Learner Discipline in Crisis:
Can South African Schools Overcome the Problem?

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ABSTRACT Discipline problems seem to exist in South African schools and the situation is getting worse and even out of hand, including bullying behavior. Traditional behavior management practices, including corporal punishment, are prohibited in South African schools. An area of concern is whether learner discipline policies and procedures are equitable, fair and effective. It is the school's role to ensure that all learners are aware of the reality, that while having rights, they also have corresponding responsibilities. Therefore, this qualitative critical review paper critically analyzes the concept of discipline and highlights the theories of approaches towards it. The paper, then in view of the critical review, draws some lessons on what strategies could be applicable to a South African school's context and makes some suggestions regarding dealing with discipline problems in schools

INTRODUCTION

Discipline problems do exist in South African schools and other countries and the situation is getting worse and even out of hand, including bullying behavior. Schools should have management policies for this kind of behavior. Traditional behavioral management practices, including corporal punishment, are prohibited in South African schools. Contemporary practices should center on management through supportive school programs, including appropriate curricula and school-support structures. An area of concern is whether learner discipline policies and procedures are equitable, fair and effective. It is the school's role to ensure that all learners are aware of the reality that while they have rights, they also have corresponding responsibilities. Learners' legal rights in disciplinary matters are delineated as a context for examining the implication of discipline policies. Substantial litigation has established that disciplinary actions must be accompanied by procedural protections that assure the rudiments of fundamental fairness to prevent mistakes in the disciplinary process. The awareness is more likely to be achieved in a supportive school culture where each learner is recognized for having unique qualities that can mature and grow in an environment, which is conducive to learning. If the discipline problems in schools are not going to be managed, they will put the education system in a crisis. In light of this background, it was critical to ask this question,

How can South African schools overcome problems of discipline?

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research question, a literature review on school discipline was done. Books, journals, electronic journals from the library of University of Johannesburg were searched for the relevant and appropriate content. Different search words were used. For instance, school discipline, theories on school discipline and definition of school discipline and alternative methods of school discipline to corporal punishment. Government policies on discipline as well as current newspaper articles were critically analyzed. A synthesis was made to develop a critical argument in the paper to deal with problems of discipline in the South African school context.

UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Definition, Historical Background and Theories

Discipline means a code of conduct prescribed for the highest welfare of the individual and the society in which the individual lives, and it is a personal system of organized behavior designed to promote self-interest while contributing to the welfare of others (Jones 2005). The term refers to students complying with a code of behavior often known as the school

rules. Among other things, these may set out the expected standards of clothing, timekeeping, social behavior and work ethics. The term may also be applied to the punishment that is the consequence of transgression of the code of behavior. For this reason the usage of *school discipline* sometimes means *punishment for breaking school rules* rather than behaving within the schools rules (Joubert 2009).

Throughout the history of education the most common form of school discipline was corporal punishment. Whilst a child was in school, a teacher was expected to act as a substitute parent, with all the normal forms of parental discipline open to them. In practice this meant that children were commonly punished with the birch or cane. However (Hyman and Snook 2000), corporal punishment was often problematic. Unless strictly monitored it could be open to abuse and there was a growing opposition to any use of physical force in disciplining individuals from the late eighteenth century onwards. A further complicating matter was the rise of compulsory education, as parents might be compelled to send their children to schools in which the disciplinary regime was at odds with parental view on punishment Hyman and Snook 2000). Corporal punishment was consequently abolished in many countries and replaced by positive reinforcements of behavior, in addition to forms of discipline more agreeable to parental tastes, such a the detention of students (McHenry 2000).

There are a number of theories to form a comprehensive discipline strategy for an entire school or a particular class. Firstly, William Glasser's Reality Therapy involves teachers helping students make positive choices by making clear the connection between student behavior and consequences (William Glasser Institute 2005). Class meetings, clearly communicated rules, and the use of plans and contracts are featured. Researchers have noted modest improvement as the result of this approach (Emmer et al. 2002). Positive Approach is based on Glasser's Reality Therapy and is grounded in a teacher's respect for students and instilling in them a sense of responsibility. Program components include developing and sharing clear rules, providing daily opportunities for success, and administering in-school suspension for noncompliant students. Secondly, The Teacher Effectiveness Training philosophy differentiates between teacher-owned and student-owned problems and proposes different strategies for dealing with each. Students are taught problem solving and negotiation techniques. It is found that teachers like the program and that their behavior is influenced by it, but effects on student behavior are unclear (Cotton 2001).

