Namibia

Positive Discipline: The big question of rights and responsibilities at Rundu Senior Secondary School in Rundu

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1. Introduction

For children in many countries, corporal punishment is a regular part of the school experience; it is also a form of child abuse. Corporal punishment is deliberate violence inflicted on children, and it takes place on a gigantic scale. Legal defences for teachers who hit or beat children still exist in most countries of the world. Corporal punishment, however, has not been shown to be effective, especially in the long-term, and it can cause children shame, guilt, anxiety, aggression, a lack of independence, and a lack of caring for others, and thus greater problems for teachers, caregivers and other children.

One of the major reasons why corporal punishment persists is that teachers do not understand that it is different from "discipline." While corporal punishment seeks to stop a child from behaving in a certain way, positive discipline techniques can be used to teach a child learn new, correct behaviours without the fear of violence. Another major reason is that teachers are often not taught why children misbehave and how to discipline them positively based on those behaviours. Many times, when a child feels his or her needs are not being met, such as the need for attention, he or she misbehaves. The frustration that a child's misbehaviour causes, and a lack of skills to handle it, leads some teachers to strike out at their children and use corporal punishment or humiliating forms of emotional punishment.

This project is intended to help teachers, school administrators, and education officials to effectively manage students in the classroom by giving non-violent ways to deal with behavioural challenges positively and pro-actively. It presents positive discipline tools that are concrete alternatives to such punishment practices as caning, spanking,

pinching, threatening, pleading, bribing, yelling, commanding, name-calling, forced labour, and other even more humiliating actions.

Children come into this world helpless and unable to fully develop without teachers. As teachers, their job is to nurture them and to teach them how to live. This is no easy task. On some days, their classes are exciting, fun, and joyful places to learn for their students and themselves. On other days, they may feel tense and uncertain about their ability to do their job. Being a teacher is rarely dull; but being a teacher is also the most important work they will ever do.

We know how tough teaching can be. We also know how much you care for your students. But children don't come with instructions. Unlike parenting, you are responsible for many children at once, not just a few, and all are unique in many ways. They also don't always behave in the way you want them. It seems that just as you figure out what works with one class; they're gone, replaced by a new set of faces with a whole new set of joys and challenges.

All teachers should want the best for their students and should be concerned with fostering confidence in their abilities and raising their self-esteem. But when your students don't listen to you, refuse to do what you ask, defy or ignore you, it is easy to become annoyed and frustrated. When this happens, or better yet before, turn to this document for help. The positive discipline tools presented here are concrete alternatives to such punishment practices as caning, spanking, pinching, threatening, pleading, bribing, yelling, commanding, name-calling, forced labour, and other even more humiliating actions.

2. Frame of Reference

Namibia ratified and signed the Convention on Rights of the Child in September 1991. Article 144 of Namibia's Constitution states that, any international treaty or agreement that Namibia signs automatically become part of its laws. So, the education system in Namibia is in accordance with CRC and other human rights treaties and Namibia is legally bound to comply with its own and international legal instruments.

The ratification of the treaty brought with it the banning of corporal punishment in all schools. This ban was communicated to schools, mostly through circulars, abruptly with no or little information on the intent or purpose. In most schools, Principals simply announced during school assemblies that teachers were no longer permitted to institute corporal punishment to students. In majority of cases no discussions were done on the reasons for this ban or the responsibilities that came with it. As a result children in most schools simply interpreted it as the freedom to 'do whatever' they wanted, with no consequences for it. Most teachers were left 'frustrated and angry' with this new directive and as a way of maintaining discipline many resorted to different forms of negative discipline as a way of "behaviour correction". This includes,

sending latecomers back home, ask them to dig a big hole and later fill it back or make them stand in the scorching sun. Unfortunately, these alternative punitive discipline measures have not yielded any positive result in terms of school or class discipline. As a matter of fact, in most schools, there has been an increase in the number of bullying cases, children carrying weapons (knives or sharp objects) to school, absenteeism as a result of victimization and rise in cases of alcohol abuse. This deterioration of discipline in most schools has led some people to advocate for the return of corporal punishment as a way of bringing back "normalcy" in schools. Although there is significant variation from school to school, this trend cannot be ignored. Together these "problems" create obstacles that prevent our youth from achieving their potential and delay their valuable contribution to the nation at large.

