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English 1

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Graded

“The Perils and Promises of Praise” by Carol S. Dweck

Dweck’s article, “The Perils and Promises of Praise,” presents the idea that praise can be both motivating and detrimental to student success. These diametrically opposed concepts presented within the confines of a single action, as Dweck points out, are often overlooked as educators attempt to rally their students to perform well. On one hand, praise can help a student become more motivated to learn, but it can also foster a false sense of expectation for success. This creates an idea of fixed intelligence, or as Dweck states, “students...become excessively concerned with how smart they are, seeking tasks that will prove their intelligence and avoiding ones that might not” (1). Dweck concludes that praise cannot be handed to students arbitrarily based on their level of innate intelligence, but rather it must be used to maintain their confidence in, and focus on, the processes they go through to achieve tasks (6).

Dweck’s examination of praise demonstrates that if done improperly it can actually be detrimental to success, and I agree because it can foster a false sense of accomplishment when it is given within the confines of a student’s natural abilities. Conversely, I believe a lack of praise when a student is challenged fosters a false sense of critical failure. From my own personal experience, I grew up consistently being praised by teachers specifically for my skills in English. Be it comprehension, writing, or grammar, these were things that I tended to excel in naturally. Already when I was two or three years old, I was already reading and writing well above what would be considered normal for my

grade level. Thus, I always expected to succeed in English classes, whether or not I was presented with a particularly challenging assignment. And as I continued to receive praise for my work on these assignments, I continually felt motivated and have usually done well on them throughout my learning career.

Where praise can be detrimental to success presents itself in a much more devious way. Dweck notes in her article that students who are praised more for their intelligence are more likely to lie about their grades or scores when tasked with something they struggle with (4). I know from personal experience that this can certainly be the case. For example, mathematics was always more difficult for me, and in the past I was more apt to cheat or modify my answers as the teacher read them off in class before turning in homework. This was because the praise did not come while I was working hard or diligently to try to solve a difficult problem, but instead only when the answer was correct. Thus, despite receiving the praise for having a correct answer, it was actually impeding my success in math because it only motivated me to continue to cheat or lie my way out of problems, rather than working harder to solve them.

In conclusion, I believe that praise can be a very useful tool to continue to motivate students to achieve their success. However, it is important to remember that giving praise at the wrong place, or at the wrong time, can be just as dangerous as never praising a student at all for anything they accomplish.

Works Cited

Dweck, Carol S. "The Perils and Promises of Praise." Educational Leadership: Early Intervention at Every Age: The Perils and Promises of Praise, ASCD, Oct. 2007, www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct07/vol65/num02/The-Perils-And-Promises-Of-Praise.aspx. Accessed 25 September, 2016.

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“Black Men and Public Space” by Brent Staples

Staples’ essay on his experiences being a black man in public space shows that the divide in racial profiling is alive and well. In the atmosphere of today’s demagoguery towards people of color, Staples’ essay examines how he has been personally affected by profiling that occurs often unintentionally by the racial majority. He even goes so far as to say that his very presence within the public space can alter it in “ugly ways” – that is – he has the ability to make people act out their most rudimentary survival instinct of fear by simply existing. Often times, as Staples notes, this can actually create a hostile environment for him wherein he must make tactical changes to his own behavior as not to rouse suspicion or cause people to arbitrarily label him a criminal. He closes by explaining these changes he must make to relax the tension between him and those he comes into contact with.

Although contemporary beliefs seem to dictate that we as a society are painstakingly moving away from the tattered history of racism, I argue that Staples’ exposé shows that even the simplest of inadvertent behaviors still create a hostile environment for people of color. Staples exemplifies this almost sardonically in his opening sentence, “My first victim was a woman – white, well dressed, probably in her late twenties” (112). Despite not having any precedent, Staples manages to feel as though he victimized this woman simply by being in her presence. Perhaps without even realizing it, this woman’s behavior shifted from one of a carefree wayfarer into one who was desperate to escape. While her rationale may have been that she was in danger, Staples points out that it actually made him

uncomfortable because he too was trying to simply get somewhere and had no intention of harming her.

Another interesting way in which Staples experienced hostility was even when he was acting with a professional demeanor. Being rushed to deliver an article while being a journalist in the 1980's, Staples hurried through the offices where he worked in order to get it to his managing editor on time. During this moment, he was mistaken for a burglar and humiliated in front of his colleagues as he was pursued through the building. Staples notes that in fact, it was one of his most frightening experiences (114).

These examples demonstrate that despite both of these people acting instinctually, and perhaps with good intention, their behavior was in fact careless and hostile. This, of course, is probably not unlike the treatment many people of color have received simply for being who they are. While some could possibly argue that these experiences fostered positive change in Staples behavior, I believe that Staples shouldn't have to be forced to whistle tunes of Vivaldi and Beethoven or keep a certain distance from others just so that they don't feel threatened. Making sure that we remember that people of color are just like any other person, perhaps we as a society can create a less hostile environment and truly move forward from our tattered past.

Works Cited

Staples, Brent. "Black Men and Public Space." *40 Model Essays: A Portable Anthology*, 2nd ed. Aaron, Jane E., and Ellen Kuhl Repetto, editors. Bedford/St Martin's, Boston, MA, 2013, pp. 112-115.