

DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.26514.17604

Abstract

This paper examines the problems involved in the justification of punishment as a means of maintaining discipline in schools with specific reference to the pre-adolescent age. The punishment of children has become a subject of serious controversy in our society leading to two major camps for and against. Some thinkers still advocate the use of punishment in character formation and learning process of the child while others consider that it is possible to dispense with punishment altogether. Faced with these two extreme positions and the perceived insights of each, this paper seeks to work out a mediatory position with a view to providing for the child the best possible platform for moral and educational development. In order to achieve this objective, this paper attempts a clarification of the concepts: discipline and punishment. Also, it takes a critical look at the problems involved in the justification of punishment in the name of discipline of pupils who are yet to be deemed responsible. Finally, the paper suggests how 'punishment' can be meaningfully and reasonably utilized in the education of the child.

Keywords: Discipline, School, Punishment, Society, Morality

Introduction

The word 'discipline' is one of the elastic terms that means different things to different people and professions. It is surrounded by a cluster of meanings depending on the context it is used. To the military, discipline connotes complete obedience to order. In a community, it means total conformity to the laid down rules and norms. In a higher institution of learning, the word 'discipline' denotes a branch of knowledge, a subject or a field of study an individual is expected to

be trained in. It is in view of this elastic nature of discipline that Brooks sees it as a word “often used synonymously with the term order whilst at other times it is used professionally to refer to the body of information and the approaches essential to the study of a particular subject area” (24). However, in a classroom situation, discipline is viewed differently. If we go by the verb meaning, it means to punish, that is, to inflict pain in order for a course of action to be taken or achieved. As a noun, it means having developed self-control. Thus, in institutions of learning, when the word discipline is mentioned, it is often understood to refer to a particular mode of behaviour which is adopted by those in authority to make the students behave accordingly.

Etymologically, the word discipline is derived from the Latin ‘disco’ meaning ‘I learn’. Thus, the word discipline originally refers to the idea of the submission of oneself to the rules that structure what is to be learnt, such as the rules to be observed in playing hockey or in writing or speaking grammar. It could be rules of thinking scientifically or logically. Since education necessarily involves learning, and all learning situations involve keeping to rules of some sort, it therefore follows that learning involves discipline. In this sense, education, learning and discipline are to be seen as three concentric circles which are necessarily interwoven and intertwined since what goes on in one relates to the others.

Two kinds of discipline can be distinguished, namely: self-imposed discipline. On the one hand, discipline is usually thought to be self-imposed whenever an individual conforms to rules or standards that is accepted by the individual as either constitutive or as a means of doing something he/she wants to do or thinks desirable. Example of this would be cases where children are delighted by the sound of music and set about learning how to play any of the musical instrument, or when they are fascinated by the work of a machine and sit to work to understand why and how it works. Self-discipline is thought to be educationally desirable because submission to rules springs from the individuals own decision in which some kind of autonomy is placed. On the other hand, discipline is seen as externally imposed when it involves the imposition of rules and regulations on individual by an agent in order to maintain a general condition of order without which nothing can be effectively learnt. It is often connected with children being brought up by various forms of persuasion and coercion to accept rules forbidding – them to do certain things. It is this sense of discipline that punishment is seen as a consequent penalty for refusal to obey established rules and regulations. At this juncture, it becomes imperative to turn our attention to the explication of the concept of punishment.

The Concept of Punishment

Oftentimes, we do not necessarily mean the same thing when we utter the word ‘punishment’ to describe a situation. Perhaps, this is due to the elastic nature of the word. In order to illustrate this divergent usage of the concept of punishment, let us suppose that while watching a wrestling bout between Hulk Hogan and a challenger, Mr. Bassey remarked that the challenger was receiving a heavy punishment from Hulk Hogan (in this case the challenger is being over-powered). Let us also suppose that a young boy came back from school in tears with the complaint that he was punished (in this case, he was flogged) by his teacher for his failure to do his homework. Now, can we say that Hulk Hogan’s challenger and the school boy are in the same situation? Certainly not! Though, both were under some sort of superior powers, it is evident that the word ‘punishment’ as used in these situations varies as it was used to convey two different senses of the word. That is, in ordinary day to day usage, the word punishment has been used in a variety of ways. It is obvious that in the two situations just narrated, the former is used in the metaphorical sense while the latter is used in the literal sense of the word. Then, what does it mean to punish?

