

# On Positive Behavior Support: A Critical View

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## A Letter from the School

At the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year, I received a letter from my daughter's public elementary school. The letter states that the school community:

“will implement a **new and exciting school wide behavior initiative called Positive Behavior Support (PBS) for the 2013-2014 school year**. PBS is a research based program proven to cultivate a more positive school climate. PBS establishes a common language, vision, and experience for everyone in our school. Students will be recognized for “Doing the Right Thing!” Students will be taught specific social and behavioral expectations related to being **respectful, responsible, resourceful and ready to learn** everyday.”

Since I believe that elementary education is more than just academics, the reference to social expectations such as respect and responsibility sounded all right. In fact, I think these social values are extremely important at school, at home, and in society. As for PBS, which was also referred to as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to avoid confusion with Public Broadcasting System, many people, including the school and district administrators, spoke highly of it. I also heard that at another school in the district, some problem decreased by 35% (I cannot remember what kind of problem it was, though). However, I was quite unfamiliar with PBS and unsure about certain points, e.g., “recognized” for “Doing the Right Thing.” What are the “right thing?” So, I started to explore.

## The Development of PBS

Here is *my* understanding of the development of PBS. The story began with behaviorism, a psychological tradition which concerns only with observable behaviors, not with mental conditions or other unobservables (e.g., Watson, 1930). The popular tool associated with behaviorism is behavior management through the use of reinforcement: basically, the use of punishment and reward. Although behaviorism became the mainstream tradition in psychology by the middle of the last century, especially in the United States, it was soon eclipsed by the growing interests in cognition (Miller, 2003; Schlinger, 2008). Nevertheless, behaviorism still

survives to this date as behavior analysis. In fact, a new branch of behaviorism called applied behavior analysis (ABA) is even thriving. After incorporating some cognitive elements, ABA found a niche in specific application areas, e.g., special education, especially for autistic children (Baer et al., 1968). Then, partially based on ABA, yet another tradition of behaviorism emerged; that is PBS. Addressing inclusiveness and humanistic values, PBS extends its horizon from special to general education (Carr et al., 2002) and is rapidly gaining ground, partially due to a strong political support (Johnson et al., 2006). According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs' National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (TA Center on PBIS, <http://www.pbis.org>), PBS is a "framework." That is, it does not necessarily involve behavioristic intervention. However, reflecting its development, PBS still owes much to ABA and thus behaviorism, as can be seen in this quote: "Were it not for the past 35 years of research in applied behavior analysis, PBS could not have come into existence" (Carr et al., 2002). In practice, virtually all implementations of PBS involve the heavy use of behavior management techniques, i.e., the use of rewards. This essay will focus on this type of typical PBS implementations with behavioral management, referred to here as **PBS-B**.

Then, the phrase, "recognized" for "Doing the Right Thing," in the school letter above must be referring to students' behavior management using rewards. This was easily confirmed on the first day of school. My daughter told me that the students started to get some sort of tokens for "good" behaviors and that they would be able to exchange them for a prize. Of course, this is not the first time rewards are used in my daughter's school or in any school for that matter; it is practically everywhere. Many teachers and parents are not so much against the use of reward, even when they are against the use of punishment.

However, I am rather concerned about this kind of *systematic* use of rewards in educational contexts. I know that it is at least controversial, as will be discussed below. In this essay, I will discuss *my* position about PBS-B. I know that everyone's opinion is different and I respect others'. I hope that my position is respected as well.

## Reinforcement and Power Structure

So, why did behaviorism decline, but not completely? Among the many factors involved in the decline of behaviorism was Noam Chomsky's comment (mid-1950s): "defining psychology as the science of behavior was like defining physics as the science of meter reading" (Miller, 2003). It must have been obvious that focusing only on behaviors was rather limiting, especially at the wake of the "cognitive revolution." Another point was the discovery of a sort of counterexample to behaviorism, i.e., "learned helplessness" (Seligman & Maier, 1967). That is, repeated exposure to inescapable adversity can lead to the lack of willingness to avoid the stimulus. This shows that there are contexts where reinforcement does not work.

Then, why was behaviorism so successful at least initially and still in certain special areas?

There must be a condition under which reinforcement works well. The answer seems to lie in this quote (Hackman & Oldham, 1980):

“Many of the early (and highly successful) applications of the principles of behavior modification have involved animals (such as pigeons), children, or institutionalized adults such as prisoners or mental patients. Individuals in each of these groups are *necessarily* dependent on powerful others for many of the things they most want and need, and their behavior usually can be shaped with relative ease.”

