

Teachers' scolding - a solid border dividing children from teachers.

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Abstract

Almost all educators are scolding frequently, and almost all children are scolded, some of them very much. Is sanctioning an unavoidable part of institutionalized childhood? A project investigates what scolding does to the adult-child relationship and how it has been reduced, civilized or overcome in different settings.

Main concepts: Institutionalization of childhood, verbal sanctioning, adult-child relations

Main problem: How can we move from pedagogics characterized by judging, marking and punishing towards a culture of appreciation and recognition?

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“Border Crossings”

Important borders are dividing children from adults. One of them is caused by adult use of sanctions. My project is inspired by the work of Foucault and Goffman. They began the work of defining what are the characteristics of all kinds of institutions. One of them is punishment, either physical or psychical. My project deals with questions as: *What do you learn from being scolded? Why do educators scold children? How do children feel about it? How do educators feel about it? Why don't we give grounds for scolding? Which children are most scolded? Which are the short and long term effects of scolding. How can alternatives be developed? What can other projects, dealing with verbal sanctioning, tell us about reasons for, types of and impact of scolding?*

The scolding project, Denmark 1994-2002.

Why such an odd project?

In a research project about the quality of life of 6-year-olds, I coincidentally found some astonishing data: When asked “What is the worst?” nearly all children answered: “The worst thing is, when I’m scolded by the adults.” The common view was also that there were more scolding in children’s institutions (daycare and schools) than in children’s homes. And the children attended warm and friendly institutions of high quality.

Surprisingly enough I found that no research had been done anywhere with scolding as main topic. And I was sure, that if children were to decide topics for research, scolding would be no. 1 on the list.

There were other reasons:

- ! The institutionalized childhood: The level of institutionalization in Denmark in daycare, school and leisure time settings is approx. 25.000 hours during childhood, from age 1 to age 16. Some 40 years ago it was approx. 8.000 hours. From that reason, one can assume that the level of institutionalized scolding, other things being equal, must have risen.
- ! The increase of the level of institutionalization in terms of time has been accompanied by an intensification of the mental institutionalization - in the minds of the teachers, i.e. children are regarded more as students, pupils - or ‘inmates’ - and less as children. In this view, they are in need of what the institutions can provide: schedules, borders, fixed limits, rigid frameworks, plans, professionalism, external order, appraisal, judging and marking by authorized and higher ranking persons. Parents are encouraged to treat children in a similar manner. The mental institutionalization provokes children’s resistance.
- ! Children’s resistance can not be understood as resistance and therefore legitimate, but as the process of mental institutionalization normally not is recognized as such, the resistance is interpreted as symptoms of lack of social competence, disobedience caused by lack of parental guidance and discipline, lack of personal moral caused by a postmodern society without societal values .. And so on. Every problem, bad reading-performance or bad behaviour, are being met with more institutionalization: more classes, more discipline, more formal teaching. Instead of dignity, respect and degrees of freedom and right to selfdetermination children are treated with moralizing and even condemnation and exclusion, which in its turn provokes more ‘inobedience’ and more scolding.

Furthermore:

To study scolding is to study child-adult relations where they are most intensive. And: Pedagogics is normally about all the good, you want to do, and so the bad that every teacher always is doing as well is hidden behind the curtain of the good intentions

That was the background.

How was it done?

Firstly, a field-project were carried out in a high quality daycarecenter for 3-6 years old children in Roskilde, Vognmandsparkens Bornehave. (1995-97). All staffmembers agreed to focus critically upon adult-child relations, when they went wrong in order to improve them. By 'went wrong' we meant when the relation exploded in an adult scolding.

All children were interviewed individually. Some of the questions: Which educator is the most scolding? From whom do you prefer being scolded? How does she look, when she is scolding? What is the worst about being scolded? What might the educators do instead of scolding?

All educators were also interviewed: 'Do you scold much? How much is much? How do you feel, when you have been scolding a lot? If you had to be scolded, which colleague would you prefer to do it? Do you grip children by the arm?'

All staff members wrote a diary, where feelings, episodes and thoughts were recorded.

And - when time allowed it - an educator who had been scolding a child wrote down what happened - what she said, what the scolded child said or did, what she then said and so on. A colleague, who happened to witness the episode or even was called upon by the scolder and asked to watch, interviewed the scolder, the scolded child and sometimes one or two other children, present during the scolding. This method was called 'the whole way around-method'. Everything was written down, every staffmember received a copy and the episode, thus seen from many angles, were discussed at a staff meeting, when possible with me as a participant.

Some results:

- ! More than half of the children hated to be scolded in public, so they don't do that anymore, but go instead to the office or another quiet place.
- ! Obviously, it was bad to be scolded by an educator, with whom the child did not have a well-established and warm relation. Therefore, this was stopped. In case, you have to find a

colleague, whose relation to the child is solid, to do the scolding.