Etymologically, the word punishment is the noun form of the verb ‘punish’ which simply means to impose a penalty on someone for an offence. This explains why the Chambers Dictionary sees the verb ‘to punish’ as “to cause (one) to suffer for an offence: to handle, beat severely (1098). In a more elaborate manner, the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* sees punishment as “the deliberate infliction of harm upon somebody or the withdrawal of some good from them, by an authority, in response to their being supposed to have committed some offence” (298). Uchendu and Banjo as quoted by Arikpo respectively define punishment as a pain or loss inflicted; or sustained from an authority by a subordinate, either for a wrong done, or for a willful disobedience or negligence of duty. It is a measure given by an authority to discourage a subordinate from doing what is wrong (361). Punishment is therefore the discomfort or pain inflicted on an offender solely as a result of some definite violation of agreed rules or regulations; it is usually given by someone in authority. That is, it is an officially permitted sanction. From the definitions above, punishment has certain basic defining features which form its essential or core nature. These are:

- i. Punishment is unpleasant, hence undesirable by the person who is being punished; it is unpleasant in the sense that it involves the infliction of suffering or pain upon the recipient;

- ii. It is inflicted upon someone to be an offender because of the offence he has committed;
- iii. It is deliberately imposed, not the natural consequence of a person's action, and the unpleasantness is essential to it, not an accidental accompaniment to some other treatment, like the pain a patient receives from a surgical operation;
- iv. It is imposed by an agent authorized by the system of rules against which the offence has been committed. That is to say, that punishment is distinguishable from revenge which is the vindictive response of an individual against one who has wronged him.
- v. There must be an established case of the violation of stipulated rules and regulations for punishment to occur. That is, punishment is usually preceded by an act of deviance to rules.

Two major categories of punishment can be distinguished, namely; moral punishment and physical punishment. On the one hand, moral punishment involves doing something derogatory to someone (particularly a child) longing to be honoured and loved. It is the denial of attention by treating the child coldly and distantly. For instance, a look of contempt on the child when he/she lies or a class scolding which exposes him/her to shame among his peers. On the other hand, physical punishment consists in refusing a child's requests, deprivations and the infliction of pain which is otherwise known as corporal punishment.

The philosophical interest in the discussion of the concept of punishment is basically rooted in the question of its justification. The questioning of the justifiability of punishment is based on the argument that it is *prima facie* wrong to deliberately inflict suffering or harm on another person. Punishment consists in doing precisely this. Thus, what condition(s) would justify a deliberate imposition of pain or suffering on another person? This question forms the focus of our reflection in the next section of this paper.

The question of justification of punishment is predicated on the argument that since it involves the infliction of some kind of harm, or deprivation of some kind of good, it transgresses normal ethical boundaries, and as such, requires specific ethical boundaries, and as such, requires specific ethical justification. It is in response to this justificatory need that philosophers have attempted to articulate their views on what they think should be the purpose and justification of punishment. A critical look at the various proposals by philosophers reveals two philosophical views that are strongly opposed to each other. These are the retributivist and the utilitarian conceptions of punishment. We shall now proceed to analyze these two one after the other.

The Retributive Theory of Punishment

It is important to note that “there is no complete agreement about what sorts of theories are retributive except that all such theories try to establish an essential link between punishment and moral wrongdoing” (Ten, 38) It is in line with this unifying characteristic that most retributivists appeal to the existence of a universal moral order which must not be upset by any individual, or else suffer the consequence. It is argued that the framework of the world is regulated by a moral order and when an individual commits an offence, he flouts this order, and causes disequilibrium. Thus, the consequence of upsetting the balance of the moral order is punishment which in itself is a reward, compensation or a kind of annulment for a crime. Punishment, according to the retributivists restores the balance that a crime or the breaking of rule has upset. Hence, it is argued that this restoration of the moral order justifies the execution of punishment. Arikpo vividly captures the retributivists’ argument for punishment as follows:

In the framework of all world, there is a moral order. When an individual commits an offence! He flouts this order, and its balance is upset. The moral order is only once again put in place by the infliction of the individual who broke it with an appropriate punitive measure. Only then is justice restored, because justice demands that any infringement on the moral order be made right by award of an appropriate punitive measure (362).

