

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

EXPERIENCES IN IMPROVING PUPIL DISCIPLINE IN A FIFTH GRADE
AT KATE SULLIVAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

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CHAPTER I

This study has grown out of a keen desire on the part of the writer to know and understand children better in order to help them grow more effectively into self-directing citizens. Therefore, the writer has engaged in a study of her pupils for the purpose of discovering means whereby she might be able to help them with problems of adjustment and self-direction.

Observation and experience with the thirty-eight children in this fifth grade caused the writer to realize that constructive attention needed to be given these boys and girls if they were to reach more effective self-direction and adjustment.

In carrying on this study the writer drew upon the following sources for data and guidance: (1) personal experience; (2) research in the field; (3) conferences with educators; and (4) wide reading in the current materials dealing with the aspects of child development considered in this study. Additional sources of information used were: (1) cumulative records in the school office, (2) available test results, (3) conferences with parents, and (4) observational data collected by the writer.

Those data collected from the sources just named were used to gain a clearer understanding of: (1) the boys and girls included in this study; (2) the thinking of educators concerned with the problems of citizenship development and personal adjustment; and (3) desirable ways and means of approaching the problem with this fifth grade.

The initiation and organization of a citizenship club was the approach decided upon in meeting those citizenship and personal adjustment needs identified in this fifth grade.

This study has certain limitations, the most significant of which are: (1) one year devoted to this study, (2) number of children included in the study was limited to 38; and (3) the incompleteness of available records.

Definition of Terms

For clarity of meaning, the following terms are defined in the sense in which the writer has used them in this paper:

Discipline. The organization of one's impulses in order to obtain a goal. Group discipline involves control of individuals comprising the group for the attainment of a group goal.

Adjustment. The establishing of a satisfactory relationship between personal needs and desires and the requirements of the environment.

Self-directing. Directing one's course without immediate guidance.

Criticism. The art of judging or evaluating with knowledge and propriety the soundness and the nature of anything.

School patrol member. A pupil or pupil of good record assigned to special duties to help protect the children's safety and to provide and maintain order.

Gong. A musical instrument used to bring silence in the lunchroom.

Honor roll membership. Those pupils who in all of their school work and behavior have performed satisfactorily in terms of their individual capacities.

Student council. A body of pupils elected by their classmates to help carry out and develop school policies.

Citizenship club. A club created and organized by the pupils under the teacher's guidance for the purpose of setting up certain criteria by which they were to govern themselves.

CHAPTER II

The term discipline means different things to many teachers. The materials reported in this paper reflect the writer's viewpoint relative to her concept of discipline. At this time, it may be well to state briefly those ideas embodied in the use of discipline in this study. The writer proposes to take a middle position; that is, a view which conceives of discipline not being so rigid and formal as to choke out all possibilities of individual growth in the child's behavioral patterns and attitudes. On the other hand, the writer does not see discipline as an absence of any outside control and direction.

Webster gives the following clarification of the term discipline:

1. The development of the faculties by instruction and exercise.
2. Training one to act in accordance with established rules.
3. Submissiveness to order and control.
4. Correction; hence training through suffering and punishment.

These ideas on discipline as expressed constitute earlier views held by the home and the school. However, Hackett and Jacobsen¹ come nearer reflecting the position held in this paper regarding the sense in which discipline is used.

¹John A. Hackett and W. W. Jacobsen, Modern Practices in the Elementary School, (Boston: Atheneum Press, Ginn and Company, 1944).

Discipline must be thought of as an organization of one's impulses to obtain a goal. Group discipline involves control of individuals composing the group for the attainment of a group goal. Singing with others and putting on a play are simple situations in which discipline is dictated by the goal to be achieved by the group. Goals for which discipline is required vary and also change with a person's age. "The aim of discipline is the development of intelligent self-control by pupils. It is a means of securing good teaching conditions within the class room."²

Discipline is wanted when it is based on devotion to humanitarian principles and ideals, such as freedom, justice, and equality for all rather than discipline based on a narrower, more egotistic affiliation of "my group".

Self-direction and self-discipline rather than discipline, based on obedience to a "Fuher" is desired. Discipline is based on an understanding of the goal in mind, rather than discipline based on "taking someone else's word for it".

