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Essay #2

Use of Rewards and Punishments in a Classroom

Zhuangzi, an influential Chinese philosopher from the 4th century, once said, “Rewards and punishments are the lowest form of education.” It would be an ideal classroom for both teachers and students to not use a system of rewards and punishments. However, it is difficult to discipline students and satisfy the institutions’ policies at the same time without such method. Using rewards motivates students to do better, whereas punishments create an atmosphere of forced learning. Therefore, the use of rewards should be encouraged in a classroom rather than the punishments. Punishments must only be used when there are no other solutions to misbehaviors.

My very first personal experience with the “English Only” policy was in Yongsan International School of Seoul (September 2005- May 2011). My school had a very strict policy about speaking languages other than English in school. To enforce this policy, each student was given a SLOTHE (speaking languages other than English) card. Each time a student was caught speaking a language other than English, he or she would receive a sticker on the card. Four stickers per quarter meant an after school detention, and eight stickers per quarter was an in-school suspension. I had to sit in several after-school detentions because I spoke a lot of Korean. My second experience with the “English Only” policy was during an ESL summer camp where I worked as the camp counselor (Summer 2013). To encourage students to speak more English during the camp, the camp counselors came up with a Token system, where we gave gold stickers for each time we heard English spoken outside of the classroom. At the end of the camp, the students exchanged the stickers to camp dollars and used it to buy snacks. My first experience involved using punishments and my second experience involved using rewards to enforce the policy. In both cases, the use of rewards and punishment worked. However, giving rewards for good behavior created a more positive learning environment than giving punishments for bad behaviors.

My high school also had a strict policy for tardiness and absences. If a student was 30 minutes late to the first period, it counted as an absence. Students were only allowed 10 absences in a year. If they were absent more than 10 times in a year, students had to repeat the grade. Some students would not show up to school at all if they were more than 30 minutes late to first period. Counting 30 minutes of tardiness as an absence seems to be too strict. A more flexible rule should be enforced. Instead of having such a strict rule, teachers should emphasize to students that being late to class disrupts the whole class and also that it is their disadvantage if they miss the class materials.

The best method of helping students prepare for presentations is through practice. Students need constant encouragement from the teachers. Incorporating punishments does not sound like an ideal solution to prepare students for presentations. For students who are too shy or nervous to do the presentations alone, they need enough practice in groups before individual presentations. Teachers can incorporate alternative methods for presentations such as filming self at home or presenting in small groups rather than in front of the whole class. Punishing students would not help the students do any better in presentations.

Classroom management is difficult and so the easiest way to implement rules and discipline students would be to use a system of rewards and punishments. However, I believe that use of rewards should be encouraged and use of punishments must be kept to a minimum. Learning environment must be enjoyable for students of all ages. Using punishment would create a learning environment of forced studying. Rewards are motivations to the students whereas punishments are tools that pressure students to study. In an ideal classroom, teachers wouldn’t have to use punishments but only rewards to create an encouraging learning environment.