

THE COUNTY JAIL SCHOOL  
PROBLEMS IN THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP\*

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The present paper reports part of the findings of a participant observation study--in the role of the researcher--of a school in a large county jail. Jail school teachers, like workers in other service occupations, often confront problems when their students (clients) fail to comply with the teachers' notion of the "ideal" client. Further, given the rapid turnover of inmate students, jail teachers face a relatively fluid, unpredictable work situation. In an attempt to bring greater structure to their work situation and to cope with stress in the teacher-pupil relationship, jail teachers use typologies. They classify their students into types according to the ways in which the students affect the teachers' activities. When new students fitting one of the relevant types enters the school, the teachers are alerted to the kinds of problems that that particular type of student is likely to cause and they can then draw upon a variety of tactics or strategems to cope more readily with the problems. In the present paper, I discuss the teachers' definitions of their students as these definitions relate to the general problems of teaching, discipline, and moral acceptability. Some definitions (types) encompass all students while others differentiate among students. Further, I describe the specific problems each type of student causes for school personnel and the various ways in which the teachers attempt to cope with these problems. With respect to the general problem of teaching, jail school personnel place their students into types in terms of the ways in which the students will facilitate or hamper the teachers' teaching tasks. Relevant types include short-term students, sentenced and non-sentenced inmate students, the new inmate in jail for the first time, the inmate who has been in jail for some length of time, and the recidivist. Regarding the general problem of discipline, jail teachers define their students as passive and generally well-behaved. In contrast to the tiers where the students are housed, fights and serious disruptions seldom occur in the school. I discuss several factors which appear relevant in explaining the striking lack of discipline problems within the school. Finally, regarding the general problem of moral acceptability, the teachers define their students in terms of the ways in which the students violate the teachers' middle-class moral standards, the ways in which they differ from the teachers' conception of the "normal" middle-class student. Teachers define their students as being "free-loaders," as "worldly," as social and school dropouts, and as being more violent and brutal than inmates in the past. Further, they differentiate between those inmate students who can be "helped" and those who cannot. Finally, some teachers differentiate between white students and black students.

Waitresses (Whyte, 1946), taxi cabdrivers (Davis, 1959), physicians (Freidson, 1960), musicians (Becker, 1951), school teachers (Becker, 1952), and workers in other service occupations (Blau, 1955: 82-96; Turner, 1947; Gold, 1952) frequently experience problems that are generic to service occupations. Becker (1952: 451) notes, for example, that "The major problems of workers in the service occupations are likely to be a function of their relationship to their clients or customers, those for whom or on whom the occupational service is performed." Problems develop when clients fail to comply with the service worker's image of the "ideal" client.

Thus, "Workers tend to classify clients in terms of the way in which they vary from this ideal" (p. 451). While the discrepancy between actual and "ideal" clients is common to a variety of service occupations, these occupations differ in terms of structure and predictability of the worker-client relationship. Davis (1959) notes, for example, that unlike workers in other service occupations, the cabdriver is provided with little order or predictability in his work. Thus, given the fleeting nature of the cabdriver-customer relationship and the importance of tips as a significant part of their income, cabdrivers develop a typology of cab users, in an attempt to bring greater order to their work. In the present paper, then, we will explore the service worker-client conflict as found in the relationship between jail school teachers and inmate students. Further, we will be concerned with the teachers' use of typologies as a means of bringing greater structure to their work situation and with the various ways in which jail school teachers attempt to cope with stress in the teacher-student relationship.

Like the Chicago public school teachers studied by Becker (1952), Metropolitan County Jail School teachers confront various problems when their students deviate from the teachers' notion of the "ideal" student. Yet the teaching situation of jail school personnel differs substantially from that of teachers in most public schools. The jail is a short-term institution. And due to the rapid turnover of jail school students, the work situation for jail school teachers lacks much of the order and predictability commonly associated with schools. Some students, for example, are present for only one day, others for longer periods. For most of the over 2,000 students passing through the school each year, the length of stay is uncertain. Teachers seldom know how long any given inmate will be present. Further, when inmates first enter the school, teachers know nothing of their educational background or academic abilities. Thus, in addition to confronting problems arising from the discrepancy between actual and "ideal" clients, jail school teachers (like cabdrivers) confront a relatively fluid, unpredictable work situation. They have relatively little control over important aspects of their work.

In an attempt to bring greater structure to their work situation and to cope with stress in the teacher-pupil relationship, jail school teachers use typologies. They define their students as being a certain type of person--having certain characteristics, behaving in certain ways. Some teacher definitions, and accordingly inmate types, apply to all jail school inmates. That is, all inmate students are perceived as being similar in certain ways, as having various characteristics which distinguish them from "normal" students or from the teachers' notion of the "ideal" or preferred student. Further, the teachers differentiate among their students. They classify students into more specific types, again depending upon the ways in which students with specific characteristics affect the teachers' activities. School personnel decide in what ways different types of students will affect their activities as teachers and they treat the students accordingly. The use of typologies, then, enables teachers with greater or lesser success to order their experience and to reduce uncertainty. The typology provides a framework upon which teachers can order their expectations of the behavior of their students. When new students fitting one or more of the relevant types enters the school, the teachers are alerted to the kinds of problems that that particular type of student is likely to cause. Thus able to anticipate problems, the teachers can employ the necessary tactics or strategems to cope more readily with them.

