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Corporal Punishment: Schools Ask, "Spare The Rod Or Use It?"

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Corporal Punishment: Schools Ask, “Spare The Rod Or Use It?”

by

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Abstract

Throughout the United States, classrooms have been dealing with a steady change of disciplinary options over the years. Our students have dealt with various ramifications for unwanted behavior and corporal punishment is a constant tool thrown in to the mix. In order to discover if the use of corporal punishment in the classroom is effective, I performed an extensive literature review of 23 articles. After analyzing the data that was collected, I have learned that there are multiple effects that shadow the use the corporal punishment in our classrooms.

Key Words: corporal punishment, effects, implementation, positives, negatives, students, teachers, tools, discipline, classroom

Chapter One. Introduction

In chapter one of my thesis I introduced corporal punishment. In the paragraphs that follow, there is a brief history of corporal punishment, along with a problem statement and the significance of the problem. I have also included my purpose of study and rationale for this thesis. Finally, there is a page dedicated to definitions of key terms, as well as the outline for chapter two.

Problem Statement

Beginning in the nineteenth century, corporal punishment was an important part of the educational process (Middleton, 2008). As Middleton stated (2008), the use of punishment in the school economy was intended as positive, to aim at helping the backslider to do willingly what he ought to do (p. 1). Educational theorists believed that the best motivation for students showing negative behavior was a threat of physical discipline (Middleton, 2008). Teachers also enjoyed the effectiveness of corporal punishment because it was a relatively quick motivation to continue with schoolwork. It was a quick and effective way for the teacher to regain control of the classroom in the event that an individual or group of students became distracted (Stephey, 2009).

Currently in the United States, corporal punishment is illegal in 31 U.S. states including the District of Columbia. In April of 2011, New Mexico became the thirty-first state to abolish corporal punishment (Hareyan, 2009). According to Gershoff (2008), corporal punishment is defined under human-rights law as any punishment in which physical force with the intention of causing the child to experience bodily pain or discomfort so as to correct or punish the child's behavior (p. 9). Schools implemented corporal punishment so that students would not repeat bad behaviors. Therefore, if students are continuously receiving corporal punishment, their

justification of correcting a behavior is not achieved. However, unfortunately, students who receive corporal punishment during their education ultimately do not understand that when you display an unwanted behavior you get physical ramifications. No other disciplinary custom receives such a widespread public support and yet also receives a near unanimous call for its abolishment by researchers (Robinson, Funk, Beth, & Bush, 2005). Described by Dupper and Dingus (2008), approximately 15,000 students are requesting medical treatment each year following instances of corporal punishment (p. 243). The tools that are used when an educator administers corporal punishment vary depending on the state and school district. The person allowed to implement the physical discipline also varies due to state and district laws.

Significance of the Problem

Although the state of New York banned the use of corporal punishment in 1985, the controversy over corporal punishment remains on the forefront of educational debates. Currently, I teach at the elementary level in an urban school district. The phrase “corporal punishment” is taboo in our school. No one even feels comfortable talking about the use of physical force on a student. I believe that because my fellow educators and I have never used corporal punishment, we are unaware that it is still a popular form of discipline in other areas of the country. My classroom has its fair share of behavioral issues; however, we are trained verbal and nonviolent methods of managing problem behaviors and how to implement these strategies. Students spend 35 hours a week with their teachers and a relationship must be built on trust. My students look at me not only as an authoritative figure, but also as a nurturer. It is my duty as an educator to give them the most comfortable and warm environment to learn. I do so by creating a classroom environment that does not tolerate bad behavior, and I reiterate this expectation through nonviolent and constructive methods of discipline.

Purpose of the Study

By completing this research, I hope not only to discover the effects of corporal punishment on students, but also to determine what the best form of discipline may be for a school district. This form of discipline should be effective, but also safe for students. Effective discipline should include prevention and intervention programs, nonviolent strategies for changing student behavior, methods for shifting school or classroom environments, and education and support for teachers. Educating the general public and school personnel about the use of corporal punishment is most imperative for a complete abolishment of such discipline practice.

