DISCIPLINE VERSUS PUNISHMENT:
WHICH WAY FOR EDUCATORS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS?

Dr. Cosmas MAPHOSA
University of KwaZulu Natal
University Teaching and Learning Office (UTLO)
Durban, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT

The study is part of a larger study on the management of learner indiscipline in schools. The study sought to establish educators' insights on the disciplinary measures used to deal with minor and major forms of indiscipline in selected South African schools. Available literature points to the realization that educators use mostly punitive disciplinary measures to deal with learner indiscipline in schools. There was a need to establish the situation on the ground. The study was a descriptive survey that utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. It looked into insights of 125 educators selected from 15 independent schools in one educational district in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Data were collected mainly through a semi-structured questionnaire administered on educators as well as interviews. The SPSS version 17 software was used to analyze quantitative data while content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. It emerged from the study that from the educators' point of view educators mostly employed punitive disciplinary measures when dealing with both minor and major forms of indiscipline. The study concludes that educators still viewed disciplining learners as synonymous to punishing them. The study recommends the establishment of staff development workshops to equip educators with skills to embrace supportive, proactive and cooperative disciplinary measures when dealing with learner indiscipline.

Keywords: Positive discipline, physical punishment, preventive approaches, learners, educators.

INTRODUCTION

Discipline problems are among the most common problems that educators encounter in the classrooms (Edwards 1993). It is very important for the educators to find effective ways of dealing with discipline problems. Effective control and maintenance of a disciplined learning environment is a prerequisite for conducting the core business of the school, which is teaching and learning. Discipline also necessitates the creation of a safe and conducive learning environment in the classroom. Richard (2003) states that school discipline is the system of rules, punishments and behavioral strategies appropriate to the regulation of children and the maintenance of order in schools. Effective teaching and learning in schools is only possible in an orderly environment.

Punishment: Punishment is generally defined as an aversive stimulus that follows an undesirable behavior, and is intended to decrease or eliminate the occurrence of that behavior (Cangelosi 2000). The Virginia Cooperative Extension (2009) identifies four kinds of punishment namely physical, verbal, withdrawal of rewards and penalties. Punishment may take form of informal arrangements such as additional homework, withdrawal of privileges and detention after class to formal sanctions such as exclusion from school and corporal punishment.

Physical punishment, however, has been observed to be ineffective in dealing with the issue of learner indiscipline in schools. In apparent reference to corporal punishment, Glenn (1981) observes a plethora of problems resulting from the use of punitive disciplinary techniques such as;

- Failure to reform the learner's conscience
- Failure to achieve voluntary, cheerful self- control
- Failure to make the offender love to do well
- Capitalizing on making learners obey out of fear
- Increasing negative behaviours of anger, hatred and malice and obstinacy
- Making offenders more hardened.

If a disciplinary measure fails to inculcate self-control in a learner or assists in making the learner more hardened then such a measure will not be effective in the management of learner indiscipline. Naker and Sekitoleko (2009) also argue that the use of physical punishment has physical, psychological, behavioural and developmental consequences in learners. In physical consequences, learners can be physically harmed through the use of punishment. Holinger (2009) states that the problem with physical punishment is twofold in that it results in the eliciting of the negative feelings that one does not want to generate in children such as distress, anger, fear, shame, and disgust and it also squashes precisely the feelings one wants to encourage in children, specifically interest and enjoyment. It becomes clear that punishment increases the unwanted negative feelings in learners which actually worsen disciplinary issues.

Discipline: According to the Committee for Children (2004: 1), the purpose of discipline is "to encourage moral, physical, and intellectual development and a sense of responsibility in children. Ultimately, older children will do the right thing, not because they fear external reprisal, but because they have internalized a standard initially presented by parents and other caretakers. In learning to rely on their own resources rather than their parents, children gain self-confidence and a positive self-image."

Sanderson (2003) observes that discipline in the raising and teaching of children is necessary if they are to become social, productive, and responsible adults. It is therefore imperative that best and effective ways are employed to ensure the development of appropriate character for the young. Newberger (2000) observes that the word "discipline" carries with it the connotation of training, which corrects, moulds, strengthens, or perfects. As Newberger (2000) further observes discipline may be associated with control gained by enforcing obedience.