Roles and South African Policy Perspective in School Discipline

The objective of the School Discipline Policy is to establish positive learning communities, which increase student responsibility and student learning (South African Schools Act 1996). Each school will need to consider the objective and outcomes in relation to its current stage of development and also consider what will therefore be realistic and achievable targets (Bray 2004). Schools will need to develop them further in order to determine the most appropriate manner of implementation. Schools should also develop performance indicators related to their implementation strategies in order to monitor their progress towards achieving the stated outcomes.

Larson (1998) suggests that these codes or discipline policies be judicious in their approach with students actively engaged in discussing their rights and responsibilities. Thompson (1994) suggests that these policies and code of conduct need to address issues that are relevant to the school as well as combine content (the rules) and process (whereby students, parents, and teachers become engaged in the rules). Each school will develop a behavior code in partnership with its community and will manage student behavior in a partnership between students, their families and school staff. Schools are a part of the communities in which they operate, and have a responsibility to work collaboratively at a local level. In order to develop collaborative partnerships according to Sterling and Davidoff (2000):

- Schools will develop decision-making policies, which encourage inclusive participation of the school community.
- Schools will consult their communities and give them the opportunity to be involved in developing the behavior code and also in implementing and reviewing it.
- Students, families, school staff and service providers will work together to negotiate student development plans to support student learning and behavior change and manage seriously or persistently irresponsible behavior.

Behavior codes and student development plans are essential elements of effective partnerships. A behavior code is a statement of a school community's values and its expectations relating to the student behavior and the school's management of student behavior. It, according to Magau (2002):

- Expands the School Discipline Policy into specific expectations and consequences, which accommodate local circumstances.
- Involves staff, students and their families in decisions about how student behavior will be managed.
- States expectations in terms of individual rights and social responsibilities, as well as the consequences of both responsible and irresponsible behaviors.
- Describes grievance procedures available to any member of the school community who believes behavior codes are not being supported or enforced appropriately.
- Is developed, implemented and reviewed as part of the school planning process.
- Is negotiated with and supported by the school council.
- Acknowledges other relevant policies and legal obligations.
- Schools may ensure that parents and students understand the school's expectations through:
  - Holding ongoing discussions with the school community to clarify values and expectations.
  - Conducting ongoing consultations with parents and students on the school's behavior code.
  - Regularly communicating information about the school's behavior code.

Behavior codes need to be explicit. Consequences for behavior must be non-violent, and reflect the policies of the Department of Education and Children's Services and the expectations of the wider community. Non-violent consequences are responses, which do not involve any form of physical punishment, emotional hurt or verbal harassment.

In implementing school discipline policy directors, district superintendents of education, principals and school-based staff, including teachers, are accountable to the Chief Executive, Department of Education and Children's Services, (DECS) and have to (Weimer 2003):

- Provide and coordinate services for students experiencing behavioral difficulties and their schools.
- Engage in appropriate interagency agreements in order to streamline the provision of services to support students with social and behavioral problems.
- Provide examples of curriculum review and reform, which addresses behavior issues.
- Provide appropriate professional development opportunities for staff.
- Provide information to parents on DECS policy.

Responsibilities of district superintendents (Dodd: 2000) are to,

- Support principals in ensuring that the school planning addresses the implementation of the School Discipline Policy
- Support principals in ensuring that each school's behavior code and other behavior management procedures address needs specific to the community.
- Work in cooperation with DECS regional services and interagency services to ensure appropriate service delivery to school communities.
- Work with principals and DECS regional services to ensure that mechanisms are developed at a local level to provide appropriate placements for students requiring temporary alternative placements.
- Support principals and other school personnel to manage critical incidents relating to student behavior or the aggressive behavior of community members, and facilitate mediation with community members when necessary.

