**Punishment is not the answer**

* Damaged children need people, not increasingly severe punishment, says top behavioural management specialist
* Plus teaching resources to help you in class



A *view of Pucklechurch Young Offenders Unit in Ashfield Detention Centre. The majority of young people imprisoned here will have initially gone through punishments of increasing severity at school. Photograph: Graeme Robertson*

Most behaviour systems are based on the "Punishment Road". The idea that for every behaviour there is a punishment to fit the crime; a punishment that is severe enough to give the child a road to Damascus and change their ways. For children who won't "do as they are told" the solution is to punish them, in increments of severity, until they will.

Walk to the end of the Punishment Road in the criminal justice system and you will find segregation, removal of possessions and pain. How we treat young people who won't do as they are told hasn't changed much in the last 100 years.

For children who are scared of the Punishment Road it can be an effective deterrent. Yet for children who are behaving differently because of emotional trauma suffered at home or because they have communication and learning difficulties the Punishment Road heaps pain on problems. Delivering increasingly severe punishment on vulnerable and damaged children is not just unfair, it is cruel. These children are not scared of punishment. What they are coping with in their own lives far outweighs any threats that school can issue.

There is a reason why we have the highest reoffending rates in Western Europe, a reason why sticking children in silent detentions or imprisoning them in isolation cells doesn't solve anything. Damaged children need people, not punishment. It is time that we gave them what they need to succeed not simply what we feel they deserve. Many teachers recognise this but are stuck with a system and philosophy that insists punishment is the answer. School behaviour systems are structured around the Punishment Road. Children are given what they deserve for their "crimes" with scant regard for what they need.

During the riots in the summer of 2011, I heard an interview with a Hackney resident that cut to the heart of the matter. "They took away the people. We have the buildings, (youth clubs, advice centres, etc) but they have taken away the people!" The youth workers, support teachers and mentors were the ones that the young people were invested in. There is no excuse for rioting but you can perhaps understand the feeling of abandonment. Young people who have been let down by adults before are asked to trust again and then let down again. It doesn't take long to be convinced that everyone is giving up and to sense that your options are narrowing fast.

Sculpt your behaviour policy around the control philosophy of the Punishment Road and it affects every conversation on behaviour. It taints every interaction. When the intervention reaches an impasse, the "big sticks" are brought out and threats of punishment increase.

The labelling begins as children receive increasingly severe punishments and (unsurprisingly) do not respond. We stopped calling children who couldn't read properly "stupid" a long time ago. We stopped standing them in the corner and laughing at them. Yet we still call damaged children "naughty", "challenging", "bad", give them a label and pretend punishment with make them better.

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<http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2012/jan/23/punishment-schools-behaviour-management>