

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND TEACHERS: THE EFFECTS OF REWARD AND PUNISHMENT ON BEHAVIOR AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on a discussion of the effect of reward and punishment on behavior and learning. Teachers will be interested to learn that not all research points to the credibility of a system of reward and punishment. Sometimes, we as educators, struggle to find the most effective method of classroom management and turn to a system of reward and punishment. But, if this method is not working, then we need to look elsewhere. There is a new approach to classroom management which will be discussed in this paper. For the purposes of this paper, the researcher observed student's behavior when responding to a system of both rewards and punishments and also when given exposure to the new approach. The author would not be aware of any other approaches to classroom management than the old system of rewards and punishments. Teachers should know of the effectiveness of the new approach and master it within their classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers play the most important role in education. They are said to be the builders of a nation. Teacher is the central log in the machinery of education. The quality and worth of teachers determines the quality of education Teaching facilitates learning. Learning is a complex phenomenon that has been explained differently.

Classroom management is a subject which will affect all teachers. While there are many systems available to provide for a well managed classroom, some are more effective than others, and can result in classrooms that are self managed. When students accept responsibility for their behavior and ownership of their successes and failures, classrooms become self managed. Often teachers are unsure of the methods needed to achieve these goals. Punishment can be seen as a viable solution in which students are forced into the desirable behaviors, e.g. studying, doing homework, being prepared for class, behaving in class, among other things. Rewards on the other hand, can produce students who are only interested in the reward rather than the learning. These students tend to display appropriate behaviors as long as rewards are present. Once the rewards cease, so does the learning.

In past generations, it was acceptable for a teacher to use corporal punishment on a student who was misbehaved or unprepared. Although seen less frequently today, corporal punishment still exists. Corporal punishment in the schools, as defined by Hyman, is the infliction of pain or confinement as a penalty for an offense committed by a student. Corporal punishment can take many forms. It can be present through verbal or physical abuse. Although a form of child abuse, teachers are apt to use this method of discipline because it is a quick fix to a problem with a student. The short term effects may seem successful in that the student becomes cooperative and submissive, but the long term effects can be detrimental. What appears to be a cooperative student, is really a student who has been beaten into submission and who looks for ways to please the teacher, even at the expense of lying and cheating to avoid further abuse.

What then are teachers to do? If they want to produce students who are motivated to learn, are prepared to learn, are well behaved in class, and are inspired to challenge themselves beyond the classroom, should they use a program of rewards and punishments or another more effective method? To determine this, it is necessary to look at the short and long term effects of both punishments and rewards.

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REWARD

Importance of rewards in teaching teaming process as the rewarding of appropriate behavior is bread and butter to the teacher.

Lepper and Greene (1978) mention that the use of "reinforcement" in the vocabulary of instrumental conditioning was promoted in the mid-t930, particularly by Skinner and primarily as a substitute for the traditional term "reward," whose very age tainted it with the suspicion of mentalism.

By Skinner's definition, reinforcers must reinforce or strengthen behaviour.

This definition is Skinner's favorite for scientific purposes. A reinforcer is any stimulus event that follows an operant response and thereby increases the strength (or probability of occurrence) of that response. Response rate provides the usual performance measure of increased response probability.

Skinner (1953) identifies two main classes of reinforcers-positive and negative.

Positive reinforcers increase response probability by being added to the situation; negative reinforcers increase response probability by being removed. Positive reinforcers are those desired, sought-after stimuli such as food, praise and money that we ordinarily call rewards.

Behaviour that goes unrewarded will extinguish: the teacher must watch the student carefully to determine the payoff. The teacher must also recognize individual differences; the payoff is often different for each child

PUNISHMENT

Punishment is at best a means of suppressing behaviour, either by the presentation of something negative or by the removal of something positive. Punishment is a very popular method for influencing behaviour in schools.

Roediger (1984) opine that punishment consists of delivery of an unpleasant or aversive stimulus following a response. Eggen (1997) is of the view that positive and negative reinforcers are consequences that strengthen behaviour. Some consequences, however, weaken behaviour or decrease their frequency. Consequences that result in a decrease in

behaviour are called punishment.

Punishment is often used by parents who want their children to behave. But many contemporary psychologists believe that punishment is often applied ineffectively and also may have unintended and unwanted consequences. For punishment to be effective, it must be applied immediately so that the relationship between the unwanted behaviour and punishment is clear. Also, it must be applied only to unwanted behaviour. But there is considerable potential for confusion here.

Sometimes punishment is applied following a desired action, as when a student is punished after coming forward to admit cheating on an exam. The student may associate the punishment with being honest rather than with the original offense; the result may be that the student learns not to tell the truth.

Punishment can also lead to negative emotions> such as fear or anxiety which may become associated through classical conditioning, with the person who administers the punishment. A child who receives compliments for being a good student is likely to show better academic performance than one who is punished for doing poorly.

A child from touching a hot stove or running into traffic . For punishment to be effective, it should do three things. First, it should be immediate. Second, it should be unpleasant enough to overcome the reinforcing aspects of the behaviour. Finally, it should be followed with reinforcement for appropriate behaviour.