Sanderson (2003) further notes that the method of distributive justice as opposed to retributive justice is a method of punishment that teaches responsibility. Disciplinary measures should be designed as corrective measures aimed at making the person responsible and not as retaliatory measures. For Carter (2011), the rewarding desirable behaviour is more beneficial and effective than punishment of undesirable behavior. In other words, children should learn to correct whatever harm they would have done by devising some action by which they can repay the persons or the situations with some compensation. This will teach them to be accountable for their actions. Discipline becomes comparatively more useful than punishment. Punishment teaches the sacred principle of "do not get caught". Punishment, instead of modifying behavior (which is the proposed goal), simply teaches people that they need to be smarter about doing the wrong thing. If the learner gets away without being caught it would be good for such a learner but the essence of behaving responsibly would not be entrenched in the learner.

The difference between punishment and discipline: Vally (2005) observes that discipline is different from punishment and impacts the learner in distinct ways. Disciplined behaviour means ways of behaving that show respect and responsibility. The goal is for the learner to develop self-discipline through their own efforts rather than through the efforts of another by means of monitoring, threats, fear, and force. Punishment is external and does not promote or allow self-discipline to be achieved. Punishment generally only stops the behaviour

for the moment but does not have positive long-term outcomes Vally (2005). Learners have to realize that they are solely responsible for appropriate behaviour and they should be taught to take full responsibility of the way they behave (Vitto, 2003). Discipline that emanates wholly from a position of power teaches learners that they only have to behave when someone is around to punish them (Scharle & Szabo, 2000). On the other hand discipline should focus on supportive and preventive strategies for achieving order and control in the classroom, encouraging a positive classroom environment, promoting self-esteem, establishing an effective partnership among all parties involved (Tomczyk, 2000). While punishment condemns misbehavior, discipline encourages self- disciplined behavior which is important for a learner's behavior without external push.

The comparison between punishment and discipline actually shows the numerous positive effects of discipline compared to the numerous negative effects associated with punishment. The need to do away with punitive measures in the management of learner discipline has to be seriously considered by educators in schools. Educators have to find ways of encouraging self-discipline amongst learners without resorting to either physical or psychological punishment.

Positive Discipline: Naker and Sekitoleko (2009) contend that the first step in finding alternatives to punitive disciplinary measures such as corporal punishment is to understand factors influencing children's behaviour which include fulfillment of their needs such as belonging, acceptance, physical and emotional security as well as being respected by peers. Teachers should, therefore, assist in ensuring that the said needs are met. Naker and Sekitoleko (2009) state that positive discipline entails guiding pupils' behaviours and helping them take responsibility for making good decisions and why those decisions are in their beat interest. Children learn and ultimately develop self-discipline without fear, coercion of external forces.

Positive Discipline states that discipline should entail use of non-punitive methods and should be for teaching valuable social and life skills in a manner that is respectful and encouraging for both children and adults. Adults could include teachers and parents. Positive Discipline is also premised on the observation that children who feel a sense of connection to their community, family, and school are less likely to misbehave. Therefore, children must learn social and life schools in order to be contributing members of their community. Positive discipline is based on the understanding that discipline must be taught and that discipline teaches. Nelsen, Lott and Glenn's (2000) criteria for positive discipline state that discipline teaches and;

- Helps children feel a sense of connection.
- Is mutually respectful and encouraging.
- Has been effective long – term.
- Teaches important social and life skills .
- Invites children to discover how capable they are.

The issue of positive discipline, therefore, entails prevention of indiscipline and thrives on the use of proactive, empowering and cooperative approaches to the management of learner indiscipline.

Disciplinary measures in South African Schools: Long before the attainment of independence in South Africa in 1994, the maintenance of discipline in South African schools relied heavily on the use of corporal punishment and discipline was taken as synonymous to punishment (Porteus, Vally & Ruth, 2001). The use of corporal punishment and other harsh physical forms of punishment has been outlawed in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). Naz et al (2011:130) observe that in most countries in the world corporal punishment has been outlawed 'because of the affront to the child's dignity'. Alternatives to corporal punishment are used against the realization that children have rights that should not be violated through harsh and outrageously punitive disciplinary measures (Hart & Cohen, 2001). It is actually a criminal activity for educators in South African schools to use corporal punishment as they are liable to prosecution.

