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Classroom Discipline

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CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of master of science in education
at the Jacksonville State College
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INTRODUCTION

Every teacher faces the problem of discipline; every teacher attempts some kind of discipline, but not every teacher achieves desirable results.

Constructive classroom discipline is a very important part of the educative process. It provides children with the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of fitting into a social group in an atmosphere which is conducive to learning and which promotes healthy emotional control. Academic learning and disciplined behavior are inseparable. If the latter breaks down, the former is impaired. Good teaching is made possible only by good discipline.

The Problem

The writer of this paper is attempting to learn, by means of research, what is considered good discipline in the classroom. Just what are the factors in constructive classroom discipline? What is the long-term goal that becomes a guiding factor? What are the successful methods of classroom procedure that lead to the accomplishment of the goal? What special consideration is due individual members of the class with respect to varying abilities and backgrounds?

The Limitations

The subject of classroom discipline is so broad that this paper will be confined to classroom discipline, adaptable in the upper elementary or middle grades.

The Definition

One can find a variety of meanings attached to the word discipline. For the purpose of this paper, the word discipline is used with the broad concept: a process of training and learning which molds, strengthens, and corrects. In this process the child is led to independent self-discipline and the inner security that is characteristic of a wholesome, well-integrated personality. Discipline in the classroom concerns itself with education, training, and control--all of which is an outgrowth of a well-organized educational program under the guidance of a competent teacher.

Discipline, then, is not an end in itself, but it is a means of helping pupils develop intellectually and achieve the best possible mental health, fitting them for efficient service in later life as well as in the society of the classroom.

Method of Study

The writer is using the research method of study,

obtaining information from books, magazines, and pamphlets on the subject of classroom discipline.

I. THE TEACHER IN THE SETTING

The teacher is the first qualifying factor in the classroom setting. Her educational qualification, her cultural background, her understanding of children, and her respect and love for them become her equipment in providing the setting. The teacher who would be a successful guide for children should have a broad cultural background based upon a good general education, including a good historical understanding of our democratic American heritage and a practical knowledge of democracy in action.¹ She should have a detailed knowledge of child development for her own age-group that helps her to understand the needs of children as human beings and to determine normal behavior patterns that have a direct relationship to growth and development. She should have a sound educational philosophy and a good command of modern teaching methods, with a realization that she does not know everything and that there is need for her to maintain a consistent program of self-improvement both culturally and professionally.² The teacher who has real love for the children who are in her

¹
Ruth Amsterdam, Constructive Classroom Discipline and Practice (New York: Comet Press Books, 1957), p. 29.

²
Ibid.

charge is more likely to create a warm, friendly, co-operative emotional climate for optimum response from her pupils. It is true that children react differently to different teachers, depending upon the degree of regard in which they are held. If they know they are loved by their teacher and are expected to be on their good behavior and to do their best at all times, it is easy for them to come to their best in the presence of that teacher. On the other hand, if they find themselves in the presence of a teacher who is indifferent toward them or even dislikes them, it is hard for them to be at ease. This type of teacher tends to bring out the worst that is in children. The children are likely to become apprehensive, nervous, and unsure. Their reaction may be an unnatural type behavior which seems uncontrollable. "That is why a child can be a devil with one teacher and an angel with another."³

If love cannot be stimulated, its concomitants, regard, consideration and respect can. These can often be deliberately engendered in a teacher who devotes herself to acquiring a detailed knowledge of her children's abilities, achievement, needs, physical status, home background, and previous history.⁴

³
Ibid., p. 19.

⁴
Ibid.

The teacher must remember that it is she who creates the atmosphere that exists in her classroom. If she is friendly, sincere, and considerate, she will develop a classroom atmosphere in which the shy will be less sensitive, the weak will feel more able, and the strong will grow more wholesome.⁵ Children are concerned about their relationship with their teacher; she can do much for the emotional health of her pupils.

The teacher's job is two-fold. She must teach subjects, but she must also teach children. It is possible for her to become so absorbed with the desire to teach subject matter that she is not aware of what she and her methods are doing for the feelings and attitudes of the children. The poor teacher neither teaches the children nor the subject matter well. As a result the children are confused, dissatisfied, and upset and are more likely to respond with undesirable behavior.