The task which confronts the classroom teacher is to translate the principles of democratic discipline into daily action in her classroom. Her daily role is that of a leader of groups. She must rightly choose the technique that will be harmless to the total group and the individuals involved.

²Ibid., p. 205

The teacher whose personality possesses a sense of humor obviously has the prime requisite for discipline. However, one can't rely on personality alone; she must know the child and use some judgment with patience and firmness.

Successful teachers know the importance of beginning early to build pride in an orderly and smoothly functioning classroom. They develop group spirit and the value of rapport among the pupils. Confidences are developed concerning plans in an effort to make them feel themselves a definite part of the school and assume responsibility for it.

The teacher's problem is two-fold: first, she must make sure that the demands made upon the child are legitimate and wholesome in terms of the fundamental tendencies of human beings of his particular age level; and secondly, she must seek to build in the child legitimate and wholesome patterns of behavior by appealing to his interests, his intelligence, his sense of justice, and his self respect.

A teacher will gain power in guiding children's growth in self-discipline if she will think over the various instances of behavior that arise day by day and compare the several ways open to her in the handling of each case. If she thinks through the implications of each method and decides which one promises greatest potentialities for the desirable growth, she will gain skill rapidly in meeting situations as they arise.

The skillful teacher will see to it that pupils have interesting and challenging things to do, that they can do, and that they form habits of doing them without delay and misapplied effort. She will give foremost attention to the kinds of activities and kinds of growth she believes her pupils should experience, remembering that the more planning, evaluation, and doing the children actually carry on, the greater will be their growth. She will remember, also, that it is the growth of the whole group that is important, not that of just a few very able pupils. Such a teacher plans her work systematically and efficiently. She knows her aims and her methods and helps the children to set up their own goals and plan wisely from the beginning of the year. By such methods, misconduct is largely prevented. When it does arise, it is easily handled in such an atmosphere.

The true teacher is a cooperator working with children, enlisting their support in the building of standards, reasoning things out with them, and arriving at mutually satisfying understandings.

Wise teachers avoid conflicts. Through foresight as to children's reactions they prevent the occurrence of situations which imply discord between teacher and pupils. They provide refreshing variety in activities to prevent children from becoming fatigued, restless, and irritable. Through a calm and sincere atmosphere of work they avert the nervousness that invariably results from a tense, hurried schoolroom manner.

A teacher sensitive to the reaction of children will detect

the early signs of nervousness or fatigue in a pupil, and will send the child on an errand or suggest a change of occupation.

It is widely recognized that discipline is best where least conspicuous, and that the teacher who disciplines least is the best disciplinarian. They decrease disciplinary problems by placing much more emphasis on the rightness of conduct than on the wrongness. True discipline implies generous cooperation between teacher and pupil.

It is undoubtedly wiser and more effective as well, for teachers to think in terms of the behavior tendencies of children, and of the factor in the school situation which promotes or hinders satisfactory adjustment, rather than of punishment and penalties. From this point of view, the problem is that of ensuring that unsocial behavior inevitably brings annoyance or displeasure, while appropriate conduct is accompanied by satisfaction and approval. Wrong conduct is not to be condoned nor disregarded, but effort should be expended to remove its fundamental causes and casual conditions, and not merely apply artificial remedies.

Investigations such as Wickman's³ show that some teachers consider the majority of their pupils guilty of frequent misbehavior, while other teachers hold that practically all their pupils are well behaved. In order to deal intelligently with undesirable behavior, one must look not only to basic tendencies but also to casual conditions that may exist in the school, in the home, and elsewhere. Usually, undesirable behavior can be corrected by helping the child to acquire

³E. K. Wickman, Children's Behavior and Teacher's Attitudes, (New York: Commonwealth Fund, Division of Publications, 1929), p. 15.

one or more of the following: (1) better understanding of the situation and its demands; (2) keener sensitiveness to group approval and disapproval; (3) greater skill or more ready habits in carrying out the desired type of conduct. "The discipline of the school should proceed from the life of the school as a whole and not directly from the teacher."⁴

It may be helpful to ask the child to sit quietly and write out an analysis of his misbehavior, describing how his conduct was undesirable, and what he should do upon future occasions, and how to guard against a repetition of his conduct. Then, the teacher, the child, and if necessary, the parent have evidence of progress or lack of progress in the child's endeavor to gain self-control. It is of utmost importance to preserve and strengthen the child's self respect. Never should the treatment of misconduct injure self-respect. When a child is trying to overcome bad habits, teacher and pupils should be sure to commend and encourage him whenever possible. Even a small improvement in behavior or attitude should be recognized.