The purposes of my paper were to explore the effects that corporal punishment has on students and teachers and to investigate the reasons why schools choose corporal punishment and how it is implemented. It was my intention to uncover the rationale behind the use of corporal punishment in the twenty U.S. states that currently allow this practice and determine the positives and negatives of such an intense disciplinary method. During my research, I investigated several states and school districts that use corporal punishment. Whether or not the effects are positive or negative, the need for such findings are imperative to the future of our educational system.

Rationale

By completing this research, I hope to understand why the use of corporal punishment is still widely used. I want to discover why states and districts still feel that it is the *only* way to control a behavior that is unacceptable. By analyzing several documents and articles, I expose the positives and negatives of the use of physical force on a student. I hope to determine whether or not the 30 U.S. states that have banned this type of punishment made the right decision for

their educators and students, or if they may be doing their district a disservice. As an educator, it is my job to discover what the best possible interventions are for a student with problem behaviors.

Definition of Key Terms

Corporal Punishment - any punishment in which physical force with the intention of causing the child to experience bodily pain or discomfort as to correct or punish the child's behavior (Dingus & Dupper, 2008).

Caning - the use of a cane, as a tool, to implement corporal punishment on a student (Dingus & Dupper, 2008).

Paddling - the use of a wooden paddle, about 12 inches long, one-to-two inches thick, to implement corporal punishment (Dupper & Dingus, 2008).

Hematoma - extensive blood clotting due to blunt trauma to a body part (Dingus & Dupper, 2008).

Licks – the use of a paddle on a body part for corporal punishment (Mitchell, 2010).

Discipline Ladder – beginning with a verbal warning for a first offense and escalating through push-ups, detentions, isolation from other students, and finally corporal punishment (Lyman, 2006)

In Loco Parentis – meaning “in position or place of parent” is the legal doctrine in which teachers and other school officials assume the parental rights of a minor (Dingus & Dupper, 2008).

Chapter Two. Review of Literature

The history of corporal punishment dates back more than one hundred years. Presently, many states in the United States still allow physical punishment in schools. Many years and several studies later, corporal punishment is still a common dispute among not only parents, but also teachers and administration.

History of Corporal Punishment in the United States

Corporal punishment has a long history in the United States and actually dates back to the colonial period (Garrison, 2001). However, the justification of this type of punishment has changed between the colonial and contemporary times (Garrison, 2001). It was believed long ago that children were possessed by the devil and the only way for the devil to leave was by a beating. In other words, they needed to “beat the devil out” of children (Garrison, 2001).

Dupper et al.’s (2008) study found the following:

Corporal punishment was viewed as a necessary form of discipline for the following three reasons: (1) to produce people that would conform to accepted societal norms; (2) to “beat out the obstinacy” that was viewed as a syndrome of “original sin,” and (3) to ensure that learning occurs. (p. 244)

The Bible played a major role in the administration of corporal punishment in the 18th century. Based on a literal interpretation of Proverb 23:13-14, ‘Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death’ (Dupper et al., 2008).

It was very clear that children were accused of making poor decisions even before the opportunity to make one arrived. The obsessive guidance of children shadowed with them when they left their homes and started school. Because of the absence of their parental figures, teachers were given the right to assume the leader role in the students’ lives at school. Dupper et al. (2008) reported, “the 18th

century marked the first documented law regarding corporal punishment in schools” (p. 244). *In loco parentis*, meaning “in position or place of parent”, is the legal doctrine in which teachers and other school officials assume the parental rights of a minor (Dupper et al., 2008). The common-law doctrine gave teachers the privilege to administer such force on a child in the absence of their parent. Garrison (2001) says, courts consistently acknowledged that parents were allowed “to administer such reasonable and timely punishment as may be necessary to correct faults in their growing children”, therefore, teachers were given this privilege as well (p. 116). It was not until the United States Supreme Court upheld schoolteacher corporal punishment in the 1975 *Ingraham v. Wright* case; that the common law doctrine was looked at again (Garrison, 2001).

