Rewards and Sanctions:
Are they punishing the school climate?

By Moyra Hewlett

Rewards and sanctions are closely tied to the behavioural approach, and based on the scientific theory that rewarded behaviours will be repeated and behaviours that have negative consequences will become extinct (Davis, Florian et al. as cited in Woods, 2008, p. 181). Classroom management strategies based on rewards and sanctions have been shown to decrease the number of discipline problems (Render et al. as cited in Woods, 2008, p. 181), especially for children with emotional and behavioral challenges (Evans, Harden, Thomas and Benefield as cited in Woods, 2008, p. 181), but at what cost? Token Economy systems that use rewards such as certificates or games, and school discipline policies that use “punishment” such as time-outs, or loss of recess minutes are administered to curb disruptive behaviour. In the UK, the rewards/sanctions approach is recommended by the UK government’s Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, as cited in Woods, 2008) and is embedded in the Department for Education and Skills’ teacher training (DfES, as cited in 2008, p. 181).

I have observed a spectrum of behaviour guidance praxes used by educators. Many of these approaches involve some form of reward or sanction, particularly with children who exhibit chronically disruptive behaviours. In the past, I have questioned my approach which often involves rewards such as praise and attention, and veiled attempts at “consequences” that too often border on what might be described as “punishments”. By
educators. Many of these approaches involve some form of reward or sanction, particularly with children who exhibit chronically disruptive behaviours. In the past, I have questioned my approach which often involves rewards such as praise and attention, and veiled attempts at “consequences” that too often border on what might be described as “punishments”. By reflecting on my personal pedagogy of discipline, I am intentionally teasing out “other frames” (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 99) in an effort to reach a deeper understanding of the effects of my praxis on children’s behaviour, and children’s emotional well-being. For the purpose of this meta-analysis of research, I have chosen three studies that vary in their methodology and viewpoints, yet converge on the topic of rewards and sanctions. The first article offers a comparative analysis of group-based and individual reward systems (Token Economy), the second article uses anecdotes to trouble the dogma of a punitive discipline strategy, and the third article analyzes teachers’ attitudes towards an alternative strategy to rewards and sanctions. Collectively, these studies offer a varied perspective on the use and efficacy of rewards and sanctions in a classroom environment.

Behavior Change and Perceptions of Change: Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Token Economy

Token economy is a behaviour management strategy whereby participants earn or lose points according to their behaviour. When a set number of points are collected, the child receives a reward. Points systems are designed to function as rewards and sanctions (Hopewell, McLaughlin & Derby, 2011, p. 701). In the mixed method study entitled Behavior Change and Perceptions of Change: Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Token Economy, the authors measure the efficacy of individual and group contingency programs for reducing disruptive behaviour and compare individual versus whole class methods.

A class of 17 students is selected from a sample of early childhood classrooms located in the south central United States. Data is gathered using an “experimental design” (Reitman, Murphy, Hupp, & O’Callaghan, 2004, p. 21) whereby quantitative data (rating of child behaviour and perceived efficacy of treatment) (2004, p. 1) sampled during “baseline” (no intervention), individual token economy, and group token economy conditions (2004, p. 20) is combined with observations of three selected participants (2004, p. 20). The teachers complete a rating scale (CTRS-R:S) (Conners, as cited in Reitman, et al., 2004) to measure instances of “oppositional” behaviour before and after intervention (2004, p. 21). The teacher’s “acceptability” of the intervention is rated using an Intervention Rating profile (IRP-15) (Reynolds & Kelley, as cited in Reitman, et al., 2004). An increase or decrease in negative behaviour is measured for each child using percentage of time engaged in disruptive behaviours observed by graduate students (2004, p. 27).

The teacher and children receive training in a Token system whereby a velcro ball is moved up as a reward for good behaviour, and down as a consequence of bad behaviour (2004, p. 24). If a child reaches the top 3 levels (good – excellent), they are allowed to play a “rewards target game” (RTG) to win prizes (2004, p. 25). To monitor whole class behaviour, three children are randomly chosen as “stars” by the teacher and these “stars” are responsible for explaining the rules of the classroom and modeling good behaviour. A timer goes off every 10 minutes at which time the teacher moves the ball up or down depending on the behaviour of the stars. (2004, p. 24). For the “individual contingency” component, one of the target participants is the “star” (i.e. his behaviour determines the reward/absence of reward). To monitor group contingency, the 3 participants are observed while another child is the star. The effects of the intervention are quantified by measuring the percentage of time engaged in disruptive behaviours during intervals (10 minutes between buzzer).