Work Plans

One of the first responsibilities of the teacher of a new class is to acquaint herself with the achievement level and ability of the individual members of her class. This will enable her to plan the work program in relation

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Herbert Sorenson, Psychology in Education, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1954), p. 162.

to the individual needs and abilities as far as it is possible. When the school program holds challenge for the gifted, the superior, the average, and the slow learner, misbehavior will be minimized. Some misbehavior comes when school work is too easy; some comes when it is too hard.⁶ Too often work programs are geared to one, two, or three groups in the class to the neglect of others. When individual differences are recognized and provided for in the work plans, children are made to feel more comfortable. Each child will be helped to develop his full potentiality.

Differences in capacity should be recognized and valued in the classroom activities, just as our expanding industrial society utilizes an ever-wider variety of abilities. As children are led to accept their own abilities, they are better able to work together toward group purposes and common problems.

The teacher whose educational philosophy is permeated with democratic ideals will encourage the degree of democratic pupil participation in group planning that is consistent with the degree of maturity of her pupils. When the planning opportunities provided for pupils are neither

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James L. Hymes, Jr., Behavior and Misbehavior (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1955), p. 57.

too hard nor too easy, children can be expected to cooperate fully.

Orderliness

The teacher who sets a healthy climate for orderly classroom behavior presents a desirable model in her own example of orderliness. The arrangement of the room, the daily routine of the program of activities, and the organization of group work will speak for itself. When the teacher has made clear by her own manner of procedure that a certain orderliness of action will prevail in the room, the children will respect her for it. Orderliness and precision give children a sense of security that is important to them.⁷ Lack of organization leads to confusion and insecurity. We must remember, however, that orderliness is instrumental; it is a means for achievement of purposes and not an end in itself.⁸

Related to orderliness is promptness. The teacher's example will not go unnoticed by her class. She should always be on the job at the proper time in the mornings and afternoons. She should make a habit of being at the

⁷ Amsterdam, Constructive Classroom Discipline, p. 48.

⁸ Robert W. Edgar, "Discipline and Purpose," Teacher's College Record, LVII (1955), 8.

door when the children arrive from any outside activity. This not only reflects an alertness on her part, but it gives a chance to set the proper tone before permitting the children to enter the classroom.

Goals

All classroom activities should be purposeful and goal-directed. The teacher, knowing her own goals, will likely be able to guide children toward worthy goals which will become their own. Self discipline can best be nourished in a goal-directed program of activities. The teacher will be influential in shaping pupil goals in that children's goals are socially derived.

The school's task in the nurture of self-discipline is to invent, adapt, borrow and discover purposeful activities. The adequacy of these activities will be tested by the response of the children. If their thoughts and actions are suffused with purpose, it indicates that they understand and accept as guides the goals implicit in these activities.

II. PREVENTING DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS

It is much easier to prevent disorder and misbehavior than to correct it after it occurs. Prevention of classroom discipline begins before the first day of school. The alert teacher will see in advance that her classroom is clean and that books, furniture, and materials are in order. Some attractive pictures on the bulletin boards will add to the setting. Pictures of summer travel and current events are always appropriate for the middle grades. The library corner can be made inviting by setting out some attractive new books and magazines or making an arrangement of attractive book covers that have been kept. Library books, arranged orderly and conspicuously, invite children to return to the business of school. A few growing plants or flower arrangements add to the beauty of the room and help create a pleasant atmosphere.

Again it must be remembered that the teacher is an important part of this setting. The first requisite for the teacher in preventative discipline is self-confidence. The teacher who has made adequate preparation for the first day of school and planned ahead for succeeding days, who knows the characteristics of her age-group, who is possessed with a sympathetic understanding of children,

can face her class with the confidence that has a compelling force upon the interest and conduct of the children. Children in the middle grades have already made a general adjustment to school life and routine, and if former school experiences have proved satisfying, they ordinarily return to school eager to fall in line. The teacher, becomingly dressed, should meet her children with a smile that makes them feel she is glad to be a part of this special occasion and happy to have them under her charge.

