

The impact of the abolition of corporal punishment on teacher morale: 1994–2004

Matsidiso Naong
mnaong@cut.ac.za

There is a direct correlation between (teacher) morale and (learner) discipline at school. Since the scrapping of corporal punishment, a sense of despair seems to have taken over amongst teachers in South Africa. The findings of this study indicated that more than 65% of teachers, out of a sample population of 80 respondents from schools located in Bloemfontein in the Free State, claimed that discipline at schools had deteriorated, and that their passion for teaching and the joy they had once found in their work had been adversely affected since the decision had come into effect. Amongst the many reasons for low morale, cited by the teachers, lack of discipline was clearly the most prevalent and common concern, and generally seemed to be attributed to the abolition of corporal punishment. I explore this concern and its impact on overall teacher morale.

Introduction

The abolition of corporal punishment remains a contentious issue within South African schools. It was recently reported that a total of 269 teachers in South Africa were fired by the government for committing serious offences. The teachers concerned — plus another several hundred of their colleagues — were found guilty on 620 charges of misconduct, which included assault, corporal punishment and misappropriation of school funds (Sunday Times, 2005). These shocking statistics were obtained from records of disciplinary hearings held by the National Department of Education in all nine provinces.

How did corporal punishment as a form of discipline come to be the norm within the South African education system? Morrel (2001) stated that the introduction of apartheid and Bantu Education in the 1950s provided compulsory education for black children, and the system was highly authoritarian. He indicated further that in African schools corporal punishment was used on boys and girls alike while, in white English-speaking schools, the emulation of the British public-school model ensured that corporal punishment was commonly used on boys. Schools that provided education for Afrikaans speakers were tough, and the rod was not spared (Holdstock, 1990).

Kubeka (2004:52) reports that teachers argued that, without corporal punishment, discipline could not be maintained (children would neither show them respect nor develop the discipline to work hard unless they were beaten or threatened with being beaten; their power as educators had been taken away; corporal punishment was quick and easy to administer, while other methods required time, patience and skill, which educators often lacked; unless they were beaten, they (the children) would think they (got away with) wrongdoing, and would repeat this misconduct; corporal punishment would restore a culture of learning in schools; it was the only way to deal with dif-

ficult or disruptive learners; educators had not experienced any harmful effects when it was administered to them as learners, so there was no reason why they should not administer it to their learners as well.

The dilemma confronting the South African teacher is that the South African education system is in a stage of transition from a system that supported corporal punishment and the promotion of an inhumane retributive ideology (Gladwell, 1999:16; Pinnock, 1997) to a situation where schools promote health and well-being. A health-promoting school engages in social, educational and political action that enhances public awareness of health, and fosters healthy lifestyles and community action in support of health. Its aim is to empower people to exercise their rights and responsibilities in shaping environments, systems and policies that are conducive to health and well-being (Camara, 1996). However, this will require support from the authorities, which, until now, has (arguably) been lacking (NEPI, 1993).

This lack of support for teachers is not peculiar to the South African situation only — it is, in fact, a common world-wide phenomenon. Maxwell (1987) mentions that schools in Scotland reported a lack of support from parents, support agencies and the education department at the time of the abolition of corporal punishment and the resultant increase in disruptive behaviour. A report stating that teachers constantly have to deal with learners engaging in disruptive behaviour confirms the unavoidable conditions that make the teaching profession so stressful, resulting in low morale and high dropout rate among teachers (Squelch & Lemmer, 1994:52).

Definition of corporal punishment

Research has indicated that traditionally school discipline has been more concerned with punishment than reward (Laslett & Smith, 1984:35; Kubeka, 2004:17). Furthermore, Lawrence, Steed & Young (1989:45) mentioned that discipline problems refer to the manifestations of behaviour that interfere with the teaching process and seriously disrupt the normal running of the school. The essence of discipline in schools is therefore defined as creating and maintaining a learning atmosphere in which teachers can teach and learners can learn in an environment that encourages respect for teachers, classmates and administrators (George, 1990:1). Disruptive behaviour creates conditions of fear and intimidation that are not conducive to the establishment of a positive learning environment.

The enforcement of the South African Schools Act (1996) laid the ground rules that must be adhered to by all, namely, that (i) no person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner; (ii) any person who contravenes subsection 1 is guilty of an offence, and liable on conviction to a sentence that could be imposed for assault. Corporal punishment is generally understood to be a discipline method in which a supervising adult deliberately inflicts pain upon a child in response to a child's unacceptable behaviour and /or inappropriate language (Maree, 1994:68; Andero & Stewart, 1996:90). It includes a wide variety of methods such as hitting, slapping, spanking,

punching, shaking, shoving, choking, use of various objects (wooden paddles, belts, sticks, pins, or others), painful body postures (such as placing the child in an enclosed space), use of electric shock, use of excessive exercise drills, or prevention of urine or stool elimination (Society for Adolescent Medicine, 2003:385). In corporal punishment, the educator usually hits various parts of the learner's body with a band, or with canes, paddles, yardsticks, belts, or other objects expected to cause pain and fear.

