

PUNISHMENTS BOON OR BANE?

How good is it?

Punishment as a word evokes fear and repulsion. In fact, it is the most misunderstood and emotionally explosive of the behaviour modification techniques. And yet when used in education, it has only positive purposes. It is an intervention used to decrease the frequency of or eliminate inappropriate behaviours. As such there are varied opinions about its desirability as a teaching technique.

Wood and Lakin (1978) researchers in behaviour management in the classroom give several reasons for avoiding the use of punishment:

- It does not eliminate but merely suppresses the behaviour.
- It does not provide a model for the desired acceptable behaviour
- Aggression on the part of the practitioner presents an undesirable model.
- The emotional result of punishments may be fear, tension stress, or withdrawal.

In addition, physical punishment may result in physical harm to the child, although such harm is unplanned.

Punishment in the perception of the punished child is frequently associated with the punisher rather than with the unacceptable behaviour. As a result, the punished child's reaction may be avoidance and dislike of the punisher rather than that the student is enabled to realize that in every punishment meted out, the intention is only to change some unacceptable behaviour and not to placate the teacher.

When the punishment is educative?

A punishment is educative when it teaches the student the need for changed behaviour. For this to happen a few conditions are necessary:

- ❖ Punishment must not stem from the vindictive or angry feeling of the teacher or other authority. It is nothing to do with feelings at all, but should be seen as a logical consequence of rule-breaking.
- ❖ When rules are broken, the teacher will not have to pose as a flouted authority; that is to play into the hands of the pupils' own immaturity. Our pupils have to learn that rules and punishments are necessary, not because adults want them, but because any form of human life logically requires them.
- ❖ Frame a contract together with students as far as possible. So they know that for specific misbehaviors specific punishments would naturally follow. This would also make

the punishment somewhat impersonal. It would be sad if the students were to pretend that punishment is just 'them', the authorities, taking it out on 'us', the pupils.

Few lines on punishment from 'Don Bosco'.

This well-known educationist of the 19th century was more a practitioner than a theorist. He has written only a few pages on education of which only few lines are on punishments. We reproduce it here in full.

1. An educator should seek to win the love of his pupils if he wishes to inspire fear in them. When he succeeds in doing this, the withholding of some token of kindness is a punishment which stimulates emulation, gives courage and never degrades.
2. With the young, punishment is whatever is meant as a punishment. It has been noticed that in the case of some boys a reproachful look is more effective than a slap in the face would be. Praise of work well done, and blame in the case of carelessness are already a reward or punishment.
3. Except in very rare cases, corrections and punishments should never be given publicly, but always privately and in the absence of companions; and the greatest prudence and patience should be used to bring the pupil to see his fault, with the aid of reason and religion.
4. To strike a boy in any way, to make him kneel in a painful position, to pull his ears, and other similar punishments, must be absolutely avoided, because the law forbids them, and because they greatly irritate the boys and degrade the educator.
5. The authority shall make sure that the disciplinary measures, including rules and punishments, are known to the pupils, so that no one can make the excuse that he did not know what was commanded or forbidden.

Rapport, the alternative

'Punishments are actually a defeat for the teacher', says Mr. Frederick Gomes, a teacher for more than twenty years, 'for it demonstrates that the teacher has failed to maintain rapport with the students. If rapport is there, then punishments become irrelevant.

...Sometimes of course the class may not exhibit the so-called perfect discipline, (which is more like the discipline of the graveyard) but certainly there will not be indiscipline."

'Rapport invites participation, and the few lightheaded ones will ultimately fall in line', he says. 'What a teacher needs a lot more of is humour

...Among the different kinds of punishments, the physical is usually forgotten by the students in course of time. But tongue-lashing is never forgotten. Nor even forgiven. And the greatest failure for a teacher is not to be forgiven by a student. The only way is to go to him/her and apologize, feels Gomes.

Cool Mrs. N.G.

Mrs. N.G. who teaches in a prestigious hill school has sent us the following anecdote: "It happened in 1989. The spoiled son of a wealthy man, well known for his mischievous ways entered my house with his father. The angry father scolded him in front of me for his carelessness and inattention. When he had finished I asked him permission to speak to the boy alone. When he had gone out I patted the boy gently and told him, 'I know you are a capable boy. One day you will be somebody great. I am sure of it. Don't take your father's words too seriously'. These words really worked like magic. Every day from then on he used to tell me, 'Miss I want to become an Engineer'. It is true. He is now doing Electronics Engineering."

What does Mrs. N.G. think about indiscipline students? 'I tell myself "After all they are children, I should not be harsh with them". This thought helps her do whatever is best, she says.

If punishment is to be used, the following guidelines could help:

Specify and communicate the punishable behavior to the children while discussing classroom rules for behavior.

Post the rules where the children can see them; review them with the group frequently.

Models of acceptable behavior should be presented.

ImmEDIATE application of the punishment, without dilly dallying.

Be consistent in the way punishments are given bothers with respect to the students as well as the nature of the behaviour. Nothing makes punishments ineffective as much as whimsical decisions/favoritisms.