

## **EMBODIED LOGIC: UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLINE THROUGH TEACHERS'**

### **COMMENTARIES**

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#### **Abstract**

Ideas of discipline are organised into coherent sets of approaches that construct unified subjects of discipline and present logical delineations of theory that, in turn, inform practices and techniques of discipline. We aim to demonstrate in this paper that despite the assumedly logical nature of these approaches and the unified subjects they attempt to produce, individual teachers when talking about disciplining students create an individual and 'embodied logic' to justify their practices that appear as much less coherent and somewhat illogical or even incompatible. This 'embodied logic' is composed through statements delivered by the confluence of discourses of discipline approaches and other related discourses, for example ideas on human nature, childhood and adolescence, respect, responsibility and so on.

In order to develop this argument, we first examine the ways in which approaches to discipline utilise scientific discourses and produce particular rationalities of discipline. Tying this examination together with considerations of respect, responsibility, self-discipline, choice and so on, the paper then examines codes of conduct that utilise these and aim to create an inherent logic of discipline. Following that teachers' commentaries on codes of conduct are analysed in order to demonstrate the ways in which constructions of 'the child', 'the adolescent' and 'human nature' and the previously explored rationalities and considerations play out in teachers' thinking. We argue that these commentaries are mobile and temporary assemblages of statements that are used by teachers to organise their reasoning to create an 'embodied logic' to justify and explain particular ways of disciplining students, but often are composed of diverse, incompatible and irreconcilable ideas and values. Thus, we develop an argument that the ways in which these considerations play out are fragmented and often illogical, in spite of teachers' attempts to build up an 'embodied logic'. Finally, we raise some questions about the implications of what this fragmented view of disciplining might mean.

## 1. Introduction

This paper encounters the ways in which thinking about discipline in schools is connected to scientific and popular ideas of human nature, the ‘process’ of growing up, constitutions of ‘the child’ and ‘the adolescent,’ and ideas of the modern subject and citizen. It examines some of the ideas that underpin classroom discipline theories, shape codes of conduct, and form understandings of teachers about discipline and disruption. One of the aims of this examination is to demonstrate the ‘polyvalent’ nature of classroom discipline discourses (Foucault, 1977). The other aim is to draw attention to their somewhat ad-hoc use by codes of conduct and teachers that produces embodied logics, that is, situation specific, value laden, shifting and diverse reasonings, to understand situations and to provide reasons for disciplining. We argue that while the vast literature on behaviour management presents classroom discipline as governed by principles (theories) and practiced through techniques that are aligned with these theories, the logics that code of conducts and teachers bring together ‘on the ground’ are less principled by coherent sets of ideas than one would presume. Rather, we highlight the ways in which this complexity forms possible temporal and situation specific statements through which teachers might understand and address disruption.

Discipline theories that teachers utilize to understand disruption and to regulate students, are informed by scientific knowledges. Discipline techniques, such as conditioning or forms of counselling, are also expert invented in line with theories. In classrooms, however, teachers use a grab-bag of available scientific and less scientific reasonings about individuals and disruptions, mixed with other discourses, that coagulate to form a particular situation-specific and flexible logic. Particular discipline theories also draw on multifaceted ideas about ‘the child’, ‘the adolescent’, ‘growing up’, ‘development’, ‘discipline’ and so on that are reorganised in a logic that serves to address given scenarios.

This paper first recounts some discourses of discipline theories then we move on to studying the individual logic some school codes of conduct employ, to maintain order and that teachers deploy to understand and deal with particular situations, to extend the number of discourses under examination and to demonstrate the ways these assemblages play out. Finally, our discussion highlights the fundamentally complex

and situation specific nature of these theories and what they might mean in regards to contemporary discipline.

