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STEALING FRUIT AND DECEIVING THE TEACHER

By AMY E. TANNER, Clark University

The following opinions of children were obtained under the auspices of the Public Education Association of Worcester in order to give a vantage point from which to modify the children's attitude. The principals of two of the public schools, who were on the Committee, kindly opened their schools to the study in the belief that the children are representative of the city children in general.

The following situations were presented to the children:

1. Every day when John went home from school he passed by a house that had a large yard with apple trees in it. John liked apples and so he used to go in and take as many as he wanted. If you owned the apples and saw John taking them, what would you do to him?

2. One day when Mary thought the teacher was not looking, she whispered in school. The teacher heard her and saw her and asked her, 'Mary, did you whisper just now?' Mary said, 'No Miss——, I did not.' If you were the teacher, how would you make Mary sorry that she had told a lie?

3. When examination time came Charlie could not do one of the examples in arithmetic, but he saw it on another boy's paper and copied it onto his own and gave it to the teacher. But the teacher knew that he had copied. If you were the teacher, what would you do to Charlie.

These questions were presented to the children by the writer, being read from the paper so that the wording should be entirely uniform, and given to all the children in one school on the same morning, between 9 and 10:30, so that there was no opportunity for discussion together by the children. All children answered them, the teacher of the room was always present and in some rooms the principal as well. The writer recognizes fully that answers under these conditions do not represent the child's *natural* reaction to the situations presented, but are a mixture of various factors, of which the two most important are the punishments he himself has received for such offenses, either at home or school, with perhaps an element of writing an answer to please the teacher. That is, they are in large measure the reflection of the moral stand-

ards of the adults who deal with the child, on the one side, and on the other, of the degree to which he himself has assimilated those standards.

In classifying the papers, the very few children below 8 and above 14 years were omitted, giving for the final returns, a total of 528 children, 270 boys and 258 girls, fairly equally distributed between 8 and 13 years inclusive, with only a few of 14 years.

The returns from the two schools and also from the boys and girls were kept separate, for purposes of comparison.

The reactions to stealing the apples show in percentages a considerable number of nearly equal classes, as follows:

Reactions	SCHOOL D		SCHOOL A	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Tell not to take.....	15%	17 4/5%	15%	30%
Chase away	15 3/5	9	3	2
Tell or ask to go away.....	10	15	3	2
Whip, strike, shake or spank....	12	8	9	1
Arrest.	13	4	12	3
Reproach, scold or threaten.....	4	5	10	19
Tell offender's parents.....	6	15	8	6
Tell to ask permission.....	3	6	18	13
Let him have them.....	4	7	5	4
Let him have a few or one.....	2	0 3/5	2	1
Fine.	4	0	0	0
Miscellaneous.	9	16	10	12

The most noticeable thing about these reactions is that a considerable number of them are not punishments at all, viz., telling John not to take the apples, asking him to go away, telling him to ask permission before taking them. These three together make up 28% of the D school boys, and 38 4/5% of the girls; 36% of the A school boys and 45% of the girls. Arrest and the various forms of moral suasion and of corporal punishment, including a report to the offender's parents, amount to 35% of the D school boys and 37% of the girls; 39% of the A school boys and 31% of the girls. An average of about 6% of all the children would even give the boy all he wants or some, that is, would encourage him to repeat his act.

Does it not seem altogether probable that this variety in the methods of dealing with stealing fruit is simply a reflection of the attitude of the home, and to some extent of the school? In a study made some years ago it was found that out of nearly a hundred professors, teachers and college students, approximately thirty of each, nearly every one remembered stealing fruit, melons, etc., when a boy, and none of them even when grown considered it very serious. Most of us look with a cer-

tain degree of toleration if not amusement on the pillaging of our neighbor's orchard. On the other hand we find person after person in Worcester as well as elsewhere testifying to the fact that after vain attempts to secure some fruit from his own trees or vines, he has cut them down. Not infrequently a certain tree is carefully guarded, but is pillaged just when the owner is ready to gather the fruit. Sometimes a state of war exists during the entire fruit season between an owner and the neighborhood boys, while in other cases the owner rather unsuccessfully attempts propitiation by giving to anyone who asks. In this case he is likely to get several requests a day, older children sending younger to make the request. So well do boys understand that the general public will not intervene that in one known case, school boys going home at noon would jump a hedge about a foot and a half high, shake the trees and gather the pears and apples in the sight of dozens of people, for the most part men going home for their nooning.

The writer has just learned of one instance of bargaining which throws an interesting light upon the property sense of some boys. One resident was about to leave his house shut for a number of weeks, and in an endeavor to save for himself some of his fine pears, he managed to assemble several of the boys of the neighborhood, told them he was going away, and asked them if they did not think it would be fair for them to leave one of his trees untouched and protect it from other boys if they themselves had all the fruit from the other two trees. They thought it would be about fair, and kept the bargain. The suggestive thing of course is their assumption that they had some sort of right to the fruit.