Court Cases

In the 1974 United States Supreme Court case *Goss v. Lopez*, the United States Supreme Court agreed that some form a discipline must be implemented to maintain order in the classroom (Shmueli, 2012). Nine students were suspended 10 days from school because of accusations of destroying school property and disrupting the learning environment (Shmueli, 2010). The accused students did not receive a hearing before getting the suspension and therefore, fought the accusations in court. The outcome of the case then planted the seed for a more stern disciplinary method of classroom management. Shmueli (2012) emphasized, “discipline promotes learning”, which ultimately led to the next United States Supreme Court case concerning corporal punishment, *Ingraham v. Wright* (p. 301).

The Eight Amendment states that no one person will be subject to cruel and unusual punishment (Wasserman, 2011). In the case of *Ingraham v. Wright*, two male students fought for their right of the Eighth Amendment.

As stated by Mitchell (2010):

In 1971, James Ingraham and Roosevelt Andrews, two Florida junior-high-school

students, challenged the use of disciplinary corporal punishment in the Dade County public schools. Ingraham was subjected to more than twenty “licks” with a paddle after he was slow to respond to a teacher’s instructions. The beating was so severe that he suffered a hematoma and missed several days of school after the incident. Andrews was paddled several times, and, after being struck on his arms, he was unable to use one of his arms for a full week. (p. 322)

Although the court agreed that the paddlings were “exceptionally harsh” the court nevertheless denied the students’ constitutional claims of failure to the Eighth Amendment (Mitchell, 2010). The court determined with further review that the Eighth Amendment’s protection was limited to people who were convicted of crimes, thus school children who were paddled as a means of maintaining order in a classroom were not protected under the Eighth Amendment (Mitchell, 2010). The Supreme Court decision on *Ingraham v. Wright* came in April of 1977 (Wasserman, 2011). As stated by Shmueli (2010), “the five-to-four majority ruled that without some sort of disciplinary sanction for misbehavior, students who wish to learn may be unfairly deprived of that right” (p. 301). According to the Court, corporal punishment does not constitute cruel and unusual punishment, nor does it violate the guarantee of liberty as stated in the Fourteenth Amendment (Shumeli, 2010).

Who Implements Corporal Punishment

It was not until recent years that corporal punishment took place in the confinement of an office. It was first administered in the classroom or in the hallway just outside the classroom (Farrell, 2012). According to Axelrod (2010), “As the school’s dominant authority figure, the principal, normally administered the strap, always in the presence of an adult witness, usually a teacher, or sometimes an office assistant” (p. 268). However, if the principal was absent, the vice principal took the place of punisher (Axelrod, 2010). Yet, according to Axelrod (2010), “a principal who didn’t advocate its use and

who didn't "back up" its use by his teachers was considered a weak disciplinarian" (p. 270). It was also not uncommon for sports coaches to do most of the "on-the-spot paddling", typically in the locker-room or even out in the field (Farrell, 2012).

Farrell's (2012) study found that:

It (corporal punishment) is less likely nowadays to be done on the spur of the moment, and more likely to require formal bureaucratic procedures and specific documentation. This affords greater legal certainty, and also helps guard against the danger of angry teachers resorting to random violence. (p. 6)

Nonetheless, female teachers rarely took part in the implementation of corporal punishment (Axelrod, 2010). Their part consisted of watching their students get punished from the corner of the room (Axelrod, 2010).

Why Implement Corporal Punishment

Student discipline varies from district to district, and state to state. Research by Farmer and Stinson (2010) supports, "Students can be punished for minor infractions such as chewing gum, talking back to the teacher, or violating the dress code, as well as for more serious transgressions such as fighting" (p. 1038). Being that 19 states still allow corporal punishment, the question still stands, "Why use corporal punishment in a school setting?" Middleton (2008) claimed, "Corporal punishment was, it should be noted, intended as a punishment of last resort, educationists cautioned that it should be used infrequently and with discrimination" (p.264). Teachers were advised that corporal punishment should only be administered if there was behavior that the student knew was wrong doing (Middleton, 2008). Nonetheless, punishments often represented the frustration of teachers because of poor performance of their pupils (Middleton, 2008). Some schools; however, have what is called a "discipline ladder".