Problem statement

Change fatigue seems to have been plaguing the teaching profession in the recent past as a succession of changes continued to have a bearing on teachers' personal as well as professional well-being, including their work ethic, job satisfaction and morale. These changes came in the form of rightsizing, redeployment and even retrenchment threats, the challenges of the new curriculum 2005 — now known as the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) — the abolition of corporal punishment, and most recently problems associated with the alleged escalating lack of discipline at schools. Reported incidents of the continued application of corporal punishment by teachers indicate non-compliance with the rules laid down in this regard in the South African School Act (1996). Could this practice be a sign of disgruntlement, frustrations, and low morale? I therefore intend to isolate and investigate the impact of the abolition of corporal punishment on teacher morale within the broader context of the management of school discipline.

Methodology

Research design and sample

A brief questionnaire was administered to a random sample of teachers from eight schools, namely, primary (n=3) and secondary (n=5) schools, located in the Bloemfontein area. The sample consisted of 100 teachers (56 males and 44 females). Of the respondents, 23 were black, 34 white, and 23 coloured. A total of 20 questionnaires was returned either half completed or not completed at all. All of the respondents had more than 10 years' teaching experience and were over the age of 30. However, given the small size of the sample population in this study, these findings can only provide an indication of how teachers feel, without necessarily laying claim to any national representation.

The questionnaire and measuring instruments

The self-completion questionnaire for the quantitative analysis consisted of biographical items and specific measuring instruments, incorporating Likert-type scales. Biographical data included gender; race; years of teaching experience; type of school (i.e. private or public school); and age. Likert-type scales were devised to measure the state of discipline at the teacher's own school; knowledge of other methods of discipline; the difference between discipline and punishment; the urge to use corporal punishment; teacher morale, and the intention to quit the profession. Participants were asked a few

questions on their current experiences regarding corporal punishment at school.

Corporal punishment — historical and cultural perspectives

Reports by Morrell (1998:292) and Kubeka (2004:50) state that corporal punishment was an integral part of school life for most teachers and learners during the twentieth century in South African schools. It was used excessively in white, single-sex boys' schools and liberally in all other schools, except in single-sex girls' schools, where its use was limited (Morrell, 1998). The introduction of Bantu Education in 1955 exposed black children who had previously been outside the education system to corporal punishment. Unlike white girls, African girls were not exempted from beatings (Morrell, 1994:30). According to Parker-Jenkins (1999:6-7), corporal punishment was used freely when mass education was introduced because it was a cheap and quick discipline method, and classes were big and teachers under-qualified. The reality regarding the objection to corporal punishment is that, as it is generally inflicted by the teachers on the learners, it is always open to abuse (Parker-Jenkins, 1999:77). Prior to the inception of the new South African constitution, with its pronouncement on corporal punishment, Thursday (known as '*Donderdag*' in the Afrikaans language) was a day dreaded and resented by most learners in this country, especially in the township schools. This day was normally set aside every week — mostly by teachers of languages and mathematics — for recitations and revision and/or the solving of mathematical problems. The teachers all carried canes on that day. This day of the week was characterised by the highest level of absenteeism among learners, due to fear of merciless beatings at the hands of these teachers. The researcher was also once a victim of these beatings, receiving in excess of 13 lashes for failing to get one of the poems right. Similarly, findings by Tafa (2002:17) indicate that the same horrendous form of discipline was also a common feature within the Botswana education system. Students complained that they were being beaten anywhere the teacher pleased for no reason, with sticks, '*sjamboks*' and board dusters; they were sprayed with Doom, sent to clean teachers' houses, sent on errands to banks and stores, and had to wash teachers' cars during lessons.

Prinsloo, in Bondesio, Beckmann, Oosthuizen, Prinsloo & Van Wyk (1989: 91), argued that the teacher does not stand *in loco parentis* in authority over the pupil, and that he/she may legally not administer corporal punishment or any other form of punishment. It stands to reason that disciplinary action may be positive or negative. Negative discipline entails inflicting punishment, while positive discipline aims at influencing the person to behave differently (Van der Westhuizen, 1991:223).

This practice within the South African education system would undoubtedly not remain unchallenged forever. According to Morrell (2001), it was in the 1980s, in the context of violent opposition to apartheid — referred to by some commentators as a "low level of civil war" — that the status of corporal

punishment was first questioned. Township students were at the forefront of confrontation with apartheid military forces. While their major demands concerned the termination of Bantu Education and racial discrimination, they also demanded an end to corporal punishment. He continued by saying that this was not so much an objection to its violence, but a rejection of the authority of teachers to punish harshly and arbitrarily. It was also part of a larger process in which the younger generation attempted to overthrow the rule of the elders (Campbell, 1992; Freund, 1996).

