Chapter 12
School Teachers as Non-Violent Role Models

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ABSTRACT

For a long time in South Africa, schools have relied heavily on corporal punishment as a means to bring law and order in the classroom. This culture of using violence has bred angry and militant children who are not afraid to stand tall and defiant of the teachers meting out this punishment. This chapter will challenge teachers to view the traditional way of using violence to restrain children against viewing new ways in which they can become role models where distressed learners can receive care and support. It will also show the benefits of a caring teacher as it adds to emotional wellbeing and social wellbeing of children which are important in the total outcomes of all children. This chapter will provide teachers with useful knowledge encouraging positive role modelling which fosters positive imitation by children. It is evident that environmental factors and interpersonal relationships will play a big role in achieving this goal; therefore, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory will play a pivotal role in defining the role of the teacher.

INTRODUCTION

A non-violent and caring approach to disciplining children in school is the ideal for which we all aspire. Attaining this goal is dependent on the effective training of teachers on other alternative methods which they can use to effectively engage with their learners. This chapter aims to define how violence in school (in the way of corporal punishment) can have detrimental effects on learners. It will also explore alternative ways which teachers can use to effectively manage their learners in school.

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Objectives

The objectives of the chapter are to understand:

- What teacher violence is
- How violence can negatively affect learners
- How teachers can create a positive learning environment
- Positive role modelling
- Alternative ways to corporal punishment

The view of teachers as violent people is based on the use of corporal punishment as a means to restrain learners in school. Corporal punishment refers to disciplinary action taken by teachers in response to some type of misbehaviour by students (Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff, 2016; Strause, 1994; Strause, 2001). Corporal punishment means any violence that includes, spanking, slapping, pinching, using the cane on the hands and buttocks is regarded as corporal punishment (Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff, 2016; Strause, 1994; Strause, 2001). There are varying degrees and ways in which this corporal punishment is metered out. For instance, many schools in South Africa use the cane as the standard instrument to mete out this punishment. This corporal punishment is also meted out differently to boys and girls. For instance, while both sexes can be given lashes on the hands, if a boy has grossly misbehaved this punishment can be given on the buttocks to inflict extreme pain.

Corporal punishment originated from the English-speaking world whereby the use of corporal punishment by schools was historically justified by the common law doctrine, in loco parentis, whereby teachers were considered authority figures granted the same rights as parents to punish children in their care (Gershoff, 2016). Indeed, teachers who advocated for the use of corporal punishment argued that it provided an immediate response to the ill-disciplined child so that law and order is maintained in the classroom. This was done to avoid extreme measures of discipline such as suspending the learner, which meant that the child would be out of school for a long time.

The broad rationale for using corporal punishment in schools was that adults and in this case these being teachers, who were standing in for parents had the right and duty to physically punish misbehaving children. Of course there was also the notion that corporal punishment builds character which is necessary for the development of a child’s conscience and their respect for adult authority figures, referring specifically to the right of teachers and their need to maintain order and control in the classroom (Poole et al., 1991).

In actual fact, there was no law that was passed against corporal punishment being implemented in schools. Against this reality, the level and manner in which
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