The data for this section is drawn from a multifaceted research project into school rules of conduct and disciplinary strategies conducted in several distinct regions of Ontario, Canada between 2003 and 2009. While we reference here some codes of conduct developed by individual schools, school boards or provinces, this paper primarily draws on thirty-one interviews conducted with teachers and administrators on the creation and application of the rules in their secondary schools. The study worked with codes of conduct and student focus groups to investigate school rules, their enforcement and the rationales behind them. Twenty-one interviews (five vice-principals and sixteen teachers) were conducted with staff in a semi-rural region and ten (two principals and eight teachers) in a large city.

Interviewees were located through asking school principals and vice-principals for referrals, through an advertisement in the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation newsletter, and through word of mouth. They were asked to discuss their schools' rules and enforcement strategies, how this information is communicated to students, and the participants' own roles in the production and/or enforcement of rules. They were then asked to reflect on which rules and enforcement strategies are appropriate or inappropriate; to raise any significant issues they see pertaining to school rules; to discuss their philosophy behind school rules and why students might break or follow them; and finally to reflect on the possibility of student participation in the production and review of school rules.

## **2. Scientific discourses in discipline theories**

Approaches to discipline are intertwined with developmental and psychological discourses; discourses of 'the child' and 'the adolescent'; discourses of citizenship; and other pedagogical theories and practices. While we limit our focus to some of these, we also note that there are many other discourses also at play in understanding, dealing with and talking about student discipline, including those addressing safety and risk, reflecting public concerns "about school discipline and mirrored by unruly students, bullying and violence in classroom and on playgrounds" (Fields, 2000, p. 73) or discourses surrounding individuals' past experiences in school in relation to

discipline (Southgate, 2003). In this section of the chapter we single out and discuss: (1) discourses of development; (2) progressive efficiency and objectives, and (3) autocratic and democratic discourses of discipline. We do this to demonstrate potential understandings of how teachers make meaning of, and deal with, disruption.

### ***2.1. Discourses of development***

Some discourses of discipline utilize theories of development, such as Piaget's (1965) theory of cognitive development or Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development that explains children's rule-following and developing skills of moralising. The deployment of these discourses introduces a particular psychological reasoning that constructs and authorizes certain approaches to classroom discipline. For example, as Slee (2003) states: "[s]ociety is intolerant of age-inappropriate behaviour. Early childhood professionals need to recognize *developmental stages* in young children as a standard against which to compare atypical behaviour" (p. 5). Porter (2003) similarly encourages teachers to look at disruption as a result of "behavioural mistakes" comparable to "*developmental errors*" caused by "normal exuberance, normal exploration [or] lack of skills" (p. 18). Through the deployment of, and detailed attention to, such *developmental trajectories*, discipline theories precisely allow and disallow certain behaviours and make those subjects of training and development.

### ***2.2. Progressive efficiency and objectives***

Developmental thinking also utilises the idea of "progressive efficiency" (Fendler, 2001) and encompasses the idea that development needs to progress to a given objective. This idea involves an assumption that the *more developed* the young person is in the areas of social relations, for instance, the *more efficient* he or she is in negotiating and solving problems, and therefore, the less disruption he or she will cause. Thus, competencies are mapped through developmental norms or stages and discipline approaches aim to foster these competencies. They therefore judge disruption according to developmental norms and institute consequences that are developmentally appropriate or meaningful for children. For example, teenagers'

assumed and naturalized hormonal imbalances, and defiance of authority appear here as developmental norms, legitimizing their strict control as a form of guidance. Or, young children are assumed to be unable to competently convey their emotions due to the immaturity of their linguistic abilities, immaturity that is sometimes evaluated as the cause of troubles with peers and therefore classroom disruption (Porter, 2003; Slee, 2003).

