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Social Justice Issues in Parenting & Teaching:
Applying a Smart Alternative to Rewards and Punishments

Abstract

Children have long been exposed to punishments with the intention of making them disciplined, productive, and fulfilled members of society. However, the use of physical discipline and behavior modification can actually be counterproductive, causing individuals to develop self-destructive motives, a decreased sense of self-worth, and the inability to effectively regulate their lives. The social justice issues discussed will include the rights of children to receive adequate, effective, and nurturing care from adults. This presentation will take a look at the care that children have long deserved to receive using the psychology, intrapsychic humanism. The presenter will explain the psychological development and needs of children, the pitfalls of behavior modification and physical discipline, and practical alternatives for parents and teachers that have long depended on using rewards and punishments in regulating children's behaviors. The information presented will be based on an extensive literature review, consultation with practicing social workers that have successfully used these principles, and the presenter's clinical experience.

Children are the citizens most vulnerable to social injustice as they cannot adequately identify and state their social and emotional needs. Further, if children recognize that their needs are not being met and they question or disagree with their caregiver (i.e. parents, teachers, etc.), they are viewed as disrespectful or manipulative and often subject to punishment. Indeed, the philosophy that “mother knows best” has been around as long as concepts of behavior modification—one of the most infamous quotes in the Bible is “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” The common thought is that children need to be silenced and unreflectively follow adult instruction and the best way to achieve this compliance is through the coercive use of rewards and punishments. In this conference, I would like introduce the revolutionary psychology, intrapsychic humanism, as an alternative to this paradigm. Using the principles outlined in *Smart Love*, parents and teachers will be able to be in touch with their true caregiving ideals, and children will be able to receive the care that they deserve (Pieper & Pieper, 1998).

The Misuse of Consequences

When one goes into most classrooms or households with children, one will undoubtedly hear an adult threatening a child with “consequences.” Certainly, all actions have consequences—I would not argue that. But, there is a danger when adults impose

artificial consequences (in the form of rewards and punishments) to children which is a practice that has gone unquestioned for much too long. Thus, my presentation would initially include a review of the relevant and most recent literature on behavior management both in the classroom and at home.

Behavior modification is the basis of many parenting programs and books. Many authors emphasize the necessity of consequences in getting the child to act appropriately. These techniques range from loss of privileges to corporal punishment to more 'creative' solutions such as putting hot sauce on the tongue of a child who swears.

Behavioral modification is seen extensively in the literature regarding classroom management (Chicago Board of Education, 2003; Denig, 1999; Lovitt, 1994; Lewis & Colvin, 1998; Morgan, 1994; Schmid, 1998). These approaches take a number of forms. One clearly delineates the consequences based on behavior, which include parent-teacher conferences, suspensions, and expulsions (Chicago Board of Education, 2003). Others give suggestions about appropriate reinforcers and punishments for certain behaviors and talk about how to effectively use schedules of reinforcement to maintain positive behaviors and eliminate negative behaviors (Lovitt, 1994; Morgan, 1994; Schmid, 1998). Finally, another explains the utilization of group contingency in which the group must behave appropriately in order for the individual to earn a positive consequence (Lewis & Colvin, 1998). Behavior modification takes other forms, including writing a child's name on the board when he/she misbehaves or having a reward chart. Behaviorism has clearly infected the practices of many education personnel and is probably utilized in a majority of classrooms.

The Pitfalls of Behaviorism

Next the presentation would include a review of the literature of opponents of behavior modification (Freiberg & Driscoll, 1996; Pieper & Pieper, 1999; Kohn, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999; Tyson, 2000). The use of behaviorism has continued because on the surface, behavior may actually change although usually that change is not long-lasting (Kohn, 1991). However, there are several detrimental effects to using behavior modification on children. First, when a child is acting out, he/she is likely experiencing a loss (i.e. he did not pass his test or is not receiving his caregiver's attention). A punishment, such as a detention or a his/her name on the board, imposes two losses—both the loss intended by the consequence (i.e. time, if detention; shame, if name on the board) but also the loss of the relationship with the teacher as the child feels the teacher is judging his/her behavior and disapproves of him/her (Pieper & Pieper, 1998). With this high number of losses, a child's self-destructive motives that caused the initial acting out are likely to increase. Thus, rewards and punishments may eliminate an immediate behavior, but they do not address the child's inner pain or loss that led to the acting out. This pain and loss are simply swept under the carpet, building up until the child's destructive motives reach a devastating level.

Additionally, the use of punishment or rewards may coerce the child into behaving in a certain way, but the sole motivation in behaving appropriately is an illogical consequence (i.e. getting a "gold star" for wearing their uniform or sitting in detention for swearing in class). When this occurs, the child misses out on the intrinsic pleasure in behaving appropriately and becomes dependent on a manipulated

environment in making choices about behavior (Tyson, 2000). Other authors have even speculated that the use of social control inherent in custodial and behavioral practices may be unethical (Petr, 1992).

Another pitfall often seen in the use of approaches based on social control is the overestimation of the youth's ability. Petr (1992) argues that adults frequently do not understand the world of a child and often make wrong assumptions about a child's capabilities during different developmental phases. Pieper & Pieper (1998) wrote an entire volume laying out appropriate expectations for all ages of development. They emphasize that parents must not place adult expectations onto children. Further, ironically, it is not uncommon for adults to use a loud voice tone when giving out punishments and lose control over their emotions; however, this behavior would deserve a punishment if exhibited by the child.