- ! Many children are afraid that the scolder is still angry with them, even long time after the scolding, so now the scolder must always go to the scolded afterwards and tell him: I'm not angry anymore!
- ! Very often, children felt the scolding unjust and felt that the scolder did not understand them. So, it was decided that the educator was obliged to ask questions before the scolding.
- ! When asked about alternatives to scolding, most children answered: 'Just say it in a normal way' ('Will that work?' 'Maybe not' 'What shall the educator then do?' 'Say it again!')
- ! The staffmembers all scolded more or less. They typically felt exhausted and sad when they had been scolding a lot but they still thought that scolding could not be avoided.
- ! Two years after the project was finished the educators had changed their minds about scolding. Now they agreed with the children, that it is possible to avoid scolding and instead speak with children in a normal voice.

How can scolding be minimized and humanized?

So, during the Roskilde-project, a model for reducing and civilizing the scolding was developed. In short:

- ! always count to 10 before scolding
- ! always ask the child, what is going on, before scolding
- ! never scold a child with whom you are not well acquainted
- ! never scold a child in public
- ! always tell the child explicitly afterwards that you are not angry anymore

After the project in Roskilde a researchproject was designed about scolding. It provides an international survey of researchprojects, dealing with sanctioning. It also examines different kinds of efforts in 20 schools and daycares towards radical changes in the child-adult relations. It shall not be described in any detail here. Just one thing. Surprisingly, we found out, that schools and nurseries do exist, in which scolding has been totally abandoned. In one setting they had a rule: Save the child! If an educator observes, that another educator is acting too roughly, shouting, scolding a.s.o. towards a child, she has to interfere and save

the child.

In another the pedagogues stressed the importance of fighting all tendencies of old patterns returning: When a new colleague says: 'He (a 2 year old) is taking the milk again and again - he is stubborn', the experienced pedagogue must take the time to answer: 'No, he is thirsty!' There is always a battle going on about the power of definition.

Scolding - a pedagogical concept?

In the Roskilde-part-project a lot of questions were asked, but nobody thought of asking staffmembers **why** they scolded - and that goes for the many projects in the survey-part as well.

Why did nobody ask why?

When educators didn't give reasons for scolding, it might be because nobody asked, or ...?

Why don't we give grounds for scolding?

The project as a whole gives reasons to believe that the following statements together are providing the answer of that question:

- Scolding is so common
- Scolding is a 'belief'
- Scolding is not a subject in the education of educators
- Scolding is not mentioned in regulations and laws
- Scolding is not regarded as education
(like peeing, smoking, cutting grass, mind one's table manners, preparing coffee,
speaking kindly)
- Scolding is a necessity originating from the logics of institutionalized life
- Scolding cannot bear the light of day
- Education is about the good we want to do, not about the bad we are doing

Some results from the surveyproject

How much do teachers , pedagogues and parents scold?

Nearly all teachers are scolding, 2/3 are scolding often (Johnstone & Munn, 1992). Most teachers are using 'less than 25%' of time in classes for direct disciplin/control..

It's hardly possible to find schools without scolding. In one school discipline-problems are brought for the schoolcouncil to decide (in the council the majority of members are students).

We have found childcaresettings - very few - with no scolding.

Several projects estimate that some 80-85% of parents are scolding their children often or very often (Kato e.a. 1998, Jeppesen & Nielsen, 2001). It is likely that parents from the 'third world' are scolding less than parents from western countries (Jeppesen & Nielsen 2001). Less than 5% of adults report that their father never scolded, less than 2% report that their mother never scolded (Sigsgaard, 2002, not published).

75% of Danish schoolchildren report that they have been scolded violently at school, while 17% have experienced or witnessed physical punishment from teachers

Some projects indicate that younger children are scolded more than older children.

Relation between scolding and parents' attitudes.

According to a Japanese project (n= 1500) (Kato, 1998) verbal violence in families (scolding, shouting, threatening) is related to:

- mothers emotional instability
- parents' conflicting opinions of upbringing
- no playing with the child
- not much pleasure in the daily life with the child

The scolding project suggests that the children who are much scolded in daycare and school are much scolded by their parents as well. Three 'types' of children getting much scolding have been identified:

1. The 'reactant' children
2. Whimpering and whining children

3. Children, clinging to adults

Those symptoms are typical for children suffering from bad parental care. So, one might say that such children with high probability will be met with a similar lack of sufficient care at school or daycare.

So, in real life God (or his institutions) is not tempering the wind to the shorn lamb but only makes matters worse. This has to be investigated more thoroughly, but it is already now possible to characterize the institution, which does not worsen the situation for the shorn lamb as a much better institution compared to the setting or the school, where the teachers without much selfcriticism or reflection just are scolding the above-mentioned children - they are, and everybody think so, annoying, disturbing and difficult. The more institutionalized, institutions are getting, the more are these three groups of children going to be scolded.

So, to reduce the amount of scolding, one has to reduce the intensity of the institutionalization.

To summarize: This has been an attempt to suggest some answers to the riddle: why so many words in books and at meetings about relatively small problems - and so few about the worst problem for our children?

It is not that general questions about child-adult relations are not discussed, for instance mobbing is discussed a lot, while scolding only rarely is brought into the light of the day - why?

The whole story is presented in a book, which was published in September 2002

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