this. They say it is a school problem, not a home problem, and tell the school they are not willing to risk their good relationship with him by punishing him. Basically, they do not believe in punishment and have never had a problem they couldn't solve by talking it over with him.

Some variation of this problem, of-

The need for Power. . . . has led all human societies to try to control others with whom they disagree, to get them to accept their point of view—often to the point of killing them if they won't.

ten much more serious, is the basic challenge all teachers struggle with: **The student will not do what the teacher asks him or her to do or, in some instances, the student will do the work but not the way the teacher wants it done.** If the child is pushed or punished by the teacher or principal, he or she usually becomes a discipline problem. However, punishment does not solve school problems, it increases them.

In a Glasser Quality School (GQS), which has no punishment, this prob-

BY WILLIAM GLASSER

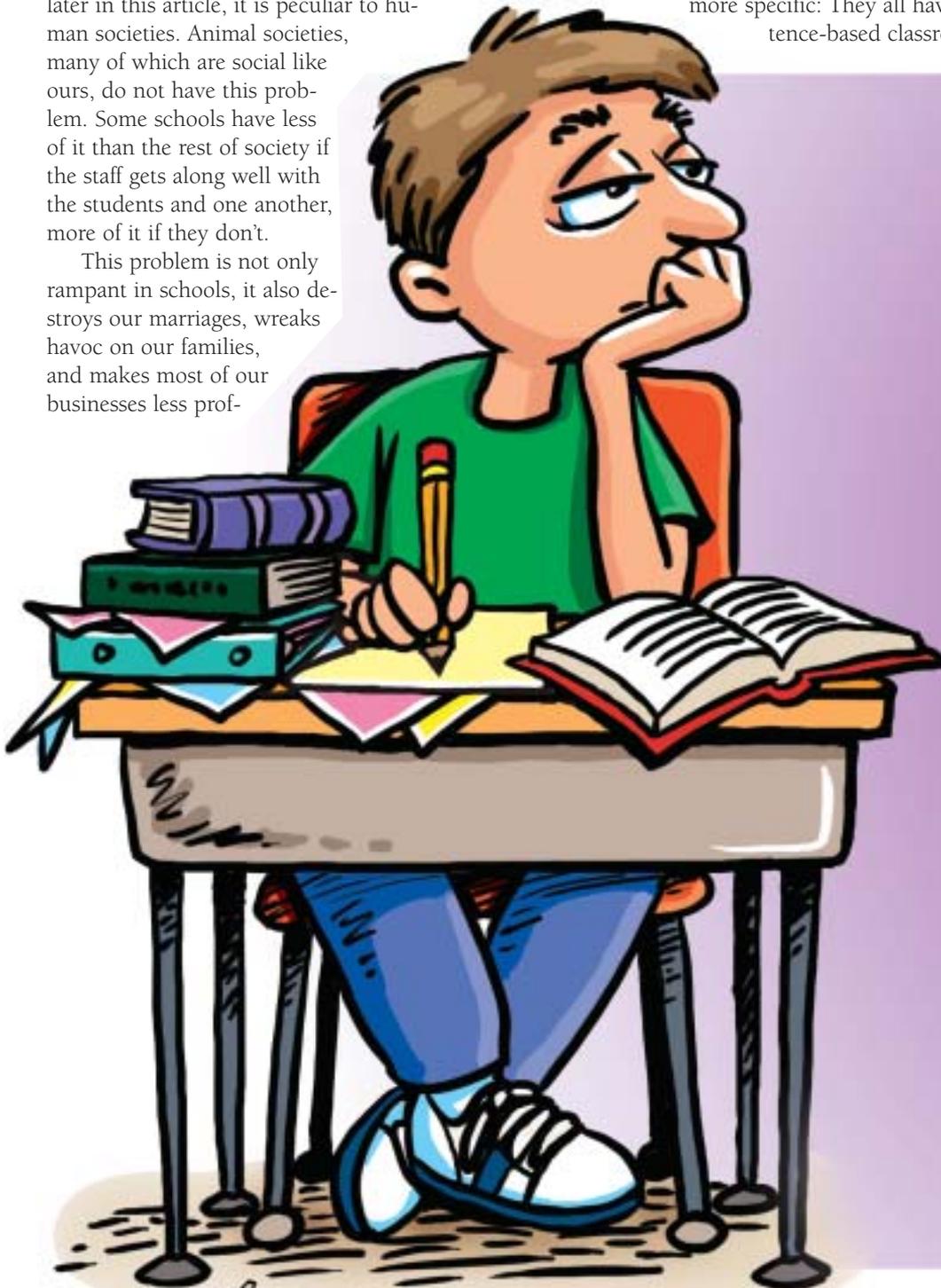
* Not his real name.