More often than not, teachers complain of not being consulted on major changes that impact on their daily activities. Similarly, one claim concurs that little or no consultation took place with teachers regarding their opinion and recommendations on the issue of banning corporal punishment (Gladwell, 1999:36; Grey, 1997; Witten, 1994). Although corporal punishment was banned in British public schools in 1986, Docking (1986) found that more than 50% of teachers in that country still supported the use of corporal punishment as a last resort. Boyson (1975) comments that pupils and teachers in Britain demonstrated for the reintroduction of corporal punishment in order to restore order and discipline in schools. Other reports mentioned that, after the abolition of corporal punishment in Scotland 1986, teachers continued to administer corporal punishment with the full knowledge that it had been abolished. Scottish teachers were generally not consulted about the banning of corporal punishment, and felt that they were not being supported by the educational authorities (Gladwell, 1999:36). From the discourse above, it becomes clear that many teachers have a positive attitude towards corporal punishment, and that the lack of consultation with regard to its abolition excluded teachers from the sphere of discourse on an issue that would have a pronounced effect on their working environment.

Problems regarding children and discipline are not only of perennial importance and faced by all educators and societies in the world; they are also complex, making us deeply uncertain about how these problems ought to be solved. Teachers are therefore confronted with the challenge of trying to maintain discipline without unnecessary harshness, encouraging reasonable moral thought and behaviour without indoctrination and maintaining order and control within the classroom without adopting a pose of infallibility. However, upholding this ideal is not always easy, as is illustrated by Chamberlain (1996:17), who recounts how she was driven to use corporal punishment:

... this is the story of how the playground bully became the bully of the staff-room. For two years, from when the boy was seven, we tried. Mother came in to hear half a dozen voices swear, hand on heart, that her angel was no angel. Still no improvement. We all threatened 'it's him or me'. A boy who dropped a pencil had his hand stamped on. Others had their art work spoilt. There was violence with scissors and cricket bat. Imagine as a teacher facing slow and relentless goading; toy cars wheeled before your eyes, watch alarms constantly triggered, and a desk provocatively strewn with battery-driven gadgets instead of books. The nine-year old persecutor

answers back. 'You want my car? How much will you gimme?' Sent out, he peels paint off the corridor walls. Some children are mildly amused. But the concentration has gone; he has broken the back of the lesson. I began to dream about the confrontations — and dread them.

Gradwell (1999:2) argued that, in certain schools in South Africa, corporal punishment was used primarily as an economical means of maintaining discipline and managing disruptive behaviour. The teachers are expected not only to accept the challenge of maintaining discipline in their classrooms, but to also use humane methods and act within the law. Surely, primitive methods such as corporal punishment are not making matters any easier for teachers today.

Efforts to understand the root cause for lack of discipline at schools require vigorous investigation. According to Burden (1995:16-18) and Ndamani (2005:5) a lack of discipline, in some instances, arises from common general causes that can be anticipated. To them, the behaviour of a person is the result of the interaction between the individual and the environment. The physiological, physical, and psychological environments combine to affect behaviour. They stated further that the physiological environment includes those biophysical variables that affect behaviour, such as illness, nutritional factors, neurological functioning, temperament, genetic abnormalities, physical disabilities and drugs or medication. The physical environment, on the other hand, includes elements of the setting that are used or present in everyday living. These can be divided into four categories, namely, resources or conditions in the home and community, school factors, classroom arrangements and instructional materials. The psychological environment comprises factors such as values, motivation, preferences and conditioning history (Burden, 1995:19-20). Similarly, Mwamwenda (1995:311) maintains that misbehaviour in school and the classroom may originate from the child himself or herself, the school, the society, the curriculum, the child's parents or the teachers.

Undoubtedly, effective management of this challenge demands a complete paradigm shift from teachers in this country. Since the abolition of corporal punishment, numerous cases of teachers not complying with the law in this regard have occurred: 'two teachers had agreed to stop beating pupils following a written request, while another three and the headmaster had been defiant' (Cape Argus, 1999); 'teacher accused of using the stick' (Daily Sun, 2005); 'parents prepare to take school to High Court over latest punishment' (Govender, 2005:9), etc. Furthermore, Justice Langa (1995) in passing judgment in one such case, stated that corporal punishment is a practice that debases everyone involved in it. Juvenile whipping is cruel, it is inhuman and it is degrading. No compelling evidence has been found to justify the practice, nor has it been shown to be a significantly effective deterrent — in fact, its effect is likely to be coarsening and degrading rather than rehabilitative (Porteus, Vally & Ruth, 2001:24). However one of the most daunting tasks, teachers today are grappling with, is how to maintain a balance between learner

discipline and performance without losing their sanity. It is an undisputed fact that, prior to the abolition of corporal punishment, most teachers in this country (if not all) found solace in the assurance that they could rely on this method of discipline as a last resort to curb any form of inappropriate behaviour in and around the classroom.

