

A "School Adaptation Check List"

R.G. Sultana

In my experience as a teacher, I have become very much aware of students' problems arising out of difficulties in adapting themselves to various aspects of school life, such as change of institution, friends, teachers, academic level and expectations. Very often, difficulty to cope with life at school creates many emotional problems and scholastic performance suffers. The checklist I have generated will, hopefully, help persons concerned in pastoral or administrative activities in a school to identify students with adaptational problems, and also to gauge specific areas which many students might be finding difficult to cope with in a particular school. Knowing the attitudes of each individual and those characteristic of the group, the school can mobilize its counselling services to help make the adjustments necessary.

Design of the "School Adaptation Check List"

The SACL (School Adaptation Check List) is based on a model generated by Ross L. Mooney and Leonard V. Gordon. The operational use of *Mooney's Problem Check List* and the revisions made to it in content and format throughout a long number of years (since 1941, to be precise), have persuaded me to keep as close as possible to what is, in the final analysis, a well-proven model. Credit for the conception of a check list as well as the format presentation are to a great extent due to Messrs. Mooney and Gordon.

The SACL contains a 100 items, 20 in each of the following areas:

1. Academic (A)
2. Recreational (R)
3. Student-Teacher Relationship (S)
4. Student-Student Relationship (S)
5. School as Institution (I)

Areas: In my opinion, these five areas or categories cover the basic sources for problems in adaptation to school life. The *Academic* area includes all those difficulties students face with regards intellectual output and input, curricular difficulties, subject matter, and so on. The *Recreational* aspect deals with the non-academic, as opposed to the purely intellectual, classroom interaction. It is a well-known fact that major

concern for students and for teachers are the inter-relationships between *teachers and students*, and *students with other students*. Finally, in the area of *School as Institution* I included such items as disciplinary style, general running and ethos of the school, as well as personal difficulties generated in confrontation with the school as an organised, perhaps bureaucratic institution.

The categorization of the items into areas is helpful in terms of presenting a homogeneity of problem content that would facilitate meaningful interpretation by the counsellor or teacher. It is also useful in pointing the data as much as possible in directions which would suggest programmes of action related to the kinds of services which tend to be available in schools.

Items: The items displayed in the SACL were generated from a variety of sources, namely:

- (a) My own experience as a student, coupled with that of various friends in my Hall of Residence coming from different nations and cultures, as well as from different social backgrounds. They very kindly offered lists of items from their own experience.
- (b) My experience in Secondary Schools for boys and girls, which was greatly amplified in 1981/82 when I was intimately involved in the setting up of a new educational establishment in Malta which made students' adaptational problems more evident.
- (c) As a teacher of R.E. I had carried out a self-descriptive essay of problems among third form girls in relation to school life and other areas of possible strife.
- (d) Research of literature on student attitudes to school and the coping difficulties they encountered.

The list of items extended to a master list of a 160, and following Mooney and Gordon, the selection and phrasing of the items in the SACL were based on the following criteria. The items were to be:

- (a) In the language of the students. In my English version, using basic English words the students would be familiar with.
- (b) Self-sufficient as individual phrases.
- (c) Short enough for rapid reading.
- (d) Common enough to be checked frequently in large groups of students, or serious enough to

ENGLISH EDITION

SCHOOL ADAPTATION CHECK LIST

SECONDARY SCHOOL FORM

RONALD G. SULTANA
READING UNIVERSITY

Age Boy Girl Form

Name of School

Date

DIRECTIONS

This is a list of some of the problems boys and girls face in school. You are to pick out the problems which are troubling you.

Read the list carefully, and as you come to a problem which is troubling you, draw a line under it. For example, if you generally dislike reading, you would draw a line under the first item, like this:

1. Not interested in books

When you have finished reading the whole list and marking the problems which are troubling you, please answer the questions on Page 4. You are free to sign your name on the last page if you so desire.

A
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DIRECTIONS: Read the list slowly, and as you come to a problem which troubles you, draw a line under it.

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|--|--|
| 1. Not interested in books | 26. Too much homework |
| 2. Poor memory | 27. Rest of class better than me |
| 3. General feeling of failure | 28. Textbooks hard to understand |
| 4. Don't like study | 29. Chosen wrong subjects |
| 5. Low marks for my work | 30. Afraid of tests |
| 6. Can't use my talents at school | 31. School not helping me discover talents |
| 7. Little space to run in during break | 32. Bothered by a physical handicap |
| 8. Not enough clubs and club activities | 33. Not enough sports/hobby equipment |
| 9. Often try to miss P.E. lesson | 34. School is all work and no play |
| 10. Breaks too short for me to rest | 35. Wish to leave school during break |
| 11. Teachers are too strict | 36. Most teachers don't like me |
| 12. Prefer to have fewer teachers | 37. Teachers go too fast during lessons |
| 13. Afraid of some teachers | 38. My efforts not appreciated in class |
| 14. Teachers hardly ever notice me | 39. Teachers concerned with lesson, not pupils |
| 15. Never tell my problems to a teacher | 40. Teachers make me feel bad about myself |
| 16. Best friend not in my class | 41. Nobody likes me |
| 17. Laughed at if I speak in class | 42. Class-mates make fun of me |
| 18. Often find myself alone | 43. Students blame me when things go wrong |
| 19. Friends not in my school | 44. Bury some students in my class |
| 20. Treated like an outsider | 45. Getting into arguments |
| 21. I feel lost and not important in school | 46. Rarely show my real self in school |
| 22. School is my main problem in life | 47. Uniform makes me feel bad |
| 23. I don't know my way around school | 48. School makes me miss breakfast |
| 24. School is a waste of time | 49. Frequently arrive late at school |
| 25. I spend more money than I afford in school | 50. School is a prison |