The data from direct observations showed a decrease in disruptive behaviours for all three participants; however, data from teacher ratings of behaviour (using CTRS-R: S) showed little change (Reitman, et al., 2004, p. 27). The treatment acceptability data (using IRP-15) differed depending on the child (2004, p. 27) and the teacher concluded that she liked the program and would use it in the future (2004, p. 28).

In summary, the authors maintain that individual and group contingencies reduced behaviour problems in the target children, the individual rewards (the Star contingency) rendered a slight increase in effectiveness (2004, p. 29) and the teacher’s acceptability of the Token Economy Program was variable. The authors acknowledge that their results are not generalizable due to the small, unrepresentative sample (Sidman, as cited in Reitman, et al., 2004, p. 32), and confer that treatment acceptability data and social validity data were “suggestive” rather than conclusive. The potential bias of observational data (i.e. measuring unwanted behaviour from the perspective of the observer) on teacher ratings and treatment acceptability to use in the quantitative data is noted (2004, p. 21). The authors recommend investigation into teacher’s behaviour post and pre-intervention, and teachers’ perceptions of changes in behavior. They also recommend varying the buzzer time between rewards processing (Gross & Ekstrand, as cited in Reitman, et al., 2004, p. 32) and using larger settings where multiple interventions are being employed for children with special needs (2004, p. 31).

Critique

I posit that these glitches in experimental design only scratch the surface. There are other discrepancies to note. Firstly, one must question the choice of participants chosen from an early intervention program providing mental health services to teachers, parents, and children (Reitman, et al., 2004, p. 21). In order to compare “the influence of group and individualized contingencies” the researchers chose a class that contained 3 children who were identified as “at-risk” and a teacher who “might benefit from consultation” (2004, p. 22). This sample may have created problems when rating the success of the intervention as a whole. Parents and/or teachers receiving mental health services may have been more likely to embrace intervention suggested to them by those in “authority” (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 108). The teacher may have been unsatisfied in her job, or perceived as incompetent and therefore
The researchers seem bias in their analysis of quantitative versus interview data; this teacher’s opinion is reduced to a common misconception: “teachers often do not recognize changes in student behaviour” (Reitman, et al., 2004, p. 30). Is this the danger of combining experimental quantitative and qualitative data in mixed method studies? Does this give the researcher the authority to discount the data set that they do not favour? The authors seem to be adopting a knowledge-power relation (MacNaughton and Hughes, 2009, p.107) in which the researcher’s truths are upheld and the teacher’s truths are discounted. “Had this intervention been evaluated in terms of the direct observation data only, the results would have been more clearly supportive” (Reitman, et al., 2004, p. 31). To remedy this, the authors recommend coercing the teacher into submission using “weekly graphs of the target child’s behavior to demonstrate program effectiveness” (2004, p. 30). I posit that the teacher’s ambiguity with regards to the success of the intervention is evidence that the Token System is seriously flawed.

When rewards and sanctions fail: a case study of a primary school rule-breaker.

The second study, When rewards and sanctions fail: a case study of a primary school rule-breaker, focuses on a nine year old boy whose viewpoint is poignantly expressed through observational data. Rules, rewards, and sanctions are examined, and the author strives to generate valid questions around the effectiveness of sanctions in the context of student social structure. The participants involved in the study are Zak, described as a child who “persistently broke school rules” (Woods, 2008, p. 183), his peers, and his teachers (Miss Chahal in year 4 and Mrs Samson in year 5). The setting is a primary school (Woodwell Green) located in a low socioeconomic “deprived area” (2008, p. 183) in London, England. All classrooms at Woodwell Green have established rules, rewards and consequences clearly posted on the wall (2008, p. 185). The method used is purely qualitative, utilizing participant observation, interviews, and questionnaires as data. The purpose of the study is to explicate the “limited success” of the disciplinary measures being implemented in the school, over a two-year period.

Findings

According to Woods, the assumption that sanctions will dissuade disruptive behaviour is oversimplified (2008, p. 185). She identifies three dimensions of discipline, to explain how reward/punishment models function: “emotional responses, trust and fairness, and the peer group” (2008, p. 192).