What the retributivists are saying in essence is that once an individual in any society has broken a law, he has created a social imbalance or disequilibrium, as a consequence of the crime he has committed or the rule he has broken. And for the equilibrium to be restored there is the sufficient need for punishment. That is, in order to balance the scale of justice, it is necessary to inflict the deserved suffering on the offender. It is therefore believed by the adherents of this theory that the crime committed must be met with the exact measure of punishment needed. This explains why R. R. Peters describes this theory as one “which believes in an eye for an eye a tooth” (3). It is the cardinal point of the retributive theory to ensure that the punishment given to an offender is not more than or less than the offence committed. That is, must be a commensurate value between the offence and the punitive measure.

This theory is infested with numerous objectives. Apart from the fact that punishment on its own is ethically problematic as it is difficult to justify the deliberate infliction of pain on another, it is equally epistemologically problematic to claim that we know with reasonable certainty that punishment

the guilty deserve. Thus, the retributive theory of punishment becomes problematic when one considers the mechanism to be used in determining what punishment is commensurate to what crime. This is because, there may be a miscarriage of justice when an offender is punished beyond or below the offence committed. In this sense, it becomes difficult to calculate the exact imbalance to be restored when a particular punishment is given to upset the imbalance. In some offence or crime one may be able, the retributivist would argue, to calculate the imbalance like in the case of theft whereby the thief may be asked to pay back or return what he has stolen. The problem involved here is the retributivist presupposition that the form of punishment should be made determinable by a retrospective examination of the offence and making the punishment as it were to fit the offence. How is this fitness of punishment to be determined? On the face of it the “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” principle appears to be a straight forward approach to the problem. Perhaps the death penalty could suit murder, and the confiscation of property may fit theft. But there are some crimes or offences that are not of this nature such as rape or public obscenity. What sort of punishment would suit this sort of crime or offence? How is the calculus to be worked out such that the upset equilibrium could be maintained by the punishment inflicted? There does not seem to be any plausible solution to this problem. Recourse to the argument of “serious” and “trivial principle is equally fallacious. This argument states that ‘serious’ offences should be matched by ‘serious’ punishment while ‘trivial’ ones with ‘trivial’ punishment. Taking this approach opens another avenue for another problem such as what is serious? And what is trivial? Who determines what act is serious or trivial? (Peters, 266). These discussions are beyond the scope of this paper.

The Utilitarian Theory of Punishment

The principle of utility is central to the utilitarian theory of punishment. This theory holds that punishment is in itself undesirable and ought never to be inflicted on any one for its own sake or just on the grounds that a crime or an offence has been committed or that a rule has not been observed. Thus, it is proposed that only if punishment promises to exclude some greater evil then, it ought to be recommended. In line with this position, Jeremy Bentham, a fore-front utilitarian is of the view that “punishment is a mischief ... all punishment itself is evil, if it ought to be admitted, it ought only to be admitted in as far as it promised to exclude some greater evil (5).

The utilitarian view of punishment is consequentialist in nature. It recognizes that punishment has consequences for both the offender and the society and that

the total good produced by the punishment should exceed the total evil. In this sense, it is argued that punishment is justified only when it can serve a useful purpose, namely, to reform the character of the offender and or deter the offender and others from committing same or similar offences in future. In other words, the utilitarian theory of punishment is entirely future looking: it is instituted to improve the offender, perhaps teach him a lesson so that he will not repeat his offence. (that is, the reformatory sense of punishment); punishment is also justified on the claim that it deters other people from committing similar offences and possibly protect other people from such offenders by isolating them from the rest of the society. Thus, for the utilitarian punishment *sui generis* is evil, but if it has any positive value at all, its value only consists in its having beneficial consequences to the person punished and the society.

In towing the utilitarian line of thought, punishment would be looked upon as a kind of therapeutic operation on a patient which in itself is undesirable and unpleasant but a necessary act in restoring the health of the sick person. For instance, electric shock is in itself evil, but when applied to restore a deteriorating health condition it becomes a good act; for it is to exclude a greater evil. Similarly, when looked at from this metaphorical sense, punishment, when applied to an offender, it becomes a treatment of a certain sort. This illustration is supportive of the kind of argument put forward by supporters of punishment as a tool of reform or restoration.