Each school district shall develop and implement a board approved comprehensive district plan for school discipline. The plan shall include, goals and objectives, giving special emphasis to the teaching and practice of self-discipline, citizenship skills, and social skills; an evaluation process whereby the goals are assessed annually; an ongoing staff development program related to student self-discipline, good citizenship, and social skills; policies and procedures related to the use and abuse of alcohol and controlled substances; and policies to define, prohibit, and intervene in bullying, including the requirements and awareness intervention strategies, including training for social skills, for students and school staff (Weimer 2003). The policies shall provide training specific to overt

aggression that may include physical fighting such as punching, shoving, kicking, and verbal threatening behavior. Policies should further include how to stop name calling, physical or verbal aggression or threatening behavior; provide training specific to relational aggression or indirect, covert, or social aggression, including rumor spreading, intimidation, enlisting a friend to assault a child. Training should be provided to teachers to identify social isolation; provide training specific to cyber bullying, including use of email, webpages, text messaging, instant messaging, three-way calling or messaging or any other electronic means of aggression inside or outside of school (Joubert 2009). Additional adult supervision may be required, such as on playgrounds, in hallways, and lunch areas. Revise existing safe and drug-free school policies as well as school harassment and hazing policies. This policies must include strategies for providing students and staff, including aides, paraprofessionals, and coaches, with awareness and intervention skills such as social skills training. Strategies to provide for necessary adult supervision must be clearly written and consistently enforced and include parents, community councils and other community members in policy development, training and prevention implementation (Dodd 2000).

Each school district and school shall develop written standards for behavior and class and school management, including consequences for appropriate and inappropriate behavior. The standards shall be developed by administering the support staff, students, parents, and community members in such a manner so as to create a widespread understanding and a sense of participation, ownership, support, and responsibility.

All discipline policies and procedures, including notice to parents and students and student due process, shall be in accordance with the law. The principal would be responsibility to (Dodd 2000):

- Develop, implement, and regularly review, in consultation with the school community, a school behavior code which is consistent with the DECS School Discipline Policy.
- Ensure that student behavior is managed through procedures supported by a strong theoretical understanding of how student learning and behavior are best supported.

- Ensure that new staff, students, and their families are aware of the school community's negotiated behavior code and the decision-making procedures are open to them if they wish to influence school practice.
- Ensure that parents or caregivers:
- Promote opportunities for staff training and development.
- Involve student services and personnel and other agencies, when appropriate, to support staff and families in managing student behavior effectively.
- Use system level consequences and interagency support programs with students who do not response to class and school consequences.

Parents are also regarded as an important stakeholder in maintaining discipline. McHenry (2000) and Atkenson and Forehad (1979) report that programs to involve parents in reinforcing behavioral messages can reduce the number of problems. All stakeholders should work together to put prevention strategies in place to improve the discipline in schools.

The role of parents in supporting school discipline has been relatively well described in the literature. Those roles can include (U.S. Department of Education 1996):

- Setting standards for behavior, limits and clear expectations for their children, in and out of school, as well as, establishing mutually agreed upon rules regarding homework, extracurricular activities, grades, curfews, chaperoned parties and places that are off limits.
- Teaching and demonstrating standards of right and wrong, and discussing the school's discipline policies with their child.
- Encouraging their child to talk about school, after-school activities and their trips to school.
- Being involved in their child's homework, meeting teachers and attending school functions.
- Building a network of other adults to refer to in the event of discipline problems.
- Volunteering in school activities when possible.
- Monitoring the television channels and video games that their children use, encouraging their children to participate in safe, healthy after-school activities.
- Working with school-parent groups to plan and implement safe school activities.

In South Africa, the school governing body is at the center of school discipline. They have to establish a school disciplinary committee handling disciplinary matters (SASA 1996)

Approaches to School Discipline

School discipline relies upon the idea of an assertive teacher who is prepared to impose their will upon the class (Coetzee and Jansen 2007). Positive reinforcement is balanced with immediate and fair punishment for misbehavior and firm, clear boundaries define what appropriate and inappropriate behavior is (Marzano 2003). Whilst this is the consensus viewpoint amongst the majority of academics, some teachers and parents advocate a more assertive and confrontational style of discipline with a claim that many problems with modern schooling stem from the weakness in school discipline. It is believed that when teachers exercise firm control over the classroom, discipline is maintained (Marzano 2003). This viewpoint is supported by the educational attainment of countries that combine strict discipline with high standards of education.