Successful teachers proceed in different ways at the very beginning of a new school year, but all such teachers have much the same goal in mind. The business of becoming acquainted, of setting up group standards, and of making a wholesome start in the program of the school year is foremost in the plans of the teacher who aims at preventing discipline problems and of guiding children toward the goal of self-direction.

Many elementary school systems form new class groups at the close of a school year. In this way the teacher has the advantage of having the names and brief records of her new class members which will help to acquaint her with any physical handicaps, such as weak eyesight or poor hearing.

Ruth Amsterdam in her book, Constructive Classroom Discipline and Practice, tells of one teacher who, having

pre-arranged class organization, prepares large name cards of all children who are to be in her class and places them on the individual desks before the children arrive. She arranges for children who have poor eyesight or loss of hearing to have front seats while others are seated in relationship to height. Each child upon arriving finds his own seat, and this becomes a tentative seating arrangement. In this way the teacher is able to call each child by name from the beginning, which eliminates stumbling and confusion on the part of the teacher in giving directions and calling for individual response.

Norma Cutts¹⁰ relates the practice of one fifth grade teacher who allows her children to come in and select their own seats, and for their first assignment of the day, she starts them writing about their vacations. While they are writing, she walks around in the room and fills in her seating chart from the names on their papers. These are tested methods of helping the teacher learn quickly, and in a systematic way, the names of the children she is to teach.

Formulating standards

Children like to know what is expected of them. On this first day, the teacher should talk with them and make

¹⁰ Norma E. Cutts, Practical School Discipline and Mental Hygiene (Atlanta: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1941), p.17.

clear her expectations. In this talk she should lead them to see the necessity of formulating some general standards of conduct for the benefit of the group. Then they will co-operatively form some group standards of conduct and safety. They may also decide on a class motto to help them remember the decisions of the class. When this has been done, a child who violates a rule thereafter is violating a rule that both he and the class decided was for the best interest of everyone. In this way the teacher can more easily bring the violator to conform to the standards of the class and she will not be identified personally with the wrong doing. AP

In a democratic classroom the majority of the children can be depended upon to practice self-discipline if the rules or standards are reasonable and understood. This will be particularly true when they feel they have had a direct part in determining the standards. Children feel more comfortable with standards and limitations. They provide the security that children must have in the process of growth in self-control. 106

Flexible Program

The teacher should have planned a full day's work. "The day-by-day work should be sufficient to fill the working periods. It should be interesting and planned to meet the needs of all pupils."¹¹ Busy interested children are not

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Ibid., p. 29.

likely to create trouble if the schedule is flexible. Children should not be expected to sit quietly for long periods of time after coming in from a three months' vacation. A few brief periods should be provided for informal activity in the classroom. Sometimes these breaks are provided for getting water, going to the restroom, trimming pencils, browsing in the library corner, examining shell or rock collections, or getting information from the bulletin board displays. Such periods provide a physical and mental change necessary for growing youngsters. Following these periods, children can return to directed activities with renewed interest.

There may be a child that will show signs of restlessness more often than the other children. In such cases, the teacher could give this child some obligation that provides a chance for him to move about, such as to go on an errand, to pass out materials, or to do some cleaning jobs.

Uncomfortable seats, poor ventilation, and overheated air are other possible causes of restlessness, irritability, and inattention. Preventive attention should be given to these causes also.

The Teacher's Voice

The teacher's voice can also play an important part in the conditioning of children's behavior. A good conver-

sational tone is best for the classroom. Her voice should be clear and free from harshness. She should avoid multiplying commands and reminders. The teacher will do well to listen to herself once in a while. If she hears too much of her own voice, it is one indication that her disciplinary plans need overhauling.¹² "Talk is cheap; and too much talk offers little guidance."¹³

It may be that children have been conditioned to teachers using their voices too loudly or too much. To overcome this, the teacher will need to use her voice in another manner to claim their attention. Most children will respond to a firm, soft voice, but a few who are conditioned to hearing every order more than once in a shrill voice may not respond. The teacher should be cautious not to misuse her voice or expressions at such a time. It is good for the teacher to stand quietly in front of the room and wait for a moment and then, in a voice just loud enough for every child to hear, call the names of those who failed to respond and repeat the order. The children will respond more favorably to the teacher who uses her voice correctly than to the teacher who abuses her voice.