Children’s emotional responses complicate the discipline policy. When the interviewer asks children in Zak’s class to explain how sanctions make them feel, the responses gathered exhibit a range of emotions such as “sad, unhappy, upset, crying or depressed, ashamed and upset, angry, sad or disappointed with myself, embarrassed” (Woods, 2008, p. 187). If emotions dictate actions, different emotions will lead to different behaviours (2008, p. 187); therefore, sanctions effect children individually, in different ways. This explains why different children behave in different ways when punished (2008, p. 187). Theoretically, the teachers’ consequences contribute to Zak’s feelings of anger and animosity which lead to decreased locus of control, and a tendency to place blame on others.

An absence of blame would then hinder the effectiveness of the sanction (2008, p. 188) since the child, “often did not seem to understand why they were being punished in the first place” (2008, p. 182). The author delves deeper into this consideration stating that this disconnect will cause “resistance” to rules and ultimately revenge-driven behaviours (2008, p. 188).

Also of note, is the concept of “fairness”. The researcher notes that Zak and his peers believe that the teacher’s actions are “unfair, biased against them” (Woods, 2008, p. 189) and that self-regulating in the school yard is often perceived as misconduct. For example, Zak tries to stop a fight, and then gets punished for being involved (2008, p. 189). The teachers’ “lenses of their reputations as rule-breakers,” (2008, p. 189) affects their treatment. Zak advocates for teachers to engage in discussions over disruptive behaviour, envisioning a discourse of behaviour guidance in which the teacher allows the student to explain why they behaved in such a way, and how to resolve conflict. To complicate this further, Woods points out to Zak, that if he fails to behave defiantly this may disrupt his reputation and Zak admits, “if you want respect (from peers) you have to earn it.” (2008, p. 191).
The children develop their own hierarchy in which a child who is punished regularly gains a certain status (‘street credibility’) (Gutherson and Pickard as cited in Woods, 2008, p. 183). Therefore sanctions, in Zak’s case, inadvertently achieve the opposite effect by elevating school yard status (2008, p. 185).

Zak also claims that sanctions can lead to humiliation, which calls into question the effects of punishment on children’s emotional well being (Woods, 2008, p. 192). In summary, the author concludes that “children and their lives are far more complex than the simplistic rules, rewards and consequences framework recognizes” (Woods, 2008, p. 193). The author advocates for extending research into the relationship between teachers and students and teacher’s perceptions of students’ behaviour (2008, p. 194).

Critique

As I am sure the author is aware, the setting of this study could promote researcher bias. Woodwell Green is considered a good school in a bad neighbourhood (Woods, 2008, p. 183). Will the author perceive power relations and ethnic bias because it has a high percentage of diverse cultures? Is she more considerate of racial issues and therefore overly critical of the repercussions of sanctions than she might have been of schools that may represent less diverse cultural backgrounds? Zak is a Muslim child from Somalian dissent. According to Yohani (2010), “immigrants or refugees from difficult situations often face secondary stressors in resettlement countries” (Yohani, 2010, p. 866); therefore, Zak’s perception of fairness and resistance to rules may stem from factors other than a discipline strategy. By doing a comparison analysis at a private school, in a high socioeconomic area of London (there are diverse class systems in London), one might address how these methods (if they are used) affect the “upper class” students.

In order to critique this study, one must uncover the underlying assumptions of the researcher. Dr. Woods seems to favour qualitative evidence to establish the efficacy of a discipline policy; “to demonstrate that any given child’s beliefs, emotions, and actions are as reasonable and warranted by their experience” (Woods, 2008, p. 184). She seems to assume that, despite its prevalence, behaviourist approaches are ineffective (2008, p. 182), yet she distributes stickers and sweets to those who give assent (2008, p. 184).

It is not clear if the researcher addressed those who were the objects of Zak’s “disruptive behaviour”: Zohraiz, (a boy in another class who was bullied by Zak) (2008, p. 185) may have felt that the sanctions were effective if they protected him from victimization. Furthermore, children may not have admitted if the system was favorable to them, for fear of alienating other students. The knowledge-power analysis (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 107) uncovered by Woods is evidenced by the teachers’ adherence to a dogma of rules and the power they yield over the students. Yet there is another power struggle underlying the obvious. Some students, like Zak, gain power by working the sanctions system to benefit their status in the schoolyard. The powerless in this dynamic (for example Zohraiz) are not addressed by the author.