QUESTIONS

1. Which problems in school are troubling you most? Write about two or three of these if you'd like to.

2. Do you know of anybody in the school who would help you adapt yourself better to school life? Would you like to talk to him/her?

3. Which suggestions, if any, would you like to make to head of school and teachers so that life at school would be more pleasant for you and your fellow students?

You can write down your name and surname in this box unless you want to remain anonymous.
.....
Thank you.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 51. No relation between subjects and life | 76. Don't know how to study |
| 52. Difficult to know what to study | 77. Afraid of making mistakes |
| 53. No discussion about things that matter | 78. I work too slowly |
| 54. Made to take subjects I dislike | 79. Can't do work at home |
| 55. Difficult to put to practice things learnt | 80. Don't understand most lessons |
| 56. No opportunity in school to do things I like | 81. Too clumsy and awkward |
| 57. Need to meet students from other schools | 82. Meet teachers only formally |
| 58. School is mainly boring | 83. I'd rather go home for lunch |
| 59. No feeling of togetherness in school | 84. Lessons cannot be fun |
| 60. Learning only takes place in class | 85. Can't stand assemblies |
| 61. Teachers make fun of me | 86. Shy to ask questions |
| 62. Don't speak to teachers out of school | 87. Most teachers are unjust |
| 63. Teachers not interested in what I think | 88. Teachers too distant |
| 64. Teachers shout and are angry with me | 89. Wish teachers don't notice me |
| 65. Teachers enjoy finding fault with me | 90. Teachers don't understand me |
| 66. Class-mates swear, tell dirty jokes | 91. Getting into fights |
| 67. Never part of the lively group | 92. Called "teachers' pet" |
| 68. Afraid someone will hurt me | 93. I have enemies in school |
| 69. Have less money than my friends | 94. Often want to copy work |
| 70. To be accepted I do things I don't like | 95. Class too noisy |
| 71. No one to help me with my personal problems | 96. Too much violence/theft |
| 72. Travelling to and from school is a nightmare | 97. Dislike style of discipline |
| 73. Would play truant if I got away with it | 98. Classroom too hot/too cold |
| 74. Education not preparing me to earn a living | 99. Have bad dreams about school |
| 75. Students have little say in school affairs | 100. Restless to leave school |

DIRECTIONS: When you have finished underlining the problems which trouble you in school, answer the questions on page 4.

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be important in an individual case.

- (e) Centred within the students' own personal orientation rather than in general social orientation.

Spontaneous rather than deliberate reaction is sought. I decided on a number of 20 items in each area because 20 seemed the number best suited to cover the range of problems in each area without stretching some areas too far and compressing others too much. The final tally of a 100 items is also handy in working out percentiles. Although some items are apparently related to two or more classifications, each of these is listed only under the one area to which it has been found to be most relevant.

With regards to format, I again followed Mooney's and Gordon's model by grouping the items in sets of five horizontally while the students proceed vertically. This is an important feature since, in instruments where the groupings are obvious, students and counsellors report a tendency for the individual to skip entire areas that appear inappropriate to them without bothering to read the items. In such cases there is also a tendency to avoid making too many items in areas that they feel have lower social acceptability. The format of the SACL overcomes these difficulties while presenting groupings of problems which are convenient for the counsellor and survey analyst.

Anonymity:

Since all the items in the SACL are formulated in a "negative" or "problem-oriented" bias, many students will undoubtedly feel compelled to hide the extent of their maladjustment. The only way to offset this tendency is to leave ample freedom for the response to be anonymous if they so desire. If the student is filling out the SACL for a counsellor, leading to an individual interview, then the threat situation will be lessened and he will, of course, need to provide his identity. In other cases where the group as against individual survey is being carried out, the students are to be free as to whether they write their name or not. Students are made aware of this option as soon as the Check List is given to them. Often enough, class, age, sex or other educational variables are all that are needed for many survey and research purposes.

Administration:

Other elements related to the administration of the SACL are here briefly described. The SACL is self-administering, with all the directions needed printed on the cover page. Indeed, elder students can mark the SACL out of class, although it is advisable that students mark them during a class period.