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in collaboration with RAPCAN and Save the Children Sweden participated in a roundtable discussion that sort to engage key policymakers on legal options and made suggestions among others, how children can be free from violence at home, and how parents and caregivers can be supported to use appropriate forms of discipline. Following this, the Parliament passed the Children's Bill. It was anticipated by many that this Bill would seek to prohibit the use of all forms of physical punishment in the home but it did not. Since 1994, South Africa has progressively banned all forms of corporal punishment in the public domain. Corporal punishment within the private domain of the home is, however, legally tolerated provided that it does not exceed the boundaries of moderate chastisement (SAHRC 2013).

At an international level, children participating in the United Nations Study on Violence against Children have overwhelmingly called for the prohibitions of all forms of physical punishment in all spheres of life (Sterling and Davidoff 2000). South Africa is a country that suffers from endemic violence. Abolishing all forms of corporal punishment and using appropriate forms of discipline in the home would bring our soci-

ety closer to ensuring our constitutional values of human dignity and equality are realized. It is not clear, however, that this stereotypical view reflects the reality of classrooms or those educational goals in countries are commensurable with those in other countries. In Japan, for example, although average attainment on standardized tests may exceed those in Western countries, classroom discipline and behavior is slightly problematic (Sterling and Davidoff 2000). Although, officially, schools have extremely rigid codes of behavior, in practice many teachers find the students unmanageable and do not enforce discipline at all, whilst others impose brutal standards of discipline, backed up with beatings and whippings.

An article in the American Bar Association Journal (Jebo 2000) sharply criticized zero tolerance policies as "zero sense". The central problem with zero tolerance policies is that all threats of violence are treated as equally dangerous and deserving of the same consequences. For instance, zero tolerance does the following:

- Does not increase school safety.
- Relies too heavily on suspension and expulsion, practices that neither improve school climate nor address the source of student alienation.
- Is related to a number of negative consequences, including increased rates of school dropouts and discriminatory application of school discipline.
- Negatively impacts minority students and students with disabilities to a greater degree than other students. Students have shown that these students constitute a disproportionately large percentage of expulsions and suspension.
- Restricts access to appropriate education, often exacerbating the problems of students with disabilities and achievement difficulties, and therapy increasing the probability that these students will not complete high school.
- Under these policies, students who commit relatively minimum infractions—talking back to teachers, writing graffiti—are often suspended or even prosecuted in court instead of receiving in-school punishment.

However, on the contrary, for example, the rights of students are well established in the Constitution and in the South African Schools Act. The rights of students are important and schools should act in the best interest of the

child. Nowhere there is a reference to zero tolerance in the Act and Constitution, although there are clear steps that should be taken and criteria to be met when a student is suspended from school. Timeliness, appeals and procedures are all discussed. Zero tolerance is not discussed. Commins (1998) has expressed concern that zero tolerance policies have increased the number of expelled and suspended students and that the policy may be counterproductive. Students that are expelled or suspended are not provided with alternative education or support services. Keleher (2000) indicated that zero tolerance policies and suspensions might disfavor minority students. Limited or no case law or legal advise can be found that indicate the rights of students where abrogated under zero tolerance policies. However, from a lay persons' perspective it seems that natural justice principals imply that each case should be judged on its own merits, including assigning a punishment commensurate with the offence and individual circumstances. More attention needs to be paid to ensure an active adult presence in the school and in encouraging students to report their concerns. More tolerance policies are resulting in inappropriate sanctions for some students. Though increasingly common in recent years, reliance on punitive approaches to discipline, such as 'zero tolerance' policies, has proven largely ineffective, even counterproductive. This holds true for general education students and those with disabilities. Current research and legislation offer alternative 'best practice' strategies that support safe education of *all* students (Nelson et al. 1997). Such effective discipline practices ensure the safety and dignity of students and staff, preserve the integrity of the learning environment, and address the causes of a student's misbehavior in order to improve positive behavioral skills and long-term outcomes.