The use of disciplinary measures in South African schools is well documented, at different levels in the Department of Education (2000: 25) document. Educators are given disciplinary actions to consider depending on the magnitude of the disciplinary case committed by a learner. For example, for minor cases of indiscipline such as learners failing to be in class on time, playing truant; failing to finish homework; failing to obey instruction; being dishonest with minor consequences there is a suggestion on the use of verbal warning, community service, demerits, among other measures. For major offences such as inflicting minor injury on another person; gambling; being severely disruptive in class; forging documents or signatures with minor consequences; exhibiting racist, sexist or other discriminatory tendencies; possessing or distributing pornographic, racist material; possessing dangerous weapons; theft; vandalism; cheating during exams at schools are advised to consider written warning of the possibility of suspension from school; referral to a counsellor or social worker; community service, once permission is granted by Provincial Education Department. However, for more severe cases such as threatening another person with a dangerous weapon; causing intentional limited injury to another person; verbally threatening the safety of another; engaging in sexual abuse; such as grabbing; engaging in sexual activity; selling drugs; possessing or using alcohol or drugs or being drunk or under the influence of narcotics; disrupting the entire school e.g. organizing boycotts; forging documents or signatures with serious consequences schools are advised to refer the learner to an outside agency for counseling; applying to the Provincial Education Department for limited suspension from school activities. For criminal cases such as inflicting major physical injury on another person (assault);   intentionally using a dangerous weapons; sexual harassment; sexual abuse, rape; robbery; major theft; breaking and entering locked premises; and murder schools are advised to apply to the Provincial Education Department for expulsion or transfer of the learner from the school. Allow for criminal or civil prosecution which may follow, given that misconduct is of a criminal nature. On major cases of discipline, schools always work together with concerned parents and School Governing Bodies in decision-making.

There are reported cases, however, that despite the outlawing of corporal punishment and the existence of the document on alternatives to corporal punishment there is still prevalent use of corporal punishment in South African Schools (Morrel, 2001; Makapela, 2006; Sokopo, 2010).This shows that despite the legislation in existence that makes it an offence to use corporal punishment, teachers still have the audacity to use corporal punishment. A study by Maphosa and Shumba (2010) revealed that teachers had challenges in maintaining discipline in schools in the absence of corporal punishment.

Research Context
Learner indiscipline in South African schools is on the increase (Masitsa, 2008; Aziza, 2006; de Wet (2007). Educators have to deal with this challenge of growing indiscipline in schools. Disciplinary measures used have to comply with constitutional requirements of upholding the rights of the child (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Disciplinary measures used to deal with different forms of learner indiscipline encountered in schools everyday are based on different theoretical assumptions underpinning such measures.

METHOD

The study was a descriptive survey of selected educators in schools in one educational district. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Qualitative data was sought to complement the quantitative data (De Vos, 2005).

Sample Selection: Ten educators drawn from each of the fifteen schools participated in the study. Stratified random sampling was employed to select educators from different type of schools namely the junior secondary and high schools.

Tools: A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data whilst phenomenological interviews were used to collect qualitative data. The questionnaire was used to collect

mainly the quantitative data required for the study. A semi-structured questionnaire was designed and some qualitative data was also collected through the questionnaire as respondents were allowed to comment on issues in some instances. Interviews were utilized to complement data collected from questionnaires.

Procedures: The researcher administered the questionnaire with the assistance of contact persons who had been identified in the participating schools. A total of 130 educator questionnaires were returned out of the 150 administered, marking an 86.7% return rate. Measures to recover outstanding questionnaires proved fruitless. Of the 130 returned educator questionnaires five were partially completed and could not be analyzed, which left the researcher with 125 valid questionnaires for analysis. Permission to conduct interviews for research purposes was sought from principals well in advance and necessary appointment were made in such a way that research activities did not interfere with teaching and learning in the school. The research participants completed an informed consent form after the purpose of the study was explained to them. A semi-structured interview guide was used to pose questions to selected educators. Interview question items were designed in such a way that they gave room for further probing and prompting. All interview proceedings were planned to be audio taped and later transcribed but participants felt uncomfortable with the use of the tape recorder and the strenuous note-taking method was employed.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data were analyzed statistically with the aid of the SPSS version 17 software whereas qualitative data reporting took the form of narratives and thick description.

