

1975
Oregon State Senate
Senate Bill 831

Senate Committee on Education

Testimony of Irene J. Hartzell, Ph.D.
Counseling Psychologist

School misconduct is not necessarily linked with delinquency in the community, but frequently there is a connection. A major determinant in whether delinquency follows is the way the school reacts to pupils who get into trouble. The school, by imposing overly punitive sanctions such as corporal punishment, can inadvertently push the pupil toward commitment to a deviant life style.

In my opinion, corporal punishment is used in schools today as an attempt to deter the pupil from further misbehavior through creating fear of future corporal punishment. We have sound evidence that a major cause of pupil misbehavior is failure. Experts generally agree that corporal punishment is not only ineffective as a deterrent, but it does not attack the root of the problem, the pupil's failure.

The school has a vital choice. It can prevent behavior problems from re-occurring by: 1. Setting limits for acceptable and unacceptable behavior and enforcing these limits firmly and consistently through non-coercive sanctions, on the one hand and 2. providing the pupil with opportunity for success, recognizing and rewarding positive behavior, and aiding the pupil to develop academic and social competencies.

Encouraging and focusing on positive behavior is a far more effective means to not only deter misbehavior but to develop socially desirable behavior than corporal punishment, because misbehavior is a learned deviant behavior pattern. Instead of fostering the desired

socially acceptable behavior, corporal punishment often only serves to reinforce the pupil's alienation from the school and its values, especially if the only type of attention the pupil normally receives is some form of punishment.

In conclusion, authorities tend to agree that failure is a major reason for misbehavior in school. In addition to setting firm, consistent limits regarding behavior expectations of its pupils, the school must endeavor to enable each pupil to succeed in order to break the failure-deviancy cycle.

REFERENCES

- Schafer, Walter E., and Polk, Kenneth, "Delinquency and the Schools," Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, Wash. D.C., 1967.
- Polk, Kenneth, "Class, Strain and Rebellion among Adolescents," Social Problems, 17, Fall 1969.
- Schafer, Walter E. and Olexa, Carol, Tracking and Opportunity, the Locking-Out Process and Beyond., Chandler Publ. Co., 1971.
- Stinchcombe, Arthur L., Rebellion in a High School., Chicago, Quadrangle, 1964.