The thinking around discipline in schools has resulted in two approaches to discipline, positive discipline and punishment-based discipline. In punishment-based discipline measures such as suspension, expulsion, and other punitive consequences are used (Nelson et al. 1997). Positive discipline strategies are research-based procedures that can focus on increasing desirable behaviors instead of simply decreasing undesirable behaviors through punishment. They emphasize the importance of making positive changes in the child's environment in order

to improve the child's behavior. Such changes may entail the use of positive reinforcement, modeling supportive teacher-student relations, family support and assistance from a variety of educational and mental health specialists. It is believed that positive discipline strategies benefit all students because (Nelsen et al. 1997):

- Opportunities to forge relationships with caring adults, coupled with engaging curriculum, prevent discipline problems.
- Discipline that is fair, corrective and includes therapeutic group relationship-building activities with children reduces the likelihood of further problems.
- Strategies that effectively maintain appropriate social behavior make schools safer. Safer schools are more effective learning environments.
- Positive solutions address student needs, environmental conditions, teacher interactions and matching students with curriculum.
- Reducing student alienation through 'schools-with-a-school' and other peer relationship can dramatically reduce acting out in schools, especially in large settings.
- When students are given an appropriate education in a conductive environment, they improve behavior and performance.
- Appropriately implemented, proactive behavior support systems can lead to dramatic improvements that have long-term effects on the lifestyle, functional communication skills and problem behavior in individuals with disabilities or at risk for negative adult outcome.

Furthermore, effective implementation of proactive behavioral supports includes several examples of effective proactive behavioral strategies (Minnaar and de Kock 2002)**.** There are a number of research-based approaches to providing proactive systems of behavioral support in schools, including Positive Behavior Support (PBS), violence prevention programs, social skills instruction and school-based mental health services. These strategies include:

Violence Prevention

The most frequent component of a violence prevention program includes a prevention curriculum, services from schools psychologists, counselors or social workers, family and community involvement, and implementation of ef-

fective school-wide discipline practices. When drafting a violence prevention and poor discipline plan, it is helpful to consider certain principles that research or expert-based experience shows, have a significant impact on success. The principles include:

* *Share responsibility by establishing a partnership with the child, school, home, and community***:** Coordinated service systems should be available for children who are at risk of violent behavior. Effective schools reach out to include families and the entire community in the education of children. In addition, effective schools coordinate and collaborate with child and family service agencies, law enforced and juvenile justice systems, mental health agencies, business, faith, and ethnic leaders, and other community agencies.
* *Inform parents and listen to them when early warning signs are observed:* Parents should be involved as soon as possible. Effective and safe schools make persistent efforts to involve parents by: informing them routinely about school discipline policies, procedures, and rules, about their children's behavior (both good or bad); involving them and making decisions concerning school-wide disciplinary policies and procedures; and encouraging them to participate in prevention programs, intervention programs, and crisis planning. Parents need to know what school-based interventions are being used with their children and how they can support their success.
* *Maintain confidentiality and parents' rights to privacy:* Parental involvement and consent is required before personally identifiable information is shared with other agencies, except in the case of emergencies or suspicion of abuse. Furthermore, parent-approved interagency communication must be kept confidential.
* *Develop the capacity of staff, students, and families to intervene:* Many school staff members are afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing when faced with a potentially violent student. Effective schools provide the entire school community-teachers, students, parents, support staff, with training and support in responding to imminent warning signs, preventing violence, and intervening safely and effectively. Professionals who are competent

in the approach must monitor interventions. According to researchers, programs do not succeed without the ongoing support of administrators, parents, and community leaders.