Corporal punishment — a systems perspective

A general systems theory approach was adopted in this study. Individual behaviour was viewed within the context in which it occurred. Schools and families can be regarded as social systems that are mutually interdependent. Therefore, the behaviour of one component of the system is seen as affecting, and being affected by, the behaviour of others. There is little doubt that the abolition of corporal punishment had an impact on education in this country. Teachers who previously relied on corporal punishment now have to develop alternative methods of coping with discipline problems. It also has an impact on learners, in the sense that they now have the right not to be struck by their teachers. Parents are also affected, as they may be called in more regularly to jointly manage the behaviour problems of their children. In addition, schools also consult support agencies in certain cases to assist them in coping with pupils presenting with disruptive behaviour. Banning of corporal punishment has therefore had an impact on various systems.

A system is a group or combination of interrelated, interdependent and interacting elements forming a collective entity. Systems are integrated wholes with properties that cannot be reduced to smaller units. Gladwell (1999:8) states that, within the school, the various elements could consist of the senior staff, teachers, learners and support personnel. Similar groupings may also occur within families. The mother and father could be seen as one element, or subsystem, and the children as the other. There are different arrangements within a system that reflect the type of organisation, which is also characterised by different types of boundaries. These can be generational boundaries, hierarchical boundaries or boundaries between subsystems (Dowling, 1985). However, general systems theory emphasises that a system cannot be dissected into parts in order to be understood, since the decontextualised parts do not necessarily behave in the same way independently as they do when in interaction with one another (Van der Hoorn, 1994). Studying a system therefore involves studying relationships rather than particular isolation, and studying these relationships in context.

One of the dominant assumptions about the efficacy of corporal punishment is that the cause of the problem lies within the pupil, and can only be rectified through a hiding. This acceptance of the principle of cause and effect produces linear thinking in teachers, whereas general systems theory provides an alternative theoretical framework for understanding the behaviour in context (Dowling, 1985; Druker & De Jong, 1996; Plas, 1986; Gradwell, 1999). Context is a key concept within general systems theory. In terms of social processes, the focus is not so much on the individual, but on the interactive processes of which the person is a part (Dowling, 1985; Gradwell, 1999).

When a learner presents with disruptive behaviour, the teacher has to view the behaviour within the context of the learner's life and come to an understanding of the forces that shape the life of the learner. Circular causality is a term used to explain the nature of certain patterns of behaviour in human relationships in terms of cycles of interaction (Dowling, 1985, Plas, 1986). The emphasis is not placed on the cause of a problem, but rather on the patterns that emerge between experiences. An authoritarian principal, who manages his or her staff in an autocratic manner, may make demands on the staff and be met with resistance. He or she may make appeals for support and then introduce decisions without consulting the staff. If the staff shows resistance, the principal might see their behaviour as not being supportive. This could result in the principal making more decisions unilaterally, since he or she believes that the staff will not give their full support. The resistance of the staff can be understood by asking why they behaved in a particular manner. De Jong (1995) argues that this type of thinking is linear, since it makes use of the cause-effect model. Dowling (1985) recommends that the word 'why' should be replaced by the word 'how'. Attention is given to how the phenomenon occurs, as well as the sequences of interaction and repetitive patterns surrounding the event. The process of not viewing events in a linear manner is called recursive thinking, and involves making observations regarding the mutuality of influences being exercised over the life of the individual through the interaction of the various systems. In addition, the notion of circularity is intimately linked with the concept of punctuation (Dowling, 1985; Plas, 1986). Punctuation is the point at which a sequence of events is interrupted to give it a certain meaning. A teacher may respond to a disruptive class by screaming and walking out of the class. The teacher's colleagues may see this as an inability to cope with the class. They have chosen to punctuate reality at the point of the teacher's behaviour. An exploration of the context of the teacher may reveal that broad educational change is constantly on the teacher's mind, and that he/she is worried about being retrenched. This could have been the primary reason for the teacher's behaviour. However, Dowling (1985) maintains that no punctuation is right or wrong.