That is, behaviorism research most successfully demonstrated statistically-significant outcomes in the context of **asymmetrically-dependent power structure** (or simply **asymmetric power structure**) between the experimenter and the subject. This point is extremely important for the development of ABA and PBS-B. It must be for this reason why ABA thrived in the area of special education, especially involving autistic children. The autistic children in such a research context must be heavily dependent on the experimenters and would have little choice but follow the instructions.

As a contrasting case, let us consider genuine friendship. Friendship would involve a different kind of power structure, which is more symmetrically-dependent or mutually dependent (in a positive way). In a sense, such a relationship would be so genuinely balanced that the involved parties would not even think about using punishments and rewards to maintain their relationship. Accordingly, for this kind of structures, nobody must be interested in doing research using reinforcement.

Between these extreme cases lie all sorts of situations. Then, for the intermediate cases, we could estimate the effectiveness of reinforcement as follows. The more asymmetric the power structure is, the more effective reinforcement would be. Note that asymmetric power structures are everywhere, e.g., at work, at school, and at home, and it is not that all of these are automatically undesirable. Nevertheless, it must have a significant impact on how rewards would work. So, here is a summary:

Reinforcement works better in an asymmetrically-dependent power structure (asymmetric power structure, for short), e.g., between adults and children. Then, if reinforcement appears to be working well in a certain organizational structure, we can suspect that it is more asymmetric.

With this in my mind, my concern is the following. When rewards are used in an asymmetrical power structure, the children will be “educated” to “fit in” the structure *as a relatively powerless subordinate*. In other words, the children will be trained to be a follower.

The connection between reinforcement and power structure makes sense to me. But I am not interested in a proof. At the same time, I am sure that there are people who would not accept

this connection. For example, the proponents of PBS-B, heavily relying on the use of reward, may not be comfortable with the statement. They may even want to refute it. However, it would be quite difficult to refute it as well. So, the discussion in this essay will go on without a proven common ground. I simply ask the reader to be patient and see if the essay would make sense. Toward the end, I will try to reach the *heart* of other people, including school and district administrators, and ask if taking different sides of an asymmetric power structure would make any difference.

## Social Values in PBS: Respect and Responsibility

As mentioned earlier, PBS integrates humanistic values, such as respect and responsibility, as a core element in its programs. Since PBS-B follows the tradition of behaviorism, PBS-B research measures these social values in terms of behaviors. One study uses the following criteria (McCurdy et al., 2003):

- **Respect:** Line up quietly and wait turn and keep hands and feet to self (in a cafeteria); Walk quietly and keep hands and feet to self (in a hallway)
- **Responsible:** Stay in assigned seat and wait for adult direction (in a cafeteria); Face front (in a hallway)

These behaviors seem to be indicators of being subdued in an asymmetric power relation, not ones of truly being respectful or responsible. My feeling is that many children could simply do these things without being genuinely respectful or responsible. For example, within an asymmetric power structure, some children may only superficially conform to the rules. At the same time, truly respectful or responsible children might not choose to behave this way for various reasons. So, I strongly feel that this PBS study fails to measure the degree of respect and responsibility. Instead, it most likely introduces or reaffirms an asymmetric power structure associated with this kind of approach.

Next, here is a list of indicators associated with respect and responsibility across a large number of schools (Lynass et al., 2012). Note that these items are arranged in the order of the frequency used in school.

**Respect:** 1. Kind words and actions; 2. Voice level; 3. Listen; 4. Treat others and property with respect; 5. Follow directions; 6. Raise hand; 7. Keep neat and clean; 8. Hands and feet to self; 9. Take turns; 10. Do your best; 11. Cooperate; 12. Manners; 13. Help others; 14. Allow others to be different; 15. Ask permission; 16. Stay in assigned area; 17. Allow others to learn; 18. Be prepared

**Responsibility:** 1. Follow instructions; 2. Be prepared; 3. Complete and turn in work; 4. Keep organized and clean; 5. Stay on task; 6. Do your best; 7. Take care of

equipment and property; **8.** Accept responsibility for your actions; **9.** Be on time

Again, many indicators seem to be associated more so with a subdued condition in an asymmetric power structure rather than with the target social values. The fourth popular indicator of “respect,” i.e., “Treat others and property with respect,” may appear different. However, it is circular; we cannot define respect in terms of respect. Note that the eighth indicator for “responsibility” is circular as well.

