



CASE STUDY #5: TYRONE (Class Disruption)

Tyrone is a classic case of attention deficit disorder...meaning in this case; no matter what the situation he can't get enough attention. His father skipped out when Tyrone was but a baby. His mother worked hard to support the two of them but mostly her work involved entitlement scams and other "no-work" methods for securing money. At an early age she had Tyrone identified as "special education".

NOTE: God... I hate that term and everything it stands for!

Granted, there are some true special needs children...Downs Syndrome, trainable mentally retarded, autism, MS and many more but far too many kids carry around a label that isn't needed. Billions of public educational dollars are wasted on a plethora of alphabet-soup programs that just aren't needed and don't work. I ought to know, I taught five periods a day of it, with an aid, while hard-working students in the next classroom didn't have current textbooks.

This isn't meant to say that we don't need alternative programs to meet a variety of student needs and learning styles, because we do!! It's ridiculous that we are now learning about how people learn but few teachers are given training in methods for incorporating these various learning styles into their lesson planning. Restructuring efforts are successfully addressing the educational delivery system. We must get away from this "one size fits all" mentality.

Most reform begins with the idea that standards must be toughened because we get just a little less than we demand from students so we need to "raise the crossbar". (Why do people employ metaphors when they have no idea what they're talking about?) Anyone who has done any jumping and or coaching of jumpers sees though that flawed logic right away. You don't improve your jumping ability by merely raising expectations.

You improve by perfecting technique and building strength/ endurance and self confidence. Much the same as found in the old mastery learning pedagogy (the extremely popular Kumon math enrichment program comes to mind). Back to the track & field analogy; jumpers improve by practicing technique with no crossbar and then hone their form by repetitions at a lower bar placement. In this way confidence is built and performance improves.

To embellish this jumping metaphor; these kids need to see a reason to learn what their instructors are teaching. Tie-ins with future employment; like "school to career" and "service learning" have a proven track record (*pun intended*) helping recalcitrant students see the need for learning as a bridge to a brighter future.

Back to Tyrone...(I Do get sidetracked don't I?) He was never really learning handicapped but simply starved for attention. As many kids do, he discovered early in life that by acting out attention is quickly forthcoming, and furthermore, negative attention is often more powerful and predictable than the positive variety!

In the "I CARE" class Tyrone made himself obnoxious. Nobody wanted him in their group because his constant interruptions were distracting at best and totally counterproductive as a rule. Finally, out of desperation, Tyrone was given center stage whenever possible in the group. Whenever psychodrama was to be used he was involved. The quarterly TV show that the class produces became the "Tyrone Show". He

brought props to enhance his characterizations and was challenged by the leaders to include as many of the other students as possible in each skit. He literally glowed with enthusiasm at the responsibility and opportunities afforded by his new leadership role.

It was an easy transition from center stage to the wings. Many actors long for the control directing affords and Tyrone was no exception.

Among the thousands of students positively impacted by "I CARE" none has elicited the kind of positive teacher response that Tyrone did. His instructors would call and say things like: "I don't know what you do in that group, but keep it up! Tyrone is like a different kid. He doesn't wreck class like he used to. When I asked him what has changed he said: 'They are teaching me how to use my power in a positive way'. It's nothing short of a miracle transformation in my class!"

It would be nice if that were the end of this study but it isn't. Tyrone began to release some of the hostility that previously was blown off in class at home. His mother's health was failing (more entitlement?) so she summoned all her influence to persuade the school district officials to place Tyrone in a residential facility for severely emotionally disturbed kids (to the tune of \$60,000* per year.

He had no business being there in the first place and after a little over eight months he was released.

They had kept him heavily medicated and when I saw him I could barely recognize him. The spark was gone from his eyes...his spirit was broken.

* The same facility now charges north of \$90,000.00

Analysis:

Every case is different but few are more perplexing than this one. Blaming each other is a great way to insure that nothing will change and that Tyrone will stay where he is (or get worse!). We want to lash out against his mother for trying to work the system at her son's expense...or how about the school officials who allowed Tyrone to be labeled "special education" when he just needed somebody to show some interest in him as a person. *

How about this "entitlement" mentality that says the world owes me something because I'm **FILL IN THE BLANK** The "everyone has their own cross to bare" argument doesn't hold up as well as it might because a "professional victim" can say: "But you don't know how I feel...you aren't me!" This type of excuse building keeps people stuck and less effective than they could be (but maybe just where they want?) Looking for excuses is easy.

The people who rise above are the ones remembered, One of the most fascinating stories of the overcoming-all-odds type happened sixty years ago, A young boy was near the school stove when it exploded. (What kind of lawsuit would we be looking at today?) Doctors wanted to amputate both his mangled legs to save his life but his mother wouldn't hear of it. Doctors from that era thought he would never walk again. She, and other family members, took turns massaging his legs 24/7 keeping the blood flowing to the feet and toes,

In a few months young Glenn was able to crawl around some on his own. He, nor his mother, was looking for any special consideration or entitlement, He just wanted to walk again and show the doctors how wrong they had been. Not only did he eventually walk again (without crutches or the profound limp predicted by the medicos) but he began RUNNING! First short little jogs and building up to running everywhere he went, In time Glenn Cunningham became one of his era's greatest milers.

This is one of thousands of examples of people from all backgrounds and hardships who refuse special treatment because they want to compete on their own merits. Each one of these exceptional people is a winner and a role model for young people. When we consider school reform and restructuring, let's not forget the importance of a curriculum that teaches strength of character and pride of accomplishment, (The program *du jour* is currently "Character Ed.")

NOTE: After reading this I get that a classroom teacher might be offended by my flippant suggestion that more “interest” might be a solution. With 30 or more kids in a regular class extra interest is often impossible. Even in a SDC setting someone like Tyrone can be a full-time job! This is where a program like “I CARE” offers a different approach as well as support for classroom teachers.