* *Support students in being responsible for their actions:* Effective school communities encourage students to see themselves as responsible for their actions, and actively engage them in planning, implementing, and evaluating violence prevention initiatives.
· *Simplify staff requests for urgent assistance:* Many school systems and community agencies have complex legalistic referral systems with timelines and waiting lists. Children who are at risk of endangering themselves or others cannot be placed on waiting lists.
* *Make interventions available as early as possible***:** Too frequently, interventions are not made available until the student becomes violent or as adjudicated as a youthful offender. Interventions for children who have reached this stage are costly, restrictive, and relatively inefficient (Price 2009). Effective schools build mechanisms into their intervention processes to ensure that referrals are addressed promptly, and that feedback is provided to the referring individual.
* *Use sustained, multiple, coordinated interventions:* It is rare that children are violent or disruptive only in school. Interventions that are most successful are comprehensive, sustained, and properly implemented. They help families and staff work together to help the child. Coordinated efforts draw resources from community agencies that are respectful of and responsive to the needs of families. Isolated, inconsistent, short term, and fragmented interventions will not be successful and may actually do harm. School communities can enhance their effectiveness by conducting a functional analysis of the factors that set off violence and problem behavior.

In determining an appropriate course of action, consider the child's age, cultural background, and family experiences and values. Decisions about interventions should be measured against a standard of reasonableness to ensure the likelihood that they will be implemented effectively. In developing and implementing violence prevention and response plans, effective schools draw upon the resources of various school-based programs and staff, such as special education, safe and drug-free programs and pupil services.

Positive Behavioral Support and Social Skills Training

Interventions that help students with emotional and behavioral disorders and social skills deficits have the potential to significantly improve school-wide behavior and safety. Effective programs include, Stop and Think, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support.

Early Intervention

Interventions that target low levels of inappropriate behavior before they escalate into violence can significantly reduce the need for harsh consequences later. Examples of proven practices include, First Step to Success (kinder garden) and Positive Adolescent Choices Training (developed for African American youth).

In-school Suspension

When focused on continuing the curriculum, while therapeutically debriefing to identify and eliminate the root of cause of acting-out episode provides an alternative to exclusion.

Adult Mentors

Who work with students to help to improve self-concept and motivation to engage in appropriative behavior.

Teacher Support Teams

(Or "Intervention Assistance Teams") evaluate both class climate and student needs, and provide support and strategies to engage difficult students as a prevention effort.

Effective alternative programs, which according to (Dohrn 2004), include:

- Low staff to student ratio with highly trained, culturally diverse staff;
- Strong component of parent and community agency involvement;
- Use of non-traditional instruction, adapted curriculum and flexible staff roles;
- Sufficient funding and resources to implement program;
- Sensitivity to individual and cultural differences;
- Clear program and student goals;
- Onsite counseling services;
- Multidisciplinary case management;
- Research-based interventions and,
- Formative and summative program evaluation (Dohrn 2004).

School Discipline and School Effectiveness

There is a relationship between how well the school is effective and school discipline (Nelson et al. 1997). The effectiveness of a school would generally influence how well the school can maintain discipline, for instance according to Bass (2008), effective schools have the following characteristics which make them enhance their discipline level:

Focus on Academic Achievement

Effective schools convey the attitude that all children can achieve academically and behave appropriately, while at the same time appreciate individual differences. Adequate resources and programs help ensure that expectations are met. Expectations are communicated clearly, with the understanding that meeting such expectations is a responsibility of the student, the school, and the home. Students who do not receive the support they need are less likely to behave in socially desirable ways.

Involve Families in Meaningful Ways

Students whose families are involved in their growth in and outside of school are more likely to experience success in school and less likely to become involved in antisocial activities. School communities must make parents feel welcome at school, address barriers to their participation, and keep families positively engaged in their children's education. Effective schools also support families in expressing concerns about their children and they support families in getting the help they need to address behaviors that cause concern.

Develop Links to the Community

Everyone must be committed to improving schools. Schools that have close ties to families, support services, community police, the faith-based community, and the community at large can benefit from many valuable resources. When these links are weak, the risk of school violence is heightened and the opportunity to

serve children who are at risk for violence and who may be affected by it is increased.

Emphasize Positive Relationships Among Students and Staff

Research shows that a positive relationship with an adult who is available to provide support when needed is one of the most critical factors in preventing student violence. Students often look to adults in the school community for guidance, support, and direction. Some children need help overcoming feelings of isolation and support in developing connections to others. Effective schools make sure that opportunities exist for adults to spend quality, personal time with children. Effective schools also foster positive student interpersonal relations, they encourage students to help each other and to feel comfortable assisting others in getting help when needed.