A further concept used within general systems theory is homeostasis. This refers to the tendency of living organisms to move towards a steady state of equilibrium (Dowling, 1985). Homeostasis is made possible by information coming in from the environment in the form of feedback. If the information received is stressful, it causes perturbation. Teachers might feel threatened when confronted with change, particularly with regard to organisational development and the need to think and operate systematically (De Jong, 1995; Druker & De Jong, 1996). The system will, in turn, regulate itself to maintain its homeostasis. This acts as a self-regulatory mechanism to maintain the *status quo* of the school (Dowling, 1985). It would therefore be important to understand what in the school situation is causing the maintained use of corporal punishment.

The relationship between schools and families is maintained intimately over a significant period of time. There is an information exchange between

the two systems, and they cannot be viewed without reference to their influence on the environment in which they exist. They are closely interrelated in a dynamic two-way relationship. This provides feedback on how the two systems view each other, and what they expect of each other (Dowling, 1985; Van Den Aardweg, 1987). Due to the abolition of corporal punishment, teachers are now being confronted by disruptive behaviour in the daily activities of school life. The challenge for teachers would be to clarify differences in their perception of the problem by focusing on how it occurs, rather than why. They would need to negotiate commonly agreed upon goals, and to begin exploring specific steps towards change (De Jong, 1995; Dowling, 1985; Druker & De Jong, 1996; Raeburn & Seymour, 1979).

Reflections on teacher views regarding the scrapping of corporal punishment

Research clearly indicates that teachers in South Africa are generally unhappy, demoralised and exhausted. In a previous study, Naong (2000:51) reported that the current status of teaching in South Africa is characterised by extremely trying conditions, notably, (i) the prevalence and influence of stress, (ii) the declining morale, and (iii) the number of teachers leaving or intending to leave the profession. Similarly, Gold and Roth (1994:5) and Brown and Ralph (1994:13) list 'student discipline and apathy' first, followed by 'lack of support', among the variety of factors that contribute to the stress, demoralisation and high dropout rate of teachers. In addition, Squelch and Lemmer (1994:168) identified some of the day-to-day conditions confronting teachers: (i) teachers make more than 400 decisions a day, usually with regard to praising or reproving students. These decisions are often emotionally taxing for the teacher, and can influence a student's behaviour and performance positively or negatively; (ii) teachers work with large groups of children — yet, at the same time, they must be sensitive to the background, needs, abilities and interests of each individual child in that group; (iii) teachers experience stress as a result of a workload which seems never-ending. Similarly, Gold and Roth (1994:5) listed a variety of factors they say contribute to the stress, demoralisation and high dropout rate of teachers. These are (i) student discipline and apathy; (ii) lack of personal support; (iii) inadequate financial support; (iv) pressures from the reform movement; (v) lack of community support; (vi) poor image of the profession; and (vii) role ambiguity. In addition, Brown and Ralph (1994:13) also identified five categories of such causes, namely, (i) relationship with pupils, for example changes in pupil attitude and motivation, perceived lack of discipline; (ii) relationship with colleagues, for example, personality clashes; (iii) relationship with parents and the wider community, for example, poor pay and status, and media bashing; (iv) innovation and change, for example, lack of information and resources to support and facilitate change; (v) school management and administration, for example, lack of staff development to meet new demands of job; and (vi) time factors, such as an increasing number of educational demands outside school time, which could lead to conflict with family and friends.

Furthermore, Legotlo, Maaga, Sebego, Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Nieu-

woudt and Steyn (2002:115) reported that 'lack of student discipline and poor morale' was viewed as the second major cause of poor performance — this affected the relationship between educators and learners. The power vested in teachers to manage schools and maintain discipline arises from common law, according to which teachers act *in loco parentis*. It is primarily on the basis of common law that teachers, prior to the SA Schools Act of 1996, could inflict corporal punishment (Gladwell, 1999:33). It stands to reason that teachers are still being confronted with disruptive behaviour and are practising corporal punishment — in some instances, with the full blessing of the children's parents. Winship (1992) attributes parents' need to have the school punish their children to poor interpersonal relationships between parent and child, and to parents feeling disempowered since their children have a higher level of schooling than they do. Due to the inability of some parents to control their children, a symbiotic relationship exists between the parents and the school in order to meet the needs of both adult systems. In addition, Sedumedi (1997:62) indicated that '... parents and teachers are in favour of the use of punishment in school, with more teachers in favour'. Based on his findings, Gladwell (1999:76) reported that a high percentage of respondents indicated that teaching had become extremely stressful since the abolition of corporal punishment. Gladwell's findings also indicated a sense of despair among teachers, attributed mainly to the disruptive behaviour of pupils and the perception among the respondents that their authority had been taken away. The general indication is that teachers are in need of assistance, and that there is a need for teacher training and the establishment of a closer working relationship with parents (Chalkline, 1997).