Lyman (2006) goes on to say what a discipline ladder consists of:

Beginning with a warning for a first offense, and escalating through push-ups, detentions and isolation from other students during the school day, there is what is known as the fifth rung. At that level, in consultation with parents, students can choose among corporal punishment, having their parents “shadow” them through a full school day, night school or outright suspension. In 8 cases out of 10, principals say students choose the paddling. (p. 4)

Stephey (2009) suggests:

Educators, who face the difficult task of maintaining order in the classroom, may resort to corporal punishment because it is quick to administer, or because the school lacks resources and training for alternative methods of discipline. (p. 2)

Other educators say that corporal punishment is a cost effective method of discipline, it is free; all you need is a paddle (Stephey, 2009). If the current disciplinary methods are logistical and or financial obstacles for a teacher, corporal punishment is a quick resolution (Stephey, 2009). Educationists believed that if the consequence of corporal punishment were severe enough, the student would ultimately stop the unwanted behavior and act in a more desirable manner (Middleton, 2008). The goal of an educator was to achieve the utmost excellence from your pupils; therefore, undesired behavior was not at all tolerated. Middleton (2008) stated, “Educational theorists had noted, that for children to achieve at school, it was necessary to motivate them and, whilst interesting them in their work was a desirable way of achieving this, the threat of punishment worked just as well” (p. 253). Ultimately, the average schoolboy was accepting of the orders, even if they were unpleasant methods (Middleton, 2008). This was due to the fact that their parents were not around during the school day, and the teacher was acting *in loco parentis*. Therefore, teachers were convinced that students favored the practice because little to no complaining was done (Middleton, 2008). A former punished schoolboy recounted being beaten and commented, “the idea

of anything grim or cruel never enters my head. If I look back at such occasions, what I see is a boy's face not surly at all but smiling" (Middleton, 2008, p. 254).

Ways in Which Corporal Punishment is Implemented

Middleton (2008) says, "Ideally, punishment was expected to be a short and severe infliction of pain" (p. 263). Thus with this brief physical contact, the student would no longer act in such an unwanted behavior and never display that behavior again.

Middleton (2008) sums up the experience of pain in respect to the students:

It was claimed that this brief burst of sensation helped to stimulate the child. It acts like a tonic and makes the heart beat quicker, kindling at the same time by reaction the sense of honor in the child. The healthy boy was expected, if not to enjoy such punishments, then to appreciate them, and prefer them to 'lines and maps and all the dreary substitutes'.

(p. 263)

Educationists suggested that punishment must be severe enough to make the desired impression and that if the teachers used the cane, they should "cane hard" (Middleton, 2008). A common tool for administering corporal punishment was a cane. This method is called "caning." According to Farrell (2012), "Corporal punishment in US schools is almost invariably applied with a wooden paddle to the student's clothed posterior" (p. 5). This method is known as, "paddling." A typical punishment consists of two to three strokes of the paddle, otherwise called, "licks", swats", or "pops" (Farrell, 2012).

A study found by Stephey (2009) stated that,

The ACLU and Human Rights Watch documented cases of corporal punishment including hitting children with a belt, a ruler, a set of rulers taped together or a toy hammer; pinching, slapping or striking very young children in particular; grabbing children around the arm, the neck or elsewhere with enough force to bruise; throwing

children to the floor; slamming a child into a wall; dragging children across floors; and bruising or otherwise injuring children in the course of the restraint. (p. 1)

The common stance for a student's body when receiving corporal punishment is standing with legs apart and arms grasping at the ankles, otherwise known as, "grab your ankles" (Farrell, 2012). This stance was the norm due to the fact that the student's posterior is straight up in the air and in full range for the paddle. However, nowadays, this way of stance is being called "demeaning" because it obliges the student actively to assume a symbolically subservient posture, or perhaps just because it makes the protruding buttocks so prominent (Farrell, 2012). Currently, most schools will have students lean over a chair or a desk while the administrator gives the punishment (Farrell, 2012).