Discuss Safety Issues Openly

Children come to school with many different perceptions, and misconceptions, about death, violence, and the use of weapons. Schools can reduce the risk of violence by teaching children the dangers about firearms, as well as appropriate strategies for dealing with feelings, expressing anger in appropriate ways, and resolving conflicts. Schools should also teach children that they are responsible for their actions and that the choices they make have consequences for which they will be held accountable.

Treat Students with Equal Respect

A major source of conflict in schools is the perceived or real problem of bias and unfair treatment of students because of ethnicity, gender, race, social class, religion, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, physical appearance, or some other factor, both by staff and by peers. Students who have been treated unfairly may become scapegoats and/or targets of violence. In some cases, victims might react in aggressive ways. Effective schools communicate to students and the greater community that all children are valued and respected. This is a deliberate and systematic effort, for example, displaying children's artwork, posting academic work prominently throughout the building, respect-

ing students' diversity, to establish a climate that demonstrates care and a sense of community.

Create Ways for Students to Share Their Concerns

It has been found that peers often are the most likely group to know in advance about potential school violence. Schools must create ways for students to safely report such troubling behaviors that may lead to dangerous situations. Also, students who report potential school violence must be protected. It is important for schools to support and foster positive relationships between students and adults so students will feel safe providing information about a potentially dangerous situation.

Help Children Feel Safe Expressing Their Feelings

It is very important that children feel safe when expressing their needs, fears, and anxieties to school staff. When they do not have access to caring adults, feelings of isolation, rejection and disappointment are more likely to occur, increasing the probability of acting out behaviors.

Have in Place a System for Referring Children who are Suspected of Being Abused or Neglected

The referral system must be appropriate and reflect federal and state guidelines.

Offer Extended Day Programs for Children

School-based before- and after-school programs can be effective in reducing violence. Effective programs are well supervised and provide children with a support and a range of options, such as counseling, tutoring, mentoring, cultural arts, community service, clubs, access to computers and help with homework.

Promote Good Citizenship and Character

In addition to their academic mission, schools must help students become good citizens. First, schools stand for the civic values set forth in the Constitution and Bill of Rights (patriotism, freedom of religion, speech, and

press, equal protection/non-discrimination, and due process/fairness). Schools also reinforce and promote the shared value of their local communities, such as honesty, kindness, responsibility and respect for others. Schools should acknowledge that parents are the primary moral educators of their children and work in partnership with them.

Identify Problems and Assess Progress Towards Solution

Schools must openly and subjectively examine circumstances that are potentially dangerous for students and staff and situations where members of the school community feel threatened or intimidated. Safe schools continually assess progress by identifying problems and collecting information regarding progress towards solutions. Moreover, effective schools share this information with students, families, and the community at large.

Support Students in Making the Transition to Adult Life and the Workplace

Youth need assistance in planning their future and in developing skills that will result in success. For example, schools can provide students with community service opportunities, work-study programs, and apprenticeships that help connect them to caring adults in the community.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE REVIEW

The following themes were harvested from the critical review of the literature.

Theme 1: Aim of Discipline

The study seems to suggest two opposing views to discipline one that is *punitive* and one, which is *developmental* and *corrective*. The misbehavior of children is common in all schools, although most schools manage to keep this in tolerable limits. Occasionally, however, poor disciplinary management within schools can cause a more general breakdown in order. In modern years this has been popularly characterized by violence against teachers and other children. Even low levels of ill discipline at schools can result in a detrimental working environment for

children and good teaching will often depend on good school discipline. Effective discipline requires the consent, either explicit or tacit, of parents and pupils. Whilst few children will enjoy punishment, most will submit to it providing it is perceived as being equitable. Moreover, to be effective, punishment should never appear arbitrary. School hierarchies award teachers great power over their students and the perceived abuse of this power to punish children in arbitrary ways can be the source of much resentment and hostility.

Theme 2: Teacher Styles to Discipline

While the literature seems to suggest a move towards a less punitive disciplinary style, on the contrary this seems not to be happening in schools (Nelsen et al. 1997). In recent years anxious educators relied increasingly on zero tolerance policies as a simple, albeit draconian response to students' threats of poor discipline and violence, which relieved them of the need to exercise judgment and make reasoned decisions to student behavior. Zero tolerance has become a philosophy, which permeated our schools; it employs a brutally strict disciplinary model that embraces harsh punishment on students. A concern raised was that zero tolerance policies were resulting in high levels of suspension and expulsion under majority of students (Jebo 2000).