Behaviorism introduced the idea of objectives to discipline theories (Fendler, 2001; Slee, 1995). According to behaviourism, particular behaviours can be achieved through a pre-designed plan of conditioning. Such an objective driven approach has been utilised in different forms of discipline that are interconnected with ideas about the learner and what she or he will become. Objectives thus link discourses of discipline to ideas about young persons in the classroom and their future prospects. One object of discipline is to ensure successful learning, hence the conceptualisation of the child as a learner and discipline as enabling the *objective of learning*. In another example, in more democratic theories to classroom discipline theories (such as Balson, 1991; or Glasser, 1992), the *objective* is the creation of a citizen who is a rational and responsible *member of democratic societies*. The citizen is expected to make decisions regarding the fulfilment of her needs in a way that corresponds to social norms. This functionalist emphasis on the role of socialization in schooling is strongly highlighted in certain disciplinary approaches and emerges frequently in teachers' talk about discipline, as we will explore below. This line of reasoning serves to legitimise teachers' demands for students to obey the rules without question.

### ***2.3. Autocratic and democratic discourses of discipline***

From the 1970s, different systems of reasoning emerged that re-evaluated the rights of students (arguably due to liberation movements Balson, 1992; Lewis, 1991). As a result, "teachers found that they could no longer dominate students" (Balson, 1992, p. 6). Consequently, teachers appropriated more democratic styles of discipline. To partly answer these shifts towards more democratic thinking, disciplinary practices, discipline approaches and associated pedagogies changed to more child-centred or interactive ones (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; MacNaughton, 2003). Disruption was (re)constructed as a problem to be solved through flexible and individual solutions

and negotiation in order to develop young persons' skills and to utilize their willing attitude to cooperate in their own discipline.

Yet a changing political climate, uneasiness with student confidence and rising fears related to safety in schools has concomitantly supported the introduction of the more authoritarian zero tolerance type policies, especially common in the USA. The tension between democratic forms of discipline and tight control still remains in disciplinary practices: appearing in school codes of conduct and teachers' thinking about classroom practices, as discussed in the next section. In practice, ideas of development, progressive efficiency and objectives, and autocratic and democratic approaches to discipline are blended together to form mobile arrangements that constitute particular logics to understand disruption and to fashion tactics for students' discipline. Staff members use temporary combinations of techniques that are produced by distinct discipline approaches as the solution to specific problems with order in school.

### **3. Responsibility, respect and self-discipline**

In this section we continue to study some of the aspects outlined above through examining how disciplinary discourses play out in their practical application in relation to codes of conduct. We also extend these discourses with those of responsibility, respect and neo-liberal subjectivity (Rose, 1996). To carry out this task we discuss a sample of school codes of conduct and commentary from teachers to demonstrate how these discourses play out in policy documents and teachers' thinking. The positions explored here reflect a multiplicity of premises on human nature and aspects of 'childhood' and 'adolescence' as conceptual categories (James and Prout, 1990), including development and becoming, and inherent nature and being.

School codes of conduct are meant to educate students and their parents about students' expected behaviour: they therefore prescribe student behaviour. Codes often include a brief philosophical framework and then a list of rules. The framework commonly discusses developing an independent, autonomous subject through student responsibility and the centrality of respect. For example as one code states: "Our purpose is to assist young people to become self-disciplined, self-directed individuals

who take responsibility for themselves and their education.” While only a minority of codes reflected this example’s specific use of the term self-discipline, the concept of responsibility is a cornerstone of most codes and in itself implies self-discipline or self-regulation. Responsibility is individualised to the student who is exhorted to make sensible choices and to take responsibility for them. The student is thus ‘responsibilised’<sup>1</sup> towards self-governance (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Such language is a nice example of attempts to shift school rules towards the more democratic approaches described above, yet with processes of control consequently blurred into the language of choice. This finding is consistent with the Australian codes reviewed by Lewis (1999) where he found students’ self-discipline to be the primary frame for school codes of conduct. Despite such ‘responsibilising’ frameworks, codes of conduct then present the rules themselves as a list of negative directives that are non-negotiable, imposed, and frequently unexplained, reflecting a custodial approach (Hoy & Weinstein, 2006) that Schimmel (2003) also observed in his review of codes of conduct in the United States. Supporting this claim, a minority of schools even overtly state that students are to defer to authority, particularly when they are being disciplined. The codes construct a scenario through which students are to learn self-discipline through obedience and conformity (Raby, 2008). As one school lists: “...students have the responsibility to:

Develop self-discipline.