Effects on Students

The effects of corporal punishment in the classroom are an ongoing debate in the United States. According to Dupper and Dingus (2008), there is research indicating the use of corporal punishment in the classroom with direct association in immediate compliance in the classroom (p. 245). However, many researchers suggest that the negatives of physical discipline outweigh the positives.

While the question whether or not to continue using the paddle still stands, many schools around the country fight for the continuation of corporal punishment in their schools because of the positive outcomes. Claims for the abolishment of corporal punishment in the classroom fail to hold up due to several studies.

Kettle (2010) found:

Those who were physically disciplined performed better than those who weren't in a whole series of categories, including school grades, an optimistic outlook on life, ...also in other areas like early sexual activity, getting into fights, and becoming depressed...with little difference between sexes and races. (p. 1)

Thorndike argued that, “The Law of Effect says behaviors that are followed by pleasant consequences are more likely to occur in the future while behaviors that are followed by unpleasant consequences are less likely to occur in the future” (as cited in Preston, 2012, p. 1). Students need not only reinforcement, but also punishment to learn what to do and what not to do (Preston, 2012). As stated by Mullins (2011), “supporters of the paddling say that the discipline has led black men to lead successful, productive lives...the paddle kept them out of trouble in a city where drop out and crime rates run rampant...” (p. 1). There is much research done on students who were spanked in schools.

Membis (2010) indicated that:

Children who remembered being spanked on their bottom with an open hand performed better in school academically, did more volunteer work and were more optimistic in terms of their future, compared with children who had never been spanked. (p. 3.)

School administrators believe that physical discipline promotes good behavior, which is necessary for academic process, so why abolish a tool that if wisely used, can create the desired pupil (Membis, 2010).

Even though some researchers and educators are for corporal punishment, others are against it due to its negative impacts towards students. Dupper and Dingus (2008) claimed, “The use of corporal punishment in schools has been shown to be associated with damaging physical and psychological outcomes that can affect some children for the remainder of their lives” (p. 245). Corporal punishment is a technique that is easy to administer and easily abused, therefore, leading to physical injuries and emotional harm (Hyman & Perone, 1998). Such physical injuries resulting from corporal punishment include; severe muscle damage, extensive blood clotting (hematomas), whiplash damage and hemorrhaging (Stephey, 2009). Emotional trauma from corporal punishment comprise of deterioration in family life, as parents were forced to withdraw students from school and resort to homeschooling, depression, and an increase of violent behaviors (Dupper & Dingus, 2008).

A study found by Dupper and Dingus (2008) found:

The humiliation that accompanies the experience of corporal punishment in schools may reduce a child's ability to problem solve rationally; make a child more aggressive, defiant, and oppositional; and further inhibit a child's ability solve problems effectively. These deficits further subject children to feelings of inadequacy and resentment and may eventually lead to anger, hostility, violence, and aggression against school property peers, and authorities. (p. 245)

In addition to emotional and social effects, schools that allow corporal punishment have seen an increase in child abuse fatalities. Students are more likely to die from school shooting in states where corporal punishment is used (Dupper & Dingus, 2008). Dupper and Dingus (2008) state, "Administering corporal punishment legitimizes the practice of violence by using violent means to solve behavior problems" (p. 246). A teacher in Mississippi states, "I see these children who get into fights and then get paddled. So you're supposed to teach them to not hit by hitting them?" (Stephey, 2009, p. 2). Educationists believe using corporal punishment is a contradiction to the method of using violence to solve violence. Students are being taught that if they hit someone, they will get hit as a result. Almost like the saying, "an eye for an eye." Many researchers feel that corporal punishment contributes to the cycle of child abuse. Ferraro and Weinreich (2006) discovered, "Children who are paddled learn that abuse is justified if an adult deems it's necessary" (p. 42). Ultimately, children will learn to solve their problems or express their anger and frustration through violence, which can lead to bullying smaller and weaker peers (Ferraro & Weinreich, 2006).

