'I must respect my teacher, I must respect my teacher, I must respect my teacher ...' The Merits of Giving Out Lines as a Punishment

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INTRODUCTION

Once again the media have placed an individual school in the spotlight by publishing negative aspects of its report by the Education Review Office (ERO). In this case, the school has been criticised for handing out lines to students as a punishment. While one could question whether publishing ERO reports is warranted given such negative publicity for the school (and is indeed a punishment in itself), nevertheless, it has prompted me to ponder the age-old practice of 'giving lines' to students (for example, making a child write out 500 times, 'I must not call out in class').

PUNISHMENT

Current thinking indicates that the practice of giving out lines has 'had its time' in the same way that it is no longer considered appropriate for teachers to send students out onto the sports field to do 20 press ups for talking in class. Most people now believe that the 'punishment should fit the crime', but let's dissect this statement a little further. First of all, what is punishment? Punishment is used to weaken behaviour by employing consequences that allow negative conditions to be introduced or experienced as a consequence of the behaviour. Rappoport (2005) explains that punitive school policies typically result in a passive experience, demanding little or no participation by the offending student. The punished student often feels resentful, alienated, trapped and disconnected from the school community. With little motivation to improve, the student's relationship with his or her teacher and school deteriorates even further. Furthermore, punishment does not help offenders buy into their responsibility for their own learning and behaviour or for treating other people with respect (Rappoport, 2005).

While punishment such as time out in detention to write lines may suppress or stop the behaviour at that particular time, it also stops any chance of teaching new behaviours (Ayres & Hedeen, 1997). The idea of teaching students appropriate behaviour is an area that is often overlooked. As teachers it is quite easy for us to point out to students the behaviour we *don't* want (for example, don't swing on your chair; don't call out; don't talk) but we need to ensure that we spend just as much time pointing out to students the behaviour we *do* want. For some students too, rather than just pointing it out to them, we need to make a conscious effort to actually teach the appropriate behaviour.

As we understand more about certain students and their challenging behaviours, we become better able to prevent problems from happening and

can actively teach new skills to replace the challenging behaviours. Although prevention and teaching are the most effective change agents, there will be times when teachers need to respond to inappropriate behaviours that they cannot have prevented. But when we do need to respond, this can be done in a positive and supportive manner rather than resorting to punishment (Ayres & Hedeen, 1997).

DISCIPLINE

Therefore, an alternative view to punishment is discipline. You could ask what is the difference between punishment and discipline? According to Bill Rogers, a well-known leader in the field of behaviour management, discipline is the way that adults lead, guide, encourage, support and direct students to thoughtful, considerate and responsible behaviour (Rogers, 1998). It is not about punishment, although the concept of behavioural consequences is a vital part of discipline. Discipline has an educational focus, therefore Rogers considers thoughtful discipline to be preventative as well as corrective, because it has a protective and preparing function in its capacity to teach students about both their rights and their responsibilities (Rogers, 1998).

The metaphor that 'the punishment should fit the crime' raises negative connotations of punishment in comparison to the guiding function of discipline, which promotes positive behaviour. Instead, Rogers (1998) suggests that we ask: 'Is the consequence related to the behaviour for which we are connecting consequences to?' You could say this is merely a play on words but the language offers two different ways of responding to behaviour. The challenge for teachers is to seek ways to make the consequences fair and related to the disruptive, inappropriate or wrong behaviour – and this is not always easy to do (Rogers, 1998). Furthermore teachers' understanding of what causes inappropriate behaviour influences their understanding of how to change it (Glynn & Berryman, 2005).

Rather than using punishment and control to enforce school rules and behavioural compliance, discipline (and even better, self-discipline) needs to be taught as a subject and not acquired as a by-product of compliance (Kemple, 1995; Varnham, 2005). Many students with challenging behaviour believe that the reasons for their inappropriate behaviour are to do with factors outside their control (for example, 'Johnny made me do it' or 'The teacher hates me, that's why I'm always in trouble'). When students feel this way about their behaviour they believe there is nothing they can do to change it. We need to teach students to see they are responsible for their behaviour, which puts them in a position to change it. In other words, by promoting self-monitoring and teaching students self-instruction strategies they will learn to monitor and evaluate their own classroom behaviour (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000).

POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORTS

Students require purposeful learning. They will accept rules (while they may not like them) if they are viewed as fair and necessary and similarly they will accept penalties if they are perceived to be authentic and logical consequences of their behaviour (Wayson & Lasley, 1984, as cited in Eggen & Kauchak, 2001). Rogers (1998) identified four key requirements for establishing an effective consequence for children. The consequence should:

1. Relate in some way to the disruptive behaviour
2. Have a degree of seriousness and be reasonable
3. Keep the respect of the student intact, and
4. Allow some appropriate right of reply

Rogers' first requirement, that the consequence relates in some way to the disruptive behaviour, is probably the main reason why it is no longer deemed appropriate to give lines to students. Rather than have students write lines as a punishment, Rogers (1997) suggests that it can be more constructive for them to write about their behaviour. The English curriculum will then become part of the 'consequential discipline' rather than a meaningless activity because students have the opportunity to write down:

- What happened? (To cause them to be in detention)
- What rule or right was affected/broken? (By their behaviour)
- What is your side of the story? (How do you see the situation?)
- What can you do to fix things up, change things?
- How can your teacher help?