Clearly, the highly qualitative selectiveness of this study is its most stringent limitation. Reitman might argue that the absence of quantitative data from varied sources, “may lead to erroneous conclusions regarding the success or failure of an intervention” (Reitman et al., 2004, p. 20), yet the absence of numerical values is what renders such provocative and convincing data. The validity of these findings lies in the individual truths that are uncovered in this school and the author’s willingness to challenge the status quo. This study paves the way for more qualitative research on the efficacy of school-wide systems of discipline, and the teacher’s ability to control their own environment instead of towing the line of school policy. A critical theorist might use this article to extend research which will problematize “the dynamics of power, politics of identity/institutions of injustice” (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 102). This brings us to the next article.

On improving school climate: Reducing Reliance On Rewards And Punishment

The third study, Reducing Reliance On Rewards And Punishment (2009), focuses on a post structural view of discipline policy, troubling the very core
of extrinsic rewards and sanctions, and teachers’ reliance upon this technique. Conscious Discipline, the method explored, is described as a shift from an “external model” of classroom control to a socio-cultural model based on a collaborative, conflict-analyzing environment (Hoffman, Hutchinson, & Reiss, 2009, p. 3). The teacher is encouraged to view conflict as an opportunity to teach prosocial behaviour and foster the “emotional intelligence” of teachers and students to reduce the need for rewards (2009, p. 3). The system is preventative rather than reactionary.

Hoffman, Hutchinson & Reiss follow two hundred plus elementary school teachers (K – 6) from four schools and four early childhood centers in Florida. Some of the participants voluntarily enrolled in Conscious Discipline workshops. This program is based on the theory of emotional intelligence versus rewards that “disrupt(s) relationships, ignore(s) underlying reasons for behavior, discourage(s) risk-taking, and undermine(s) interest in immediate tasks” (Hoffman, Hutchinson & Reiss, 2009, p. 2).

Emotional intelligence is an individual’s capacity to think reflexively about their emotional thought processes, in order to guide their behaviour (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, as cited in Hoffman, et al., 2009, p. 503) emphasizing pro-social intrinsic motivation over rewards or sanctions. This insight brings the members of the community closer to understanding the consequences of their actions to themselves, others, and the overall social climate of the school (2009, p. 3).

Surveys were completed by 206 teachers who were unfamiliar with Conscious Discipline (CD). The surveys were then repeated with a subset of the participants (117) who attended CD training. The data collected from the surveys was rated according to “levels of emotional intelligence” and attitude towards the “social climate of the school” (Hoffman, Hutchinson & Reiss, 2009, p. 6). The “school climate” is explained as the quality of social relationships in the school and their effect on the children’s holistic development (Haynes, Emmons & Comer as cited in Hoffman et al., 2009, p. 2).

Findings
This study revealed some significant findings about teacher’s attitudes towards discipline, and the relationship between school climate and emotional awareness. Firstly, teachers who were unfamiliar with the practice of Conscious Discipline, and subsequently relied on the behavioral theory of rewards and punishment, scored lower on emotional intelligence than those who had taken the course. In addition, they perceived their school climate to be unsupportive, inflexible, and lacking unity (Hoffman, et al., 2009, p. 8). The pre-workshop group (Group 0) had poor attitudes to student-teacher enhancement and teacher morale. The teachers who took the training sessions and completed the surveys a second time fell into two distinct sets based on their opinion; post-workshop teachers who were (Group 1) or were not (Group 2) fully committed to implementing the Conscious Discipline approach. The results showed that both groups reported a “benefit in improvement” of the school climate, although Group 2 felt they had a higher awareness of emotional intelligence, and reported a boost in the quality of student-teacher relationships (2009, p. 9). Group 1 (pre-workshop, not committed to intervention) perceived the school climate as better, but not the quality of student-teacher relationships, (although it was higher than group 0 for quality of teacher-teacher relationships).

In summary, the researchers conclude that teachers’ assessment of the school climate is inextricably linked to their involvement with the Conscious Discipline program (Hoffman, et al., 2009, p. 5). Based on these results, the researchers advocate for teacher training in classroom management approaches that foster more intrinsic motivation to behave, learn, and excel (2009, p.10).

Critique
The limitations of this study, as indicated by the researchers were “strategic data collection difficulties” (Hoffman, et al., 2009, p. 9), whereby participants in the experimental group could not be paired with those in the control group. Bias may also have been created by participants’ ability to select or decline training. Those willing to take training may have been those seeking change and therefore more prone to positive influences of intervention.

There are many variables in a school setting that cannot be controlled, such as previous training, relationships with students, and years of experience. The researcher attempts to reduce variables by using “teachers of similar educational background and socio-economic status … within the same schools” (Hoffman, et al., 2009, p. 9); however this choice may create issues of generalization. The participants in this study are new teachers. Could novices, who often struggle with classroom management, be more suggestive to new methods, or be more willing to change their methods than experienced teachers?