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Ruth W. Washburn, "Discipline for Self Reliance," Childcraft, Vol. XII (1960), p. 110.

13

E. L. Phillips and Others, Discipline Achievement and Mental Health (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1960), p. 35.

The teacher should remember to use her voice also to praise children for their worthy effort and desirable response. Children should know when they have pleased their teacher. She should look for opportunities to praise them. A word of praise or a smile of approval can do much to condition the emotional atmosphere in the classroom.

III. EFFECTIVE GROUP DISCIPLINE

In spite of a wholesome classroom climate as created by the teacher with the best in preventive measures, some friction is bound to arise as wants and needs of the individual personalities are fitted together. Some conflict is normal. School situations that allow room for children to make mistakes and to experience results and outcomes give children the opportunity of testing themselves. Such experiences promote growth toward self-control.

Almost every child is at times aggressive or destructive. A teacher must recognize this and deal with each incident honestly in a way that helps a child to face the facts and realize that while the teacher still accepts him as a person she disapproves of what has been done.¹⁴

The teacher must use care not to manifest an authoritarian, arbitrary way of classroom living. However, obedience to authority is an important function in a highly organized society, and the teacher should help children accept authority as friendly and reasonable.

The most successful disciplinarians make it clear that the law is universal. ...Teachers are there to introduce children to the responsibilities and restrictions that are so inevitably a part of life.¹⁵

¹⁴ Victoria Wagner, "Self-Discipline is the Best Discipline," National Education Association Journal, XLVIII (October 1959), 42.

¹⁵ Washburn, Childcraft, XII, 108.

Manipulating Behavior

The two-fold purpose in any disciplinary measure includes (1) the technique of influencing surface behavior then and there and (2) the technique of influencing basic attitudes. Both techniques are important. In most instances both techniques are employed. Certainly if the long-term goal is before the teacher, she does not aim at manipulating surface behavior only. Surface behavior can be changed quickly, but basic attitude changes must be brought about over a longer period of time. A teacher is to help children see outcomes, to help them search for reasons, to help them make good choices.¹⁶

In the democratic classroom where children have helped to set their standards of conduct and where they know and understand the limitations, the teacher can do much in maintaining optimum behavior through simple control measures. Simple control of developing behavior problems may follow these progressive steps by the teacher:

1. Ignore the behavior
2. Direct a look, smile, or a word to the transgressor
3. Give a simple positive command to the erring one
4. Have a conference with the group or the individual
5. Require rectification or reparation

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Hymes, Behavior and Misbehavior, p. 21.

It is better to ignore some minor problems and give children a chance to iron out some difficulties of their own. If the teacher corrects every mistake in behavior there will be little chance for constructive independent growth toward self-discipline.

Often a look, a smile, or the simple speaking of a name is reminder enough to reclaim a diverging one. The smile is most effective in that it shows the child that the teacher is aware of his temptation and while he knows she disapproves of his yielding, he feels sure of her sympathy and friendship.¹⁷

When the matter has advanced to where the teacher must use a stronger technique, a simple positive command has the merit of offering a desirable substitute for the child's undesirable behavior, for example, "John, go on with your story." In this way there is no reference to the misdeed itself.

The next step in simple control is the individual or group conference. The group conference will be necessary when there is a question, misunderstanding, or general mistake involving the group. In the properly conducted conference, the child will have a chance to explain what

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Cutts, Practical School Discipline and Mental Hygiene,
p. 41.

he was doing and why. The teacher will give her reasons for disapproval and try to get some evidence of the child's agreeing with her. The immediate conference has the advantage of having the details fresh in the minds of the conferees; the after-school conference has the merit of allowing pent-up emotions to cool off in case such a stage has been reached.

Removal from the situation may be necessary. It may mean changing a child's seat, having him sit apart from the group for a while or giving him a seat in the hall where he cannot disturb others.

