



REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS ROLE IN TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP FROM THE MENTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Rewards and punishments have a major role in behavior change strategies. The purpose of the study is to identify the most efficient modalities of intervening on the child's disturbing behavior applying the punishment-reward duet. The conclusions further to the research provide relevant data for improving pupils' conduct by applying the most adequate modalities of reducing their undesirable actions in the school environment

Key words: teacher – student interactions, reward, punishment, mentor

1. Problem statement

Various techniques for the teaching staff's prevention and intervention in case of the conflictual situations in the classroom were promoted in time. Some of the used strategies are the strategies of intervention in terms of attitude, i.e. reward and punishment. French and Raven (Apud Olsen & Nielsen, 2009, p.12) indicated that the teacher's use of punishments and rewards represents the position power, a source of power which the teacher can adopt in the relations with its pupils, along with personal power.

Reward and punishment are frequent didactic options in Romanian school. Especially in traditional school, the punishment role is well highlighted and supported being deemed an "all-powerful means" of education and much more used as it induces the illusion of efficiency and quickness in stopping an inadequate behavior. Ion-Ovidiu Pânișoară indicates that "traditionally, the punishment creates anxiety and stress. Fear in itself is seen as useful as it is also traditionally deemed that the person fearing something shall act by trying to reduce the intensity of felt anxiety by doing what is expected from it" (Pânișoară, 2009, p. 224).

However, contemporaneous pedagogy considers that punishment is an educational strategy with positive connotations, a guidance means, a moral concept related to the conscience concept. Also, it recommends that the teacher rather uses rewards as a stimulator of motivation in the education process. Even if in certain situations we have to resort to punishment, it is much more efficient to shape pupils' behavior through positive strengthening.

A model of behavior changes is based on the ideas of B.F. Skinner indicating that most behaviors are learnt and that learning is largely controlled by the environment. Strengthened behaviors tend to manifest again. The fundamental idea is that behavior changes are based on their negative or positive consequences. Based on such idea, the reminded model was prepared, used for gradually changing undesirable behavior. The specific nature and difficulty of the problem consist in adequately applying punishments and rewards to the concrete situation and to the individual peculiarities of pupils.

The Assertive Discipline classroom management model was initially developed by Lee Canter in the 1970s and then expanded based on Marlene Canter's work with children with behavioral problems. Although this approach is often characterized as focusing primarily on rewards and punishments, the Canters actually place great emphasis on "catching students being good" and then providing appropriate feedback and reinforcement (Canter & Canter, 2001).

This approach was developed to train teachers specifically to manage behavior in a classroom setting and is based on the idea that teachers have a right to teach in a well-managed classroom and students have the right to learn in a controlled environment (Marshall, 2005).

The premise of Assertive Discipline is that teachers should establish a systematic discipline plan prior to the start of the school year and then communicate expectations and consequences to the students immediately.

Having a preconceived, systematic plan permits a teacher to be consistent with behavioral expectations and to apply praises and consequences to all students in a fair and reliable manner. The four main components of the Assertive Discipline model include the teacher establishing: (1) a set of consistent, firm, and fair rules; (2) a predetermined set of positive consequences for adhering to the rules; (3) a prearranged set of negative consequences to be applied when rules are not followed; and (4) a plan to implement the model with students (Canter and Canter 2001). The Canters hold that an effective behavior management program is fueled by informed student choices. Students are aware of teacher expectations and what will occur when they choose to meet those expectations and, conversely, what will occur when they choose not to adhere to the established classroom rules (Canter 1989).

Andy Miller, Eamonn Ferguson & Rachel Simpson (1998) has emphasized and analyzed an inventory of rewards and punishment. Rewards: Praise in front of other children; Private praise Good marks; Good written; Comments on your (their) work; Mentioned in assembly; Praised by other pupils; Whole class praised; Parents informed of your (their) good behaviour; Having your (their) work on display. Punishments: Being told off in front of the class; Being told off in private; Being sent to see the headteacher; Teacher explaining what is wrong with your (their) behaviour in private; Teacher explaining what is wrong with your (their) behaviour in front of the class; Kept in at playtime; Being moved to another seat in the classroom; Parents informed about your (their) naughty behavior; Taking unfinished work to do in another class; Being stopped from going on a school trip.

The application of rewards by teachers must observe the following principles (Stan, 2004, p.67):

- if the pupil is told what it is received for, the strengthening is more efficient;
- purposes must be strengthened on a short term basis, so that the pupil can make the connection between the behavior wished from it and the strengthening;
- the strengthening must not be granted to counterbalance reprimands for previous facts; it must be the consequence of the pupil's behavior;
- reward must be granted in time and not with delay (in order for the pupil to establish the same connection);
- the granting of rewards may be made for a set of actions or contents.

Taking into account that rewards shall lose their value in time, the teacher must announce in good time which is the structure of contents or actions for which that reward type is given.

In applying a punishment, the following aspects shall be taken into account (Stan, 2004, p.47):

- Prevention of avoidance of punishment by specifying the steps necessary to re-win privileges;
- Avoidance of aggressiveness supposes withdrawing privileges, without using aggressiveness;
- Prompt application of punishment – due to the possibility of establishing a connection between the undesirable behavior and the applied punishment;
- Consistency of the teacher's attitude in applying the same algorithm for all the pupils making mistakes;
- Use of warnings: upon the first deviation, the pupil shall receive a warning, upon the second deviation, some privileges shall be withdrawn and if it continues, shall be punished;

- Resorting to punishment is necessary to be made deliberately.

2. Methodology

The objective of the study is to identify the perceptions of both the beginning teaching staff and of those with a significant teaching experience in primary education included in the sample as to the manner of applying the reward/punishment duet in order to increase the frequency of pupils' desirable behaviors.