So, what PBS-B research accomplishes seems more of introducing and/or reaffirming an asymmetric power structure rather than actually measuring the social values it attempts to cultivate. Even if the outcome of such a study shows a statistically-significant outcome, the true meaning of the outcome seems far from the development of the expected social values.

Of course, it would be extremely challenging, if not impossible, to characterize and measure these social expectations. Maybe, there is an inherent problem with the approach taken by PBS-B. In addition, in a context where rewards are used, and especially if it works, that context must be based on an asymmetric power structure. Then, the children may not have a sense of true respect of the adults for the first place, because the children would, possibly unconsciously, feel forced and manipulated through the use of reward. In my opinion, social values such as respect and responsibility need to be cultivated in a context where people actually respect each other and be responsible for their own actions (more on this point toward the end of this essay). If we are interested in true understanding of the working in such a context, simplistic measurements may not make much sense.

Another point is about how PBS-B is being implemented. Basically, the entire procedure is prepared and executed top-down by the involved adults. One may think that this is rather obvious and inevitable (an alternative will be discussed toward the end of the essay). But what I want to point out is that even in the middle of children’s learning social values, PBS-B would *not at all* let the children take part and contribute. I wonder if children feel respected and responsible in such an environment.

Yes, PBS emphasizes stakeholder participation and being person-centered. For example, a PBS article states that “with respect to their ability to enhance personal dignity and opportunities for choice” and “[i]n person-centered planning, the specific needs and goals of the individual drive the creation of new service matrices that are carefully tailored to address the unique characteristics of the individual” (Carr et al., 2002). However, what is done seems more like children’s information being taken and used. Children are *not dynamically* involved in the process of solving problems.

## From Special Education to General Education

When PBS extends its domain from special education to general education, there must be a

subtle difference in many respects. First, I can imagine that children in general education are more vocal and could challenge the adults more visibly. Thus, the power structure in general education may be less asymmetric than special education. However, general education still involves children, who are inherently less powerful than adults. Thus, the child-adult relationship in this context would still exhibit an asymmetric power structure. This suggests that research results in general education would still exhibit effectiveness of reinforcement but not as spectacularly as in special education.

In fact, this seems to be related to the current state of the art. The reality is that a lot of PBS studies are still in the area of special education (e.g., Conroy et al., 2005). Thus, even though PBS claims that it is “research based,” there is a considerably smaller research base in general education, where the practice is widely applied. This is referred to as research-practice gap (Lewis et al., 2004). There also is an argument made by ABA researchers that PBS research set in a broader context seems not as rigorous and has shown little evidence of positive lifestyles change (Johnston et al., 2006).

## The Use of Reward

The use of reward is a highly controversial topic in research and in practice (e.g., see Akin-Little, 2004). The literature does not seem to be converging in any way, i.e., *for* or *against* the use of reward, and under what conditions. In a sense, the existence of a controversy itself can be a reason to worry about it. In other words, the core element of PBS-B has *never* been established *solidly*. Since many people seem to be in support of PBS-B, I will focus and discuss some of the potential problems with the use of reward. A more detailed discussion can be found in Kohn (1993) and Deci (1995). The problem with rewards is also discussed by Pink (2009), in the context of business; as a shortcut, one can watch his 18-minute TED Talk ([http://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_pink\\_on\\_motivation.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_on_motivation.html)).

Following the failure of the “zero tolerance” movement (Skiba & Peterson, 1999), PBS-B tries to avoid punishment. That seems good. Nevertheless, what PBS-B tries to achieve through rewards is actually closely related to the use of punishment. In fact, it is a sort of mirror image; rewards can be seen as “negative” punishments. For example, if only a small number of children are rewarded, the remaining children would be discouraged and practically punished (Kohn, 1993). Even if the procedure was declared in advance and the choice was made “fairly” according to the “rules,” this would not help many children who indeed need help. Repeated experience of getting no rewards would discourage some children and label them “failure” as seen by others and by themselves. Often, unnecessary competitions resulting from the distribution of limited rewards can create an unhealthy atmosphere. We can compare this potentially competitive situation with a more cooperative environment, where children could actually learn social values more naturally. Even when the entire class is rewarded, there can be problems. For example, it has been observed that children can behave aggressively in order to be collectively rewarded (Balsam et al., 1983).