The researchers claim that prior to completing the course, those teachers who were committed to using the procedure showed an elevation in positive attitude to school climate. This seems redundant, since a consumer’s belief in a product can often improve their attitude towards it. It may have been the perception of increased knowledge that led to a more positive attitude to school life, rather than the CD teacher training.

The researchers in this study seem to hold a negative view of rewards and sanctions and a positive view of conscious discipline (Hoffman, et al., 2009, p. 3). Yet, according to McDaniel, conscious discipline training involves “seven key skills”, one of which is “consequences.” (McDaniel, 2008, p. 283). The term “consequences” is vague. One might contend that any form of consequence, whether it be natural or inflicted by the teacher is, in fact, a system of sanctions and the setting of limits (Ostrosky & Thomas, 2011) may impinge on the right of the child to make their own decisions.

To their credit, the authors advocate for a system that challenges the behaviourist idea described in the Reitman et al. (2004) and Woods (2008) articles, in favour of a more holistic approach. Ostrosky & Thomas claim that Conscious Discipline will “reduce aggressive acts, decrease children’s impulsivity and hyperactivity, and decrease behavior and discipline issues” (2011) by transforming the emotional environment that surrounds
teacher and child. Unlike behaviourist
approaches such as the Token System,
this includes all elements of a child’s life
– teacher relationships, teacher-child
relationships, and parent-child
relationships (Ostrosky & Thomas, 2011).

The authors recommend single case
studies of individuals to monitor the
influence of Conscious Discipline
(Hoffman, Hutchinson & Reiss, 2009, p.
9). Perhaps these authors seek to
“challenge any social habits or customs
that prevent us from changing it” (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009, p.
99) by merging qualitative data with a
postmodern theory to increase validity?
Unlike Reitman et al. (2004), this article
seems to focus on the teacher’s attitudes
and thought processes as a means of
transforming the environment (Levin as
cited in Hoffman, et al., 2009, p. 3).

Comparison
It is my opinion that the last article
attempts a poststructuralist approach by
troubling the status quo, but is hindered
by the use of “reliable” quantitative data
to measure something that, in essence, is
unmeasurable. Although the method
sounds promising, the results are less than
impressive. In contrast, Wood’s
anecdotalis are convincing, despite the
absence of numerical values. She artfully
uses a single case study, riddled with
inconsistencies and complications, to
illustrate the messy mix of effects that
sanctions have on children, thereby
discrediting the gestalt of discipline
appropriated by the UK education system.
As educators, many of us have
experienced that one child who does not
fit into the mould, and cannot be wedged
into a statistical analysis of what works
and what doesn’t. The success of
behaviour guidance must be accountable
to each child, rather than a percentage.
Rating compliance based on episodes of
inappropriate behaviour (as in Reitman
et al., 2004), is akin to rating educational
objectives based on percentages of
improvement. This research method fails
to account for each child, and is
“antithetical to education” (Benjamin
Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational
Objectives, as cited in Bracey, 2006, p.
49).

One must also compare the direction of
focus in these three articles. Reitman
et al. (2004) focus on teacher’s training to
change the behaviour of the children,
Woods (2008) uncovers how discipline is
viewed through the children’s eyes.
Although the final article (Hoffman, et
al., 2009) shifts focus to the teacher’s
emotional intelligence, the researchers
still feel the need to score the
“acceptability” of the program and to
“measure” intelligence (in this case
emotional intelligence) in order to prove
effectiveness. Hoffman, et al. (2009) also
use traditional teacher training methods
(worksshops and booklets) to instigate
transformation, but lumping this holistic
approach under one title—Conscious
Discipline—could be unwise. The
Conscious Discipline package, may be
misinterpreted as a “fix-all” approach
perceived by some teachers as impossible,
or others as the only answer. Rather,
“awareness of cognition and emotion”
must be embedded in the very core of
educational teaching (the teaching of the
teachers) in order for it to hold true in a
hegemonic educational system.

