

A Survey of Discipline Strategies Employed by Pre-primary School Teachers in Guiding Pupils Behaviours in Jos Metropolis

Mary P. Haggai

And

Grace Selzing-musa

Abstract

Children in early childhood are active and talkative. Teachers in pre-primary schools tend to misunderstand this nature of the child and describe the behavior of the child as disruptive. The paper is a research report that investigated the discipline strategies teachers use in guiding the behavior of pupils in pre-primary schools. Using descriptive survey, data was collected from 70 pre-primary school teachers in Jos metropolis using anecdotal observation technique. Two research questions were postulated and answered using mean of frequencies. Results of the study showed that teachers guide behavior through positive feedback/approval, engaging pupils in activities, setting expectations and limits. It was also found that disruptive behavior is punished through spanking and other forms of physical punishment. It was recommended that pre-primary school teachers need a thorough understanding of children and their behavior characteristics. That they also need to learn developmentally appropriate discipline strategies in handling children in early childhood.

Introduction

Discipline in early childhood classrooms seems an uphill task for many teachers in pre-primary schools. This is particular so for teachers who expect young children to sit quietly for extended period of time in one place doing an activity or listening to the teacher. Children in early childhood are so physically active that they easily move about, are noisy, and disruptive. Teachers who may be frustrated with these behaviours often shout “keep quiet,” “stop it” or spank the children. Every teacher will face situations in which children's behavior is inappropriate or even hurtful therefore, every teacher needs some strategies for guiding children in developmentally appropriate ways to achieve self control and self-discipline. There are teachers who believe that children are inherently bad and they tend to gravitate toward unacceptable conduct. Such view makes teachers to be too rigid and likely to punish behavior that is normal for the child of that age. On the other hand, there are teachers who believe that children are inherently good and may tend to be too lenient. Reisser, Cox and Wright (1997) observed that too rigid or too lenient discipline may lead to extreme or unhealthy discipline patterns. The premise for this study is that teachers of pre-primary schools have adapted disciplinary strategies that may have lasting negative impact on children such as physical abuse or over permissiveness. Therefore, the study set out to investigated the discipline strategies teachers of early childhood programs employ in order to guide children's behaviours.

Teachers have often taken punishment to mean discipline when they use aversive stimulus to deter bad conduct or enforce compliance to rules and regulations in the classroom. However, Reisser, Cox and Wright (1997 p. 289) have pointed out that the term discipline is broader than punishment. Discipline according to them refers to the “the training and instruction that is intended to produce a specific pattern of behavior, character development, moral or mental improvement”. Brewer (2007) similarly defined discipline as “guiding children development in appropriate ways to achieve self-control and eventually become self-disciplined individual.” Therefore, discipline is the entire process of shaping and molding a child's behavior and attitude by caregivers whether they are parents or teachers so that the child learns socially acceptable behavior patterns, self-control and ultimately self-discipline. Quite a number of discipline models have been propounded. Among them are:

- i. Assertive discipline: Lee Canter (1976) put forward a discipline which he called assertive discipline in which rules for classroom behavior are established by teachers and the consequences of breaking them are posted in the classroom. If a child breaks any of the rules, then his or her name is written on clipboard, blackboard or book in the first instance. Another offense results in a checkmark and a child who receives a second checkmark is to be sent to the headmaster's office and having parents of the child called to the office. Canter believes that assertive discipline enables teachers to be effective and that

this discipline model help teachers solve problem of behavior management in the classroom. However, Gartrell (1987a) observed that assertive discipline turn teachers into “management technicians” and damages children's self-concepts. Teachers may find that assertive model fail to take the cause of disruptive behavior into consideration. Brewer (2007) reported that research on assertive discipline showed that many teachers have moved away from it because of the frustration they encounter with problem students who seem to be relatively unaffected by the procedures, while it provokes anxiety in others.

ii. Glasser Model (1997): This model requires a teacher providing good choices for children and handling disruptions that occur in a calm and logical manner. Glasser believes that good choices produces good behavior while bad choices produces bad behavior. He posits that a child's behavior represent a child's attempt to meet a need and better discipline will be achieved where children are not frustrated in getting what they need. Glassez identified the basic need of the child as having the sense of belonging, to have power, to be free and to have fun. Where choices to meet these needs are lacking, discipline problems will occur. He believes that working in group meets most if not all of these needs. Hyson (2012) has provided evidence to show that engaging young children in free choice activities reduces disruptive behavior and management challenges for the teacher. Ginott Model (1972) advocates setting up a classroom climate that is conducive to

the development of good discipline through effective communication between the teacher and the child. A pivot principle of this model is that corrective messages to the child should attack the problem and not the child. Congruent communications according to him are responses that are in harmony with the children's feelings about situations or themselves. Part of effective communication is avoiding labeling children and communicating a willingness to help children solve problem. Ginott's major contribution to the approach of discipline in the classroom is his emphasis on teachers' ability to communicate well with children.

Reisser, Cox and Wright (1997) have identified extreme discipline strategies that are harmful in shaping children into responsible adults. These according to them include

- a. Physical abuse as punching, slapping, whipping, burning, and other horrors inflicted on children in the name of discipline.
- b. Verbal thrashing-These are harsh, degrading and insulting language on the child. Hard words such as “you are stupid” “you little beast” burn their way into the memory and emotions of children and create emotional scars in the same way physical abuse creates scars on the body.
- c. Authoritarianism which stresses absolute obedience without understanding or internalizing of principles.
- d. Yelling and screaming-raising one's voice in anger
- e. Idle threats failing to carry out threat

on a child for misconduct usually result in children ignoring teachers' instruction or threat.

- f. Laissez faire attitude- The child is left on his or her own without the teachers guidance in any form.
- g. Non stop bribery Making a deal over every directive a teacher gives before children can respond.