The best treatment of misbehavior is its prevention. The maintenance of school life upon a high plane of interest, of challenge, and of vigorous, wholesome activity, with the sense of worthy achievement ever present, will eliminate most of the causes of misconduct. Clear activities, well-planned work, high standards, and intolerance of careless, slipshod work are obvious foes of disorder.

A teacher who does not exercise self-control in her own conduct

⁴John Dewey, Education Today, (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1916), p. 8.

can hardly expect to promote the growth of enlightened self-control in children. Confidence of children in their teacher will develop quickly if she strives to merit that confidence through good judgment, fairness, and friendship. One should be especially sensitive and sympathetic towards children in distress. Often the teacher is the only one who can supply the urgent need in such a situation.

Nothing is more wholesome for both pupils and teacher, than a spirit of cheerfulness in the classroom. Praise and humorous criticism do more than nagging and fault finding.

Classroom discipline, if it is to be educative, must take into account the unalterable truth that conduct of each child, because he is human, will and must be different from the conduct of every other child. And most important of all is a sympathetic and friendly attitude on the part of the teacher.

In the wholesome classroom, the achievement of worthy goals is its own sufficient reward. Well disposed and thoughtful conduct receives recognition, approval, and encouragement from teacher and fellow pupils, which is both wholesome and more satisfying than artificial prizes for being good. The most satisfying and educative recognition of superior conduct is to grant a pupil more freedom and responsibility than he had before. This presents a new incentive to further growth.

A recognized principle of a daily program is to know when and where to be quiet or active. When some active undertaking is being

worked upon, a considerable amount of legitimate noise necessarily takes place, while during a library period, a reading period, or a period when concentration is necessary, quiet work is required. A quiet room does not necessarily contain a repressed group of children. It may mean that the children are too busy and interested to want to bother their neighbors. It may mean well-planned, organized work and worthwhile interests, with other time set aside for relaxation and activity.

Misbehavior may be caused by ignorance, boredom, thoughtlessness, fatigue, mischievousness, desire for attention and recognition, or rebellion at what seem unchallenging and purposeless tasks. Whatever the cause of misbehavior, the problem is an educational one: it is the problem of directing the energies of children into worthy channels.

The foregoing discussion briefly expresses the concept of discipline held by this writer. In the section which follows, the materials presented are premised on the basic philosophy expressed in this chapter.

CHAPTER III

At the beginning of the school year the writer began exploring ways and means that would best tie into the ongoing program which would contribute to the development of better citizenship and discipline. This study was undertaken in order that the teacher might help her pupils to become better adjusted and self-directing. After thorough consideration, the idea of a citizenship club seemed to be a likely approach. This club would be created by the teacher and the pupils cooperatively.

The teacher presented the citizenship club idea to her class for discussion and exploration. A lively interchange of thinking was stimulated. This interest, under the guidance of the teacher, began to take form and direction. The resulting organization was a group project which they thought would best help them meet their particular needs.

The following week was given for the class to have opportunity to think the problem over and discuss their ideas among themselves. Numerous discussions took place during the meantime in regards to the object of the club, the selection of the chairman, the forming of committees and their various duties, and the rules and regulations concerning the club.

The last thirty minutes on Friday afternoon was designated for the next meeting. The group was primed and ready for discussion and organization under the teacher's guidance. A temporary Chairman was elected by the group to serve during this meeting. It was then decided

that a chairman would be elected to serve for a week at a time. This person would have to have a good record for the week. The class decided to judge an individual in terms of behavior and efficiency in all school work. It would be the chairman's duty to appoint the various committees for the week from the good citizenship list. This was determined by cooperative evaluation of each person by the class under the direction of the teacher.

The Committees to be appointed were as follows:

Office worker

Work from 2:00 until 3:00 P. M. every day.