Finally, one must question the assumptions upon which behavior modification is built (Kohn,). Assumptions that would be questioned in this conference include:

- If the adult is not in *control* of the class/home, the most likely result is chaos. (Note: there is a difference between structure and control)
- Children need to be told exactly what the adult expects of them. It would be disastrous if children are asked to reflect on how they should conduct themselves instead of simply being told.
- You need positive reinforcement to keep a child to do well.
- Children are fundamentally selfish, aggressive, and disobedient and need to external controls.
- Children choose their behavior. They are aware fully aware of consequences and adverse consequences will deter future misbehavior.

The Principles of Intrapsychic Humanism

Founded on the most up-to-date child development research, intrapsychic humanism is based on the premise that all individuals are born with an innate desire to experience pleasure in conflict-free caregiving relationships and regulate their own lives (Pieper & Pieper, 1991). However, many people have not experienced such a caregiving relationship, and have perceived their abusive or neglectful relationship with their parents as ideal. In idealizing that relationship, they may have developed motives for painful experiences that have the unconscious meaning of pleasure. Thus, an effective intervention involves the parent or teacher providing the child with a conflict-free relationship with the aim that the client will eventually develop a consciously self-regulated and conflict free inner well-being (Pieper & Pieper, 1998; Tyson, 2000). Thus, the adult using the intrapsychic humanism approach to teaching would view herself as more of a partner with the child than an authority figure.

Smart Love introduces the concept of "loving regulation," which is a response to the critics that say the only alternative to behavior modification is permissiveness. The parent or teacher using loving regulation recognizes that a child may not be able to regulate his or her motives and behaviors and may require guidance. However, instead of punishing the child for being unable to regulate his behaviors, the adult supports the child while at the same time protecting the child. The adult provides this support without adding to the child's unhappiness or interfering with the child's development of inner happiness. It believes that the best way to respond to misbehavior is with warmth and

understanding and that adding an unrelated consequence will cause the child to think that the adult wants her to suffer. For instance, the child who is playing by the electrical socket should not be spanked to teach her to stay away, but rather the parent can let the child know that he is concerned for her safety and take her into another area.

Towards Social Justice: Child Care Using Intrapsychic Humanism

The question that most parents and educators would ask is: how can you control a home or classroom without punishment or rewards? The response of one who practices intrapsychic humanism is “try it!” Using the understanding developed from the research that has shaped the theory of intrapsychic humanism, the adult can effectively recognize her student’s motives, ways of reacting to those motives, and ways to develop the student’s autonomous ability to make positive decisions. Due to spatial constraints, the author will not detail the principles of intrapsychic humanism, but will provide the basic steps in creating a climate conducive to the development of constructive motives in students.

For instance, let us look at a classroom using intrapsychic humanism. The development of a classroom based on patience, care, and mutual respect begins when a teacher asks her students to define the rules of the classroom. Then, he/she can ask the students what should happen if rules are not followed. If the students respond punitively (because it has been ingrained in them) such as “send them to the principal’s office,” the teacher could respond, “What do you think someone is feeling when they break the rules? How do you think sending them out of the room would feel?” This will give students a greater awareness into their own misbehavior as well as others. The teacher would also be aware of ensuring that the child’s needs to feel like he/she belongs are met, ensuring the child feels appreciated, that he has some decision-making abilities, and that the system is fair.

When a child does act out, a teacher has a number of potential interventions that do not involve punishment. The teacher can acknowledge the loss experienced by the youth and gently redirect behavior; this very acknowledgement can suffice the youth’s need for care and they regain composure. If the child continues to disrupt the class or is a danger to him/herself or others, then the teacher can send him out of the room to a *caring* adult in the school who will help calm the child down. When sending the student out, the teacher can phrase it in such a way that it does not seem like a punishment and that the student is welcome to come back once they have calmed down.

In addition, the most vital component is the ongoing caregiving relationship that the teacher provides to the student. If a child is in need of extra attention, the teacher can offer to meet the student after school or during lunch. The teacher demonstrates her care by responding positively to the student’s constructive motives, helping them mourn losses that will likely arise throughout the school year, and offer her unconditional, nonjudgmental support to the child.

Additional Underlying Research

This conference will additionally be based on research as undertaken by proponents of intrapsychic humanism, most notably by the staff at the Smart Love Parenting Center, an organization in Chicago that is actively expanding the use and knowledge of smart love. Additionally, the practice of intrapsychic humanism and smart

love has expanded internationally, in particular to Lithuania. Loyola faculty member Dr. Tyson is involved in data collection for that project, and this presenter will have access to that information. Finally, this presenter can discuss his own naturalistic research through use of intrapsychic humanism and smart love in clinical practice, which is currently being consolidated into a manuscript for publication. The presenter has developed smart love parent groups for teen fathers at his current jobs and frequently uses smart love principles in consulting with parents and teachers in his role as a school social worker.

Conclusion

This conference can provide an opportunity for individuals to question social justice issues related to parenting and teaching. Child-rearing is often an area that is not reflected on. Since people tend to idealize the care that they have received as children (a fundamental belief of intrapsychic humanism), they do not question their own practices in raising children or teaching. Currently, we live in a society that still allows, accepts, and even encourages spanking (listen to the radio morning shows and you hear DJs continuing to proclaim the benefits of corporal punishment). Is it fair and just to spank a two-year-old for trying to touch and outlet? Is it fair and just to put hot sauce on a three-year-old's tongue for repeating the swear words his mother said? Is it fair and just to keep a student out of school (i.e. suspended) because he swore at the principal? This presentation would question the effectiveness of 'consequences,' the idea of free will (aberrant behavior is arguably the result of unconscious forces as explained by intrapsychic humanism), and most importantly assumptions we hold about child-rearing as a society. Additionally, a new understanding and concrete, practical tips for implementation will also be discussed.

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