Effects on Teachers

Corporal punishment is ultimately used to obtain behavior that is desired for the perfect learning environment. Many teachers will resort to using this type of physical discipline because there is a long history of craved outcomes.

Teachers implement corporal punishment in expectations of better control of the classroom, to enhance moral character development, and to increase respect for the teacher or other authority figures (Society for Adolescent Medicine, 2003). For most students who receive corporal punishment, there is an immediate change of behavior after the implementation of physical discipline. Teachers are eager to continue with such a behavior plan that has a quick turn around. Also, because corporal punishment is common in many homes around the country, children grow to expect it throughout their life as a form of punishment (Gershoff, 2010). Therefore, when they come to school parents encourage teachers to use physical discipline on their children because they use it at home to correct unwanted behavior (Gershoff, 2010).

In the meanwhile, Wischhover (2011) noted, lawmakers are still asking the question, “Are teachers going too far?” (p. 1). Problem behaviors are very stressful for a teacher. With the use of corporal punishment, some of that feeling of stress is taken off the shoulders; however, with the increase of court cases in result of physical discipline, many teachers are now second-guessing whether or not to use corporal punishment. One teacher states, “You sometimes have to take a deep breath and remove yourself from the situation” (Wischhover, 2011, p. 2). Knowing that the opportunity to use corporal punishment is allowed, is one thing, but choosing to administer it and putting your validity as an educator on the line is something that more teachers are starting wonder. Teachers are not only there to educate young minds, but to build relationships with their students. With the repeated use of physical force to obtain a desired behavior, teachers are possibly losing trust from their students.

Training Programs for Teachers

Discipline is important and schools have a strong role in teaching children to be self-disciplined. However, alternatives to corporal punishment are obtainable in the United States, none of which use physical force to correct misbehavior. Hyman and Perone (1998) acknowledged, “Effective discipline includes prevention and intervention programs and strategies for changing student behavior, changing school or classroom environments, and educating and supporting teachers and parents” (p. 1).

Thus, Society for Adolescent Medicine (2003) concludes that any school wishing to create a successful educational learning environment, free of physical violence, should include the following alternatives:

- Encourage a system approach for prevention and intervention with incremental consequences for rule violation and compliance to encourage student success and self-esteem
- Establish clear behavioral expectations and guidelines and encourage disciplinary consequences that are meaningful to student and have an instruction and reflection component
- Encourage consistent, fair, and calm enforcement of rules at the individual, class and school level
- Provide social skills training, conflict resolution skills, anger management, and problem-solving training
- Provide information on effective discipline programs and resources to parents, other mental health professionals, and school personnel
- Assist with development and monitoring of behavioral intervention programs – schoolwide, classwide or individual

- Provide inservice programs on communication, classroom management, understanding of behavior and individual differences, and alternative ways for dealing with misbehavior
- Promote National Child Abuse Prevention Month, SpankOut Day, and other organized activities to increase awareness of children's social issues and post listings of national organizations who favor abolition of corporal punishment
- Network with community groups and mental health agencies to provide programs and support for school staff

Several questions about corporal punishment still concern schools in the United States. With answers to these questions, many hope to find the best way to combine effective discipline and academics. Chapter three will include the reasons for the articles chosen for the literature review as well as the way the articles were collected.

Chapter Three. Methodology

When I started to collect articles for doing a literature review on corporal punishment, I found that it was not very difficult to come across research that was fairly current. Not to say that there was no research done in the past, but I wanted to limit my search within ten years of publication. There are multiple scholarly journals and news articles that pertain to my research of corporal punishment in schools. With the right questions to ask and the correct research to go along, the act of reading and finding critical articles was not a daunting task.