Instead of dwelling on the merits and demerits of how CRC was implemented in Namibia, particularly in schools, this project intended to improve the implementation of CRC in terms of positive discipline. We intended to involve both students and teachers in the whole process, so that they feel part of the process and own it. The project supports the Positive Discipline model. This model is based on mutually respectful relationships at school in general and class in particular. Positive Discipline teaches educators, students and community members the skills necessary to create healthy interpersonal connections in an environment where each person's contribution has meaning, is valued, and respected. A young student's sense of community (connection or "belongingness") at school increases academic success and decreases socially risky behavior. This sense of connection or 'belongingness' can only be created when one feels s/he is part of a system through participation. There is overwhelming evidence that young people who see their teachers as both kind (supportive/responsive) and firm (demanding) have more success socially and academically. It is for this reason that this project will bring students (class captains of grade 8,9 and 11) School Representative Council and their class teachers together so that they formulate class rules that create a class connection or belonginess between class teachers and their students, whilst demanding responsibility in return.

3. Purpose

The purpose of our project is to improve the implementation of Child Rights Convention in relation to positive discipline at Rundu Senior Secondary School.

This is considered a pilot project because our aim is to start working with grade 8, 9 and 11 students and grade teachers in formulating class rules at the beginning and, gradually progress in future to the formulation of school rules involving all the student body thereby building warm relations, good communication and freedom of expression which will promote the sense of connection and "belonginess".

4. Methodology (Activities)

In planning activities for this project, we targeted classroom captains of grade (8, 9, and 11) and class teachers of grade (8, 9, and 11) as well as School Representative council. We targeted these groups because we realised that this was going to be a two year program and there was going to be no use in involving grade 12 students, who only one school year of schooling left. While it could have been prudent to involve everyone in the targeted classes, it was impossible due to time and resources available. As a result, we decide to involve class captains and teachers, with the idea that that they were going to share the knowledge gained with their counterparts. Below is a summary of activities carried out with each target group.

A. Seeking approval from educational authorities

The first activity was to seek approval of the project from the school authorities at Rundu Senior Secondary school as well as the Regional Education authorities.

B. Workshop with SRC and Class captains

In these activities students explore the idea that people's basic needs are considered rights, and see the link between rights and responsibilities:
• demonstrate an understanding of basic personal and family needs and learn how basic needs are met
• demonstrate an understanding of the need for rights and responsibilities, e.g., need for protection and respect

- identify the physical, interpersonal and emotional needs of healthy human beings (Healthy Living)

Activity 1. THE RIGHT TO WHAT?

1. The facilitator introduces the concept of children's rights, and the class brainstorms a list of rights they think children should have.
2. The class compares their list with the cards, and adds any new ideas to their list.
3. The class compares their list with the summary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Activity 2. RIGHTS, WANTS OR NEEDS?

1. In pairs, students sort a set of 20 cards into the following categories:
   - MOST IMPORTANT
   - IMPORTANT
   - LEAST IMPORTANT
2. Each pair joins another, and decides which the 6 most important cards are.
3. Groups share their list of most important cards with the class.
4. The class discusses:
   - Was it difficult to select some items over others?
   - How did you decide which items were most important?
   - What is the difference between "wants" and "needs"?
   - Why would some "needs" be protected as rights?
   - Do all children have these rights met?
   - What other rights do you think children should have?
   - What can be done to ensure children everywhere have all their rights met?

Activity 3. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Complete Activity 1 or 2. Keep the cards that have been designated as "rights" rather than as "wants" for use in this activity.
2. Explain that with rights come certain responsibilities.
    Example: The right to "opportunities to share opinions" corresponds to a responsibility to "express opinions in ways that do not harm another's rights".
3. In pairs or small groups, students write and illustrate on a blank card a responsibility they think goes with each right card.
4. Pairs or groups exchange rights and responsibilities cards. Each group tries to find a match between each right card and a responsibility card. Alternatively, the teacher collects rights cards and responsibilities cards, and gives one right or responsibility card to each student. Students move around the room, forming pairs to match a right to a corresponding responsibility.
5. The workshop discusses responsibilities for both rights bearers (students) and duty bearers (school authorities)

Conclusion

As a conclusion to these activities students were asked to formulate rules in their own classrooms, which will hold them accountable to their responsibilities as students. These were to be shared with their teachers.

C. Workshop Class teachers

A workshop with teachers was a reflective one, with case studies like the one below and teachers needed to reflect on appropriate disciplinary measure.

The Case of Ramon*

"I'm not going to that man's class! I don't have to do what you say!"