Of course, the use of rewards and that of punishments are not completely symmetrical. There are many differences. For example, PBS researchers suggest “simply to ask yourself how you react to positive feedback versus negative feedback on your job performance” (Strain & Joseph, 2004). It is true that we tend to feel positively when we are praised, at least temporarily. However, whether that truly helps us advance in any direction in a long run would be a different question.

Some people might also ask: if rewards work, why don't we just use them? But we have already seen that rewards work most spectacularly in an asymmetric power structure. Then, we must pay a close attention to the environment. In other words, we need to check whether the asymmetric power structure is causing any damage to the students. If that is the case, continuing to use rewards even if they are working can be a dangerous idea.

Now, let us recall the case of genuine friendship, where friends would not normally use rewards or punishments (if they do, it would not be a genuine friendship). One might point out that such an experience is by itself “rewarding” and thus, it still involves a sort of “reward.” If one calls this “reward,” I have no objection to it; it is more like intrinsic motivation. Then, this kind of genuine reward is something we can apply to educational contexts; it is completely different from the use of reward for behavior management.

Next, let us observe some specific issues raised by parents from my daughter's school. There is a big problem about the way rewards are distributed. Here is the procedure: for each “good” action, children receive a token; the students place them in a jar outside their classroom; using a lottery, only *some* children receive a prize. First, delayed rewards are shown to be ineffective (as summarized in Akin-Little et al, 2004). Second, lottery could compromise the sense of fairness in the children. It would be extremely difficult to explain to a child why s/he did not win the lottery (and thus a prize) even though the same child had accumulated tokens.

Second, children are receiving tokens for trivial things, such as fastening a seat belt in the bus; this is not only meaningless but potentially damaging. This is because children will get used to receiving rewards for obviously expected actions and gradually come to expect or even demand material rewards for actions they are supposed to do naturally. In fact, I am aware that some children started to show this kind of behavior after the introduction of PBS-B. In my opinion, basically all the use of material rewards boils down to some sort of problems related to this point.

Third, this type of simplistic reward system does not address all the different situations involved in different children. There certainly are children who were so beaten up that they don't care whether or not they get rewards. In this case, rewards just don't help them. On the other hand, most of those who receive rewards would behave all right even without rewards. In this case, rewards will most likely diminish their existing, intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, some parents were shocked because the parents were never consulted about the

introduction of PBS. If PBS emphasizes respect (including the respect for the parents) and stakeholder involvement, why was this the case?

There is one more point I would like to discuss, i.e., the use of feedback. For example, one might say that “noticing what a child is doing appropriately and telling that child you appreciate it.” This is indeed a good way to provide children with feedback, which is needed. However, as long as not accompanied with judgmental tone of voice, etc., this kind of feedback is considered as informational feedback (Kohn, 1993) or nonevaluative statement and is effective as such (e.g., Strain & Joseph, 2004) and technically speaking, not a reward (cf. praise as a judgment call). It certainly does not need to be associated with a tangible reward.

Finally, even within the PBS circle, the use of rewards is a delicate matter. Some PBS researchers admit that rewards can be abused (Strain & Joseph, 2004). These researchers even state that “[p]ersistent, continuous positive reinforcement is not and should not be the norm.” In their view, the use of rewards are “scaffolding” and must be eventually removed.

So, one question we can ask would be the following: when we think about a reward, we need to think whether this is given in the context of an asymmetric power structure, whether the child would be yielding consciously or unconsciously to the teacher’s power and pressure, and whether there is an alternative. My inclination is that there indeed are alternatives in almost all cases.

## Political Background

As pointed out earlier, one of the main boosters of PBS is a political background. This seems to apply to my daughter’s school as well. It was neither the teachers nor the school administrators who initiated the adoption of PBS-B at the school; it was the school district. As for the school district, it seems to be the regulations and national/state trend that prompted it to adopt PBS. Without the pressure from the top, would PBS have been adopted at my daughter’s school? I strongly doubt it.

According to TA Center on PBIS:

Since Congress amended the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, Positive Behavioral Supports has held a unique place in special education law. PBIS, referred to as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports in IDEA, is the only approach to addressing behavior that is specifically mentioned in the law. This emphasis on using functional assessment and positive approaches to encourage good behavior remains in the current version of the law as amended in 2004.

