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Positive reinforcement for positive results

*“If people are good only because they fear punishment, and hope for reward,*

*then we are a sorry lot indeed. - Albert Einstein –*

In South Korean, mothers want their children to be fluent English speakers because English is a global language and their children will need English skills to communicate with global leaders. As a Korean mother of a 7 year old son, I have been sending my son to an English Language Institution that has a “English Only” Policy for the past one year. As result, in one year my son has acquired a good command of the English language but sometimes there are days when he does not want to go to the English Language Institution and feels stressed out from the routine of traditional classroom teachings in English. If I could change or suggest new teaching approaches or management policies at the Institution it would be the following.

One, there should be more rewarding fun activities to make the classroom a happy, stress free place. In relation to Skinner’s theory, positive reinforcement is superior to punishment in changing behavior for a longer term. I think that giving out prizes such as stickers and candies to reward better behavior are positive reinforcements whereas taking away playtime for the usage of Korean in the classroom could be an example of negative punishment. To increase English speaking in the classroom, I wish the institution and teachers could reduce stress in the environment by adding more fun and play related activities involving English such as having Simon Says, Musical Chairs and Bingo Game, Show N Tell time where children can bring in a toy and have time to play with toys, and Storytelling time where children can bring their favorite book so that children can know more about one another. These activities would be a better way to get the class to learn English in a more natural environment by playing together. We all have different learning styles as Gardner has mentioned with his 8 multiple intelligences. I believe that adding a good mix of activities covering verbal, mathematical, visual, spatial, musical, and kinesthetic will give students an equal chance to absorb English better by stimulating multiple intelligences.

Two, the teachers, students, and parents should mutually agree on classroom ground rules in advance to remove any unpleasant situation that may arise in the classroom such as lateness as well as penalties for bad behaviors and awards for good behaviors. To maintain good behaviors and monitor bad behaviors, students that had the best behavior for the day can be the next day’s teacher’s helper or captain of the class. Students who are captains can have perks like choosing which student will answer the teacher’s question or who gets to be first in line. I think that this will encourage better social skills such as leadership and communication.

Three, we need to have the institution coach mothers how to talk to children in English at home and get the students interested in learning English. According to Piaget’s theory, as we are a project of society, we cannot change a person unless we change the entire society. The English only policy should not only be applied to the classroom and but also be applied at home as well. At home, mothers and fathers should freely have English conversations with the students and also give positive feedback like “English is not hard, it is easy”and should apply Total Physical Response(TPR) method such as using easy English instructions at home like “ stand up”, “sit down”, “wash your hands”, and ‘brush your teeth”. These were methods I used at home and my children have naturally understood these expressions within a day. It is very crucial to have them feel comfortable in communicating in English in daily situations as well as in the classroom.

In summary, I wish that Korean children love to speak in English because it is fun and something worth trying. Not because they is a reward or punishments to enforce English. However, if they go against the English Only Policy which would encourage other students to want to talk in Korean more, there should be supporting ground rules on what is okay and not okay in the classroom to let the child use only English for the benefit of the class. Also children should have good English support to speak English at home as well. In conclusion, bring up happy children who love to play and communicate with others in English.