In Becker's (1952) study of Chicago public school teachers, three problems--teaching, discipline, and moral acceptability--dominated. The form of and adjustment to each problem varied according to social class differences among students, as defined by teachers. In contrast, jail school teachers seldom differentiate among their students according to social class. Rather, the teachers tend to characterize

all inmates as lower class. Although middle-class and upper-class youth, when arrested and detained in the jail, also attend the jail school, they seldom remain for long. In most cases, they are quickly bailed out. As the school principal commented: "It's so much more the case that we get guys from the low, low, low socio-economic groups these days. They're just not the same type of guy we used to get." Jail school teachers, then, define their students as lower class and they see certain problems in the teacher-pupil relationship as related to behavioral characteristics which they attribute to their students' social class background. Yet social class alone does not account for all problems. The students are lower class, but they are also jail inmates. Thus, given the additional statuses of jail prisoner and defendant in court, the teachers classify their students into types according to the ways in which the behavioral characteristics associated with these statuses affect the teachers' work situation within the school.

In the present paper, I discuss the teachers' definitions of their students as these definitions relate to the general problems of teaching, discipline, and moral acceptability. I describe the different types of inmate students, the specific problems they cause for school personnel, and the various ways in which the teachers attempt to cope with these problems.

### Setting and Method of Study

The Metropolitan County Jail serves a large northern urban area. The jail population, which averages approximately 1,800 inmates daily, is composed of two types of inmates: sentenced prisoners and non-sentenced prisoners. Sentenced inmates are convicted misdemeanants serving a term in the jail. Non-sentenced inmates include all other inmates: prisoners held for preliminary hearings or for trial and prisoners awaiting transfer to another institution. The jail school consists of an academic division and a vocational division. School facilities include four classrooms, a principal's office, an interviewing room, a print shop, a shoe repair shop, a wood working shop, and a small craft shop. Ten full-time teachers and an assistant principal, all supplied by the Metropolitan Board of Education, comprise the teaching staff. (The sole female teacher on the staff supervises the women's jewelry-making shop. This shop is located in another section of the jail and was not included in the present study.) The school, which operates year round, ordinarily for four hours a day, Monday through Friday, has a normal daily enrollment of approximately 150 students and an average annual enrollment of over 2,000 students. And while the jail houses adults of all ages, only those inmates, aged 17 to 20, are permitted to attend the school.

The present paper is based on data collected through participant observation--in the role of the observer-researcher--during a period of approximately one and one-half years. Excerpts from my field notes, each quote being identified by the name and position of the person speaking and the date of the field work, are used to illustrate and document the discussion.

### Problems of Teachers

#### Teaching

The teaching tasks at Metropolitan County Jail School involve instruction in academic, vocational, and social matters. The teachers view students according to the ways in which they will facilitate or hamper the teachers' efforts to teach them something. Thus, some types of students are defined by the teachers as easier to teach, others as more difficult to teach. Several relevant definitions are related

to the students' status as jail inmate and court defendant. Some of these definitions pertain to all students, while others refer to specific types of inmate students.

The teachers view all students--both sentenced and non-sentenced--as likely to be enrolled in the school for only a relatively short length of time.

. . . our school here is not like a regular school. With all the turnover, it is just impossible to do the sort of things they do in other schools. . . (Teacher-Richardson; 5-16-67)

So, a first and pervasive definition is of the students as short-termers, as constantly entering and leaving the jail and accordingly the jail school. The teachers view rapid turnover of inmate students as a major source of difficulty in teaching. The students are not present long enough to allow the teachers to teach in the manner they prefer or to observe significant academic advancements by their students.

While all students are viewed as being victims of rapid turnover, non-sentenced inmates come and go much more quickly than sentenced inmates.<sup>1</sup> And the teachers make other distinctions between sentenced and non-sentenced inmates. For example, they see the sentenced inmates as much more settled and trustworthy. Sentenced inmates do not cause as much trouble; they do not get into as many fights on the tiers where the inmates are housed. They are easier to deal with.

. . . These sentenced boys are a lot more coherent, a lot more lucid, than the unsentenced boys. They know how long they're in for and they'll just think about getting out. The unsentenced boys are another story. But it didn't used to be that way. Now all they think about is getting out--calling their parents--talking to a social worker--getting a personal bond. . . . They come down here and that's all they can think about: how to get out. The sentenced boys are different. They're more settled. They can think more about other things (Teacher-Scott; 5-26-67).

Furthermore, whereas the sentenced inmates have been convicted of misdemeanors, the non-sentenced inmates may include murderers and rapists who may be potentially dangerous. These factors combine with the extremely rapid turnover and unpredictability of length of stay of the non-sentenced inmates to make them especially problematic.

The teachers adapt to these problems in various ways. First, non-sentenced inmates are always assigned to one of the classrooms in the academic section rather than to the shops. School personnel reason that the rapid turnover and uncertainty of length of stay of non-sentenced inmates is less disruptive for the classrooms than it would be for the shops. In the shops, for example, the teachers must spend some time merely acquainting the inmates with the various tools and machines and making certain that the inmates become familiar with the basic safety procedures associated with each machine. Furthermore, because the teachers see the non-sentenced inmates as less settled and less trustworthy, non-sentenced inmates are not permitted in the shops where they would have access to tools which might be used as weapons. Other adaptations--specifically, adaptations to the rapid turnover of students--are found in the curriculum and teaching techniques. Because the students ordinarily are present for such short periods of time, the teachers do not use a conventional weekly or monthly lesson plan. Rather, they decide what to teach as they go along. They emphasize tutoring of individual students and short-term assignments for the class as a whole: lessons that can be completed in one or two days. Similarly, in the shops section, no attempt is made to train each student to be a skilled craftsman. The boys are not in jail long enough. Rather, emphasis is on keeping the boys busy and on developing a few broad skills and a general knowledge of (or experience with) tools.