Undoubtedly, some parallels can be drawn between the story related by Chamberlain (1996:17) and what some teachers are going through in this country. She reported that, in her school in the United Kingdom, the classroom atmosphere is shockingly disrespectful compared with the 1950s and 1960s. Pupils are noisy, easily distracted, and occasionally cheeky and rebellious, and conversation with one's neighbour while the teacher is trying to speak is the norm. Family life is so much less orderly, society less formal, that children find it hard to understand the concept of appropriate behaviour and terms of address. The trendy desire to make learning appear casual and fun, without the need for self-discipline, has helped to undermine general discipline. From numerous reports, it is evident that — despite the trying conditions teachers are faced with — the state of discipline within the South African education system has not yet deteriorated to the level found in the United Kingdom. There is still hope that it may be possible to halt the escalation of disciplinary problems in South African schools before it gets totally out of control.

Findings of empirical study

Evidence is constantly resurfacing that some teachers are not complying with the legislation regarding corporal punishment in South Africa. Maree's (1999:62) findings supplied ample proof that corporal punishment is still rife in this country, despite being outlawed.

Report on selected questionnaire items

Figure 1 indicates the level of responses per item. These refer to an agreement with the statement. The statements were as follows:

1. *Poor discipline at our school is a serious concern.*
2. *Other methods of discipline besides corporal punishment are not effective in instilling discipline at school.*
3. *I always feel like using corporal punishment when the learners don't want to behave.*
4. *I fully understand the difference between punishment and discipline.*
6. *I feel happy that corporal punishment has been abolished at our schools.*
7. *The situation of poor discipline at our school will make me leave the profession sooner than expected.*
8. *The performance of my learners has deteriorated since the scrapping of corporal punishment.*
9. *I am adequately trained to deal with the situation of poor discipline in my classroom.*
10. *My morale has improved since the abolition of corporal punishment.*
11. *I have my own methods of discipline in my classroom.*

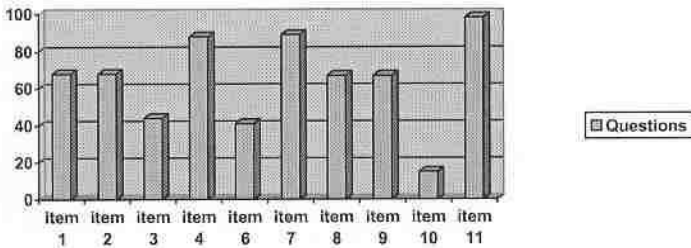


Figure 1 Responses to research questions listed above

Notwithstanding their sense of helplessness (No. 6 = 40%), most teachers (No. 11 = 99%) claimed to employ their own customised methods of exercising discipline in their classrooms. Unfortunately, it was not clear whether corporal punishment formed part of these customised methods of discipline. However, what seemed to be clear was that these methods of theirs (No. 2 = 68%) were not working. Interestingly, 88% (No. 4) of them stated that they were familiar with the difference between punishment and discipline. Regrettably, 90% of these teachers warned that the situation of poor discipline at school would make them leave the profession. Clearly, thorough training was vital if this sense of inadequacy was to be adequately addressed, and a sense of self-worth restored among teachers.

It was evident that an overwhelming majority of teachers had not completely embraced this change (Figure 2). With the exception of a moderate number of white teachers (38%), black (70%) and coloured (60%) teachers were still not happy with the abolition of corporal punishment. This finding

concurred with Gladwell (1999:75), who indicated strong support for the re-introduction of corporal punishment, albeit as a last resort (58%), or for total unbanning (25%). However, the high percentage of respondents who indicated that they felt neutral about this issue could be a positive sign, as it could signify that the majority of the teachers concerned are beginning to question their own stance regarding corporal punishment. This view was supported by the fact that 30% of the black teachers interviewed, 22% of the white teachers and 10% of the coloured teachers, indicated their neutrality regarding this issue.

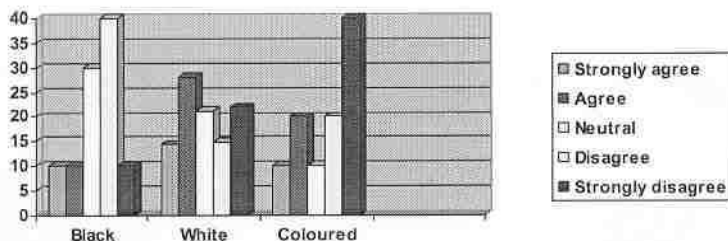


Figure 2 Responses to item 'I feel happy that corporal punishment has been abolished in our schools'

It stands to reason that an overwhelming number of teachers (90% of blacks, 80% of coloureds, and almost 60% of whites) expressed a very low morale (Figure 3). This was an indication that most of them still felt dissatisfied with the sweeping changes that have engulfed the education system in this country, including the abolition of corporal punishment.