Meet the expectations of the code of behaviour at all times...[...]

Be courteous and respect authority and the people in positions of authority.”

Responsibility, on the one hand, can be considered as an individualised tactic that structures the field of possible conducts and deploys the subject as active in her or his self-discipline. It is also used, on the other hand, in order to reinforce the dominance of the rules and authority figures. The person who is taking up this position, the “self-disciplined student,” is therefore someone who acts as if he or she is inherently obedient. In this way, students are ‘responsibilised’ to be active in developing their self-discipline, but until they reach their full potential to discipline themselves according to the particular codes, they are coerced to do so through the authority of

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<sup>1</sup> The term: ‘responsibilised’ is invented by Hannah-Moffat (2000).

the teacher. Thus, a certain capacity to handle responsibility for one's own behaviour is assumed to exist from a young age, alongside assumptions of the same person's incapacity to self-govern.

Another tactic within some codes of conduct is to focus on respect for self, others, property and authority. The category of 'respect for self' is a particularly interesting one as it is a disciplinary technique which suggests care for the self and yet it is presented through some school codes of conduct in a similar way to responsibility, as contingent on compliance. The same school states that "self-respect is impossible unless students first respect other people's authority and property" while other schools suggest that respect for self is evident through obedience to school rules, such as those against the use of drugs and alcohol. We propose, therefore, that discourses of 'responsibility' and 'respect' are taken up by codes of conduct as tactics that mix ideas of self-discipline, obedience, authority, and so on.

A similar relationship between self-discipline and obedience becomes visible when schools employ zero tolerance policies. A version of this policy was adopted in Ontario between 2002 and 2008. Zero tolerance reflects a common, behaviourist approach with clear objectives (Slee, 1995) as it is based on the idea that certain infractions will bring mandatory consequences. Zero tolerance assumes that swift, sure consequences will deter future problems, both in a specific student and in other students. It assumes a rational subject who will weigh the consequences before choosing to break a rule. Punishment is thus framed in the context of student choice: students illustrate their responsibility by choosing 'appropriate' behaviour in the face of certain consequences.

#### **4. Assembling embodied logics**

Embodied logic is a particular and temporary selection of available statements that form mobile assemblages to understand and reason about disruption and students' discipline. Staff members' comments on school codes of conduct reflect these flexible collections, and here we examine some of these to illustrate how they produce multifaceted understandings.

The following excerpt revolves around considerations of responsibility and self-discipline:

Jen (teacher): I think it is important to, to discipline for lates and truancies. Um, again because you need to teach them how to be responsible and to, to be present for learning....

Bill (teacher): ...at least give the kids a heads-up warning first. You know like if you see somebody, say “that’s really not appropriate to wear today. I don’t want to see that outfit [...],” you know? For me to deal with it first. Give the kid the opportunity to make the decision to correct it too, some ownership and some responsibility too. Like, to try to give the power to that kid to make that decision.

Jen’s comment typically suggests that a teacher-directed form of discipline is necessary in order to teach future responsibility, that appears as the objective of discipline, and yet she feels the need to legitimise the use of authority by drawing on classroom discipline’s pedagogic role to settle students down to be ready for learning. In contrast, Bill’s comments are reflective of a democratic approach in that Bill is interested in the student making a choice. Bill pre-determines, however, the possible options for students and keeps the consequence of not making the ‘right choice’ in focus. His comments thus illustrate concerns with teachers’ dominance explicated by guidance approaches. Guidance aims to institute more democratic relations between students and teachers, and therefore the emphasis on control and obedience is subtle in Bill’s talk, for it is tamed by the use of ideas of ‘ownership’, ‘responsibility’, ‘decision making’ and the ‘handing over of power’, but it is still there and perhaps more insidious, belying its more democratic aims. This tendency for guidance approaches to be enlisted in the interest of control has also been observed by Slee (1995), Pongratz (2007), and Millei (2007a, b).