RESULTS

Biographic Details
The study made use of 123 participants of which 60 (48%) were male and 65 (52%) were female. Of the total number of participants, the majority 83 (66%) were above 31 years of age while 86 (69%) had above 5 years of teaching experience. The majority of the participants were professionally qualified teachers whereas 10 (8%) of them had non-teaching qualifications. There was also a fair representation of junior secondary school and high school teachers.

Disciplinary measures used for minor forms of indiscipline

Table 1: Educators' responses and statistical significance regarding disciplinary measures used for minor indiscipline (N=125)

Disciplinary measures for Minor offenses	Responses				Significance		
	YES	*%*	*NO*	*%*	x^2	*df*	*P*
Verbal reprimands	116	92.8	9	7.2	91.592	1	0.000*
Talking to learners	108	86.4	17	13.6	66.248	1	0.000*
Demotion from leadership positions	96	76.8	29	23.2	35.912	1	0.000*
Manual tasks	87	69.6	38	30.4	19.208	1	0.000*
Kneeling on the floor	86	68.8	39	31.2	17.672	1	0.000*
Sending learners out of class	78	62.4	47	37.6	7.688	1	0.006*

Denial of privileges	75	60.0	50	40.0	5.000	1	0.025*
Menial tasks	74	59.2	51	40.8	4.232	1	0.040
Corporal punishment	67	53.6	58	46.4	.648	1	0.421
Verbal insults	63	50.4	62	49.6	.008	1	0.929
Ignoring	59	47.2	66	52.8	.392	1	0.531
Not marking learners' work	54	43.2	71	56.8	2.312	1	0.128

*df =1, p<0.05. Statistically significant difference between participants who said 'yes' and those who said 'no' because p is less than 0.05

The questionnaire also sought the educator respondents' views on disciplinary measures used to deal with minor forms of indiscipline in classrooms. As Table 1 above shows, there were statistically significant differences between participants who confirmed and those who denied the use of the following disciplinary measures in dealing with minor forms of indiscipline such as verbal reprimands, talking to learners, demotion of learners from leadership positions, manual labour, making learner kneel on the floor, sending learners out of the classroom and the denial of privileges. This suggests that these were measures seemingly in use according to educator respondents.

There were no significant differences between respondents who confirmed and those who denied the use of menial tasks, corporal punishment, verbal insults, ignoring and not marking learners' work as disciplinary measures used to deal with minor forms of indiscipline. This suggests that, from the point of view of educator respondents, these were not commonly used.

In interviews carried out with educators most of the already cited disciplinary measures were further raised. The following are some of the excepts from the interviewees;

Interviewee A:
Because we are not allowed to beat, I simply ask those learners who misbehave when I am teaching to kneel on the floor for the whole lesson.

Interviewee B:
Some of the learners are so disruptive of teaching that I normally ask such learners to leave the classes. However, the Principal does not want learners to be sent out of classes.

Interviewee C:
In cases where learners do not submit given work for marking on time, I just don't mark the work. This will teach them to submit work on time in future.

Interviewee D:
I normally threaten misbehaving learners with unspecified action. At times it helps but most of the time it doesn't because they know that I use empty threats and will not follow-up my threats with serious action.

Interviewee E:
Some of the noisemakers are punished by being made to sweep the floors after school.

Further probing showed that the educators looked for ways which made learners feel they had been punished.

The next table summarizes frequencies on educators' responses on disciplinary measures used for major forms of indiscipline.