In addition to the differences between sentenced and non-sentenced inmates, teachers make other distinctions among inmates with respect to the length of time necessary for the inmate to adjust to the routine of jail life. The sooner an inmate adjusts, the sooner he can concentrate on school work, and the easier it will be for the teacher. While all inmates have to adjust to some extent, the teachers feel that inmates today adjust more quickly to jail life than inmates in the past. This change in patterns of adjustment, especially for sentenced inmates, is attributed to changes in inmate composition and to a general shortening of sentences.

Meyer said, "Yeah, it used to be that the first month and the last month were the worst [for the sentenced inmates]. During the first month--more so at the beginning and less as the weeks passed--the inmates were still not very well settled. And then during the last month they'd get excited and impatient--start counting the days. I say more so in the past; but that doesn't seem to be the case so much anymore." I asked, "Why is that?" Meyer replied, "I guess for several reasons. There's been a general trend toward shortening the sentences. Used to be that a lot of them got a full year. Anymore, I suppose the average sentence is probably three months or so. Then too, the type of inmate is different. Used to be that we'd get only about twenty percent Negroes. Now we get ninety-five percent colored. And the whites, there used to be a lot of Polish and Irish--we still get some--but the families the inmates come from were more stable. Even the lower class families. If a boy comes from a stable family and has to spend time here, I think it affects him differently. He has more adjusting to do. But with many of the inmates today, the conditions in the jail aren't much worse than what they're accustomed to. They get their meals regularly--can watch T.V.--and they get along okay. I guess everybody has to do some adjusting--being around the same men all the time and having to use an open bathroom--but some of them find it easy. They're in here with their buddies. . . . But the sentenced ones, they know they're going to be here for a while and they take better care of things. . . . I think it probably takes them less time to get adjusted" (Principal-Meyer; 10-5-67).

Other broad distinctions regarding patterns of adjustment, while to some extent relevant to all inmates, are made especially among non-sentenced inmates. There are at least three types of non-sentenced inmates: the new inmate who has never been in jail before; the inmate who is in jail for the first time but who has been there some length of time; and finally the recidivist. Again, the pattern of adjustment to jail life affects inmate behavior in the classroom and accordingly the task of teaching.

The new inmate who has never been held in a jail before is likely to be bewildered, confused, and passive. He may or may not have been able to telephone his parents. His parents may or may not be able to raise enough money for his bail. He may or may not know the details of the bail system. Referring to the new inmates he had just enrolled in the school, the principal commented:

You can see by that that most of these guys don't even know what's happening. Like this guy who couldn't get hold of his parents. They're supposed to let them place a call when they're brought

into the receiving room. Apparently they let this kid. But in some of the other cases, who knows. Then this other one [inmate], who missed his court date. Maybe it is just a mistake. Or it could be that the judge changed the court date after the kid left the court room. When the judge sets a date, the bailiff grabs the kid and rushes him out. The lawyer may tell the judge that he can't make it or something may come up--the judge may continue the case indefinitely. Or even some of these kids may even be in the court room when the judge gives them a date but they just don't understand what it's all about (Principal-Meyer; 4-25-67).

Thus, the teachers see some of the new inmates as not knowing what is happening, as being unfamiliar with the jail and with the judicial system in general. The inmates' lack of knowledge is not limited to the minute details of the judicial system, however. Often they lack knowledge of the most fundamental things: court date, amount of bond, and so forth. And in the extreme case, they may not even know that a bond has been set--that it is possible to be released on bond. Inmates in such an emotional state--bewilderment and confusion--are not likely to show much interest in classwork. They are likely to be passive and unresponsive to the teachers' teaching efforts. They, more than the other two types, are likely to cause the greatest problems for the teacher in his teaching task.

Other inmates are not as distressed by being detained in jail. They have been in the jail for some time and have made the adjustment. Often they are more responsive--easier to teach.

. . . And John over there, he's been here almost the longest of any of them. He knows his way around by now--he's as happy as a bug in a rug. Did you notice how he knew that Smith had gone to court?--and with a boy like that, you have to let him do more things. Give him a little more attention. You know--ask him how he's doing--let him pass out the folders [to the other inmates]--things like that. . . (Teacher-Murphy; 10-26-67).

Still other new inmates appear to have little or no trouble adjusting to jail life. These students--the recidivists--have been in the jail or in other correctional institutions previously.

A lot of them [the new inmates] are pretty disturbed when they first come in. For some of them it's the first time in jail and all they can think about is how and when am I going to get out. This goes on for a week sometimes. Of course, there are others who come in here laughing and joking as if there weren't anything to it. If a boy has already been picked up, and spent some time at Springdale [juvenile center] or maybe at Garden City [school for delinquent boys], then this is nothing new for him. But for a lot of them, it takes a while before they settle down (Principal-Meyer; 10-5-67).

The recidivist, like the inmate who has been in the jail for some length of time, is likely to be easier to teach.