Devotional leader

Have charge of room devotion each day.

Host or hostess

Answer door calls or greet visitors.

Flower

Water pot plants and arrange cut flowers.

Duster

Dust shelves, window sills, and blackboard daily.

Paper basket

Pass paper basket at certain times of the day.

Paper

Distribute paper when needed.

Song leader for prayer

One leader for each three tables to lead prayer at lunch time.

Tables

Three pupils wipe off tables and have clean for next group.

Ice Cream

One pupil serve ice cream to those who ordered it.

Gong

At lunch time, one pupil hits gong to serve notice for prayer.

Books

Two pupils distribute books during reading period or language and arithmetic workbooks when needed.

Captains

One girl and one boy each organize games to be played at physical education with their own sex.

The Chairman of the groups would function in the following manner: (1) Coordinator; (2) be responsible for posting the week's schedule on the bulletin board on Friday afternoon; (3) on Monday morning, announce the schedule to the room; (4) check to see if each child performed his duty at the right time; (5) lead the group to and from activities outside the classroom.

Vacancy created by the removal of a pupil from the committee as a result of misbehavior or repeated failure to do assigned work would be filled by one appointed by the teacher. The child removed would have to work satisfactorily for two weeks before again becoming eligible to be restored on the "Citizenship Honor Roll". If a pupil removed from the "Citizenship Honor Roll" failed to be restored after two weeks, he

would be punished further by being deprived of certain privileges according to the extent of his misbehavior. This list of privileges took such forms as follows:

1. Deprived of playing with group (time to be determined by the teacher.)
2. Certain library privileges to be taken away.
3. Could not participate in extra activities.
4. Deprived of going to bathroom with group.
5. Not allowed free period with others.
6. Persistent failure to comply with group could cause pupil to be replaced from permanent library committee.
7. Removed from patrol duty.
8. Not qualified to remain on Student Council.

These privilege restrictions were developed by the pupils and did not always reflect the attitude of the teacher.

Evaluating Citizenship Club:

The project seems to have been effective in providing and maintaining wholesome and happy relationships between pupils and teacher. The following present in summary fashion those points which best characterize an evaluation of this project:

1. Aroused interest in good citizenship practices.
2. Concern for the rights and dignity of fellow classmates.
3. Development of understandings relative to citizenship.
4. Increased practices in living democratically in the school-

room and on the playground.

5. Intelligent use of time.
6. Development of responsibility for doing jobs assigned at the right time.
7. Sharing and planning together.
8. Helping to make policies as the need arises for the group to abide by.
9. Use of constructive criticism.
10. Concern for neatness and order.
11. Intelligent respect for the flag and what it stands for.
12. Improved practices in the care of school property.
13. Development of both fellowship and leadership.

In order that a clearer understanding of the material presented in the evaluation and the implications of the effectiveness of this project may be shown, certain personal data on the children have been reported in Tables I, II and III.

From observation of the teacher, pupils' records, and the data recorded in Table II, it is the writer's subjective opinion that the educational background of the middle class parents contributes to more favorable and desirable citizenship attitudes and practices in their children's behavior than was found to be true for those children whose parents were in either the lower or higher educational brackets.

The writer further concludes from Table II that the occupational status of professional parents reflected in their children's behavior a higher level of conduct than was evidenced by those children from

homes in a lower economic status.

Table III shows there is a relation between the normal I. Q. and the level of personal adjustment as reflected in the children's attitudes and behavior. This table, further points out that relationships exist between grade placement and chronological age and citizenship attitudes and behavior. This data indicates the more nearly a child is placed according to his chronological age the more normally he is adjusted in accordance with desirable behavior and right attitudes. However, there are exceptions to the foregoing statements. The writer found that occasionally a bright and ambitious child would surmount the difficulties in his environment and push ahead of those children who were more fortunate in their surroundings. Likewise, the writer observed that occasionally a child from a supposedly good environment arrived at school in a neglected condition and poorly adjusted.