lem has been reduced to the point where it either does not occur or, when it does, the system under which the whole school runs almost always solves it. I believe that schools have this social problem because our whole society, including teachers, suffers from it: Huge numbers of people can't get along with one another to the extent they want. As far as I am concerned, it is by far the most important problem of all human societies. And, as I will explain later in this article, it is peculiar to human societies. Animal societies, many of which are social like ours, do not have this problem. Some schools have less of it than the rest of society if the staff gets along well with the students and one another, more of it if they don't.

This problem is not only rampant in schools, it also destroys our marriages, wreaks havoc on our families, and makes most of our businesses less prof-

itable than they could be. I also believe that a GQS in which students, teachers, principals, and parents get along well with one another could serve, as some do now, as models of good relationships for the rest of their community.

There are two reasons that explain why all the people involved in a GQS get along so well with one another. The first is a general one: They all use Choice Theory to guide the way they deal with one another socially. The second is more specific: They all have implemented the competence-based classroom, a method of teaching



Since we teach children a great deal by example, if parents and teachers can learn to replace the deadly habits with the caring habits, all their relationships will improve, and they will serve as the models children need.

Ray Wheeler
WWW.CARTOONWORKS.COM

that persuades almost all students to do, at a minimum, competent work. I believe it is common knowledge that people who are competent in whatever they are doing tend to get along much better with others than people who are less than competent.

Choice Theory Explains Why We Get Along Well With Others and Why We Don't

Because we have the same genetic structure, *almost all of us tend to follow a way of thinking that makes it very difficult,*

often impossible, to get along with others to the extent we want to when we disagree. I have given this psychology a name: **external control psychology** or simply **external control**. For example, in the first paragraph of this article, the teacher and the parents might have great difficulty getting along with each other if the teacher wanted to punish Johnnie for not doing his homework. Choice Theory explains where this psychology comes from and how, when it is used, it always harms the relationship between those who use it and those who are recipients. Choice Theory also ex-



plains why all humans use this relationship-destroying psychology and other creatures don't.

All Mammals, Including Humans, Are Motivated by the Same Four Genetic Needs

Humans and other mammals are driven to do all they can to **Survive**. The other three needs are: **Love and Belonging**, so our helpless children can survive, **Freedom**, so we can move, think, and express ourselves freely; and **Fun**, so we are motivated to learn new, useful behaviors.

But beyond those four needs, *only humans are genetically driven by a fifth need*, the need for **Power**. It is this need that has led all human societies to try to control others with whom they disagree, to get them to accept their point of view—often to the point of killing them if they won't. Just watch one day of television if you have any trouble believing this. But **external control** is not in our genes. It has been learned, and a study of history will reveal occasional examples of human societies—democracies are a good example—that have attempted to protect their citizens from excessive external control.

Basically, external control has led people to act as if what they believe is not only right for them, it is right for everyone. The people of the world are either trying to control others or are trying to escape from their control. That strug-

gle is what history is mostly about. But it goes beyond history. All serious literature, drama, and especially grand opera are based on external control. We live in an external control world, and almost all of us use what I call the **Seven Deadly Habits** that are the hallmarks of this belief: Criticizing, Blaming, Complaining, Nagging, Threatening, Punishing, and Bribing and Rewarding to Control.