Most children dislike being separated from their fellows, but they can easily understand that separation is a natural consequence of disturbing behavior. Thus removal fulfills the criteria of being effective, immediate, and logical.¹⁸

Isolation of the child from the group should follow immediately after the misconduct. He should always be given work to do. Periods of isolation should be short, and it is often good to allow the child to voluntarily return when he feels he can fall back in line with group standards. When he returns, the incident should be considered closed.

Rectification and reparation include cleaning up after accidents, doing over something that has been done

¹⁸
Ibid., p. 46.

wrong, and repairing or paying for something that has been destroyed or damaged.

Discipline of Well-Adjusted Children

When behavior seems bad, the teacher does not just act; she first considers the child, what the cause must be, and what steps she should take as a corrective measure. This involves knowing children as developing human beings and knowing something about them as individuals. Professionally, the teacher knows the facts of child growth, and this enables her to recognize behavior that is related to the process of child growth and development. She also knows that at every age all children do things which are troublesome or which would be bad if they continued forever. Good discipline has nothing to do with erasing child-like qualities or taking children to task for being themselves.

Most children in a class come from stable homes. They have known the love of two protecting parents, both secure in their parental roles. These children are reasonably stable and reasonably sturdy. These children usually do the wrong thing when they do not understand the right thing. They want to please; they want to do the right thing; but they have not yet mastered the appropriate actions. In such cases there is need to talk things over again. A teacher should never allow mistakes to repeat themselves again and again. Errors creeping into the

operation should not be allowed to stand and become re-confirmed.¹⁹ The teacher must teach.

Ignorance is not always to blame for misbehavior nor is reason always the remedy, but behavior is always caused. It is the role of the teacher to decide on the cause of the behavior. Whatever action follows should be based on the cause of the behavior. The teacher must decide whether talking will help most, whether the behavior should be ignored, or whether the situation should be altered.

The wise teacher in her decisions will always take into account that children have feelings, and feelings and attitudes are as important as conduct. These children have a claim to respect, decency, gentleness, and consideration. Her action must be designed to help them, not to hurt them.

Discipline of the Wounded-Aggressive Child

Unfortunately, all children do not have a stable home background. There are disturbed children in every class. There may be children from homes broken by death or divorce; there may be those who are nagged by parents who have set unattainable goals for them; there may be adopted children

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Ibid., p. 19.

who have spent part of their lives in an institution and now have foster parents; there may be jealous, frightened children who were unprepared for the new brother or sister in the home; there may be those who have a history of serious illness behind them. The causes may be many, but the reality is that these are troubled children. They have missed something vitally important for them as human beings and they make themselves known by their behavior. "One way or another, sooner or later, the human must get in with people and must have some attention."²⁰ These wounded children have faced obstacles and they are unhappy and overwhelmed, but they are fighting for their basic satisfactions--love, attention, understanding--the cause of their misbehavior.

Problems for the teacher? Yes. The wounds of these children make them aggressive. They may talk too much, talk back, interrupt, boast, bully, shove, steal, or lie. Their need for acceptance, belonging, and security so compels them that they cannot seek in nice ways. This compulsion for the immediate satisfaction of their needs is their great block to good discipline.

The teacher is faced with what to do with these children with disrupted lives and disrupted behavior.

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Hymes, Behavior and Misbehavior, p. 91.

The teacher must stop this behavior, to be sure. The class must be protected, the teacher must be protected, and these struggling children must be protected. Like other children, they find comfort in limits, and they will respect the teacher for her firm, sensible, reasonable limits.

The way the teacher stops the undesirable behavior of these hurt children can deepen the bleeding wounds of their lives, or it can begin to heal the wounds that are already there. The teacher can be firm without being harsh or irritable. If the teacher feels anger, the children will know because she will be unable to hide her feelings. The good teacher will have a deep sincere consideration for these children as human beings as she copes with the undesirable behavior. She should stop them quietly but firmly, with sympathetic understanding, trying to see their side of life.