The consequence must have a degree of seriousness and be reasonable. For example, there is a big difference between a consequence for calling out and a bullying incident (Rogers, 1998). Therefore, consequences will vary significantly in relation to the degree of seriousness about the behaviour at issue. At all times, however, the consequences must be firm but fair (Curwin & Mendler, 1999) and students must understand the reasons behind the rules if they are to be expected to take responsibility for their own behaviour (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001).

It is important to keep the student's self esteem intact by maintaining the dignity of all involved and ensuring that the student who has transgressed is not publicly humiliated (Ayres & Hedeen, 1997; Rogers, 1998). Drewery (2005) suggests that in some schools, 'some people in authority can be quite overbearing in their application of their power over students' (p. 7). She further implies that some teachers expect students to respect them when they do not always model the same behaviour themselves. There is no place for sarcasm and disrespect in teaching because it is unprofessional, unnecessary and unacceptable (Rogers, 1998). The reality is, however, that teachers can create the contexts, tasks and teaching strategies that either facilitate or inhibit students' management of their own behaviour and learning, as well as their engagement in school – and teachers (through their own behaviour) can exert either a positive or a negative influence on the behaviour of their students (Glynn & Berryman, 2005). Ginott (1972) sums this up nicely:

> As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a student's life miserable or joyous. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a student humanised or dehumanised.

Rogers' final point is that an effective consequence must allow an appropriate right of reply, while still exercising the consequential follow-up and follow-through. Further to his earlier suggestion of getting students to write (or

talk, in the case of younger students) about their behaviour, Rogers (1997: 162) has developed a 4W form (four questions beginning with *what*) for this purpose:

- What I did against our class or school rules
- What rights (or rules) I broke or infringed
- What is my explanation?
- What I think I should do to fix things up or work things out

Similar to Rogers, Canter and Canter (1993: 38) have devised a 'Think Sheet' for sharing with students. On this sheet students answer the following statements:

- This is the rule I broke:
- I chose to break this rule because:
- Who was bothered when I broke this rule?
- This is what I could have done instead:

Unlike the mindless 'dishing out' of lines, these approaches are helpful because they (1) give students a right of reply; (2) provide students with a chance to think through what happened; (3) refocus the students' attention back to the right or rule affected by the behaviour; (4) give a basis for further teacher-student dialogue; and most of all (5) concentrate on what the restitutional outcome ought to be (Rogers, 1997: 89). To further encourage students' ownership of their behaviour it may be appropriate to negotiate consequences, where teachers work through with the student what needs to happen as a result of the inappropriate, disruptive, rights-infringing behaviour. Obviously any hostile, aggressive or repeated disruptive behaviour would have non-negotiated consequences (Rogers, 1998). However, the development of a climate that provides for and supports learning and development will lessen the need for overt guidance and control (Ministry of Education, 1998: 14).

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

The discussion so far confirms Glynn and Berryman's argument (2005) that 'there are positive alternatives to introducing unpleasant or punishing consequences in order to reduce undesirable or unacceptable behaviour' (p. 307). Restorative practices (originating out of the criminal justice system) are a more recent alternative in New Zealand schools and offer a new way of promoting school discipline. The key constructs of restorative justice are: respect, fairness, support and affirmation (versus shame), belonging, participation and empowerment, responsibility and repair, reintegration, healing and forgiveness (Maxwell, 2005). Putting this within a school context, Barnes (as cited in Rappoport, 2005) describes restorative practices as a set of practical responses to student behaviour and proactive strategies that strengthen accountability and school culture. These practices (for example, restorative conversations and for more serious infringements, restorative conferences) focus on restoring a healthy, respectful relationship between the aggrieved parties and the offending student by actively involving the offender in directly repairing, or restoring, the damage his or her actions have caused. Being accountable to their victims and to others affected by their misdeeds puts the responsibility back on the student, and most importantly, it helps to teach students how to handle situations differently the next time (Rappoport, 2005).

Similar to the behaviour modification philosophy espoused by Bill Rogers, the approach emphasises positive support within strong limits. Instead of being further isolated from the community, offending students are expected to face the people they have wronged, listen to the harm caused by their inappropriate behaviour and find an acceptable way to make amends. Their actions restore their relationship with their school community (Rappoport, 2005). Drewery (2005) supports this view also. As one of the principles of restorative justice is respect, she says that 'working restoratively is to work in ways that do not undermine the agency of the other', in this case, the student (p. 6).

CONCLUSION

Rather than simply stating the problem with punishment, this paper attempts to offer some solutions to the problem by providing positive alternatives for teachers. Using the practice of giving out lines as an example of 'what not to do' discussion then centred on how to employ consequences that are more effective for students. Taking a positive approach to behaviour management is more likely to teach children to become responsible for their own behaviour.

In conclusion, Maxwell (2005) indicates that values derived from restorative justice theory can provide a source for clarifying the standards to which we aspire to in New Zealand. Within the education context, Drewery (2005) believes that restorative practices in schools are not just about discipline, but about building community, thus offering an opportunity to consider the role of education in society. Are these aspirations worth aiming for? I think so! If we want teaching to be a nurturing process then we as teachers must aim to manage behaviour in ways that are respectful of both students and their educators.

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