But what is so important is to understand that while

One of the wonderful things about teaching Choice Theory to anyone young or old is that it is very pleasant to learn.

power is in our genes, external control is learned. This means we can learn to replace the Seven Deadly Habits with **Seven Caring Habits**: Supporting, Encouraging, Listening, Accepting, Trusting, Respecting, and Negotiating Differences. But as far as I can discover, no one has offered a major psychology such as **Choice Theory** that we can put to work in our lives to replace external control.

Because of the deadly habits, our marriages are falling apart. I got back from Ireland recently where a newspaper



Dr. William Glasser leads out in a breakout session at the 2006 NAD Teacher Convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

was reporting research that shows that 75 percent of English marriages are ending in divorce, which does not account for all the people who stay unhappily together. Schools are also filled with the deadly habits, as are businesses and families.

Choice Theory is called that because all of our behaviors are chosen. Unlike animals, we have no genetic behaviors. This means that there is nothing but long years of experience that stands in the way of our learning to choose the caring habits to replace the deadly habits that too many of us choose now. We also need to learn that the deadly habits encompass much more than the words that come out of our mouths. We also choose the tone of our voices, the expressions on our faces, and the gestures we make with our hands. Since we teach children a great deal by example, if parents and teachers can learn to replace the deadly habits with the caring habits, all their relationships will improve, and they will serve as the models children need.

School teachers in a GQS don't use the deadly habits and take every opportunity they can to explain to the students why they don't. But they are careful not to use the external control statement, "Now that I've stopped, you have to stop, too." We have learned by years of experience teaching Choice Theory that once we stop, in time the students will stop, too. That will also extend to parents, most of whom are eager to learn how to get along better with their children.

When they read what I have just written, people who are used to using external control tend to say, "That's not fair! If I stop, you have to stop, too." But fairness is not the point of Choice Theory. The point is more like the Golden Rule: "I'm going to treat you the way I'd want to be treated, whether you treat me this way or not."

I and my staff members teach Choice Theory to school staffs and to individuals and groups when we counsel. All of us use it in our own lives. We have trained many thousands of people in the use of Choice Theory, and the continual feedback we get is, We are better teachers and counselors for doing this. But what we didn't expect is all the feedback they give us saying how much better their whole lives are when they put it to work in their families and in their marriages.

Obviously, these ideas are much more complicated than the little I am able to explain here, but if you can even begin to get rid of criticizing in your marriage and ask nothing in return from your partner, you will soon see how powerful this theory is.

The Competence-Based Classroom

In this classroom, C, D, and F grades, which are the main reason students don't like school, are eliminated. While all students want to feel as if they are cared for, this is impossible because more than half the students in our schools never earn a grade above C. In a GQS, the lowest grade for credit is a legitimate B. What we have done is raise

both the floor and the ceiling. Students who achieve well beyond competence can earn A+ or other recognition for what they have done.

Giving these higher grades takes care of parents who say

Teaching the students Choice Theory can, in time, lead to a whole community learning it.

that getting rid of low grades makes it harder for their child to look good in comparison to others. Our schools are called Quality Schools because so many students make the effort to achieve beyond mere competence.

Many teachers fear this system because they believe that many of their students cannot do competent work. Our experience in more than 20 GQSs does not support that fear. Almost all the students do competent work or even higher if they are told that nothing less will be accepted for credit. But along with this, we also tell them we believe they can do competent work, and that our job is to make it possible for them to do it.

The Ten Axioms of Choice Theory

1. The only person whose behavior we can control is our own.
2. All we can give another person is information.
3. All long-lasting psychological problems are relationship problems.
4. The problem relationship is always part of our present life.
5. What happened in the past has everything to do with what we are today, but we can only satisfy our basic needs right now and plan to continue satisfying them in the future.
6. We can only satisfy our needs by satisfying the pictures in our Quality World.
7. All we do is behave.
8. All behavior is Total Behavior and is made up of four components: acting, thinking, feeling, and physiology.
9. All Total Behavior is chosen, but we only have direct control over the acting and thinking components. We can only control our feeling and physiology indirectly through how we choose to act and think.
10. All Total Behavior is designated by verbs and named by the part that is the most recognizable.