Several comments from Chicago, a vice-principal, discuss young people as junior adults, or adults in training, who can see that a rule is not unreasonable. He also suggests that students today are more mature than in the past and therefore sees a problem when teachers are overly committed to consistency and rigidity. But then he argues that young people are insufficiently mature, so their responsibilities and abilities to make decisions are incongruous with their independence, as evident in the following two quotes:

I think that it's that difference of maturity between a 14 or a 15 year old often than say a 19 or 20 year old, one who is in public school and another who is paying seven thousand dollars a year to be in a program [re: cleaning up own lunch mess].

However I think that it is a natural function maybe of families, that at 14 and 15 and 16 years of age, parents begin to, I dunno if they begin to lose control over children as much as they had before or they assume too much that children are capable of making adult-like decisions because they're asking for adult-like responsibilities and opportunities and then trust that the kids will know what to do is right. [...] That is exactly when you cannot let kids, in my opinion, make all those decisions [...] I mean, some kids make some wacky decisions at those ages.

The above examples and quotations from one interview with the vice-principal position students in a number of ways. They are junior adults, on the one hand, who can see reason and are therefore rational, like adults. On the other hand, they are also seen as adults in-the-making (developmental rationality) because they do not always make the right decisions. They are also understood as more mature than students of the past, reflecting proximity to adulthood, desires for independence and recognition of cohort-based generational difference. But they are seen as not mature enough to recognize the need to clean up their own lunch mess, although this decision is then more directly attributed to a rational weighting of having to pay or not pay for their schooling. Following this vice principal's logic, students possibly need top-down discipline due to their immaturity; guidance towards making the right decisions; and also incentives and consequences based on their presumed rationality.

In these staff members' narratives, there is a tension between an emphasis on young people's developing autonomy and independence alongside emphasis on obedience. Another related tension is evident between considering young people as beings in the present versus becoming in the future. Further, assumptions about human nature (e.g. as rational) stand in tension with those about childhood or adolescence (e.g. as irrational). The particular circumstances of individual situations and the power relations involved not only mix such contradictory statements into coherent logics, but enable the teacher to use them to underpin the rationality, relevance and benefits of these strategies for students. If we look at the following statement from Bill:

My juniors and I got into an issue about some classroom rules and so I said to them "you know I've tried to meet you half way and you guys

aren't able to meet me half way so I'm going to have to go to the letter of the law here." And with my seniors, I feel that they're at the point where they can have some more responsibilities for their actions.

Bill in his statement seamlessly uses contradicting notions of students being irrational and rational, obedient and autonomous, and as being irresponsible in the present while becoming more responsible with time.

Conceptualisations of childhood and adolescence as both being and becoming are evident in these excerpts and further complicate understandings of self-discipline. The fluidity of these categories of growing up allows young people to be framed in multiple and conflicting ways: within an immediate context they are prone to irrationality and yet assumed to be rational in response to behavioural strategies; they are in need of present control from others and in need of future internalised control; they are guided by their biologies (e.g. hormones) and yet able to make the right 'choice.' And yet within these conflicting representations, the underlying necessity to discipline through the enforcement of codes of conduct remains intact and unquestioned. Students need discipline because of their irrationality and hormonal excesses and yet also to guide their rational choices, to ensure their present control and their future self-discipline.