With respect to the methodology, I
prefer qualitative data that contextualizes
the true issues, to instantiations of
disruptive behaviour or intervention
effectiveness. The Reitman et al. (2004)
study concludes that a Token System is
effective. In contrast, the School Climate
study (Hoffman, et al., 2009) is not as
definitive in its effort to label Conscious
Discipline training as effective, or not,
but rather establishes a connection
between teacher’s perception of school
climate and their ability to foster
relationships that promote classroom
management (2009, p. 10). Although
Reitman et al. (2004) assume that
quantitative data is more reliable than
anecdotal, I agree with Woods (2008),
who explains, “the rich, qualitative data
such methods generate can do some
justice to the complexity of children’s
lives, complexity which is often missed
with quantitative methods” (Woods,
2008, p. 184). For Zak, what could be
more important? Woods (2008) validates
children’s feelings, ideas, and strategies
whereas Reitman et al. (2004) ignore
them.

The definition of disruptive
behaviour differs in each of the three
studies and raises question about how
adults view children’s behaviour. In
Reitman et al. (2004), appropriate
behaviors in the classroom are listed as
follows: (a) “Use your inside voice,” (b)
“Use your walking feet,” (c) “Keep your
hands and feet to yourself,” and (d)
“Listen to the teacher” (Reitman et al.
2004, p. 23). Some might question the
use of “all or nothing” rules. Do children
know what “walking feet” are? How do
you keep your hands and feet to yourself
if, for example, you are helping someone?
“Listen to the teacher” implies that the
teacher has absolute power and is always
right. These may be unrealistic goals. In
Wood’s study, disruptive behaviour is
described as “wandering around the
classroom when the child is supposed to
be sitting down, fiddling with equipment,
calling out, and talking to peers” (2008,
p. 181). Is a conversation with peers
always viewed as disruptive? Is there no
chance to build social communication
skills through conversation? The Token
Economy system and the disciplinary
measures in Woodwell Green seem to be
based on Foucault’s “regimes of
truth” (Foucault, as cited in
MacNaughton & Hughes, 2009, p. 104)
– a child who dares to challenge the
“rules” is punished. Key to the Reitman
et al. (2004) and Woods (2008) studies is
the underlying assumption that “truth
carries authority” (MacNaughton &
Hughes, 2009, p. 108). The system of
discipline (in this case dictated by the UK
government’s Office for Standards in
Education) (Ofsted, as cited in Woods,
2008, p. 1) is intended to persuade
children that the rules (no running, no
touching) are the truth. Teacher
knowledge (such as training in a Token
Economy System) and power (authorities
as experts) may benefit the institutions,
but not the children or the teachers
themselves. Perhaps if the rules were
questioned, the behaviours would
change. Is adherence to accountability
driving unrealistic expectations (Genishi
& Dyson, 2009, p. 60)? There may not be
enough time devoted to play in these
settings.

One might also question and
compare the method used to discipline in
these three studies. The Star
Intervention system (Reitman et al.,
2004) seems prosocially dysfunctional. A
complicated procedure in which the
behaviour of three children is used to
measure the behaviour of the entire class, may not be a wise choice for teaching justness and fairness in a classroom. What sort of message pervades when one child is held up as a target for others to judge (Reitman et al., 2004, p. 25)? Woods seems dedicated to challenging these regimes of truth by upholding the views and experience of the child as keener evidence of truth (Woods, 2008, p. 184).

“Think openly about our past and present practices in order to improve on them.” (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2000 p. 99)

The research explored in the three studies has expanded my knowledge-base on punitive approaches, and confirmed my suspicions of the effectiveness of rewards. The study by Woods (2008), drew me into the child’s world and the final study by Hoffman, et al. (2009) offered potential for change. I am intrigued by Conscious Discipline (despite the title) and will explore this further; however, I will not assume that one method can transform a classroom. I will look into other preventative measures such as the Incredible Years Teacher and Child Training Programs (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller, 2008) and The Peace Education Foundation (PEF) socio-emotional development program (Pickens, 2009). Children are individuals and need to be treated as such, as is so richly demonstrated in Woods’ study of Zak (2008).

These research articles have compelled me to analyze my own pedagogy of discipline and heightened my awareness of the tenets of behaviour guidance. Classroom management strategies cannot be separated from their subsequent effect on children or the teachers who implement them. My cathartic search through the dimensions of discipline has led me from the behaviourist era of rewards and sanctions into a more reflexive, poststructuralist quest to trouble the very meaning of rules, and the behaviours they impose. To turn the researcher’s lens from student to teacher, challenging the thought processes of those who care for our children, is — in my opinion — a wise turn of events, and one that should be soldered on. The search for “falsity” in the discipline of rewards and sanctions could be the beginning of a new era of classroom management, where a child’s voice is a catalyst for change.

“Think openly about our past and present practices in order to improve on them.”
MacNaughton & Hughes, 2000

References