Disciplinary measures used for major forms of indiscipline

Table 2: Educators' responses and statistical significance regarding disciplinary measures used for major indiscipline (N=125)

Disciplinary measures for Major offenses	Responses				Significance		
	YES	%	NO	%	$x2$	df	P
Guidance and Counseling	107	85.6	18	14.4	63.368	1	0.000*
Talking to learners	103	82.4	22	17.6	52.488	1	0.000*
Suspension	95	76.0	30	24.0	33.800	1	0.000*
Detention	93	74.4	32	25.6	29.768	1	0.000*
Demotion	88	70.4	37	29.6	20.808	1	0.000*
Manual Labour	79	63.2	46	36.8	8.712	1	0.003*
Use of anger management techniques	70	56.0	55	44.0	1.800	1	0.180
Use of stress management techniques	69	55.2	56	44.8	1.352	1	0.245
Expulsion	65	52.0	60	48.0	.200	1	0.655
Referral to psychologist	62	49.6	63	50.4	.008	1	0.929
Community Service	59	47.2	66	52.8	.392	1	0.531
Transferring	56	44.8	69	55.2	1.352	1	0.245

*df =1, p<0.05. Statistically significant difference between participants who said 'yes' and those who said 'no' because p is less than 0.05

Table 2 shows that there were statistically significant differences between educators who confirmed the use of guidance and counselling, talking to learners, suspension, detention, demotion and manual labour and those who did not confirm the use of these disciplinary measures in dealing with major forms of indiscipline. The existence of such significant differences shows that the cited disciplinary measures seemed to be in common use in schools participating in this study.

There are no statistically significant differences between respondents who confirmed the use of anger management techniques, stress management techniques, expulsion, referral to psychologists, community service and transferring. This suggests that, from the point of view of educator respondents in this study, such measures were not commonly in use.

In interviews held with educators, some interviewees lamented the lack of strong deterrent measures to deal with serious forms of indiscipline. The following are some of the excepts from the interviewees;

Interviewee O
It is really unfortunate that we are supposed to administer discipline in schools when our hands are tied. Pieces of legislation in place make it very difficult to discipline learners, it is very difficult to suspend, let alone expel a learner. The processes and procedures are too many and often with serious repercussions for us as educators.

Interviewee P
Learners who engage in gross violation of the school code may be suspended for a short period of time and they come back to join others and they continue misbehaving.

Interviewee Q
The Deputy Principal always offer counseling to some offenders of great cases in the school. The situation would be better if we had a resident trained psychologist in the school to offer professional counseling services.

Interviewee R
The Principal advises parents of learners who are habitual offenders to transfer from the school.

Interviewee S
If a learner misbehaves while holding a leadership position in the school, such a learner is automatically demoted from that position. This serves as a lesson to others in similar positions to behave appropriately.

Such views only helped the researcher to gain further insight into how helpless some educators felt when it came to the issue of having in place the necessary disciplinary measures.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to establish the different kinds of disciplinary measures used to deal with both minor and major forms of learner indiscipline. It emerged from the study that the following disciplinary measures were mostly used in dealing with minor forms of indiscipline; verbal reprimands, talking to learners, demotion of learners from leadership positions, manual labour, making learner kneel on the floor, sending learners out of the classroom and the denial of privileges. Such disciplinary measures are mostly punitive in nature. The findings are consistent with findings in earlier studies by Van Wyk (2001) that most educators in South Africa had limited knowledge of disciplinary strategies. The finding further confirm the findings in a study by Maphosa and Shumba (2010) which found that after the banning of corporal punishment in South African schools, educators had serious challenges in coming up with and using alternative disciplinary measures. Use of punitive disciplinary approaches contradicts calls by the Committee for Children (2004) for disciplinary measures that encourage moral and mental development, as well as a sense of responsibility in children.

The study also found that the disciplinary measures commonly used to deal with minor forms of indiscipline were mostly retributive in nature. Such a finding confirms an assertion by Zaibert (2006) of the existence of disciplinary measures that are meant to 'fix' perpetrators of indiscipline. Sending children out of class or

demoting them from leadership positions as disciplinary measures really confirm the thinking behind disciplining that one deserves to be punished as 'pay back' to the offence committed. Sadly, such approaches do not help the offender to understand their disciplinary problems and assist with ways to behave in better ways in future. Sanderson (2003) advocates for disciplinary measures that are corrective and not retaliatory.