One of the arguments usually brought against the utilitarian theory of punishment is a case where an innocent man is punished in order to deter other members of the community. The argument is usually presented as follows: let us consider the case of an innocent man who has been condemned to death by the authorities, who has been condemned to death by the authorities, who know perfectly well that he is innocent or at any rate have no evidence that he is guilty, but convict him nevertheless. The authorities, perhaps with good reasons, that much good would result or harm prevented by having him out of the way; moreover, there is a crime-wave and people are impatient with the law enforcement agents for not finding the culprit-they will act more securely if they believe that the guilty party has been found and this will in turn create more respect for law and order; in the sense that would-be criminals will not escape punishment for any crime they may commit. Or in case the real culprit is dead and another man, a nuisance, is substituted for public condemnation and is punished. The utilitarian would argue that there would be many good consequences of doing so for it would deter others from doing same. The retributivist would strongly disagree with this sort of argument, he would contend that punishment should be administered simply because an offence has

been committed, for which the offender deserves to be punished: a man should not be punished for the offence he has not committed.

Punishment as Discipline in Schools

In educational institutions and practices, when discipline is used, it is often used to refer to the procedure or actual maintenance of order in schools. If for instance X makes the assertion that “there is discipline in a certain school Y”, or that “the students in Y school are discipline”, what is often understood by such a claim is that order exists in Y school. Or in the second instance that the students of the school Y are law abiding; in a certain sense cultured. If in another instance one makes the claim that “John is to be disciplined one being discipline. The import behind the question, if further probed into is that John has done such and such an act which falls below the standard expected of him to behave in the situation under consideration. In other words, one may say that John has flouted or disobeyed so and so regulations. John in this circumstance can be said to be responsible for his actions. Responsibility here implies John’s admission of choosing to do the alternative rather than the demanded mode of behaviour. To this extent, John can be said to be guilty. Hence, the injunction John should be disciplined. In this sense, the word discipline involves punishment of a certain sort. Since it is a way of ensuring the maintenance of law and order, and bringing about the desired behaviour amongst the pupils.

In the school context, discipline generally refers to the maintenance of the general condition of order without which nothing can be effectively learnt. It is often connected with children being brought up by various forms of persuasion and coercion to accept rules forbidding them to do certain things. Such as making a noise in the class or fighting. Without such general conditions of order, it is claimed, teaching cannot go on. Since it is the teacher’s primary duty to teach, and teaching cannot take place without discipline (a general condition of order), keeping discipline is therefore bound up with the teacher’s power and authority. The teacher is given authority from outside the classroom, that is, by his employers, to influence his pupils (within certain norms). The word ‘influence’ is used in a very wide sense to refer to the teacher creating some change in his pupils; unless this occurs, he is merely child-minding or adolescent-minding (Wadd 45) Arikpo corroborates this position when he writes that:

The importance of order and discipline in a school needs no explanation. Without such, there can be no sound teaching and learning. In a disorderly class, the teacher spends much time trying

to secure the attention of the learner. He loses inspiration and does little of effective teaching (361).

In order to avoid this ugly trend and to ensure that he accomplish his mission of guiding, influencing and moulding the child into a responsible individual who is useful for himself and the society, the teacher's task, according to Arikpo becomes that of:

Making the learner keep quiet and to behave himself properly in the class should the learner be lazy and unwilling to work he can, to some extent, force him to do some work. Should he be noisy and disorderly in leaving his desk, class or work to some other part of the school, it is the teacher's responsibility to make things very unpleasant for him. The teacher should be able to do this because as a professional, he is in control and has the right to demand those things from the learner. He exercises this right by creating a system of punishment (362).

However, it is important to note that whenever an imperative is given for the discipline of an individual and where discipline is understood as stated above, there seems to be some underlying motives behind discipline. These motives are for reforming, deterrence, teaching a lesson and compensation. The first two appears to be very cogent motives behind a teacher disciplining the learner by means of punishment. Thus, punishment as employed by the teacher is imply a means to an end (discipline) not an end in itself. This implies that punishment ought not to be given as a sadistic act of merely seeing learner's suffer but ultimately as a way of ensuring that they behave in line with expected ideals and norms. In this sense, punishment is understood as a genuine case of discipline in schools.

Evaluation

The ethical problem involved in the justification of punishment as a means of maintaining discipline in schools, particularly with pre-adolescent learners is centred on the question of responsibility. In spite of the apparent differences between the two philosophical positions for the justification of punishment (the retributive and the utilitarian theories) earlier discussed, a closer, scrutiny of both reveals a common feature which they have, viz that an a

to intentionally do Y also entails that X has at least the option of not doing Y and that it is only in this sense that one can say that X has the responsibility of doing

Y. Since X intentionally did Y when he had a lot of options carries with it the notion freedom to act otherwise when instructed.