To a misunderstood child understanding can be the biggest blessing of his life. It is a healing thing. It makes people grow and it makes people well.²¹

If the teacher lacks understanding, she will do well to visit the homes of wounded-aggressive children. After learning first-hand some of the background of these children, the teacher may have reason to wonder how they are as good as they are. Understanding is the first step

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Ibid., p. 100-101.

toward the disciplining of these children. With this as a starting point, the teacher can use the classroom program, the curriculum, herself, and her relationship to give these empty children what they are seeking; love, achievement, belonging, praise, acceptance, and independence. If through the gentle effort of the teacher their needs can begin to be satisfied, they can begin to settle down and the compulsion can begin to subside.

Helping these wounded children is a slow process. They were not hurt in a day nor a year. Usually these pressures, tensions, and strains began long before the child started to school. The teacher needs confidence as a shield against despair, and restraint to ward off impatience; but through diligent effort she can start these children on the way to a better life.

Discipline of Quiet Children

It is not easy to recognize the quiet children as presenting discipline problems or needing help. These children do not fight, push, run in the halls, tattle, interrupt, or talk too much. They are conspicuous only by their excessive goodness. They may never volunteer, may hesitate to ask for help, or may withdraw into happy day-dreams. They are not causing trouble, but they are in

trouble, consequently they present a discipline problem. The teacher must be aware that they are uncomfortable, probably unhappy, and certainly carrying all the pressure they need.

The thing to remember about mouse-like children is that they have pressure inside, that this bottled-up pressure must somehow be released. Children cannot stay quiet always. The pressure can reach a point beyond their control, and violence be the result. Not all these emotionally repressed children end in violence, but they have the violence potential.

The school's job in teaching discipline is not to get children through graduation without mishap, but to produce people who can live with themselves and others.²²

The teacher then will not try to capitalize on their goodness, but will allow her good will, her interest, and her concern to reach the person of these too-quiet children. A talk with their parents can be quite revealing. The teacher may find that Johnny has always been good, shared his toys, loved his brothers and sisters, and has always been obedient. In some cases she may find that in early childhood these children were made to feel strange, bad, ashamed, or unloved when they were merely being child-like.

Almost all children have uncivilized behavior in the

process of growing up. They hate their parents momentarily. They bite or kick them. Normal, healthy youngsters have their wild moments. "The veneer of society must be put on slowly; if it is clamped on, emotions are clamped in."²³ These children may have been made to feel that they are different, mean, or unworthy when in reality they were like every other child in the world.

One task of the teacher is that of exerting remedial influence. The home influence experienced by some children will probably remain the same, making the job for the teacher even harder. The teacher should try to establish friendly relationships with the child and his family and begin to build the child's self-confidence little-by-little, so that eventually the child develops a more wholesome attitude toward himself.

The teacher should avoid scolding or anything harsh or embarrassing. She should try to discover the child's interests and special abilities and develop them tactfully. Many withdrawing children have real talents, and if these are cultivated, the results will show them that they can accomplish something in the world and will give them some needed recognition. These accomplishments, duly praised,

²³
Ibid., p. 126.

promote growth in self-confidence.

The school program can afford opportunities for the release of some pent-up emotions. In the middle grades, children's original stories, essays, poems, and plays can provide avenues for release of feelings, as can dramatics in which these children may play the part of bossiness, spitefulness or hate.²⁴ The withdrawing child often finds satisfaction of seeing things grow under his own hands. This is a valuable therapeutic aid to the withdrawing child.

Allowing too quiet children to work with others in small groups provides a small social world where they can begin to come out of their shells with more ease than they feel in whole-class participation. A smart child can eventually begin to assume some responsible role of leadership in group work when properly guided.

The attitude of the teacher should be that of a physician; she is trying to help people and make them well. The work is not easy. Progress will be slow. But the teacher who will be patient and preserve an experimental attitude can accomplish much with some children.

²⁴
Ibid., p. 128-129.

IV. THE EFFECTIVE USE OF PUNISHMENT

The need for some form of punishment in the classroom cannot be denied. The classroom is a small society in which group standards are formulated for the good of all. The social environment of the classroom has some relationship to the standards of the society in which the child will spend his adult life. Every social group must have recourse to some form of pressure in order to preserve itself. The society in which the child lives outside the classroom punishes. There are policemen in every town. The difference between school punishment and society punishment is that society punishes the wrongdoer to "get even" with him, and the school punishes to prevent future anti-social conduct.²⁵ The purpose of punishment is the protection of others and of the wrongdoer himself.