Thus, teachers distinguish among different types of non-sentenced inmates: the new inmate in jail for the first time, the inmate who has been in jail for some

length of time, and the recidivist. The primary criteria are extent of experience with the courts and with correctional institutions and length of time in jail. Until the inmates settle down--until they adjust to the routine of jail life--they are likely to pose problems for the teachers. Those who initially are confused and bewildered cannot concentrate on their work; they cannot participate effectively as students. Obviously, adjustment alone will not insure that the inmate will be a "good" student. Indeed, there are other factors mediating against the possibility. Yet the teachers do see some form of adjustment as necessary in order for classwork to proceed smoothly.

The teachers often cope with the problem of the confused and bewildered inmate by attempting to help him. The teachers provide small favors, such as bandaides, shoe strings, an occasional cigarette, or paper for writing letters to persons on the outside. And perhaps more importantly, they provide information: for example, court date, amount of bond, recognizance bond procedures, request forms to see a social worker or public defender. Such favors and information, while perhaps trivial to anyone on the outside, do to some extent facilitate the inmate's adjustment to jail life and accordingly make the teachers' tasks easier.

Related to the concerns discussed above is the teachers' more general definition of their students as having many problems on their minds--problems other than school work. Some problems arise on the tiers; others are related to the inmate's case in court; still other problems are related to the outside world--to the inmate's family.

. . . You have to realize that these boys are not just ordinary. . . . But you have to realize that they may lie straight to your face or they may tell you one thing today because they had a bad meal or they didn't get out on bond as they thought they would or any of a dozen things like that. And the boy who appears to be aggressive and defiant today may be as calm and nice as an angel tomorrow. The difference may be that last night his buddies tried to beat him up, up on the tier. And tonight things will settle down. . . (Teacher-Murphy; 5-16-67).

The teachers realize that any student, at one time or another, may have problems other than school to think about. They see the students as often being passive and docile. The teachers realize that the inmate's immediate concern may be to protect himself on the tier, to "beat the rap" in court, or to look out for the welfare of his family on the outside. These problems transcend the problem of initial adjustment. They may develop for any inmate at any point during the inmate's stay in jail. Even the apparently well-adjusted inmate may suddenly encounter conflict on the tiers or a reversal in the courts. The potential is always present. When preoccupied with non-school concerns, the inmates are less responsive in class. They make it difficult for the teacher to teach effectively.

Because of the wide range of problems that may confront the student, coping with the troubled student is not an easy task. Sometimes the teachers are able to deal with the students individually. If, for example, the teachers are able to determine the source of the inmate's concern, merely talking to the student may help ease the student's worry. Or, more specifically, if the problem centers on the inmate's court case, they may attempt to get information--court date or amount of bond, for example--that will help to alleviate the inmate's concern. However, more often the teachers do not know the specific reason for an inmate being troubled. The number of students, their relatively short length of stay in the school, and the often unpredictable nature of the problems confronting the students make it difficult for the teachers to deal individually with each student's problems. Consequently,

the teachers attempt to cope with troubled-students by emphasizing the distinction between the jail and the jail school. The teachers define the school not only as a place where students come to learn but also as a place where inmates come to get away from the troubled tiers. The school is a temporary sanctuary; it is the inmates' "isle of reprieve."

. . . These boys need a break from the tiers--just like a man needs a break from his work. . . . The school's the same for these guys. It gives them a chance to get away from everything that goes on up on the tiers--at least for a little while each day. The school's their isle of reprieve. You've got to be a teacher--not a jailer. . . (Teacher-Murphy; 10-26-67).

The most important element in the conception of the school as an "isle of reprieve" is lowered teacher expectations. Given that the teachers perceive their students as having so many other concerns to think about, they expect less work from them in the classroom.

A final definition pertaining to problems of teaching in the jail school is related specifically to the inmates' intellectual and academic characteristics and more generally to the inmates' social class background which is not conducive to academic achievement. The teachers define their students as heterogeneous with respect to proficiency in various subjects, and as homogeneous because almost all the students are below the academic norms for boys their age. Because of their diverse, yet generally retarded, academic characteristics, all students are viewed as problematic. All students need help. Yet the extreme diversity of their abilities makes it difficult for the teachers to teach effectively. Material which is on the appropriate level for one student is too elementary or too difficult for another. Further, given the condition of rapid turnover, the teachers lack time to determine the actual level of achievement of each student. This hinders attempts to gear the level of instruction to the individual student's level of proficiency.

Although the teachers define all students as heterogeneous yet generally retarded, they further distinguish a sub-type: the less proficient student who is sensitive to his deficient status. Thus, some students cause problems for the teachers when they want to do the same work as the other boys, even though it is beyond their ability. They do not want the other inmates to know that they are incapable of doing the "more advanced" work.

The teachers cope with these problems in various ways. To determine the subject areas in which the student is deficient, the teachers may give a student a short quiz in a particular subject area or merely talk to the student and observe his work for a few days. Teachers approach the task of teaching the student who is sensitive about being behind the other boys academically by first giving him the same assignment the class is working on and then gradually introducing work which is more consonant with the student's level of proficiency.

In short, Metropolitan County Jail School teachers define students according to the ways in which they will facilitate or hamper the teachers' efforts to teach. With respect to teaching, the definitions of inmate students relate to the student's status of jail inmate and/or court defendant and to the student's intellectual and academic characteristics. Some types--the definition of students as potentially troubled by non-school concerns, for example--encompass all jail school students. Other types--sentenced and non-sentenced, for example--differentiate among students with different characteristics. Thus, the use of typologies enables teachers to anticipate potential problems--potential points of stress--in teacher-pupil relations. It enables teachers to quickly identify those students who may cause problems so that they may then proceed to cope or attempt to cope with the problems.