In addition, we see that “[b]oth No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act require educators to use research-validated practices in classrooms” (Lewis et al.,

2004). This type of top-down pressure must be influencing a lot of, if not all, schools.

The political background of PBS inevitably entangles a certain set of political values and ideologies. By framing the entire movement of PBS as a “framework,” the PBS proponents are able to downplay the issues involved in behavior management *and* integrate values/ideologies which are potentially orthogonal to its research components. However, this mixture of science and value/ideology within its framework can also be problematic if we examine its scientific validity. This situation seems to be causing the weakness of PBS research as we noticed in an earlier section of this essay. In a sense, “PBS fails as a science because it does not indicate how to differentiate reality from desire” (Mulick & Butter, 2005).

Now, let us shift our focus to school and district administrators. The administrators must be in an asymmetric power structure in relation to the higher authority, e.g., the state/federal government and other powerful educational organizations, including Common Core State Standards Initiative and the TA Center on PBIS. Then, PBS is not only making the children subdued but also affecting the administrators in an analogous manner.

## Administrators’ Perspective

In order to see how a child might feel about PBS-B, I would like to introduce the following imaginary scenario. Let us suppose that all the district and school administrators in a hypothetical state received the following letter from the state government:

The State education department will implement a new and exciting state wide administrator initiative called **Positive Administrator Support (PAS)** for the 2013-2014 school year. PAS is a research based program proven to cultivate a more positive administrative and school climate. PAS establishes a common language, vision, and experience for everyone in our district and school. Administrators will be recognized for “Doing the Right Thing!” Administrators will develop specific administrative and professional expectations related to being responsible, committed and ready to serve everyday.

Although not included in the above letter, one of the imaginary PAS documents describes the following reward mechanism.

The administrators will be “recognized” by “doing the right thing.” In other words, they will be rewarded by demonstrating responsibility, commitment, and service, which will be measured by the increase in the students’ test scores on the state-administered tests. In particular, if the average school/district score goes up by X%, the school/district administrators’ salary will go up by the same rate. In addition, successful administrators will be recognized with an announcement in the state publication distributed to *all* the schools in the state.

If we are a district/school administrator, how would we feel? Would we feel comfortable because the program name contains the buzz word “positive?” Would we be convinced that this is the way because it is claimed to be research and evidence based? Would we be happy because we may be get paid more and/or recognized? Would we feel motivated to work hard in this context?

At the same time, we may also start to feel a little skeptical. Would everything labeled “positive” be really positive? Would the research actually apply to our case? What kind of research any way? Could the test score and the salary *continue* to increase? What about if the test score decreases? Would PAS really be able to touch the sense of responsibility, commitment, and service deep within us?

We may have more concerns. This mandate is completely top-down; we were never consulted. Even if we feel good about getting paid more and being recognized, aren't we just being subdued by the authority's mandate? Why can't we do research and choose our own initiatives for the district/school by ourselves? After all, aren't we creative and autonomous adults? Isn't the measurement of our administrative and professional expectations through test scores completely irrelevant? If we are working hard with more challenging children in a more challenging school, would it be fair for us to deal with potentially lower test scores? There even is a recent study that demonstrates that wage differences could drive people to cheat (John et al., 2013); would the monetary incentive with public recognition be really healthy? The best reward for us would come from our satisfaction with the future of our students. As long as we have a decent job security with a reasonable salary, do we really need an incentive like this to continue working hard? By recognizing only high achievers, wouldn't the rest of us feel diminished?

Of course, this is just an imaginary situation; it may sound absurd. Or does it? Actually, if we take a close look at the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Obama administration's Race to the Top (R2T), PAS may not be completely unrealistic. For example, administrator and teacher incentive programs are coming everywhere, including Los Angeles Unified School District. In Los Angeles, this has been met with resistance. Why? Well, why wouldn't children under PBS-B feel the same? PBS papers suggest “incentive programs for teachers to increase compliance with the SWPBS program. For example, teams might highlight faculty who implement the program well in a newsletter, or the school principal might send thank-you notes to teachers congratulating them on contributing to a safe school” (Anderson & Kincaid, 2005). The keyword here is “compliance.” This time, not students, but teachers, are targeted as the subordinate in the asymmetric power structure. Shouldn't we be concerned?