It must be remembered that punishment is not the approach to a problem of disorder, but rather a last resort. It should be used sparingly. Whenever punishment is necessary, it should be suited to the individual and the behavior. Fairness, consistency, and understanding should be characteristic of the teacher in any act of punishment.

²⁵ Amsterdam, Constructive Classroom Discipline and Practice, p. 79.

Children expect correction. They expect to be punished when they transgress, just as they expect to be praised when they please, and taught when they do not know. If the form of punishment used is looked upon by their peers as undesirable but fair, they will not resent it.

Corporal punishment, once considered a "cure all," has been frowned upon and banned in many states. Much could be said as to why it is not a desirable form of punishment. First of all, it does not solve the problem. It quickly reaches the point of diminishing returns.²⁶ To whip a boy for lying, for swearing, or for stealing will not likely reform him. "Reformation in these deeply moral lines must arise from inner impulses, stimulated and encouraged through the wise tact and appeal of the teacher."²⁷ Most writers on the subject advise that a teacher should never approach a child physically except for the protection of herself or another person. Other writers, including Paul S. Anderson, agree that in some communities and with some children corporal punishment consistently used can be very effective.²⁸ It should be use only as a result of a

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Laurence E. Vredevoe, "Practice in School Discipline," American School Board Journal, CXXXIX (July, 1959), 21.

27

George H. Betts, Classroom Methods and Management (Indianapolis: The Bobbs Merrill Co., 1922), p. 373.

28

Paul S. Anderson, "Discipline in the Classroom Today," Phi Delta Kappan, XLI (December, 1959), 116.

study of both the community and the child. The real effectiveness of any punishment depends upon the attitude of the child toward it.

The form of punishment children dread most is segregation or isolation. The trouble maker does not like to live alone. When he is removed from contact with his gang, group, friend, or just others, he soon longs to be back. Most dreaded is that in which the wrongdoer is not allowed to eat lunch with others.

By all means the teacher must avoid putting punishment on a personal basis. She should act in keeping with the dignity of her position. She should keep herself calm and stand outside the problem. She should consider the cause, the behavior, and the child before she acts.

The teacher should avoid sarcasm, ridicule, scolding, nagging, and threats. Threats that cannot be carried out should never be made. If a threat seems necessary, the teacher should use one that can be carried out, and then she should carry it out. A threat that weakens the teacher in the eyes of her class is that of sending the child to the office. "The teacher should never even hint that she is not the ultimate guiding spirit within her own four walls."²⁹

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Amsterdam, Constructive Classroom Discipline and Practice, p. 82.

Some Types of Misbehavior and Appropriate Actions

There are no set forms of punishment that always get results with all children. But successful teachers have found that with many children certain methods of procedure have proved very successful with specific behaviors or misdemeanors.

Talking is one type of behavior that is not considered serious, but when it is disturbing, some action needs to be taken. The elementary forms of simple control will usually get the desired results. But when these fail, removal from the group becomes an automatic block for talking. After a reasonable length of time, the child who has been removed should be brought back to the group and given a chance to adjust himself. When he returns, the teacher should occasionally ask him a direct question so that he will not feel shut out because of his transgression.³⁰

One sixth-grade teacher finds it desirable to allow a child who disturbs others by talking to write her a note explaining why he talked. This gives the child a chance for self-analysis. Other teachers allow children at times to write down what they said when they transgressed. This helps them to see how trivial a seemingly urgent communication was.

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Cutts, Practical School Discipline and Mental Hygiene, p. 81.

Undue activity, such as running in the hall, skipping stairs, and sliding down bannisters, must be controlled for the sake of safety if none other. The child should understand the reasons for controlling this type of behavior. This will have been discussed when safety rules for the group were set up in the beginning. The teacher may then ask him to return to the starting point and walk to the room.³¹ The teacher should avoid punishing the whole class for the offence of one, two, or three members. She should have only the offenders to perform this remedial act. Student monitors as an outgrowth on the work of safety are sometimes used effectively in helping control overactivity outside the classroom.³²

Over activity inside the classroom that has a physical cause resulting from some type illness or abnormal growth pattern should be handled with respect to the cause. The teacher certainly should be informed through parent-teacher conferences, and in extreme cases the teacher may need to confer with the doctor also. It is not the teacher's job to punish the child for behavior that is beyond his control. But she may be able to help him learn to live with a condition that is his. The teacher can do much in adjusting

³¹
Ibid., p. 86.