## Discipline

Although Metropolitan County Jail School teachers confront many problems in attempting to accomplish their teaching tasks and accordingly differentiate among their students in terms of the ways in which they influence teaching, the teachers do not define student discipline as a severe problem.

In a way, you might say we don't [have the same kind of discipline problems as in other schools] --at least in most cases. But you might get into a situation where there's a pretty edgy conversation with a boy. He may be extremely obstinate or arrogant.---And if you can't make him settle down, you just don't kick him out first thing. But if a boy's so emotionally bothered that you can't even talk to him, you can get him out of there. Or, we might transfer him to another room. There's always a possibility of a personality clash. A boy may like you, but not me. And you can't always tell that at first (Teacher-Murphy; 10-20-67).

Personality clashes may develop and occasionally a group of boys may be loud and rowdy when the teacher leaves the classroom. Similarly, on occasion, inmates are reprimanded verbally for loitering in the corridor, being in the wrong classroom, staying too long in the washroom, interrupting when the teacher is talking to another inmate, and so forth. Yet, more commonly, the inmates are extremely passive. In contrast to the tiers, fights and serious disruptions seldom occur in the jail school. In short, the behavior of inmate students, while in the school, is sometimes bothersome but seldom disruptive. And when we consider that the inmate student population consists largely of lower-class high school dropouts, many of whom were probably discipline problems in the school they attended previously (cf. Becker, 1952: 456-460), the relative lack of disruptions in the jail school is striking.

Several factors appear relevant in explaining the lack of discipline problems in the school. The major point is that, relative to the jail as a whole, the jail school is a "good thing" for the students. As noted previously, the teachers emphasize the distinction between the jail and the school: teachers are not jailers; the jail and school should be separate. And unlike the jail as a whole, guards ordinarily are not present in the school section. Thus, the school offers the students a reprieve from life on the tiers. It is a diversion. And while the installation of television sets on the tiers may have made the school somewhat less attractive for the inmates, the school still constitutes a break from the routine of staying on the same tier, both day and night. Similarly, the inmates know that the teachers can do things for them. The teachers provide information, and to a lesser extent favors, which the inmates would otherwise do without. In this sense, then, the teachers and inmates participate in an exchange relationship: diversion, favors, and information in exchange for good behavior.

Two additional factors are relevant. First, the relatively high staff to inmate ratio in the school facilitates interaction, communication, and the exchange of information between the teachers and inmates. But it also makes inmate behavior (and misbehavior) more visible. Again, this is in contrast to the tiers where there is relatively little supervision and accordingly less chance of being observed. The inmate who wants to misbehave, regardless of how we define misbehavior, has ample opportunity to do so while on the tier. Second, the teachers always have the option of transferring a student out of the school and off the tier housing the young inmates. If transferred, the inmate would be isolated from his peers, some of whom were friends or members of the same gang on the outside, and would be housed with older inmates. Even though, as indicated in the following quote, the teachers hesitate to transfer

an inmate, the threat of transfer is always present and may be used to encourage good behavior.

I would send Brown out of here, but he'll be moved to Pennyton [prison farm for boys] soon. They might ship him out tomorrow or it might be a few days. And if I kick him out of here, then they might put him on a tier with older men. Then you can't tell what might happen--he doesn't look like he can take care of himself (Teacher-White; 12-7-67).

#### Moral acceptability

Problems of moral acceptability arise ". . . from the fact that some actions of one's potential clients may be offensive in terms of some deeply felt set of moral standards; these clients are thus morally unacceptable. Teachers find that some of their pupils act in such a way as to make themselves unacceptable in terms of the moral values centered around health and cleanliness, sex and aggression, ambition and work, and the relations of age groups" (Becker, 1952: 461). Among the jail school teachers, moral unacceptability involves inmate behavior and values within the jail as well as on the outside. In both instances, however, the behavior is attributed primarily to the social world beyond the jail and the courts--to the racial and social environment in which the students have grown up and to the ways in which this environment has influenced the inmates. Thus, morally unacceptable behavior, even when it occurs within the jail, is not seen as a function of imprisonment.<sup>2</sup> That is, the inmates do not behave in an unacceptable manner because they have been imprisoned. Rather, their behavior is seen as being based on unacceptable values which the inmates develop prior to being arrested. Unacceptable behavior is attributed to elements outside the school or jail. Jail school teachers, then, attribute their students' behavior to the inmates' "unstable," lower-class family, where the father is frequently absent and the student does not receive the "proper" amount of attention or discipline. And given that almost all inmates are lower-class, the inmates as a whole are defined by the teachers as morally unacceptable, in behavior and in values. Yet jail school students differ from conventional school students. To the unacceptability attributed to social-class background is added the stigma of arrest. While the teachers do not necessarily consider all inmates guilty, the high recidivism rate (as well as the racial and social background of the inmates) encourage the presumption of guilt: either of the offense as charged or of some other offense which has gone undetected. And even if not presumed guilty, the moral acceptability of anyone who has been arrested--who has gotten into trouble with the law--is suspect. Yet prisoner status cannot be completely separated from social class status. And ultimately, the teachers trace their students' unacceptable behavior back to the lower-class milieu in which they were reared: to the family, to economic/cultural deprivation, to the juvenile gang.