But we also make school more sensible for all students. For example, we eliminate rote memorization and use only open-book tests. The questions require thinking, understanding, and the ability to use what the students have learned. Those who need extra time to answer test questions competently are given more time. Much of the homework involves using additional time to improve test answers to competence. Competence, not speed, is what is valued in a GQS. Ours is actually a much more rigorous system than the one now in place in the U.S., in which we graduate students without their ever getting a grade above a C.

Coaches worry that athletes won't be able to play if the schools they attend get rid of low grades, but that has not happened. I don't believe it is possible to be a star athlete and not have the ability to do competent school work. Because they want to play, they have an extra incentive to work hard. In the rare instance that we believe students are not capable of competent work, we address these situations individually.

The GQS Adds Both Competence and Quality to the Community

I realize that many teachers do not believe such a school would be possible with the students they are asked to teach, many of whom seem to have given up trying. They do not realize that low grades and external control have, over a long period of time, caused many dropouts. But when these obstacles are removed and all the students begin to do competent work, this positive effort can lead beyond school to raising the expectations and the effort of the whole community.

The key here is the teaching of Choice Theory to all the students, starting in kindergarten or when they enter school and continuing for as long as they remain in school. Well before any student reaches the 4th grade, all students in a GQS will have learned from their teacher and older students how to put Choice Theory to work.

One of the wonderful things about teaching Choice Theory to anyone young or old is that it is very pleasant to learn. Generally, instruction is not done formally; rather, the ideas are introduced to students informally as events in the classroom lend themselves to teachable moments. There are many of these moments that a teacher who knows Choice Theory will easily recognize.

But as students learn Choice Theory, their parents will also be invited to learn it in evening classes. As they do, they are pleased by how much better they get along with their children at home and with each other. Teaching the students Choice Theory can, in time, lead to a whole community learning it. As they do, many problems

begin to disappear, as almost all community problems are caused by people who don't get along with one another.

A Final Word

Obviously, this brief article is only enough to pique your interest. For much more information, read the other articles in this journal and log onto my Website <http://www.wglasser.com>. But almost all you need to know to get a GQS started is in my 2000 book, *Every Student Can Succeed*. This book is available from the William Glasser Institute. Information on how to get it is on our Website, also.

I also recommend that you read *Soul Shapers: A Better Plan for Parents and Educators* (2005) by Jim Roy. *Soul Shapers* is written for Seventh-day Adventist educators and parents and explains quite well how Choice Theory works in Christian schools. It was very interesting for me to read about how my ideas compare favorably with those of Ellen White. I support the ideas in *Soul Shapers* so strongly that I agreed to write the Foreword for the book. I have worked with Seventh-day Adventist schools for many years, but especially since the convention in Dallas in 2000. I hope that what I have written, as well as what Ellen White has written, will encourage Adventist educators to embrace the value of positive relationships and a relevant curriculum within a non-coercive environment. ✍



Dr. William Glasser is a world-renowned psychiatrist and educational consultant. He is an author of 21 books, including landmark works such as *Reality Therapy* and *Schools Without Failure*. His 1990 book, *The Quality School*, has been a valuable resource to educators seeking non-traditional answers to nagging school challenges. He is the founder of the Glasser Institute in Chatsworth, California, and can be reached by e-mail at wginst@wglasser.com.

REFERENCES

- Glasser, William, *Every Student Can Succeed* (Chatsworth, Calif.: Glasser Institute, 2000).
 Roy, Jim, *Soul Shapers: A Better Plan for Parents and Educators* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 2005).

Seven Caring Habits	Seven Deadly Habits
Supporting	Criticizing
Encouraging	Blaming
Listening	Complaining
Accepting	Nagging
Trusting	Threatening
Respecting	Punishing
Negotiating differences	Bribing or rewarding to control