Spanking is one of the major disciplinary strategies teachers use in pre-schools (Brewer, 2007) but Reisser et al (1997) pointed out that some psychologists have concluded that disciplinary spanking is inappropriate. They however maintained that disciplinary spanking is adequate when appropriately applied. They caution on too frequent and too severe use of spanking as this tend to degenerate into physical abuse. As an alternative to spanking or corporal punishment, Brewer (2007) has suggested the use of time out, withdrawal of privileges and behavior guidance.

Early childhood educators have advocated behavior guidance as a means of inculcating discipline in young children. Morrison (2009) stated that behavior guidance in early childhood lay the foundation for life long and productive living and that the main strategies to achieve these are self-regulation, empowering children with responsibility, establishing expectations and converting destructive behaviors into successful ones.

The strategies early childhood educators have used for discipline among young children can be summarized into two major categories namely: punishment and behavior guidance.

The researchers are interested in investigating which discipline strategies teachers in Jos Metropolis use and whether or not these are extreme strategies that may have negative lifelong consequences on the pupils.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Some teachers use discipline strategies in early childhood education that are abusive and punitive on one extreme or are over permissive on the other. The question is which type of discipline strategies do pre-primary school teachers use in guiding children's behavior?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study set out to survey the kind of discipline strategies employed by early childhood teachers to guide behavior.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Which behavior guiding strategies do teachers of pre-primary use in their classroom?
2. What kinds of punishment do teachers of pre-primary schools use?

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey was adopted as the research design to study the discipline strategies teachers use for controlling children as well as inculcate responsible behavior in them. A representative sample was used to collect data.

The population was made up of teachers of pre-primary school teachers in Jos Metropolis consisting of 587 teachers teaching in 128 pre-primary schools. Samples of 35 pre-primary schools were randomly selected for the study, while 70

teachers comprising of two teachers each from the selected schools were used for the observation.

The technique used for data collection was observation schedule. An anecdotal structured observation scheduled was constructed using adaptations from Brewer (2007) observation for supporting positive behaviours. Twenty discipline strategies were listed on the observation schedule with time structure to record behavior.

The instruments was validated by pilot testing using two schools in Jos South Local Government which do not constitute part of the sample schools. After the pilot study, modifications were made on the original draft before it was produced for use.

The researchers visited each of the samples and observed him or her for 30

minutes to one hour depending on the length of period of the teacher. With the arrangement of the teacher, the observer went into the classroom through the back door and sat at the back of the classroom and recorded discipline techniques used by the teacher immediately they were used on the observation sheet.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data collected was used to answer the research questions.

Research question one: Which punishment strategies are used in discipline by pre-primary school teachers?

Data relevant for answering the research question is presented in table 1:

Table 1: Punishment strategies are used in cursing discipline by pre-primary school teachers?

Data relevant for answering the research question is presented in table 1:

TABLE 1: PUNISHMENT STRATEGIES USED BY PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS TO DISCIPLINE PUPILS.

STRATEGY	N	F	X	RANKING
Spanking/beating/slapping	70	132	1.88	1
Verbal insult	70	1	0.014	6
Yelling/screaming	70	4	0.057	5
Disappointing look	70	18	0.25	3
Withholding privilege	70	6	0.08	4
Time out	70	0	0.00	7
Kneeling/standing up	70	38	0.54	2

The first three punishment strategies often used by teachers are spanking/beating; kneeling/standing up and disappointing behavior.

engaging activities on discipline in early childhood education. In a study of self-regulation, they found that engaging pupils in activities make children develop a sense of competence which motivates them to plan and monitor their own activities on more challenging tasks rather than being disruptive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The use of positive discipline strategies such as positive feedback should be reinforced in pre-primary school teachers through workshop. The strategy can be enhanced when teachers are trained in communication skills to recognize and praise a child's effort in the position direction.
2. To ensure that children are happily engaged in free choice pleasurable activities, teachers should create secure and safe environment for children to thrive in classroom. Teachers can provide stable nurturing environment for the period the children are under their custody.
3. Teachers should also provide places and activities which children can work together in small groups and also a place for them to get away when they feel they need to be by themselves. Such a place could be the quiet area.
4. Teachers should eliminate times when children have nothing to do but wait. The teacher can make the time more productive with songs, poems and rhyming games.
5. Meeting children's needs is an effective strategy for maintaining discipline among pre-school (Reisser, Cox and Wright 1997); therefore teachers must work together with parents to ensure that children's physical, nutritional, safety and security, belonging and affection as well as self-esteem needs are met in the classroom.

REFERENCES

- Bodrova, E & Loeng, D. J (2012). Developing self-regulation in kindergarten; can we keep all its crickets in the basket? In Carol Copple (Ed). *Growing minds; building strong cognitive foundations in early childhood*. Washington DC: NAEYC
- Brewer. (2007). *Early childhood education: pre-school through primary Grades*, Boston: Pearson
- Canter, L. (1976). Assertive discipline and the search for perfect classroom. *Young Children*. 43(1) p. 29
- Gartrell, D. (1987). Assertive discipline unhealthy for children and other living things. *Young Children*, 42:10-11.
- Ginott, H. G. (1972). *Teacher and child*. New York: Macmillan.
- Glasser, W. (1997). *A New look at the school failure and school success*. Phi Delta: Kappan.
- Henniger, M. L (2009). *Teaching young children* upper saddle river. Pearson: Merrill.
- Morrison, G.S. (2009). *Early children education today*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson.
- Paintal, S. (1999). Banning corporal punishment of children. *Children education*. 76(1). 36-39
- Reisser, P.C. Cox & Mr. Wright (1997). *You and your baby*. New York: Tyndale. House Publisher Inc.