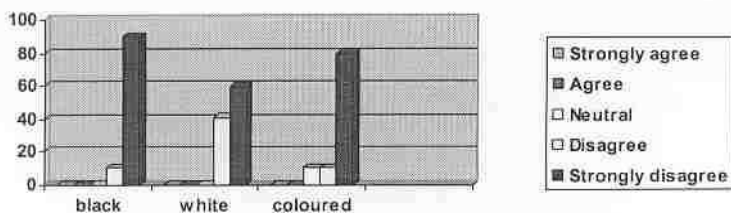


Figure 3 'My morale has improved since the abolition of CP'

Their discontentment was summed up in the following feelings that were expressed, particularly with regard to a perceived lack of discipline among learners, which could arguably be considered a consequence of the abolition of corporal punishment in this country:

"Since its abolition we spend most of our time solving an assortment of

cases”

“... learners do not respect teachers any more, how can they perform?”

“Parents have shifted their children’s lack of discipline to schools, and yet they are not co-operating with us”

“the department is quick to judge teachers when teachers try to encourage learners to learn, and make an issue when learners do not perform at the end of the year”

“School children are druggies; they abuse all sorts of drugs, especially cigarettes and marijuana — that is why they are so disrespectful”

“Children bring knives and drugs to schools, and their parents know about these things and want us to solve these problems for them”

“... gave up long time ago, with disciplining these children — I don’t want to go to jail”

“Discipline begins as home, and yet parents are not willing to help us, they only know how to blame when we discipline their children”

“Children are taking advantage of the prevailing situation — no-one can force them to do anything, yet we are expected to make them study and pass — is that fair?”

“Without corporal punishment, you can expect the behaviour of children to deteriorate — spare the rod, spoil the child, isn’t it true?”

“What is happening overseas, with children shooting one another, is the result of the abolition of corporal punishment, and South Africa is going that route, I am telling you; when these things start happening, I don’t want to be here”

“... children’s rights are obviously far more important than teachers’ rights, so what must we do — you just get in class, teach those who want to learn, and get the ... out when your time is over”.

Undoubtedly, teachers felt unhappy and helpless when it came to the challenge of learner discipline, and from their views expressed above it was evident that they felt disgruntled and disempowered. This was consistent with the findings of Gladwell (1999:76), namely, that “a high percentage of respondents indicated that teaching had become stressful since the abolition of corporal punishment. They have also indicated feelings of despair”. Gladwell stated further that these feelings of desperation were mainly attributed to the disruptive behaviour of learners, and that the respondents believed that their authority had been taken away. Even though low morale among teachers was obviously a result of the interaction of various issues, it was interesting to note that, after 11 years of democracy in this country, an overwhelming number of teachers still regarded the scrapping of corporal punishment as a big mistake. Figure 1 indicates a close relationship between items 1 (‘poor discipline at our school is a serious concern’), 6 (‘I feel happy that corporal punishment has been abolished at our schools’), and 7 (‘the situation of poor discipline at our school will make me leave the profession sooner than expected.’). The majority of the respondents (68%) indicated that they did not find other methods of instilling discipline effective, and that they were familiar with these alternative methods (item 4).

The following letters (Figure 4) represent the following forms of discipline:

A — spanking/pinching; B — sending the learner home; C — detention; D — time-out (withdrawal); E — fines; F — points system; G — withdrawal of privileges; H — community work; I — communication; and J — other. Figure 4 reflects the respondents' application rate of these alternative forms of discipline in their classrooms in attempting to curb any form of unruly behaviour. It can be stated conclusively that the majority of teachers (62%) preferred to talk to learners when they misbehaved, followed by detention (24%), with withdrawal of privileges (22%), and sending them home to their parents (19%). Involving parents seemed to be the last resort for most of these teachers. Some of the respondents indicated that they would like to see effective support from both their employer and the parents.

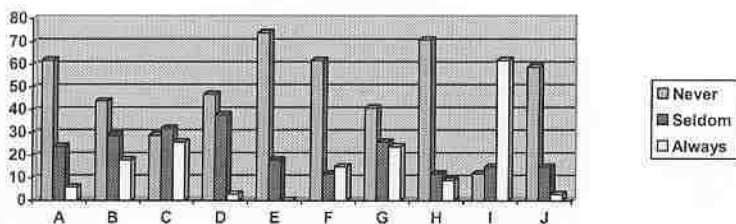


Figure 4 Response rate to the application of other forms of discipline

The need for a paradigm shift

It is common knowledge that, before 1994, South African teachers had become accustomed to a particular way of teaching and thinking, which included the use of corporal punishment. This conceptualisation of the teacher's working environment had formed a paradigm. A paradigm can be understood as the manner or way in which people view their world (Naicker, 1999; De Jong, 1995; Druker & De Jong, 1996). Therefore if schools are to be run effectively, teachers will need to undergo a paradigm shift, or a change in the way in which they view the world (De Jong, 1995). Naicker (1999) emphasises that teachers in South Africa have had to switch over from an education system that was content-based, segregated and often inflexible, to a non-racial, outcomes-based education system with a flexible curriculum, instruction and assessment. The challenge has therefore been for teachers to let go of the old style of thinking and adopt a more holistic approach to education. A paradigm shift could be facilitated by teachers thinking more systematically and putting in place interventions that promote a systemic understanding of pupils' behaviour (De Jong, 1995).