Data Inclusion Criteria

This project contains multiple articles gathered from various sources. Most of the articles I collected are excerpts from educational and psychological journals. 90% of my research was done through scholarly journal websites. The search engine I used to collect most of my articles was ERIC. When searching to find articles containing information regarding corporal punishment, I used key words such as: corporal punishment, schools, effects, emotional effects, physical effects, implementation of corporal punishment, etc. I chose not to include European countries into my research only because corporal punishment is quite scarce and currently there is little research with existing corporal punishment. There were several articles regarding court cases and recent corporal punishment findings in the United States as well. It was important to gather articles that were going to contain the necessary information to build such a knowledge base of corporal punishment in the United States. Most, if not all, articles have a non-biased opinion on corporal punishment in school. Ultimately, the data collected serves more as a door to the unknown about the past, present, and possible future for our children in the educational setting with the possibility of corporal punishment. When collecting the articles, I was very thorough in only choosing those that could answer the questions I had in chapter two. As a result, 22 articles were analyzed.

Study Design

This study is an analytical review of literature. When beginning to analyze my data, I broke up my research findings. By breaking up my chapter two and analyzing it piece by piece, I was able to dive deeper into the research and uncover finite answers to my chapter two questions.

The analysis was broken down into the questions I previously asked in chapter two. Some of the questions include, why implement corporal punishment, what are the ways that corporal punishment is implemented, and also the positive and negative effects on both students and teachers. The articles were analyzed based on the facts that the articles provide and the credibility of the author(s). The year in which the articles were published also gave details to when important changes to state policies change on physical punishment. Nonetheless, it is very important to discover from my research the effects of corporal punishment. In chapter four I analyzed my data that I have collected. In doing so, I hope to uncover answers regarding the use of corporal punishment in schools.

Chapter 4. Results and Discussion

After reviewing the literature on corporal punishment in our schools in the United States, I have realized what a truly controversial topic corporal punishment is in education today. It is an issue that will continue to shadow our education in the United States. Corporal punishment does not only affect the lives of our children and students, but the teachers that educate them and the administration staff that mold the school environments. It is a disciplinary method that has drastically morphed over time and continues to evolve with the increase of knowledge of its consequences.

As I have found from my research, corporal punishment dates back to the 16th century. Like many ideas and methods in education, things develop over time and mesh with what is the best strategy to better influence young minds. When corporal punishment was first administered, teachers saw results and therefore continued with its methods. However, by receiving outcomes that were favorable, educationalists were blinded by the effects of their master physical punishment implementations.

In 1975, when *Ingraham v. Wright* made it to the United States Supreme Court, our educational disciplinary methods were finally put into the spot light. It never occurred that beating a student could have such ramifications as to hematomas, muscle damage, or hospitalization. Now, the United States has always tried to be the best at everything, sports, food, vacation spots, etc., but education was a golden ticket. For a country so rich in wealth and human life, how is it that corporal punishment took such a back seat in our priority list of education.

Fortunately, the government has much approval from parents, teachers, administration, and students in schools that still allow corporal punishment. I was surprised to see the number of

students who are pro-corporal punishment. In the educational world of do's and don'ts most students will ultimately take a mile if you give them an inch. Unless, of course, you have such a system in place that corrects the brain from even beginning to think of that scenario. The schools that still implement corporal punishment swear by their methods and completely believe that with pain, the brain will eventually end the unwanted behavior.

The act of implementing physical punishment is a big weight to hold. Principals and other administration staff have the responsibility to give the number of paddles or licks to the accused student in their office. Because corporal punishment varies from state-to-state, I would imagine that it would be very difficult for a principal to administer such a beating if he or she does not believe in such physical force. However, because the principal is deemed the dominant authority figure in school, the physical torch, so to speak, is passed on to them, willingly or unwillingly.