Wielkiewicz (1997) articulates the using versus rmsusmg punishment by saying in this manner that punishment refers to the administration of an aversive stimulus immediately after behaviour has occurred which has the effect of reducing the probability that the behaviour will occur in the future. Punishment is very often used in public and private as a means of maintaining order and discipline. When punishment is physical in nature, it is called corporal punishment. Corporal punishment refers to hitting with a hand or fist, hitting with an object such as a belt, paddle, cane, whip or anything else. Corporal punishment is used almost every school.

What are some of the problems in using punishment, especially corporal punishment, in schools and in the home? The proper use of punishment is to suppress or eliminate a particular, easily identifiable, behaviour. However, this is only a small portion of the goal of behaviour management. In addition to eliminating or suppressing behaviour, it is also important to teach the child appropriate behaviour in the same situation. Punishment alone does not accomplish this. In fact, when punishment alone is used to control behaviour, it can occasionally cause undesirable behaviour to increase by making the child more anxious and less interested in learning, so that misbehaviour may be even more likely to occur.

A NEW APPROACH

This is all very confusing information for the teacher who wants to have a classroom of students who are well managed and well motivated. In the absence of a system of rewards and punishments, what are teachers to do? Because this system has been used for so long, it is familiar and comfortable to teachers and may be difficult and frightening to abandon. Teachers are being held accountable not only for the knowledge that the students come away with, but also the behaviors which they have learned. That is why it is more important than ever to adopt a system that works both in the short and long term. The time has come to teach our teachers effective classroom management, while eliminating the systems of rewards and punishments.

Research of discipline and motivational strategies within the last five to seven years seems to suggest that students will fare better if they are taught how to recognize the natural consequences and rewards of their actions. Natural rewards and consequences provide an environment in which the student accepts responsibility, not only for the chosen behavior, but also for the resulting reward or consequence. There are new methods which teachers are using with success. The methods are relatively new, so it is difficult to predict the long term effects, but the methods are being used with success in classrooms and seem to be producing responsible, self managed children. I have had

the opportunity to observe, first hand, teachers who have abandoned the old system of rewards and punishments in favor of a new system.

I have observed classrooms in which the students are required to draft a class constitution and bill of rights. The students take time in the beginning of the year to draft a list of rules and rights. They are the things which students feel are important. When left to do this on their own, students come up with a very responsible list of expected behaviors. They feel a sense of ownership for these rules and rights and are more likely to obey them. The rules relate to issues which concern them, and therefore make sense to them. Students are responsible for deciding the consequences of infractions. Because students have drafted the list of rules and expected behaviors, the consequences are naturally occurring and not contrived. Also, students maintain the right to revise the constitution if a rule loses its meaning or if a new rule needs to be added. Teachers have had much success with this method and its popularity is quickly spreading throughout the school systems.

Modeling appropriate behavior is another effective management method which uses neither rewards nor punishments (Hyman, pg. 138). Teachers are constantly watching for students who are behaving as they should and working as expected. A comment such as, "I like the way Susan is working", is directed at the student. Other students, wishing to please the teacher, will look at Susan and model their behavior after hers. This method works especially well in the primary grades, as these students strive to please. Teachers can also use a friendly smile, a nod of approval, or a pat on the back as a reinforce for good behavior.

Consistent, meaningful praise works well. If a teacher is conscious of her students' efforts, she will know how to dole out praise effectively. It is important not to overuse the concept of praise, as students will soon find that it has lost meaning and effectiveness. Praise should be given when students have done a fine job with social or academic tasks and should not be overdone. A simple, "Great job, guys", is all that is needed. Students will come to know that the praise is sincere and they will attempt to

construct their behaviors and activities so they will be awarded the teacher's praise. Praise helps students to feel good about themselves, while rewards cause students to feel good about the prize.

CONCLUSION

There are many times when a system of rewards and punishments does not give the intended results. Students are still unruly or irresponsible about completing assigned tasks. The punishments and rewards become greater and greater, as the undesirable behavior increases. In a system of rewards, students have learned to expect the reward and have lost sight of the value of the task. When the reward is taken away, the behavior ceases. Clearly, this system is not working as effectively as desired.

Much of the research that is available on the current methods of discipline is fairly new. Most of the current research has been conducted in the last five to seven years. There are no long term studies because the methods have not been in use for a long enough period of time. The old system of rewards and punishments may be comfortable for the seasoned teacher and easy for the novice teacher, but teachers cannot ignore the facts. If these methods are so successful, why do we need to consistently punish the same behaviors? Teachers should be taught the new methods. These methods are being used successfully and a visit to one of these classrooms will present students who are self-managed and self-disciplined. Students have accepted responsibility for their actions and have taken ownership of the resulting consequence, both good and bad. They know the rules and regulations; they know there is no limit to what they can learn; and they know they are only limited by their own choices. The learning environment has become much more inviting

and both teachers and students are reaping the rewards.

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