Granting that our example of John being disciplined is a genuine case, one or two questions come to mind as to the justification of punishing John who is in his pre-adolescent age to be precisely six years of age if we accept the assumption that punishment at least in the eyes of the public or onlooker entails guilt and responsibility on the part of the person being punished or disciplined. One may ask to what extent can John at this age be said to be responsible? In many educational institutions today, we see pupils of John's age being disciplined because it is generally assumed that they are responsible for their bad behaviour. Put in another way, can we say that John is responsible for his behaviour in the same way as his teacher would be if he (the teacher) fails to comply with one of the educational edict of the state and he is being punished?

One conceptual and practical problem that arises out of this situation is that when John is being disciplined, most educationists would accept this type of approach as being right because they would argue that it is the paramount duty of the teacher to correct, reform and mould John into what perhaps the parents in particular or the society or the teacher or all of them want him to be. In this sense, punishment as a means of maintaining discipline is conceived as a therapy-such that the patient, in this case John, when given the appropriate dosage of treatment, in this case punishment, would be cured-made to obey the particular rule he has flouted.

The above argument on its very score is weak on the ground that it has up till date been very difficult to say precisely at what age a child is said to be responsible; responsible in the sense that he must make the choice after a careful consideration of the various options open to him to choose between patterns of behaviour especially when such choice(s) involve moral judgement. Thus, disciplining John in the sense described above implies the assumption that John is responsible perhaps in the sense the adult is. Is this assumption reasonable?

In response to this question, Kant argues that for the establishment of morality, moral actions or actions that are to be regarded as such must be based on the free choice of the individual to so act as he did. That is to say, it is impossible according to Kant to establish moral laws which are unlike laws of nature, without the existence freedom or the free will. Moral laws that govern human behaviour (ethically) directs its existence of a freewill which is capable of functioning independently of the laws of nature or physical causality. If there were no farewell, morality, Kant concludes, would be impossible or illusory.

Following the above argument, it would be absurd on the one hand to deny John the faculty of freewill for if he is to qualify as human, he must have this quality. On the other hand, it would be more absurd to assign to John at his age the kind of responsibility and guilt one would assign to an adult. But the idea of discipline and punishment seems to do exactly this! However, the puzzle here is not denial of John the faculty of freewill but to what extent and degree can we say that John or any pupil of his age in breaking the rules, acted on his own accord as the adult would do? That is to say, John was aware of the consequences of his action when he did otherwise. It appears it is more reasonable to contend that although John has some level of freewill to act in a certain way but that most of his actions and those of his age group, though rational are mostly influenced by what he admires. His actions most often may be motivated out of sheer curiosity to find out what would happen if he did so and so without understanding the implications of taking such an action. In a situation where this behavioural pattern of the child is not positively acknowledged and the term discipline carries the connotation of the learner conforming: of not making academic, technical or social mistakes the child's so called freewill and sense of responsibility is distorted and learning ultimately becomes problematic. In such an atmosphere, according to Brooks: "Integrated learning cannot occur for the pupil will feel under threat and this will give rise to an intolerable level of anxiety which will cause the child to shut himself up in defence rather than opening himself up to experience" (28).

It is therefore important to note at this juncture that mistake is a natural platform for any child to develop his sense of insight and creativity. It should not be seen as an affront to laws rather as a necessary process of understanding why the law need to be obeyed. This makes it clear that one cannot protect a child from making mistakes as it is a condition-sine-qua-non for his maturity. A precocious child will find it difficult, if not impossible, to become a man of insight and clear understanding. On the importance of mistake to the development of the child, Brooks has this to say:

Children must be brought to realize that mistake is not some form of minor 'crime' which merits some punitive reaction. Mistakes can be creative in the sense that they can lead to new insights, the development of more realistic goals and valid personal growth. He teacher who is affronted by mistakes is not likely to be competent to create a learning environment which has personal relevance for the children (27-28).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the argument in support of John's teacher to discipline John in particular in terms or inflicting physical pains on him is untenable on the basis that even if the teacher's motive were innocently genuine the consequence of destroying confidence and aspiration in the child and replacing with fear and lack of creativity cannot be justified. Furthermore, the institutionalization of discipline of this form (punishment) for the pre-adolescent learner is absurd on the grounds of responsibility and guilt to action. John cannot be to be fully responsible for his action. Hence, on these grounds, it is morally wrong for the authorization of discipline in form of physical punishment on learners of John's age irrespective of whether the motive is utilitarian or not. But this leaves us with yet another ethical problem, how to correct the young when they go wrong when all avenues of persuasion and explanation have been exhausted?