Within future-oriented developmental frameworks, young people are also 'trapped' by what they are in the present. Lesko (1996) talks about this irony in reference to youth who are abstracted as timeless, as they are always becoming, but at the same time imprisoned by time in that their age keeps them from representing themselves. This present incompleteness is also defined by various assumptions about adolescence in relation to discipline: e.g. that this is a time when young people are testing boundaries, peer-oriented, present-oriented, risk-taking, and so forth. While developmentalism did not seem to guide staff approaches in terms of incremental skill-building etc., it did emerge in such broader discourses that 'fix' adolescents in a specific mindset that swings between rationality and irrationality, and between dependence and independence.

Gemini (teacher): It's all about immediate gratification at that age right?

Iron (teacher): Today they'll follow the rules, tomorrow – I don't know, a hormonal thing – they don't want to follow the rules. The next day, they follow the rules.

Interviewer: Yeah? So you think it's just because they're teenagers?

Iron: Yeah! Yeah, I think it's just 'cause they're teenagers.

Louis (principal): Teenagers need to express themselves in a very different way. They need to, uh... Yeah, remember. I mean, these are... their hormones are raging! Alright? [...] They're in their teenage years. Their hormones are growing, you know? They're leaving the... They're trying to... the separation from the home. Daddy is no longer the coolest thing, mommy is no longer the coolest thing. Mommy isn't all-knowing, daddy isn't all-knowing anymore. "I don't want to hold their hands, I don't want to be hanging out with mommy and daddy anymore, I'm cool now!" Rules? Rules are the same thing. I know better!

Within this orientation, rather than assuming an immediate rationality or responsibility, it is suggested that young people need guidance from their present immediacy, irrationality and defiance to the future consistency, patience and compliance of adulthood. It is assumed, that armed with scientific knowledges of the adolescent stage, teachers know teenagers better than teenagers know themselves. Yet again we see that there is complexity in how teenagers are represented in their present contexts. First, they are guided by instant gratification, then by inconsistency in how they feel and then by defiance – all this alongside the other, abovementioned assumptions that consequences will be meaningful to them because this all also occurs within a broader context of an assumed inherent rationality to human nature in which students' choose to obey or face the consequences. This emphasis implies little need for flexibility in institutional response to rule-breaking.

## **5. Interrogating embodied logic**

Together, the combination of assertions presented here illustrate sets of ideas that reflect various scientific knowledges and other discursive elements that were assembled by teachers to produce a particular and situated logic to understand disruption and discipline students. In these mobile and flexible understandings and discourses, contradicting ideas are used seamlessly, for the most part to justify,

legitimate and deploy control over students in sometimes outward and other times insidious ways.

This analysis performed on teachers' commentaries raises questions about the effectiveness of improving discipline in classrooms by purely advocating for teachers to embrace coherent sets of theories by teachers. This kind of reasoning leaves other discourses and conceptualizations, such as those discussed above, unaccounted for. For example, ideas about the nature of 'childhood' and 'adolescence', 'human nature' and 'development' have strong bearings on teachers' understandings of disruption. Whether teachers in practice can consistently adopt comprehensive and coherent discipline programs, such as the ones recommended by Edwards (2008), also depends on these and other discourses and rationalities that shape teachers' thinking. Porter (2003) discusses some elements of this problem in her book, such as ideas or images of 'children' that discipline theories adopt, disregarding teachers' conceptualisations of 'children'.

This study also demonstrated that teachers use a variety of available discourses and their logics which are often composed of diverse, incompatible and irreconcilable ideas and values. The ways in which these considerations play out in everyday practice are fragmented and often illogical, in spite of teachers' attempts to build up an 'embodied logic'. This finding points to the necessity to understand discipline, teachers' use of discipline theories and their practices from a particularly broad context and with different conceptual tools. These investigations might adopt frameworks, theories and methods of sociological, political and linguistic studies, and examine classroom discipline at a broad societal level, rather than only school level analyses that psychological investigations commonly deliver. This work is started in our new volume titled: *Re-Theorizing Discipline in Education: Problems, Politics, and Possibilities* (Millei, Griffiths & Parkes, In press).

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