However, certain factors have impeded such a shift within South African education. Firstly, the transformation of the educational system took place suddenly (Naicker, 1999). According to Chalkline (1997), this sudden change was also accompanied by other changes in education that affected the job security of teachers. These changes were introduced primarily to address the imbalances in education. However, the fact that they took place so suddenly

impeded teachers' acceptance of the new direction education was moving towards. Secondly, Naicker (1999) identifies the complexity of policy development as being an additional factor in impeding the paradigm shift. Various committees and commissions were initiated to advise the education department on policy formulation and implementation with a view to managing the educational change. Although the work performed by the various committees and commissions provided rich data (Gladwell, 1999:46), the transformation within education remained incomplete due to a lack of collaboration between the committees and commissions (Naicker, 1999). Thirdly, it is evident that the ability of teachers to make a paradigm shift has been overestimated. De Jong's (1995) evaluation of the organisational development work done within schools by the Teacher In-Service Programme (TIP) of the University of the Western Cape found that only a minority of teachers experienced a significant paradigm shift from a linear to a more systemic way of thinking. In addition, the teachers who did accept the new ways of thinking were impeded in their efforts by their colleagues, who were either resistant or disinterested. This brings into question the effectiveness of in-service training to effect a paradigm shift among teachers (Naicker, 1999).

A fourth aspect is that the expectations of the majority of teachers have not yet been met. In 1994, many promises were made that the imbalances within the South African education system would be addressed. Although some milestones have been achieved, a sizeable number of schools are still reporting an inadequate supply of basic necessities such as books, libraries, laboratories, etc. Gladwell (1999:46) states that the new approach to education in South Africa respects the rights of pupils. The new paradigm therefore demands an essential shift away from corporal punishment.

Summary and recommendations

Reviving the appeal of teaching, both as a profession and a career, recruiting new teachers and retaining those currently employed has presented itself as a new challenge in this country and constitutes a daunting task, particularly to education authorities. It has become obvious that most teachers do not enjoy their work any more, and claim that this can be attributed mainly to inflexible and non-accommodative policy issues. One of these issues is policy on school discipline. Obviously, this state of affairs is not aiding the process of improving the image of the profession. This sense of despair and helplessness amongst teachers can only fast-track their exit from the profession. It is evident that most teacher training programmes in this country continue to fail, not only to keep up with the national transformation agenda, but also to pro-actively spearhead the necessary changes in education. Raikane (1992) argued for the inclusion of a course in educational law in teacher training programmes in South Africa, with a view to advising teachers on legal matters pertaining to their conditions of service and the consequences of administering corporal punishment.

School psychologists, guidance teachers, etc. have never had such an essential role to fulfil in this country. Schools must rethink their discipline policies and seek new ways to address today's unprecedented behaviour prob-

lems (Ramsey, 1994:247). Undoubtedly, positive school rules are needed for schools to be effective, and punishment (i.e. corrective discipline) is needed for those who break the rules and disrupt school activities (Squelch, 2000:27). However, the type of sanction the school may impose must be determined and regulated by law.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa protects people from torture and cruel, inhuman treatment. The Schools Act forbids the infliction of corporal punishment on learners, no matter how tempting this might be. Therefore, educators need to consider other alternatives. Notably, although the SA Schools Act of 1996 rejects corporal punishment, it does not discard the idea of authority. Rather, it prescribes that the authority of the teacher should foster mutual respect between learner and teacher in order to establish a positive learning environment. It advocates disciplinary methods that promote respect for and responsibility towards oneself and others. Transitional failure would be viewed as the justification for the continued use of corporal punishment (Gradwell, 1999:83). Abolition of corporal punishment in this country must certainly be viewed as an attempt to halt the tide of human rights abuse. However, it is imperative to point out that all the commendable policies and procedures to support the national transformation process must take into consideration the fears and reservations of those who are supposed to implement them. If the concerns of teachers are not meaningfully and adequately addressed and their fears are not allayed, this process of change is bound to fail.

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Matsidiso Naong is Lecturer and Head of Economic and Management Sciences Programme in the School of Teacher Education at the Central University of Technology, Free State. His research interests are educational management, leadership and human resources management in education.