The reactions to Mary's lie are as follows, the children being asked what they would do if they were the teacher, to make Mary sorry she had told the lie.

Reactions	SCHOOL D		SCHOOL A	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Reproach.	15½%	18%	13%	28%
Scold.	9	12	7	6
Shame before class.	7½	13	5	10
Make admit the lie.	6	7	4	2
Keep after school.	9	14	15	15
Tell parents	7	6	15	4
Whip, strike or spank.	9	11	6	2
"Punish".	8	1	2	8
Rattan or ruler.	4	3	4	4
Send out of room.	2	3	7	4
Send to principal.	4	3	1	0
Miscellaneous.	13	9	15	15
Obscure.	3½	0	4	3

If we put together the various forms of suasion, reproach, scolding, shaming, forcing confession, and perhaps sending out of the room, we find that it includes, of the D school children, 40% of the boys and 53% of the girls; of the A school children, 36% of the boys and 48% of the girls. The word 'punish' is probably a euphemistic term for a whipping, and if we include this and the use of the rattan with the other physical punishments, we find that at school D 21% of the boys and 15% of the girls would use it, while at school A, 12% of the boys and 14% of the girls would do so.

The miscellaneous forms of punishment would in many instances fall under the general head of suasion.

The tone of the papers that fall into these two classes is interesting. Often the child makes it very vivid: 'Why, Mary, how could you tell me a lie?' 'Don't you know God won't love you if you do that?' 'How can anyone love you if you tell lies?' At the same time, it seems evident that the children do not feel the offense to be so very flagrant, and here too the variety of punishments seems to indicate that neither at home nor school is there any one kind of treatment of lies that is generally followed.

The reactions to the third problem, the boy who cheated in examination, are as follows.

Punishment	SCHOOL D		SCHOOL A	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Throw the paper away, mark it zero or below passing.....	31%	36%	53%	54%
Not count that example.....	3	2	1	10
Do other examples.....	7½	11	13	11
Do others after school	3½	6	1	3
Lower his mark.....	3	2	3	1
Keep after school.....	2	2/5	1	4
Scold.	4	4	2	0
Reproach.	5	3	7	5
Whip, strike or spank.....	16	14	5	4
Rattan.	3½	4	0	0
"Punish"	2	4	0	0
Tell parents	1	2½	0	0
Tell principal	2	2	1	2
Give another chance.....	2	3/5	0	0
Miscellaneous.	11	11	12	17
Obscure.	2	0	0	0

Here the most suggestive thing is the large proportion of children in both schools who would throw out the entire paper because the boy got help on one example. It seems evident that teachers have rather a uniform way of reacting to this particular offense, and many of the children's papers bring this vividly before one. 'I would tear up his paper into little

bits and throws it into the waste basket,' is a not uncommon form of expression. When the question was raised as to whether it is not rather severe to give no credit on the entire paper when there is cheating only on one example, the response from one principal was very prompt: 'But this is the kind of punishment given both by high school and college, unless indeed the pupil is expelled, and the child must learn what to expect.'

But when we consider that only a small percent of these children will graduate from high school and a much smaller number from college, we might question whether this form of deception and Mary's lie should not be put together with other things under the general head of deception, and fought all along the line, systematically, in school, with certain definite penalties that will be the same always and that will be inevitable. To some of us, lies like Mary's seem fraught with more possibilities of social harm than cheating in examination. Very few of us have examinations after finishing school, but all of us have constantly temptations like Mary's, to lie when we are unexpectedly caught in wrong doing. Ought not the school to combat the lie as such with more diligence, and not attach such undue significance to a situation which the school itself creates and which rarely occurs outside of school?

It was thought that characteristic differences would appear between the two schools, because one of them has some 30% of children whose parents are foreign born, and perhaps an equal number whose grandparents were, while the other has very few children with foreign born parents. For instance, we note that 15 and 9% of the D school children would chase away the thief as against 3 and 2% of the A school, while 18 and 13% of the A school children would give him the apples if he would ask, as against 3 and 6% of the D school children. That is, the D school children, coming as a rule from poorer homes than the A school children, would defend their fruit more vigorously and would be less likely to give it away than the others would. They would also tend less to suasion in this case, while in the case of Mary's lie, they would use it to about the same degree as the others. In all three problems they resort to corporal punishment more than the A children, most in the cheating, second in the stealing and least in the lying. Even if one did not know beforehand, one would infer that the children of D school come from homes that, on the average, are more primitive in their ideas of punishment than the homes of the A school children.

Few sex differences appear that seem significant, unless it is that few girls would arrest the thief as compared with the

boys. Smaller percentages of girls than boys would inflict corporal punishment on the thief, but on the other hand, nearly equal percents of both sexes would use it on Mary, and on cheating Charlie.

Nor was it possible to trace any significant changes in the character of the punishments with increasing age from 8 to 14 years, though doubtless there are such differences. The number of children of each age was too small to make it worth while to consider this problem here.