The general research hypothesis of this study is: If the teachers valorize the punishment and reward intervention techniques at small school age children, then the number of undesirable behaviors shall decrease.

Two working hypotheses resulted from this general hypothesis:

- There are significant differences between the beginning teaching staff and those with significant didactic experience as regards the application of punishments to pupils when they manifest undesirable behaviors.
- There are significant differences between the beginning teaching staff and those with significant didactic experience as regards the application of rewards to the pupils having behaviors adequate to school rules.

The method used in this investigative approach is the questionnaire applied to 40 primary education teachers from 5 schools in the rural environment and 5 schools in the urban environment from the Arges County. The teachers with significant didactic experience represent 50% of the sample.

3. Findings and results

In order to verify whether punishing students immediately after their wrong behavior is different depending on the teachers' chair experience, we applied the chi-square association test. The results obtained further to the application of this test [$\chi^2(3) = 16.821, p < 0.001$] highlighted that there are significant differences among the members of the teaching staff, depending on their experience. Beginning teachers are more permissive as to the application of punishments as soon as pupils have an undesirable behavior, as compared to the experienced teaching staff who are stricter in applying correction to such behaviors (Table 1). The teaching staff who have more chair experience are more consistent in applying punishments for immediately correcting the undesirable behaviors manifested by pupils.

Table 1. Chi-square analysis regarding the application of punishments to pupils depending on the teachers' didactical experience

Teacher's perception on punish students immediately after their wrong behaviour	Teachers	
	Beginners teachers	Experienced teachers
Always	.0 %	30 %
Often	25 %	55 %
Sometimes	55 %	15 %
Amost never	20 %	.0 %

By applying the chi-square association test we highlighted that there are significant differences between the beginning teaching staff and the experienced staff in applying rewards to the pupils who had desirable behaviors [$\chi^2(3) = 12.952, p < 0.005$]. Beginners are willing to be liked by pupils, they want to obtain their sympathy, so they apply more frequently rewards as soon as pupils have a desirable behavior (Table 2).

Table 2. Chi-square analysis regarding the application of rewards to pupils depending on the didactic experience of teachers

Teacher's perception on reward students immediately after their good behaviour	Teachers	
	Beginners teachers	Experienced teachers
Always	50 %	10 %
Often	40 %	50 %
Sometimes	10 %	30 %
Amost never	.0 %	10 %

The analysis of the data in Table 3 highlights that the teachers with more experience act by foreseeing long-term consequences. They are careful to the rhythmicity and frequency of the occurrence of desirable behaviors. The inconsistent application and the incorrect selection of reward types, of the moment when the reward is offered shall not lead to the expected results. Thus, the stimulating value of positive strengthening may be lost.

Table 3. Crosstabulation - Follow-up and reward the punished students when they properly behaves later on * Teachers

Follow-up and reward the punished students when they properly behaves later on	Teachers	
	Beginners teachers	Experienced teachers
Always	5 %	10 %
Often	20 %	60 %
Sometimes	60 %	30 %
Amost never	15 %	.0 %

The analysis of the answers given by the teachers in the sample (Table 4) to the question if the punished pupils understand the reason why they were punished, highlights the fact that most of the teachers with didactic experience and beginning teachers consider that the pupils to whom they applied various punitive methods are aware that they deserved that type of treatment.

Table 4. Crosstabulation - The students being punished understand the relationship between his/her behaviour and punishment * Teachers

The students being punished understand the relationship between his/her behaviour and punishment	Teachers	
	Beginners teachers	Experienced teachers
To a very high extent	20 %	30 %
To a high extent	45 %	50 %
To a small extent	35 %	20 %

4. Discussion

Punishment/reward is a tandem present in the activity of every member of the teaching staff; it is a pedagogical patch which resorts to the teacher qualities and its availability as partner in the educational act.

If the pupils' desirable behavior is immediately rewarded, then the probability that such behavior is repeated increases.

Offering rewards in a correct and fair manner makes the pupil to be an aware accomplice to the educative act. It shall become more sociable, shall have a flexible, cooperating attitude, which is open to novelty. It shall communicate easier, shall have a creative capacity, shall be optimistic and trustful in its own forces. It shall engage in new activities with a spirit of initiative. The necessity of a mentoring activity in school by the teachers who are experienced and have a background in the field is also given by the attitude of beginning teachers of rewarding to a larger extent efficient standards and to a less extent the effort, the concentration, the wish clearly expressed by the pupil of reaching the specified standards. Beginners are more permissive, they evaluate school progresses and performances on a less strict, rigid scale.

Any member of the teaching staff, irrespective of seniority, must prove trust in its pupils and be animated by pedagogical optimism.

Beginning teachers have the tendency of resorting to punishment in case of the pupils persisting in making mistakes. Beginning teachers keep very attentively track of mistakes, the breach of the previously established rules by the disturbing pupils. For the pupils proving efforts to correct themselves, this method must no longer be applied. The sheets observing the pupil's behaviour, the notebook of the form master, the classroom's notebook are useful instruments for beginning teachers. The form master taking over one series shall take possession of the psycho-pedagogical sheets drafted by the series elementary teacher.

In order for the application of punishments or rewards to be successful, the pupil must know the exact reason for which it deserves this treatment. The pupil becoming aware of the reason and understanding what the teachers wishes it to do shall correct the error (apologize, admit its mistakes, make commitments and keep its promises). The teacher must appreciate the qualitative change and highlight the pupil's strong points. They shall find it easy to communicate with correct and consistent teachers. Thus, the pupil – an active partner, aware of its performance, shall join the teacher in the effort made to correct unwished behaviors.

All these aspects may be mastered and transposed to practice by the beginning teachers more successfully and in a shorter time period under the guidance of a mentor teacher.

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