

Isolation Rooms and Restraints: The ethical issues of using extreme methods in the classroom.



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Defining the Issue

Currently the use of Isolation rooms and restraints in school has been a hot controversial topic. The biggest issue, it seems, is using such an extreme method of controlling behavior for children. The parents are divided on this matter, as those who have struggling kids fear for the trauma isolation and restraints will cause on their kids, while those who have normal developing kids fear for having a traumatized kid injuring their kid. Isolation rooms and restraints are relatively new to the schools. With this development there is also the issue of misuse. Teachers putting students into isolation rooms for behaviors that are far from radical, and the issue of concern with the aftermath and how other children will treat kids put under these conditions.

Examples of the ethical issues

“Out of Sight, Out of Mind”: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Young People’s Experience of Isolation Rooms/Booths in UK Mainstream Secondary Schools - by Emma Condcliffe

This Analysis testifies to the real experience of the students in secondary school who have been placed in an isolation room. It goes into how this experience has affected them, both emotionally and academically. It was done with consented permission, with five participants between the ages of 11-18. It uses the “Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), two superordinate themes containing six subordinate themes were identified representing the YP’s lived experiences: The Process (A restrictive process, the punishment, a process that separates) and More than the Process (Impact on learning, relationships, uniqueness.”

Ethical Issue example #1

Participant # 1: Marti

Marti is in 7th grade, he describes being put in isolation as feeling like you in solitary confinement “Because the walls are painted white, there are white lights, you’re locked up in a booth with white walls” Marti expressed that for him “being in there (isolation) I don’t think it changes anything. It’s just taking you out of a class cos they are trying to move you out of the way so because they don’t feel that you’re doing the right thing at the right time.” For Marti, he found it unfair, and usually believed his behaviors were far from “isolation worthy”.

Ethical Issues example #2

Participant # 2 Marc

Marc is in 8th grade, for him, is was restraint, not being able to move around or have very limited physical movement. Marc described his experience as like being “crammed in one place” with “no space to move”. He felt it was claustrophobic and uncomfortable. Being restricted made Marc feel angry and scared of being trapped, because of that he often tried to escape (successfully at times), and if he got away he states feeling “a bit of relief” because “it’s too much” to be isolated for Marc.

Ethical Frameworks that address this issue

Utilitarianst believe that so long as something brings people happiness and pleasure, actions are right, with this framework. The complication is that it talks about the overall happiness of everyone, so the idea of isolating one student to bring an overall happiness to all the students who were being troubled by that student would ultimately lead to everyone's happiness. Ultimately restraints and isolation would be for the best.

Deontologist believe in the moral code of justice. There are certain rules that cannot be broken no matter if it is for the greater good because they are not considered moral choices. So if a person breaks the moral code, then justice must be served. So in this case if the student hurts someone, it is reasonable for them to be punished. In this case, the student is responsible for their choice and must accept their punishment

Ethical Framework that address the issue

Ethics of Care or Care Ethics on the other hand believes that context can overrule justice and our code of conduct. This focuses on the interconnection of humanity. Basically ethics should be more about relationships than autonomy and rules. In this Framework, isolation rooms and restraints on children is considered to be disastrous on the relationship between teacher and student, between caregiver and the one being cared for, so the removal of these methods of behavioral control are considered ethical and they should be removed from schools.

Ethical Framework with the best response

In personal opinion, I agree with the ethics of care mindset in saying that I believe forcing a student to be isolated or wear restraints takes away from the school feeling like a safety zone and loses your rapport with that student. If you think about it, how would you feel if the person you thought you could trust, all of a sudden became the person you feared the most, because you associate them with a particularly fearful punishment. Ethics of care sees the students in a more humane way, where we could think of less drastic and less unhelpful ways for correcting negative behavior. So ultimately I agree that the public schools should remove all isolation rooms and restraints used.

Resources used

- Condliffe, E. (2021, May 1). *"out of sight, out of mind": An interpretative phenomenological analysis of young people's experience of Isolation Rooms/booths in UK mainstream secondary schools.* "Out of Sight, Out of Mind": An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Young People's Experience of Isolation Rooms/Booths in UK Mainstream Secondary Schools. - UEA Digital Repository. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from <https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/82288/>
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