Richardson said, "Well, I taught in the so-called inner-city school before coming here. Here [in the jail] most of the boys come from a broken home--not a very good home. In the inner city schools, a lot of them do too. But here--most of them do. They've never learned right from wrong. They break the law and then wonder why they got picked up." I asked, "Do they know what the law is and break it intentionally, or don't they know?" He replied, "Oh, they know--most of the time--they just go ahead and do it and try not to get caught. They get together in a gang and do things they wouldn't do otherwise. A lot of it is frustration. They see things that other people have--see things on television--and they want them too. They've been down so long. They try to get these things their own way. They're

what we call culturally deprived." I said, ". . . but why do they do these things more often when they're with a gang?" He answered, "Well, when they're with a bunch of boys, they're not scared. You'll see, most of the boys we get were multiple arrests. There was a group of them in on it, and three or four or five were caught--then they try them all together. And too it's prestigeful to break the law and get away with it. The guy who's been in jail or out at Garden City [school for delinquent boys], he's a big man. Then, too, you've heard about prisons actually teaching crime--they can learn a lot in here about how and how not to get caught. And the other guys'll call him "chicken" if he doesn't go along with it. So, they do these things that they'd never do otherwise. They've never learned to respect the law." Then I asked, "What do you mean, they don't understand why they got caught?" He replied, "Well, they can't understand. They think they must've had bad luck. Everything is blamed on "bad luck" when they get picked up. They know they've broken the law, but they think they were unlucky. . ." (Teacher-Richardson; 10-13-67).

Most inmate students violate at least some of the middle-class moral standards of jail school personnel. The teachers define their students, first, according to ways in which the students as a group are morally unacceptable. Thus, they classify all jail school students in terms of the ways in which they--typical inmate students--differ from the teachers' conception of the "normal" middle-class student. One such definition describes the inmates as "free loaders" who are concerned only about themselves. The inmates are unacceptable in that they do not "pay" their own way; rather, they always want something for nothing.

. . . You're better off if you don't offer an inmate a cigarette. As soon as you do, then the big "X" is on you, and everyone will be after you, bumming a cigarette. It's just a way of life for these guys. And they expect to get something free. I used to give them letter sets, just a couple of pieces of paper and an envelope. But it got to the point that everybody wanted some writing paper. Also I used to keep some aspirins here in my [desk] drawer. Thought that it would save the hospital a lot of bother. If an inmate needed an aspirin, all he had to do was to come to me. But it just got to be too much. They were lined up three deep--well, not quite that bad--but everyone wanted a free aspirin. So it may bring you closer to the inmates, but you could go broke supplying them with cigarettes. If they want cigarettes, they can buy them in the commissary. . . (Principal-Meyer; 4-17-67).

Thus, teachers view the inmates as being primarily concerned with themselves. They feel that the students will lie straight to your face and try to con you.

Murphy said, ". . . You go and talk to them, but how are you going to tell whether they're telling you the truth? It's always the other guy. It wasn't me. There were two or three of us, and it was the other two who did it." Another teacher responded, "[They'll say]It's a bum rap." (Teacher-Murphy; 5-16-67).

The teachers also view the inmates as "worldly." For the most part, teachers do not view their students as average boys who by chance have gotten into trouble with the law. Rather, they are different. The teachers view many of the inmates as having dropped out of the "normal" everyday activities of life.

. . . Really these guys are pretty worldly for their age. Most of them have been out of school for two or three years. They're school dropouts. And even more than that, they're social dropouts. They've dropped out of school, church, family, clubs, just about everything. . . . So many of these guys think that they are it. They think the "cool" guys are in here and it's the "squares" out there. But then I tell them again, that it's the losers who are in jail (Teacher-Scott; 4-25-67).

Furthermore, their sense of humor differs from that of the "normal" student.

Another thing about these boys is that they don't have a sense of humor like they used to. What's funny to them is to see an old lady fall--or to see a teacher stumble in front of the class. They just don't have a sense of humor anymore (Teacher-Murphy; 10-26-67).

Teachers, then, define their students as differing greatly from the teachers' conception of the "ideal" student. They are defined as "social dropouts" and as "school dropouts." It is as school dropouts that jail school inmates violate the teachers' personal (as well as occupational) moral standards regarding the value of education. The students, characterized by lack of motivation, lack of aspiration, and lack of achievement, are in direct contrast to the teachers who highly value each of these.

. . . You know, almost all of these boys are high school dropouts. Oh, occasionally we'll get one or two who are still enrolled. But most of them are dropouts. We try to help them as best we can. But most of them are just too far gone. They're too far behind in their schooling and they just don't care. . . (Teacher-Richardson; 5-11-67).

Jail school teachers view all inmate students as being similar in various ways. Yet they distinguish between the inmate of today and the inmate of ten, fifteen, or twenty years ago. The "type" of inmate has changed. The behavior of today's inmate is considered even more unacceptable than the behavior of inmates in the past. Inmates today violate the teachers' notion of pride--both self-pride and pride in one's work--and the notion of fair play. The teachers perceive today's inmate as being more violent and more brutal.

. . . Meyer said, "Yea, but those were different kinds of guys. That was when it was about twenty-five percent Negro and look at it now. Those guys would really calm down--but with these, it's different. That's one thing. I think there's a lot more of just sheer brutality now than there used to be."