Furthermore, let us also imagine a specific reward system for the administrators analogous to the one used at our daughter's school. For example, whenever we parked our car between the white lines in the parking lot, we get a token. Whenever we come to work on time, we get a token. We place those tokens in a jar in the office. Of course, they could catch us when we do *really* good things, such as consulting parents about various issues before implementing an

initiative. However, the state administrators tend to pay attention only to those actions that can be counted easily. Once in a while, a state government official comes in and announces the winner, who will receive a luxury car (Lamborghini or Tesla?). Since this is a costly prize, this happens only to a few people. But suppose that our colleague in the same office happened to receive a car one day (even though we got more tokens), how would we feel? Do we think this incentive system would increase our or anyone's motivation? Can't we feel how the children are experiencing? With this imaginary scenario, I'm trying to tap into our empathy. Without empathy (as the basis of respect), we could not respect children or other people, much less "teaching" it.

In this and, possibly, the real scenarios, our school and district administrators are in a position not that different from that of students with PBS-B. Are we, the administrators, really comfortable? Can't we do something to bring the power structure involving school and district administrators as well as students less asymmetric? If we look back twenty years later, would we feel that we were doing the right thing with PBS-B? How would our children be doing then? Surely, we don't want to see millions of followers following dictators as in Orwell's 1984. If we truly value "respect," not only for our children but also for ourselves, the golden rule, "do unto others," might come naturally to our mind. One instance of the golden rule might read: We should do to our children what we want others to do to us.

## Alternative Approaches

Let us now leave administrators' perspective. If we consider PBS-B's dependence on asymmetric power structure unhealthy, are there any alternatives? Here, I will discuss just two examples. I wish the school/district administrators had had a chance to do research before settling on PBS-B.

One approach is called Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS, <http://www.ccps.info>) developed by Ross Greene (2008). This approach appears to be quite in contrast with PBS-B and addresses various potential problems of PBS-B. CPS focuses on working *with* challenging children *without* the use of reinforcement, *neither* punishments *nor* rewards. This approach is much broader than dealing with just challenging behaviors. CPS has been applied to deal with children in general education and even a group of children at the same time (i.e., not just individually).

The main observation of CPS is that some children are challenging because they lack certain cognitive skills needed to behave in an expected manner. Then, the main process of CPS is to cultivate the missing skills through the collaboration of all the involved parties, but mainly between the student and the teacher. More specifically, the teacher tries to be empathic with the student and help her/him identify the lacking skills. Then, together, they identify the problem(s) that would trigger the student's challenging behaviors. Finally, still together, they try to come up with a mutually agreeable solution, that would satisfy both the student's and the teacher's needs. We can easily see that CPS is based on the mutual respect of the student and

the teacher and does not abuse an asymmetric power structure. Since the problem solving structure of CPS by itself is an example of an environment where respect and responsibility are *needed* and *used*, it is more likely that all the involved parties would cultivate the skills dealing with these social values without relying on the questionable association between these values and certain controlled behaviors as in PBS-B. With CPS, reinforcement is unnecessary and distracting, if present. According to Ross Greene, “consequences don’t teach kids the thinking skills they lack or solve the problems that set the stage for their challenging behavior.” Children would develop the sense of respect if they are respected. In other words, the respect *of* a child naturally arises from the respect *for* that child. Ross Greene summarizes the difference between PBS-B and CPS as follows:

“[P]erhaps the most striking difference between the two models is that PBS doesn’t involve collaboration between adult and kid; it is an adult-driven model. There is no major emphasis on collaborating with kids to identify their concerns (only a major emphasis on identifying *adult* concerns) and no emphasis on enlisting the kid in coming up with a mutually satisfactory action plan, rather, the *adults* come up with the action plan.”

Many people, so much being accustomed to the reinforcement-filled world of education, might think that this is overly idealistic. This is not the case. In case you are interested in, CPS is research based; it is based on the recent advancement in cognitive science, not on experiments involving behavior modification. CPS has been adopted in many contexts, including families, schools, inpatient psychiatry units, residential facilities, and juvenile detention facilities. CPS has been implemented in many school districts, occasionally in conjunction with the Response to Intervention initiative. At Durham Community School in Durham, Maine (<http://dcs.rsu5.org/>), CPS has been implemented even within a PBS framework. This example suggests that the PBS *framework* has a room for CPS, say, PBS-CPS, *without resulting in PBS-B*.