Further research revealed as to why corporal punishment is used in our classrooms. Although the use of corporal punishment is supposed to be used as a last resort, many teachers enjoy the quick response of positive behavior if a threat or implementation is used. Classrooms are always in motion. Subject to subject and question after question mimics the daily life of a schoolteacher. However, there is always a temper to control or an issue to resolve that takes time out of the day. Educationalists saw the use of corporal punishment as an easy tool to dissolve those non-sense issues and get back to the topic at hand. But ultimately, teachers were taking out all of their stress on one or two students, giving them much more of a punishment that they deserved. Because corporal punishment is virtually free, all you need is a piece of wood; this type of punishment became popular very quickly. The goal of a teacher is to teach. Therefore,

taking out the numerous distractions and breaks for behavioral issues, you have your ultimate goal, teaching.

When corporal punishment was first used, the teacher would use any tool in the classroom to cause such physical pain. A belt, ruler, cane, or even a pencil became common instruments to implement corporal punishment. The goal of corporal punishment is to inflict so much pain into a student that he or she will not ever do that behavior again. In a society filled with multiple ways of communication, why is it that we still need to resort to violence to work out our issues? In a place of learning and structure, you would think that the first idea taught would be how to communicate. Throughout our country hundreds of schools still use corporal punishment. There are guidelines to which administration staff must follow to implement physical punishment, but if we see the same students in and out of the office for corporal punishment, should we ask ourselves, “what can we do instead?”

The effects of corporal punishment on students continue to be a subject that is addressed often. Year by year, states are continually asking whether or not to abolish corporal punishment. Hundreds of thousands of students reap the social, emotional, and physical effects of corporal punishment. After reviewing countless articles about the effects of physical punishment towards students, it is very clear that the ramifications for such discipline are in the “hot seat”. Multiple school social workers and school psychologists have voiced the immediate concern of the safety and well being of our students. With such physical discipline, students do not want to continue going to school, therefore the school absences are increasing and voluntary transfers to other districts are rising as well.

With the use of physical punishment on a student who fought another classmate, we are only teaching our students that violence equals violence. How can we as educators expect to

receive the absolute best from our students if we cannot even begin to have the correct disciplinary measures in place? Our county does not believe in “an eye for an eye”, so why are we shadowing that behavior on our pupils? Researchers have stated that with the use of violence in our schools, there have been spikes in the amount of disrespectfulness and lashing out to adults in schools. As educators become enraged with inappropriate behavior, their need to use corporal punishment increases. Therefore, when adults use such a method as corporal punishment, our students see their anger and learn that because you are mad or upset, violent, physical discipline helps to solve the issue. Nonetheless, taking a step back and looking at this as a big picture, one can only notice that our equation of “violence = violence” is not equal.

As I have discussed, corporal punishment is very inexpensive. The only necessary tool that a school must have to implement such a method is a paddle, which in simplest terms is a long rectangular piece of wood. Although this method is cheap, and requires little to no training at all, there are other disciplinary methods in our country that have the same, if not better effects on student behavior. Such teacher training programs may come at a price or may require more staff in a building, but none of which include a physical force to correct unwanted behavior. With the proper training and necessary methods put in place to correct inappropriate behavior, any school will rise to such a level of respect from both teachers to pupils and vice versa.

I fully believe that in order for our classrooms to run smoothly, necessary disciplinary methods need to be in place. Unfortunately, with the amount of negative effects of corporal punishment in our country, I have discovered that using such physical force to correct a behavior does not work in our school environment. I plan to use this literature review to improve my classroom disciplinary system, as well as advocate for improvements in my school wide positive behavioral system that is already in place. As educators we have many hurdles to jump and

mountains to cross. Dealing with behavioral issues is a daily occurrence to which we take with a grain a salt and learn from things as we grow. Corporal punishment, which started in the early 1600's, has changed drastically over the last four hundred years. Along with everything else, methods change as our environment changes. The way we teach our students today will ultimately change in the coming future. My research of corporal punishment will hopefully open up the eyes to which are closed to such a controversial topic in the United States. I foresee all 50 states some day abolishing corporal punishment in their school districts, like many countries overseas have discovered. If at all, I hope that my research has opened a door to the methods to which we teach what is right and what is wrong. For all we know, our students will be the teachers one day.

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