.....  
Mitchell said, "You know Frank, what you were saying about the fights. I can remember when they used to body punch each other. Two guys'd get up there [on the tiers]--stand about so far apart--they'd wrap some cloth around their hands. Of course, then again sometimes they wouldn't bother; and

they'd stand there for maybe half an hour trading punches--really working up a sweat. . . ." Then Meyer said, "Yeah, but it wasn't the kind of brutality that you find up on the tiers these days. Back when they had 'kangaroo courts' they might strong-arm a guy and take all his money away, but after they got his money, they left him alone. There was none of this stuff with four or five guys getting him in a back cell and beating his head off." Mitchell said, "Yeah, and in those days a strongarm guy was looked up to. He was respected. It was the same thing with the kid who stole cars. It was none of this joy ride stuff. Those kids did it for a living. . . ." Murphy said, "They had class." We laughed. Then Mitchell said, "Yeah, I guess that's it. They used to have more class. Now you get so much of what my grandmother would call dreck [German meaning filth, dirt, scum]." Meyer said, "That's it. Dreck. It's so much more the case that we get guys from the low, low, socio-economic groups these days. They're just not the same type of guy we used to get" (Principal-Meyer, Psychologist-Mitchell, Teacher-Murphy; 10-27-67).

Thus far, I have concentrated on ways in which jail school teachers define their students, in general, as being morally unacceptable. Within the student population, however, there are also different types of morally unacceptable students. Further, the teachers differentiate among their students according to degree of unacceptability. Some students, for example, are not really bad; or at least they are not beyond help. Other inmates, however, are too far gone; they are "no good."

I asked Richardson, "Well, like with that guy, you said he was a 'no good buzzard.' How can you tell by looking at these guys? You know, I would've guessed he was just in here on a misdemeanor." Richardson replied, "Well, it's sad to say, but some of them have just gone beyond help. You can't tell just by looking at him. But did you see his scar? [The inmate had a six inch scar on the side of his head.] That was from a knife--in a fight. And you have to talk to them too. You can tell by how they respond to you--what kinds of questions they ask about their case. I've been a teacher for thirty-two years and I guess a lot of it is experience. You've got to know what to look for." I asked, "What about Sam, what's he in for?" Richardson replied, "Sam? Oh, Sam Jones--he was in here before on an assault and battery charge. Just a month or so ago. He beat that rap and now he's back in here on an armed robbery charge. You know, the law says you're innocent until proven guilty. But I think he's guilty" (Teacher-Richardson; 10-20-67).

Another teacher expressed a more precise definition of the types of inmates he trusts or distrusts. Referring to a student who had been antagonistic in class, the teacher commented:

. . . He's the kind of guy who'd let anybody take the rap for him and I don't intend to let him get me into trouble. I don't trust him. . . . But I don't trust a kid who's in on narcotics or on a confidence charge. The strongarm man . . . knows what he's doing. He may strongarm you, but it's not like these guys. These guys [who are in on a narcotics or confidence charge] would hurt you. But not

physically--they probably couldn't. . . . I don't trust him (Teacher-White; 12-6-67).

All Metropolitan County Jail School teachers have taught either in the jail school or in similar types of schools for several years. As discussed earlier, the teachers define their students as having many problems; and accordingly, they do many things to help the students. Yet, they do not have the idealistic notion that all students can be helped. Nor do they believe that all students can be trusted. This is not learned immediately, however. Rather, it is learned through experience and over time. Referring to a student in his class, one teacher commented:

Well, he plays the nice guy part--innocent. . . . Don't worry, if he saw you on the street and knew you were carrying some money, he wouldn't hesitate. The reason I say this is that when you first come into a place like this, you tend to be sympathetic--you want to help everybody. And a lot of them really look innocent. Then you learn. That's the way it was with me (Teacher-White; 12-7-67).

Finally, some teachers differentiate among their students according to race. They define black students as having values very different from those of white inmates. Further, some white teachers feel that many blacks totally reject white, middle-class culture and that it has become increasingly difficult to communicate with black students.

Jones said, "You know what I think would be an interesting study?---To compare the Negroes and the whites in the jail. They have an entirely different set of values." I asked, "How do you mean?" He replied, "Oh, just the way they look at things. They do things that you and I would consider wrong but they don't think anything of it." I asked, "Do you mean they don't know the law or do you mean they don't consider it wrong in spite of the law?" Jones replied, "Well, both.---But they think they can get a woman any way--whether she's married, single, or even if they have to jump her. It doesn't make any difference.-----And they don't like to be told what to do anymore." A few minutes later, Scott said, "These guys think that if it's white then it doesn't include them. That's Charley's culture--that's what they call it. White man's values aren't meant for him. But the kids too, they think if there are many [other kids] in on it, then they're not guilty. If twenty hands touch the purse they've stolen, the gang did it. They're not guilty." Later, Scott said, ". . . but anybody with a coat and tie, including the guards, is suspect to them [the inmates]. It'll be hard to get them to open up. And with the Negro boys especially. We used to be able to get through. But anymore, . . . [the two Negro teachers] . . . are the only ones who can do any good. It seems that for the past few years they've [the Negro students] closed us out" (Teacher-Jones; Teacher-Scott; 10-9-67).

Metropolitan County Jail School teachers cope with the problems arising from their students' morally unacceptable behavior in various ways and to various degrees.