The other approach was proposed by Marilyn Watson (2003); this is based on attachment theory (one of the most influential and heavily researched subfields of psychology). The book focuses on “the power and importance of caring, trusting relationships for fostering children’s academic growth as well as their social and ethical development” and “explore[s] a fundamentally new approach to classroom management and present many practical strategies for helping all children develop the social and emotional skills needed to live harmonious and productive lives, the self confidence and curiosity to invest wholeheartedly in learning, and the empathy and moral understanding to be caring and responsible young people.”

One of the observations of Marilyn Watson is that children misbehave due to attachment insecurity rooted in their upbringing. She, along with the teacher, clearly demonstrated that this unfortunate condition can indeed be improved in a classroom setting. In the classroom discussed in the book, the teacher teaches social values, including respect and responsibility, without using reward, punishment, or competition. The main tool used in the classroom is exactly the social values the teacher was trying to cultivate, i.e., respect (for the children) and

responsibility (of the teacher). Such an approach might appear difficult to many teachers and parents. However, it is because too many teachers and parents are accustomed to behavior-based approach. If we have a chance to observe instances of genuine teaching and parenting, we won't be surprised that this kind of approach actually work, especially in the long run.

There also is a general approach applicable to any asymmetrical relationships, obviously including the educational context. The basic idea of Carl Rogers' (1961) humanistic psychology and his educational philosophy is to consider and treat people in the "one-down" position with respect, as a human being. When the PBS-B approach emphasizes the use of material rewards, it tends to loose the sight of this most important point and could even lead teachers to see students more as objects.

If a true educator compares these approaches with PBS-B, the difference must be so evident. Are we a true educator?

## Concluding Remark

In this essay, I criticized the behavior management aspect of PBS (referred to here as PBS-B) from several different angles, mainly through the notion of asymmetrically-dependent power structure. As long as the systematic use of material rewards remains a core element, as implemented in my daughter's school, I am strongly against PBS (or against PBIS). I hope that the school and district administrators respect the critical view of PBS-B and be open to its alternatives. At the same time, I am not so optimistic. Once people are fixated on a certain idea, especially a political one, it would be difficult to change their position even with a mounting evidence against it (Kahan et al., 2013). Of course, I am not immune to this tendency. However, I would certainly hope that the conversation about PBS begin to be more open and diverse rather than closed and narrow.

One of the mission statements of our school district is to "prepare life-long learners who are responsible, successful citizens making positive contributions to our society." For the children to be a life-long learner and responsible citizens, would they need the skill to simply follow the instructions given by adults or the skills to solve problem collaboratively and creatively? When our children become adults, they will face a variety of problems created and abandoned by their predecessors. At that point, will they be prepared to handle those problems on their own? But one reason why we emphasize life-long learning must be that learning is important also for *us*, adults, including the district/school administrators, teachers, and parents. Then, we must all learn what PBS-B *really* means *to* our children and must be responsible for constructing the environment fruitful for our children's future.

## Addenda

January 28, 2014: In a recent Board of Education meeting of our school district, a new state-mandated teacher/administrator evaluation policy was adopted. The policy contains dozens of

pages. The district superintendent said that it is a state mandate and thus there is no option but to adopt it. Most of the board members follow the suit. This is what I am worrying about. The generation of the current adults are already followers. But there was a bright moment. One board member abstained from voting, saying that he had not read the entire policy and such a policy could compromise teacher autonomy. This is why I am still hopeful.

February 1, 2014: According to my daughter, the use of lottery has been replaced by a more straightforward mechanism, at the end of January 2014. The students who earned twenty-five bear paws are entitled to exchange them with an item at the school store. This eliminates the unfairness associated with the lottery and is certainly a welcome shift, albeit a minor one.

October 8, 2016: This school year, my daughter moved on to a middle school, where PBIS is very well-established. In addition, there are much more “control” over students than in the elementary school. I do not yet know how to go about this.

October 17, 2016: I have to admit that our household has joined the PBIS bandwagon! In order to deal with our aging cat’s “undesirable” behaviors, we instituted Positive Feline Support (PFS). Whenever she behaves in accordance to our expectations, she gets either a timely meal or an extra snack. It is working! Just like the kids in schools everywhere. The only downside is that she will never be a self-motivated, autonomous citizen of our household. In fact, we know exactly why and how this is working. And it is exactly why we wouldn’t do the same to our daughter and we don’t want any children in the world has to go through a similar program.

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