³²
Ibid.

the curriculum to the needs of these special children so as to provide some needed activity. A rocking chair brought into the room for certain problem cases resulting from abnormal growth has been successfully used to relieve muscular tension.

An accident by definition is not intentional. All children should be instructed in the proper handling of paints and other materials. When an accident occurs, the teacher may see that further instruction on how to be more careful is necessary. The punishment that naturally grows out of the problem is to require the child to restore order and in some cases pay for the wasted material.

Pushing and shoving in line is a violation that some children find hard to overcome. When this occurs, the teacher might have the wrongdoer step out of line and tell her what standard he forgot to follow. When the line forms the next time, she might ask him why he was told to wait. If he persists in pushing, after these measures have been used, the teacher might allow him to remain seated for the length of time it takes for the class to move to the playground.

It should be remembered that some tagging or punching is normal behavior for middle graders. By so doing they are indicating friendships. Such normal behavior should be recognized as such and ignored.

Physical attack, such as fighting, usually takes place on the playground or after school. While it does not occur in the classroom, the problem is brought into the classroom and must be reckoned with. Fighting usually happens as a result of disputes over games or irritations due to difficulties out of school. Removal or separation puts an immediate stop to violence and gives a chance for the offenders to calm down and consider causes. A private conference with both parties gives each a chance to tell his side of the story. The teacher then has the opportunity of pointing out the need for peace and self-control. The physical danger involved in fighting should also be pointed out. The Golden Rule may be emphasised to good effect in many instances. It should not be necessary to send these children to the principal except when it involves family feuds or when two grades are involved.³³

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Cheating may be an individual problem or it may be a group problem. But in either case it will do little good to punish the cheater without trying to discover the cause. The teacher who gives a zero on the test possibly helps the child very little by so doing. A conference with the child will help to reveal the cause. It is usually an effort to get a passing grade or a higher mark. In the

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³³
Ibid., p. 83.

conference, the teacher has a chance to point out the wrong involved and help the child to see the need for honesty. The teacher may find that the child needs special help. Supplying of needed help is often the answer to the problem of cheating. This also has the added advantage of showing sympathetic interest in the child, which has a healing effect. Many children have reported that special help has cured them of cheating.³⁴

Stealing is a relative of cheating. The motive for stealing is usually an effort to obtain money when a family has limited means or the child is denied an allowance. It will do little good to administer severe punishment, even though the act is a serious one. By no means should it be regarded as trivial. The school's job is to help build character. Stealing is evidence that the home has failed in its teaching duty, and the school's job becomes a bigger one.

The individual conference can be a source of help in the changing of attitudes if the teacher makes a serious approach to the problem of stealing. Children must be taught the moral involved. The Golden Rule can help the child to see how he has wronged the other person. To ask the child to return the stolen property will be punishment

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Ibid., p. 96.

for him. Sometimes a teacher is able to assist a child in finding ways to earn pocket money of his own so that he may more easily rehabilitate himself.

SUMMARY

In this paper constructive classroom discipline has been discussed as an educative process in which children learn to live together as a social group under the adult guidance of the classroom teacher within a democratic organization, the ultimate goal being that of self-direction of the individual for wholesome living in society as an adult as well as in the society of the school. Important in the pursuing of this goal are the educational qualifications, personality, and self-confidence of the teacher. Better control can result from preventive measures involved in teacher personality and classroom management than through remedial action. Self-discipline can best grow in a friendly co-operative climate that is rooted in mutual respect.

Punishment, though necessary, should be considered as a last resort and never as the approach to the problem. Milder forms of punishment are usually more corrective than the more severe forms, including corporal punishment. The one constant rule is that the teacher determine the cause of bad behavior and that she be consistent in her action--the child is a human being.

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