For example, they learn over time, and with experience, to be careful not to be conned by the inmates. Further, while the teachers find many of the values and much of the behavior of their students disturbing, they also make concessions. Because their students are not like "normal" high school students, jail school teachers permit some types of behavior--such as smoking in the classroom--that would not be allowed in the conventional school. And more generally, the teachers learn to distinguish (or think they can distinguish) between those inmates who are not really bad and those who are beyond help. Thus, as illustrated in the following quote, jail school teachers, in various ways and with varying degrees of success, cope with their students' moral unacceptability by attempting to change them--to make them more acceptable.

My role here in the school is more than one of just being a teacher. A lot of these boys lack a strong father image--many of them don't even know their fathers or their fathers haven't been around enough. They need someone to tell them if they're doing something wrong. I'll swear at them--if I see them doing something they shouldn't do--that's the kind of language I think they understand. They need someone to discipline them. But they also need to know that there's someone who cares for them--maybe for the first time. You'll notice, I compliment the boys. When they do things well, I tell them they did well. . . . So many of the boys are far behind--and they come from such mixed-up backgrounds. But if I can be someone for them to look up to, I think I'm doing something. . . . As I say, so many of these boys have never had someone they could look up to and respect--they've never had someone to tell them right from wrong or to tell them that they're really a pretty good boy (Teacher-Lee; 12-19-67).

However, the teachers' most general adaptation to their students' morally unacceptable behavior is, in fact, limited acceptance. The teachers consider much of the behavior and many of the values to be morally unacceptable and personally offensive. They do not approve of the self-centered, "worldly" behavior of their students, for example. But they do accept it as a way of life for the inmates. In contrast to the naive, inexperienced middle-class teacher in a conventional school who often finds the behavior of her lower-class students incomprehensible, the jail school teachers do comprehend.<sup>3</sup> They define the behavior labelled morally unacceptable as the norm. They do not like the behavior but they accept it as part of lower-class life. They come to expect it of their students. They explain the behavior in terms of the inmate's lower-class status generally and his inattentive home life specifically. Thus, while the behavior is no less offensive, personally, it is more tolerable.

### Summary and Conclusion

Service workers frequently encounter problems in their relations with clients. One source of conflict, common to many service occupations, is the discrepancy between actual and "ideal" clients. But service occupations vary in terms of the structure and predictability of the worker-client relationship. Like public school teachers, jail school teachers experience various problems when their students fail to fulfill the teachers' expectations of the "ideal" student. Unlike public school teachers, however, jail school personnel confront a relatively fluid, unpredictable work situation. In an attempt to bring greater order to their work situation, jail school teachers classify their students into broad types. Thus, when new students fitting one of the relevant types enters the school, the teachers are alerted to the kinds of problems that that particular type of student is likely to cause and they can then draw upon

a variety of mechanisms to cope more readily with the problems. Jail school teachers tend to characterize all inmate students as lower class and to see certain problems in the teacher-pupil relationship as related to traits which they attribute to their students' social class background. The teachers also classify their students into types according to the ways in which behavior associated with the students' statuses of jail prisoner and court defendant affect the teachers' work situation. Some definitions (types) encompass all inmate students while others differentiate among students. Given the various types of inmates, the teachers experience, and attempt to cope with, problems in the areas of teaching and moral acceptability, but not in discipline.

#### Footnotes

\*The field work upon which this paper is based was conducted while I was a research assistant to Professor Howard S. Becker at Northwestern University and was supported by National Institute of Mental Health grant, number R12 MH 9222. For the complete study, see Lewis A. Mennerick, "The Impact of the External Environment on a County Jail School" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1971). For additional papers reporting various aspects of the research, see: "E-Block Education: The Impact of the External Environment on a County Jail School," Blanche Geer (ed.), Learning To Work, in preparation; "The County Jail School: External Control of Recruitment as a Constraint"; "The County Jail School: Custody-Security as a Constraint"; and "The County Jail School Teacher: Social Roles and External Constraints".

In order to protect the anonymity of jail school personnel, all names--including the name Metropolitan County Jail--are pseudonymous.

<sup>1</sup>Of the 489 non-sentenced inmate students who were released between September 30, 1967, and February 15, 1968, the average length of stay was 19.5 days. However, when we exclude the 25 inmates who had been in the school the longest, the average is only 14.5 days. Roughly one half of the inmates were present for from 1 to 10 days. The mode is 7 days. Although the transfer of a large number of sentenced inmates to another institution during the period upon which these computations are based precluded the possibility of determining the average length of stay for sentenced inmates, teachers estimate the present average sentence to be approximately 3 months.

<sup>2</sup>One exception is the dress and cleanliness of non-sentenced inmates. While some inmates enter the jail poorly-dressed and smelling of body odor, others enter well-dressed and clean. However, because the non-sentenced inmates often have only the clothes they were wearing at the time of their arrest, after a few days in the jail their clothing is usually dirty and they smell--much like a group of boys who have just completed a rigorous physical workout. The teachers attribute the uncleanliness in part to the students' values and in part to the jail which lacks adequate laundry and bathing facilities.

<sup>3</sup>It is interesting to note that while jail school teachers find the behavior of their lower-class students comprehensible, they find the behavior of the few middle-class inmates with whom they have contact incomprehensible. The teachers are unable to comprehend the middle-class student from a "good" family, who had the opportunity to get a "good" education and eventually secure a "good" job, but instead got into trouble with the law.

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