TABLE I
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE PARENTS OF FIFTH GRADE CHILDREN INCLUDED IN
THIS STUDY

Educational	Number	Percent
College Graduate	7	19
High School Graduate	12	32
10th Grade	2	5
8th Grade	2	5
7th Grade	2	5
6th Grade	2	5
Not Known	11	29

TABLE II

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF PARENTS OF FIFTH GRADE CHILDREN INCLUDED IN THIS STUDY

Occupation	Number	Percent
<u>PROFESSIONAL</u>		
College Professor	4	10.0
Teacher	3	7.8
Doctor	1	2.5
Chemist	1	2.5
<u>PUBLIC</u>		
Warden Federal Prison	1	2.5
R. O. T. C. Colonel	1	2.5
Salesman	2	5.0
State Employee	2	5.0
Post Office	1	2.5
Bus Driver	1	2.5
Pilot	1	2.5
Business Manager	1	2.5
<u>PRIVATE</u>		
Farmer	3	7.5
Merchant	3	7.5
Jeweler	1	2.5
Owner Pepsi Cola	1	2.5
Contractor	1	2.5
Bookkeeper	2	5.0

TABLE II--Continued

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Truck Driver	2	5.0
<u>SKILLED</u>		
Plumber	1	2.5
Sheet Metal Worker	1	2.5
Engineer-Telephone Co.	1	2.5
Not Known	3	7.5

TABLE III

CHRONOLOGICAL AGE, GRADE EQUIVALENT, AND AVAILABLE I.Q. OF THIRTY-EIGHT FIFTH GRADERS

C.A.	G.E.	I.Q.	C.A.	I.Q.	G.E.
10-5	3.5		11-1		6.6
10	2.5		11-7		4.5
10-8	4.1		11-2		3.8
11-8	4.9	97	11-3		6.5
10-11	6.1		10-2		5.3
11-8	2.3		11		4.9
11-4	5.3	108	12-8		4.1
10-5	6.2	103	10-11		4.3
10-11	6.6	133	10-3		6.7
10	6.4		10-2		2.3
10-4	4.1		10		5.2
10-9	6.5		10-7		3.8
10-11	5.4	97	10	140	5.5
10-7	3.4		10	95	3.6
10-10	4.5	94			
10-5	4.9	113			
12	1.1				
10-6	3.7				
10-5	5.5	102			
10-9	6.6				
10-1	5.5				

TABLE III--Continued

<u>C.A.</u>	<u>G.E.</u>	<u>I.Q.</u>	<u>C.A.</u>	<u>I.Q.</u>	<u>G.E.</u>
10-8	4.8				
10-9	5.0				
10-4	5.5				
Average C. A. 10-7		Average G. E. 4.9			

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summarizing, the writer concludes that discipline is an integral part of all teaching. It is the gradual development in boys and girls of attitudes and habits that constitute character. The good disciplinarian gives children daily practice in self-control and responsibility; and, at the same time, aids them in making wholesome and satisfying adjustments to the many social situations that continually arise in their school life. Only when children learn self-control can teacher control be withdrawn.

Those conclusions which appear to be of significance to the writer are presented in the following statements:

1. Discipline is wanted that is based on such ideals as freedom, justice, and equality for all.
2. The classroom teacher helps to translate the principles of democratic discipline into daily action.
3. The teacher who possesses a sense of humor obviously has the prime requisite for discipline when this quality is coupled with good judgment, patience, and firmness.
4. Building pride in an orderly and smoothly functioning classroom is important.
5. The teacher expresses confidence in her pupils and makes them feel a definite part of the school.

6. Wholesome patterns of conduct may be built by appealing to the child's interests, his intelligence, his sense of justice, and his self-respect.
7. The growth of the whole group is important and is accomplished through systematic and efficient planning.
8. Building standards with the children's help and reasoning with them in order to bring about satisfying understandings is paramount.
9. Refreshing variety in activities help prevent fatigue, restlessness, and irritability.
10. Emphasis on the rightness of conduct helps to decrease disciplinary problems.
11. The discipline of the school should proceed from the life of the school.
12. Clear activities, well-planned work, high standards, and intolerance of careless and slipshod work will eliminate most causes of misconduct.
13. The teacher's good judgment, fairness, and friendship will capture the confidence of children.
14. Cheerfulness, praise, and humorous criticism are conducive to good conduct.
15. The conduct of each child is different.
16. There is a time to be active and a time to be quiet.
17. Misbehavior is an educational problem.

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