Conclusion

In response to the above question, this paper argues that in whatever way one looks at it, punishment (in the mild form) cannot be totally excluded in the education of the child. However, the administration of punishment must be carried out in an atmosphere of love, that is, in such a way that the child will have a sense of being loved but that his/her misbehavior is what is being detested. This therefore underscores the importance of establishing the right kind of relationship between the punishing agent and the child. The point being stressed here is that the agent of punishment must not be seen by the child as a bully nor a wicked person who only derives joy and satisfaction in seeing a child suffer. To avoid this negative perception, the punishing agent must not punish a child with signs of anger (like cursing a child when being punished) as this leaves the child to focus only on the anger and the pains he is subjected to rather than the purpose of the punishment. This only makes the child to be more stubborn and remorseless. Kant corroborates this point when he writes that:

Punishments inflicted with signs of anger are useless. Children then look upon the punishment simply as the result of anger, and upon themselves merely as the victims of that anger, and as a general rule punishment must be inflicted on children with great caution, that they may understand that its one aim is their improvement (Education 36).

Punishment inflicted with signs of anger only makes the child to see the punishing agent as a wicked person and thereby begins to look at the punishing agent with contempt which ultimately results into personal hatred. In this situation, the child loses the required respect and likeness needed; for understanding to take place. Thus, the purpose of punishment (that is character formation) is better achieved only when the friendliness, mutual respect and likeness between the child and the punishing agent remains intact; even in the face of punishment. It is in defense of this point that Derek Wright is of the opinion that:

There seems little doubt that both at a relatively superficial level and also in a more committed and long lasting sense, when the child likes the punishing agent the probability that punishment for misbehavior will result in later self-control is much increased (39-40).

This point being stressed here is that in a situation where a child sees a punishing agent as a friend, care-giver and loving figure the child would be in a positive frame of mind to understand why he/she is being punished (as a corrective measure) for an act which goes contrary to an expected behavioural pattern. Consequently, the child tends to be more psychologically and emotionally prepared to take corrections. This state of mind of the child is only possible when the adult engages in some kind of explanatory talk which enhances the trust the child has in him/her. This explanatory talk must be done in a balanced and objective manner in which the adult does not only highlight the child's right attitudes. In a situation where the adult focus repeatedly upon the misbehavior of the child, contending himself with saying what a naughty and unpleasant boy he is without a more positive evaluation on other occasions, the child is likely to conclude that he is a bad person and that there is nothing he can do about it. It is important not to misconstrue this thinking as a call for the institutionalization of a system of rewards in a child's character formation. Just as it is dangerous to punish a child with signs of anger, so also it is to give reward for every good act a child undertakes. It is of no use, argued Kant, to give children rewards; this makes them selfish, and gives rise to an *indoles mercenaria* (Education, 35) Kant elucidates this point further when he writes that:

if you punish a child for being naughty, and reward him for being good, he will do right merely for the sake of the reward; and when he goes out into the world and finds that goodness is not always rewarded, nor wickedness always punished, he will grow into a man who only thinks about how he may get on in the world, and

does right or wrong according as he finds either advantage to himself. (34).

From the foregoing, it is evidence that a balanced and objective explanatory talk involves the adult emphasizing the general nature of an offence, giving reasons for judging it wrong, explaining its effect upon others, and relating it to future occasions. When this forms the content of the talk on a regular basis, the child becomes equipped with the necessary criteria for making judgements of his own. For instance, the purpose of punishing a child for stealing from the pot is not just to stop him stealing from the pot but to stop him stealing in any context. For this to happen, the inhibiting anxiety must be associated with the general concept of 'me stealing' and the child has to be taught how to apply the concept of stealing in his own behaviour in a wider variety of situations, (Wright 40). In this way, the wrongness or rightness of an act is dissociated from the authority of the adult and the child acts in a particular manner not because there is an authority to punish or reward but because he is convinced that it is the right course of action to take.

In line with the analysis, it is therefore the position of this paper that when punishment (in the mild form) is accompanied by explanatory talk, it creates the platform for the comprehensive development of a child, that is, a child of insight and clear understanding. It is also important to note that the success of any kind of talk by the adult (teacher) depends upon the child's readiness to listen, and this in turn depends upon how much the child values the adult. Punishment administered by such valued adult faces little or no resistance by the child as the respect he has for the adult neutralizes such feelings. Thus, what is key in the education and character formation of the child is mild punishment backed by the right kind of relationship between the child and the punishing agent.

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