

Discipline in Relation to Creative Teaching

WARREN R. GOOD

The goal of discipline in home and school, this article asserts, should be to develop "the individual who is in the habit of seeking his own success, directing his own destiny and cooperating in the improvement of the general welfare."

THE REAL purpose of modern discipline at home and in school is to guide social development and adjustment. And of course, the kind of guidance we give depends on what we wish to produce. It has not been long since most parents and teachers sought implicit obedience—unquestioning docility and conformity—as evidence of successful discipline. But fortunately this criterion is rapidly giving way to the idea that initiative, self-direction and social conscience are the normal indications of wholesome development.

Rigid control of behavior is, by its very nature, wholly antagonistic to democratic ideals. It represents an autocracy on the part of parents and teachers which conditions children and youth to expecting—and accepting—autocratic control from their "superiors" in later years, and to exercising their own imitative and compensatory despotism over their "inferiors." Similar control in learning and teaching requires that everybody learn the same things at the same time, and reproduce what has been learned, in acceptance of adult judgments of value. Under such conditions it is not the teacher's fault if intellectual curiosity is not eradicated, and initiative, self-direction and creativeness stifled.

All this sort of discipline, this fet-

tering of both mind and body, is out of place in the education of free men. And yet, even the most recent studies indicate that the majority of teachers' problems in discipline, as they see them, are concerned with disorder, disobedience and inattention, rather than with lack of social adjustment and with the recessive behavior that betrays present rejection and forebodes an unhappy if not disastrous future.

Too often discipline is concerned with means of compelling children or older students to act in certain ways, to the neglect of a psychological analysis of the process and its effects. In many a schoolroom pupils sit where they are told, ask permission to speak or to move, and spend the class hour following the teacher's directions or answering his questions. For infractions of this routine or for being tardy in attendance or in meeting assignments they are kept after school, assigned extra tasks, given a lower mark, deprived of normal privileges, required to apologize, isolated or sent to the principal. And what do pupils learn from all this? They learn to take directions, to be prompt, to be quiet and to look to the teacher for the direction

Warren R. Good is a lecturer in education, School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

of activities and conduct. They may also learn to be resentful, to avoid teacher and task and to retaliate with a variety of ingenious annoyances which bring more punishment when the culprits are apprehended—as, often, they are not.

An Analytical View

In other schoolrooms the teacher takes an analytical view of procedures and a diagnostic attitude toward the evidences of maladjustment that are commonly called discipline problems. Pupils sit or move about and talk with others at their own decision, work much of the time at tasks of their own choosing, plan undertakings and execute them with whatever advice they wish to seek. There is no desperate rush to be inside a door before a bell rings, no schedule of punishments and no student police force watching the corridors during class hours. The sin of tardiness is ignored unless it appears to indicate a disregard for responsibility, and then it is treated as a problem in individual adjustment rather than an offense against the school routine. Breaches of good taste in social relations are recognized as being due to ignorance or to an unsatisfied need for recognition, and are the basis for inconspicuous educational treatment rather than punishment. The activities and the discipline display respect for the dignity of the individual, and encourage initiative, curiosity, self-direction and social responsibility on the part of each pupil.

When discipline is based on analysis and diagnosis, the teacher considers his proposed action from the standpoint of the question, "What will the pupil

learn from it?" If he learns merely to comply, or if he learns to resent his treatment, to dislike the school and to wish he could escape it all, the procedure is inferior. If he learns to meet his difficulties rationally, to accept responsibility for the direction of his own activities and conduct, and to act in good faith for the welfare of himself and his group, the procedure contributes to desirable social growth. It is certainly not too broad a generalization to say that penalties and punishments are inferior instruments of discipline. They are much too freely used in schools, largely through the persistence of traditions from European countries which educated the masses for subservience, and partly because they are very obvious expedients requiring less intelligence and skill on the part of the teacher than a rational approach.

Mutual Respect and Tolerance

In a rational approach to discipline, mere compliance is subordinate to understanding. We want our children to understand *why* certain modes of behavior are followed, we want them to question the reasonableness of things, and we want them to have the habits of finding out about things and making up their own minds. That is, we want them to grow up as people who have had much practice in planning for the welfare of themselves and their communities. Furthermore, we want to be sure that the discipline of the home and of the school does not interfere with that development by inculcating an attitude of subservience to the ideas and demands of an older generation. That precaution implies no lack

of respect for one's elders; it suggests, rather, the cultivation of *mutual* respect and tolerance.

Such attitudes toward discipline will in themselves obviate many of the characteristic disciplinary troubles that plague the traditional teacher. They place the emphasis on what the pupil becomes, not merely on how he behaves. Many of the difficulties teachers have with "discipline" are due to conflict between psychological needs of pupils and unwise provisions or requirements in the classroom. Most prominent among these needs are the need for recognition and the need for activity that challenges the interest and the ability of the pupil.

If the pupil who finds no interest in what he is supposed to do is so apathetic as to sit quietly, he causes no trouble and may receive a high rating in citizenship. But if he squirms and talks with his neighbor or invents conspicuous diversions he is likely to be reprimanded or punished. It does not always occur to the teacher that the solution may lie in cooperative direction of activity rather than in coercion. Often the diversions are of such nature as to suggest that the major cause is lack of recognition in the "legitimate" activities of the class. Showing off is merely an inexperienced expression of the commendable desire of us all to be respected and favorably recognized by our fellows. Each of us needs to be important. The pupil who has a low measure of success with academic tasks may seek recognition through disturbances or even in open rebellion. Every pupil needs the opportunity to succeed and to win approval in activities

that are educationally valuable and socially worthy.

Alertness to Personal Justice

Concern with the immediate task should not monopolize so much of the teacher's attention that he loses sight of the main objective: the development of young people who can take honorable places in a society of free men. These free men, of course, will not really be free if they are gullible and unquestioningly obedient. Citizens who believe and do as they are told are especially susceptible to exploitation by economic and political vultures. Competent citizenship requires an alertness to personal justice and a concern for the general welfare, that should be exercised from the earliest years. Clearly, therefore, the foundations in critical thinking and self-direction should be laid in the public schools, and the development nurtured there. Unless we are seeking to encourage humility and subservience, students ought from childhood to compare sources of information, to experiment with different ways of doing things and to have influential voices in deciding what they are to do and how.

The discipline of both the home and the school should recognize the dignity of each individual and his right to seek recognition and direct his own activities. The problems of inappropriate responses are problems for guidance, for education, not for coercion and punishment. The goal is not the person who will faithfully do as he is told, but the individual who is in the habit of seeking his own success, directing his own destiny and cooperating in improving the general welfare.

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