"I'm not even supposed to be in this class; my momma says I'm supposed to be in a special education school. They said I'm learning disabled and have ADHD, whatever that is." [ADHD is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.]

He runs down the hallway bumping into other children and teachers, walks into the classroom in the morning stating what he isn't going to do, and yells or runs around the room whenever he feels like it. He calls classmates members of the "dumb club" and swears other sixth graders are committing acts that I hadn't even heard of until I was in my third year of high school. … This is my homeroom student, "Ramon. " I feel angry about his behaviour. I'm tempted to hate him, but most of all, I'm frustrated with him, my lack of skills, and the system. … I left school that day in tears, sick to my stomach because of this child.

*This case study is adapted from the diary of Ellen Berg, a language arts teacher in Turner Middle School, St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

What Would You Do?

Ramon's case, though to an extent extreme, is not uncommon. Virtually all of us have experienced students who have challenged our authority or who have disrupted our classes and upset our students in many ways. Ramon is in desperate need of discipline, but what alternatives are there?

Reflection Activity: How Were YOU Disciplined?

Think back to when you were in primary school. If you or one of your classmates had misbehaved like Ramon, what disciplinary methods would, or did, your teachers use? Write these methods down in the table below. Then, write down how you felt about these methods, as well as whether or not you thought they were effective in the long-term. How do you think the child felt? Did you see or experience a lasting change in behaviour?

Next, ask yourself, "If I had a student like Ramon, what would I do, and why?" Do you think it would be effective in stopping future misbehaviour? Write your thoughts down as well. Are your methods similar to those of your teachers?

	Disciplinary Method	Why was this method used?	Was the method always effective, especially in the long-term? How did the child feel?
Your Teachers' Actions			
Your Actions			

Feedback on the Activity

In completing the table above, it would not be surprising if many of you answered "To punish the child for misbehaving" or "to stop his misbehaviour" under the column on "Why was this method used?" Likewise, under the last column on "Was the method always effective, especially in the long-term?" many of you – if you thought long and hard – probably answered "No". Sooner or later, the same child misbehaves again, often in the same way. Why? The answer lies in the difference between punishment and discipline.

Conclusion

What can you do together with your class to make sure that you do not punish your students but you discipline them? How can you involve them in this process?

B. Formulation of classroom rules

Each class captain was tasked to work with their class and class teachers in formulating classroom rules. All classes formulated these rules and were forwarded to the team. The team then compiled the formulated rules and shared them with the school authorities. The implementation of the class rules faced a number of challenges, which will are discussed under "Discussion and Reflection" section.

5. Results

- Learner's feel that there is a platform for them to relate to.
- Better communication was established between teachers and learners.
- Some of the classes are using the rules.
- Some classes are still using the disciplinary book.
- The school authorities felt that the project threatened the status quo at the school.

6. Discussion and Reflection

For every pilot project there are always challenges that are encountered either during the process or at the end of the project. Will highlight more on the problems faced during the implementation process. From 21-25 July 2014 the group had a workshop with the teachers and after we departed a week after the school experienced an incident where the SRC chair person was found under the influence of alcohol. This is against

the school rules. The management delt with the situation by calling him to the office but unfortunately the kid rejected claiming that it was his right not to talk to them in reference to what they were taught about child's rights by the change agents. The management felt the project was empowering learners not to listen to them. In the process of making the planned rules approved by the school management so that the whole school utilise the rules formulated by the learners with the teachers in the supervision of the change agents. After the incidence the change agents received a letter from the management requesting the change agents not to carry on with the project because they were misunderstandings from both sides and the school management felt they didn't own the project because all change agents were not teachers at the that school.

Despite the request to discontinue the project, the change agents negotiated to have a meeting with the management to iron out certain issues. The meeting took place on the 1st of September 2014 where the management considered our request though they were not totally convinced. After all the effort of negotiating, learners didn't turned up on the 2nd and 3rd of September on the follow up workshop with the change agents and the mentor's visit.

Furthermore as change agents we have learned that there were no proper communication from both parties and this is one part that needs improvement in the future and there was lack of support from the management. For the project to be effective the management, learners and change agents need to work as a team.

7. Way Forward

Team members are to integrate into their regional network and continue to participate in their various projects. For example;
- Regina to work with other change agents in Rundu
- Kingston to work with other change agents in Windhoek
- Samuel to work with other change agents in Ondangwa

List of References

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