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Case Study

The Art Box

Anna Walker was a little girl who got away with theft. This isn’t a very positive way to introduce a person, but for Anna it is the truth. She never had to face her wrongdoing or accept repercussions for her actions. The reason for this is very simple. As Kohlberg would describe it, Anna was at Level 1/Stage 1 of her overall moral development. Level 1 is the state at which a person’s moral reasoning is preconventional. During this time, the person is level 1 does not fully understand the rules and regulations of persons other than themselves. Stage 1 of Level 1 is called Punishment and Obedience. When one is at this stage, they are only able to separate bad and good by way of how much punishment is received. At a stage such as this, when the stolen items were not recovered immediately and Anna continued to get away with theft, as well as eventually have her parents side with her, resulting in a lack of punishment, Anna reasoned that the theft was ok.

When dealing with students in this framework of mind it necessary to get to the bottom of the situation as soon as possible. More importantly, it is imperative to lay the ground rules and repercussions for not following the rules before such circumstances have the opportunity to be committed. As a teacher, I would reflect on such rules before any other lessons were to be taught in the classroom. If the situation has already occurred, role play with the students or other ways of giving examples of theft and how it affects others would be utilized. Another tool would be writing the rules as a class and placing them in bold font on posters throughout the classroom. Lastly, the punishment would have to be immediate, separate parent-teacher conferences with all families involved (and if necessary a joint conferences as well), and some form of classroom-community service work would have to be invoked as punishment.

Though Anna’s state of moral development played a large role in this incidence, she was influenced by outside factors as well. Mr. and Mrs. Walker’s parenting styles played a very big role in this behavior. Mrs. Walker rarely speaks in the case study. With such little involvement, you can assume that she is a practitioner of the uninvolved parenting style. Mr. Walker, on the other hand, was combative, demanding, and aggressive throughout the entire case study. This is the authoritarian parenting style. Children under this form of parenting tend to be more worried about pleasing their parents than solving problems. As we saw in the case study, Anna was more concerned about pleasing her father by convincing him of her innocence than she was of convincing Mr. King, her teacher and the one attempting to make a punishment.

Of course, Mr. King’s attempts to give Anna a punishment were not very effective at all. He wanted to have a conference with Anna’s parents first. This is an alright idea, however, in order to engage parent’s in their children’s school life it is important to start off on the best foot possible. Mr. King made the mistake of making contact with the Walker family during a very high stressful, negative moment. As a teacher, it should be a general rule that contact with families remain consistent and long-lasting. The best communicative teachers I ever had are still in contact with my family. In today’s world of technological advances, any numbers of ways of communication are available. Sending letters home with the students, emails, classroom websites, message boards, phone tree lists; etc. But just simply utilizing the technology isn’t always what makes it effective. The teacher would have to always be updating the information given, always asking questions and requesting feedback, and, most importantly, never giving up. If Mr. King had had better communication with the parents (assuming that he didn’t, the case study did not say), he could have sent a letter home to the families in advance. On this letter, he would inform the families of the theft situation, named the items lost, and ask for any information if available on the items whereabouts. Then, after he discovered Anna’s part in the situation, he could contact her family directly, create small talk that generalized her year (positively!) so far, and eventually discuss the discovery of the items in her desk. Thus could begin a conversation about how such actions have zero-tolerance in the classroom and punishment would be given. End the conversation on a hopeful note, give contact information on persons within the school they could approach if they were not in agreement with the situation, and follow through with the punishment described. If Mr. King had done this, his opinion would have been more highly regarded than it inevitably ended up being. Whether the Walker family approved of his stance on the situation or not, he would give them their options while standing his ground. If he wanted, he could have another member of the school (possible the Principal) ready to join the conference if the need arose as well. At least, this is how I would think to handle such a situation more smoothly.

References

Woolfolk, A. (2007). *Educational Psychology. 11th edition (Active learning edition).* Allyn and Bacon. (Part One) ISBN-10: 0131381113