

Hi Karen,

I'm interested in your work around the "Thoughtful Schools Project." I'm the principal at Tapping Primary School. At Tapping we do not use rewards, punishments or unwarranted praise to manipulate student behaviour. We want students to become self-motivated learners and emotionally capable therefore we have removed any practice from the school that works against this vision.

As you would be aware most schools have a Behaviour Management Policy. The title itself implies that students must be managed and controlled. At Tapping the policy is referred to as Behaviour Education and Self-Management. We are educators; we need to educate. I believe behaviour should be treated in the same manner as Mathematics, English or other curriculum areas. If a student is stuck on a particularly difficult problem in Mathematics, does the threat of punishment or the promise of reward help the student to solve the problem? Why then is this our major strategy when dealing with student behaviour?

Like other areas of learning, behaviour is shaped by the sum total of regular and frequent lessons that create small but meaningful changes over a long and sustained period of time. At Tapping we believe it takes effort and patience to work respectfully with children to develop skills of self-control and a commitment to behaving responsibly. It takes no time, no effort, no talent and no patience to simply announce, "Do this and I will give you that."

The research around offering rewards or using punishments to produce lasting change suggests that it fails miserably. It rarely produces the desired result because it does not alter the attitudes and emotional commitments that underlie behaviour. Rewards and punishments will get obedience and short-term compliance. However, if the objective is to develop careful thinkers with good values who can maintain positive relationships and are persistently self-motivated, then rewards and punishments are virtually useless. *Do this and you will get that*, turns out to be bad news whether our goal is to change behaviour or to improve performance.

Supporters of the push for harsher penalties for students who misbehave usually make the argument that in the real world if you rob a bank you will go to jail or if you speed you will get a fine. So, our kids had better get used to being punished at school or home if they cross the line. This kind of thinking not only develops the lowest form of moral reasoning in our children, it also teaches them to only act in self-interest. Surely, we are obliged to help children develop a moral compass?

I believe that if we are concerned about what kind of people our children will become then there are no shortcuts. Good values have to be grown from the inside out. Rewards and punishments can change behaviour for a while, but they cannot change the person that engages in the behaviour. No behaviour manipulation ever helped a child develop a commitment to becoming a caring and responsible person. No reward for doing something we approve of ever gave a child a reason for repeating that action other than the desire for the reward itself.

I'm excited that your project will look more closely at behaviour education, not behaviour management. It is time to educate in all subject areas, including the subject of personal and social capabilities (behaviour); which Tapping Primary School considers is the most important subject of all because it is the subject, that affects all others.

If we can contribute to the project, then we are more than willing to do so.

Regards,
Bill Boylan.
Principal, Tapping Primary School