Usefulness of the School Adaptation Check List

Here I intend to set out two different presentations of the usefulness and purpose of the SACL. The first will be a global, general overview, so that the value of the check list is depicted as

briefly and succinctly as possible. The second will be a description of usefulness in terms of the criteria of Display, Comparison, Discovery, Clarification, Reassurance, Affiliation, and Orientation.

General Overview of Usefulness:

1. Adaptation of Form I students to a new system: the Secondary school.
2. Helps clarify to students their problems and needs in schools.
3. Used by teachers as basis of evaluation for discussion with parents.
4. Administrators and teachers become aware of of the effect of system on children.
5. Comparative survey of adaptation based on age, sex, social background, time.
6. Comparative survey of adaptation in different schools, stems, countries.
7. Helps client before counselling interview, as well as the counsellor.
8. Indicates clusters of problems for individuals/groups.
9. Indicates areas of change/programme innovation for school administrators.
10. Helps locate students who want and need help/counselling.
11. Helps locate groups of students with particular school-based problems.
12. Indicates discussion topics and group activities in tutor groups.
13. Suggests approaches by which a teacher can meliorate relationships with class.
14. Can measure changes brought about by planned problem-reduction programmes.
15. Reveals student attitudes to school.

Categorised Presentation of Usefulness:

- A. **DISPLAY:** The problem tally in the specific areas provides the counsellor or analyst/researcher with a quick overview and display of the variety of problems which are the expressed concern of the student. It similarly gives the students an opportunity to review and summarize their own adaptational problems and to see the full range of personal matters they might discuss with their counsellor/teacher.
- B. **COMPARISON:** The SACL can be a very useful instrument to gauge the comparative adaptational/coping ability or extent at different levels of the school year. It can be used at an intra-school and an inter-school level, providing clusters of problems faced in various educational institutions which follow different educational principles and philosophies. It would be interesting to compare check lists between forms, between schools in urban and rural areas. A comparative study would throw light not only on which problems young people are concerned with in their school life, but also on a more general, system-oriented level. When administered at different times to the

same group, the SACL can be used to indicate changes brought about by a planned problem reduction programme evolved during the interim period.

- C. **DISCOVERY/CLARIFICATION:** The SACL is primarily designed to help counsellors or other concerned persons with the well-being of students become aware of coping difficulties faced by individuals or groups. While a competent counsellor can elicit an expression of a counsellee's problems over a period of interviews, and observant teachers and form tutors infer adaptational problems from the day-to-day behaviour of students, the check list is a quicker and more reliable method of discovering the attitudes and difficulties faced. Previously overlooked areas needing attention can be brought to light. Discovering the problems of each individual and those characteristic of the group itself, the school can mobilize its counselling services and adapt its curricular offerings to meet those needs.

The SACL is helpful to the student marking it because the process of going through the list may often be immediately in his understanding what is making him feel uncomfortable. By providing the language or semantic differentiating of various problems, the student is involved either in

- self-discovery and self-understanding: a quicker recognition and analysis of his needs
- or clarification, whereby he can see a vague discomfort encapsulated in words. Indeed, as in Mooney's Problem Check List, students attest to the value of merely filling out the check list.

The SACL is also an educational tool in terms of students realising/discovering the problems other students face in school. It is therefore a "discovery" of the problem world of the students, perhaps leading to greater consideration. It could also be used as a basis for discussion — the analysis of group problems indicates discussion topics and

group activities which are related to the personal interests and needs of the students in any given group. It can form the basis for the tutor group sessions, as well as for any course in life skills or human relationship programmes. Vocational Guidance Officers can use the data as a help in drawing parallels between problems faced in school and those in the world of work, and a programme could be built around the clusters of problems underlined.

- D. **REASSURANCE:** Students realise that people are genuinely concerned about their daily needs as members of a system, and that these people are striving towards a better understanding of their needs and aiming for a professional way of providing help. There is perhaps relief in realizing how few problems they actually have.

- E. **AFFILIATION:** The check list helps locate the most prevalent problems expressed within a student body vis-à-vis school as a basis for new developments and revisions in the curricular, extra-curricular and guidance programmes of a school.

It also suggests approaches by which a teacher can establish a more personalised relationship with each of his students, and by which form tutors can understand better the group they are pastorally concerned with.

- F. **DIRECTION/ORIENTATION:** The SACL presents a clear picture of the cluster of problems students individually and/or collectively have to face within an educational establishment. This is invaluable information to the Administration concerned for the total well-being of students they are directing. The Check-List therefore becomes an orientation instrument in so far as it points towards areas of modification or/and change which will help students feel more comfortable in their daily school life, enhancing personal and intellectual growth. The SACL can contribute to the process of fact-finding which is so essential to an intelligent plan for action in any institution.

Meeting Teachers' Needs

(Continued from p. 18)

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