Theme 3: Positive Discipline versus Punished-based Discipline

The review seems to suggest that teachers are stuck with a punishment-based disciplinary approach (Bass 2008). The adoption of a zero tolerance approach to school discipline usually entails the expulsion or suspension of students as an automatic consequence of serious acts of misconduct, particularly the possession of weapons and drugs. Unfortunately, an increasing number of schools apply a zero tolerance approach to behaviors that do not necessarily threaten the safety or welfare of others. Furthermore, harsh consequences are invoked automatically, irrespective of the severity of the misbehavior or the circumstance involved, and without consideration of the negative impact of these consequences of the welfare of the offending student or on the overall climate of the school (Joubert 2009. The review seems to indicate that

more has to be done to advocate for alternative research-based discipline strategies that can be more effective in stemming violence and creating a suitable learning environment. Balanced and rational steps for improving the safety and crisis preparedness of all school environments can and should be taken in the development of safety related school policies and a code of conduct for students, the training of educators on discipline and safety strategies and train educators on crisis preparedness guidelines for dealing with any discipline and safety issues at school as well as prevention strategies of indiscipline.

Theme 4: School Discipline and School Effectiveness

The review seems to suggest a link between well functioning schools and the level of discipline found (Magau 2002). Well functioning schools foster learning, safety, and socially appropriate behaviors. They have a strong academic focus and support students in achieving high standards, foster positive relationships in school staff and students, and promote meaningful parental and community involvement. Most prevention programs in effective schools address multiple factors and recognize that safety and order are related to children's social, emotional, and academic development.

Theme 5: School Discipline and Policy

The review has demonstrated the need for schools to clearly define policies on school discipline (Coetzee and Jansen 2007). All individuals and groups within society must be valued and treated with respect. The diversity within a school community must be acknowledged in a school's responses to student behavior. Schools must acknowledge that students have different levels of ability to learn and cooperate with other people. They need to take into account these when formulating appropriate responses to irresponsible behavior. Most irresponsible or withdrawn behavior indicates that students need more learning, practice, support, or counseling. Schools need to explore the possible causes and to implement strategies for behavior change in order to increase the level of successful learning. Strategies may include reviewing and reforming schools structures, classroom practice

or curriculum and involving DECS and interagency. In order to achieve this, stakeholders have specific responsibilities.

Theme 6: Responsibilities of Stakeholders

The review has confirmed that school discipline will improve when all stakeholders are involved and participate in the disciplinary processes.

Theme 7: Prevention and Discipline

The review has confirmed that prevention is always a better approach in dealing with discipline (Coetzee and Jansen 2007). Effective practices for improving the behavior of troubled children are well documented in the research literature. Research has shown that effective interventions are culturally appropriate, family-supported, individualized, coordinated, and monitored. Further, interventions are more effective when they are designed and implemented consistently over time with inputs from the child, the family, and the appropriate professionals. Schools also can draw upon the resources of their community, to strengthen and enhance intervention planning.

CONCLUSION

Everyone who cares about children cares about poor discipline and poor violence. It is time to break the silence that too often characterizes even the most well-meaning school communities. School discipline and safety is everyone's job. Educators, administrators, parents, community members, and students all must commit to meeting the challenge of getting help for children who shows signs of indiscipline and of being troubled.

Coordinated school efforts can help to overcome the looming discipline crisis, which schools are facing. Together we must develop solutions, because the solution of the crisis does not just rest in the schools. If the problem is not going to be a coordinated effort, the constitution, which promises safety and security to all, will become an empty document.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based in the lessons drawn from the review it would be appropriate to recommend the following:

1. Better management of discipline as a whole school approach must be implemented. To improve discipline, all stakeholders must be involved in drawing up a code of conduct for the school.
2. Educators must look alternatives for corporal punishment.
3. Schools must become safe havens where positive and effective education can take place.
4. Effective practices for improving the behavior of troubled learners must be investigated and documented.

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