It further emerged from the study that disciplinary measures used to deal with minor forms of indiscipline were mostly reactive. This finding is consistent with assertions by Liaupsin, Jolivette and Scott (2005:48) that for a long time schools have dealt with challenging student behaviours using disciplinary measures that are 'reactive, exclusionary and ineffective'. Turnbull et. al (2002) actually argue that use of punitive and reactive disciplinary measures is linked to the increase and intensity of the behaviours meant to be controlled. The use of disciplinary measures that only deal with disciplinary cases after they have occurred have been observed to be often too little and too late (Charles, 2007).

The study also found out that suspension, detention, demotion, and manual labour were found to be the most common disciplinary measures used in dealing with major forms of indiscipline in schools. Such a finding further corroborates assertions by Vally (2005) of the need to distinguish between discipline and punishment in schools. When a learner is detained after school or suspended from school for a disciplinary offence one wonders the motive behind this when considering the need to be more proactive and supportive to offenders. Scarlet (2008) advocates for disciplinary measures that focus on the prevention of indiscipline.

The use of suspension of learners from school as a disciplinary measure also confirms findings in a study by Aziza (2001) which also found that there were rising cases of students suspended from schools in one of the provinces in South Africa. Some of the disciplinary measures also infringed on the rights of the child as pronounced in the South African Constitution. Detention and manual labour, for example, are in contravention of sections of the Constitution which spell out that children should not be treated in inhumane or degrading ways (Republic of South Africa 1996a). Nieuwenhuis, Beckmann and Prinsloo (2007) warn teachers of their crucial role of ensuring discipline in schools in an environment that is very sensitive to the protection of children's rights.

The study also found that corporal punishment was still in use in schools despite the fact that it was unlawful to use it. Such a finding is consistent with findings by Makapela (2006) that corporal punishment was still in use in South African schools. Such a finding further strengthens the observations by Maphosa and Shumba (2010) and Vally (2005) that educators still lacked the capacity to instill discipline to learners without punishing them.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study that sought to ascertain the disciplinary measures used to deal with minor and major forms of indiscipline concluded that educators still viewed disciplining learners as synonymous to punishing them. Disciplinary measures used for both minor and major forms of indiscipline were largely punitive in nature and used with the intention to 'fix' learners for offences committed. Disciplinary measured used were also found to be reactive rather than proactive. Educators waited until before cases of indiscipline were committed before they could take action. Some outlawed disciplinary measures such as corporal punishment were still found to be still in use in schools. Some of the disciplinary measures used in schools were observed to be infringing on the rights of children.

Recommendations
In the light of the findings of the study the following recommendations are made;
1. Short courses or staff development workshops on discipline should be offered to educators with emphasis on creating awareness on the use alternative disciplinary measures.

2. It should always be highlighted to teachers by creating disciplinary guidelines in schools that clarify the differences between discipline and punishment.
3. Teachers should always be reminded of the dangers of physical punishment in general and corporal punishment in particular so that they avoid the use of physical punishment in schools.
4. Learners should be empowered to report cases of abuse in the form of physical punishment by teachers and avenues to report such abuses should be made clear to learners.

Limitations and implications for future studies

The present study focused on one type of school, the independent schools in one educational district and as such results may not be generalized to all schools in South Africa. Future studies may be carried out at national level and involve different types of schools so as to obtain more generalizable results.

BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESS OF AUTHOR

Cosmas MAPHOSA is a Researcher in the Teaching and Learning Office at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. He holds a Doctorate Degree in Education specialising in Educational Management. Dr Maphosa has so far published fifteen research articles in international peer-reviewed IBSS and ISI accredited journals while five other articles are currently in press in various journals. Dr. Maphosa has also presented ten conference papers to date. His research interests are in curriculum issues in primary and secondary schools, higher education as well as educational management issues.

Dr. Cosmas MAPHOSA
University of KwaZulu Natal,
University Teaching and Learning Office (UTLO)
Durban, REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

E. Mail: maphosas@ukzn.ac.za or maphosacos@yahoo.com
Phone +27 31 2290 3683; Cell: +27 74 550 6003

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