

## **‘Being hit was normal’: teachers’ (un)changing perceptions of discipline and corporal punishment**

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Global and national concerns that corporal punishment is still being used, openly in certain milieus and surreptitiously in others, suggests that education stakeholders need to take cognisance of teachers’ perceptions and experiences that influence their classroom discipline in the context of changing curriculum policies and legislation. This study was guided by research objectives that explored, firstly, teachers’ perceptions of their past experiences of corporal punishment and, secondly, their perceptions of their disciplinary techniques since the abolition of corporal punishment. Through a qualitative research methodology of semi-structured interviews, data were collected from seven primary school teachers in KwaZulu-Natal. Teachers’ perceptions of their experiences and practices of corporal punishment were explored through two dimensions of the Foucauldian concept of bio-power, namely, disciplinary power and governmentality. The findings show that although all teachers experienced corporal punishment negatively when they were pupils, their responses to the abolition of corporal punishment were varied, multiple and complex. Recommendations for further research include exploring the resilience of authoritarian teaching approaches and teacher professional development of learner-centred approaches to curb teacher frustration that contributes to their use of corporal punishment.

### **Introduction**

Education policy reforms are proposed because governments believe that by intervening to change the conditions under which learners (pupils) learn, they can accelerate improvements and raise the standards of achievement for their citizens’ global economic participation. Since 1994, a flurry of education policy reforms that was introduced to improve the quality of education in democratic South Africa has impacted on the work of teachers as agents of change. Among the most significant policy reforms are the curriculum policy reforms and legislation regarding the abolition of corporal punishment. Whilst the South African Schools Act No. 84 (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996) specifies that: no person may administer corporal punishment to a learner [pupil] at school, research indicates that the practice of corporal punishment has not abated in schools in South Africa (Vally & Ramadiro, 2006; Morrell, 2001; Zulu, Urbani, Van der Merwe & Van der Walt (2004); Payet & Franchi, 2008; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Harber & Mncube, 2011).

Prior to legislation abolishing corporal punishment in schools and the curriculum policy reform in 1996, teacher-centred approaches placed the teacher as an authority of knowledge (Harber & Mncube, 2011) and this position was maintained through the use of corporal punishment to encourage subjugation and passivity among the majority

of school pupils (Vally & Ramadiro, 2006). Major changes in the curriculum have emphasised pupil-centred approaches to teaching and learning through the implementation of Curriculum 2005; the Revised and National Curriculum Statements (RNCS and NCS) as well as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), respectively (DoE, 1997; 1998; 2002; n.d.).

For the majority of teachers, the abruptness of the curriculum changes was simultaneously accompanied by legislation prohibiting the use of corporal punishment. The challenges associated with the paradigm shift of teachers implementing curriculum changes of an unprecedented magnitude are well researched and documented (Jansen & Christie, 1999; Moletsane, 2003; Harley & Wedekind, 2004; Chisholm, Hoadley, Wa Kivulu, Brookes, Prinsloo, Kgobe, Mosia, Narsee & Rule, 2005; Govender, 2009). It is imperative that policy-makers and education stakeholders also take heed of research on teachers' (un)changing perceptions with regard to the practice of corporal punishment for classroom discipline in order to achieve the vision of quality education.

### Research objectives

Taking cognisance of the central role of the teacher in contributing to the achievement of quality education, the research objectives of this paper are to explore teachers' (un)changing perceptions of their experiences and practices of corporal punishment within an educational context through a Foucauldian lens of bio-power with its two dimensions of governmentality and disciplinary power. This is done, firstly, by ascertaining teachers' perceptions of their past experiences of corporal punishment and, secondly, by exploring their perceptions and experiences of their current strategies of discipline since the abolition of corporal punishment.

### Statement of the problem

On a world-wide level, human rights activists have strengthened their campaign to end corporal punishment which is considered a "hindrance to the progress of humanity" (Geltner, 2014:1). The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2001) defines corporal punishment as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) has sought to promote the inherent rights, education and wellbeing of all children in the home, school and community (Paintal, 2007).

International research from 29 countries as cited by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment (GITEACPOC, 2013) indicates that today corporal punishment is still used openly in certain milieus and surreptitiously in others. Nair (2013) reports that international research by Columbia University researchers indicate that regular beatings of children can lead to their impoverished vocabulary and diminished cognitive ability. In 2001, a global initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (GITEACPOC, 2013) was launched, calling on governments to declare their opposition to corporal punishment.

Through its Constitution, South Africa is among several countries in the world committed to ending corporal punishment of children. Being hit is no longer normal. Post-apartheid legislation has not only affirmed the rights of all pupils, but has divided teachers' disciplinary practices into categories of normal and abnormal in relation to their use of corporal punishment.

Despite the promulgation of laws prohibiting corporal punishment in democratic South Africa in 1996, Vally and Ramadiro (2006) report that for many pupils, corporal punishment remains a regular part of their school experience and that its practice has become deeply embedded in the fabric of our society. These findings are supported by a survey of 410 South African school children by Clacherty, Donald and Clacherty (2005) who found that generally corporal punishment was still rife in schools situated in areas of low income households. The literature reviewed (Vally & Ramadiro, 2006; Morrell, 2001; Zulu et al. (2004); Clacherty et al., 2005; Payet & Franchi, 2008; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Harber & Mncube, 2011; Shologu, 2012) indicates that the societal practice of corporal punishment has not abated. There is much focus on the rights of learners; the negative effects of corporal punishment; the increasing cases of school corporal punishment and a lack of self-discipline among learners. The reasons for corporal punishment in schools, according to Morrell (2001), are a lack of alternatives, the legacy of authoritarian education practices and the belief that corporal punishment is necessary for orderly education to take place.

The assumption of the South African Council for Educators (SACE, 2013) that the attitude, dedication, self-discipline, ideals, training and conduct of teachers determines the quality of education alludes to the responsibility bestowed on teachers as agents of change. Teachers' discipline without the use of corporal punishment is important for teaching and learning.

This qualitative research is a response to a critical gap in exploring how teachers perceive and experience the practice of corporal punishment in the context of changing policies and legislation. Two aspects of the Foucauldian concept of bio-power, namely, disciplinary power and governmentality, are used as theoretical lenses to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences of the practices corporal punishment within the context of legislative changes in democratic South Africa. The findings of this research are relevant to policymakers and other stakeholders who should take cognisance of teachers' perceptions and experiences of the practice of corporal punishment in order to support teachers towards creating a classroom context that is not only free of corporal punishment but conducive to teaching and learning.

### **Theoretical framework**

Foucault's (1979) concept of biopower, through its two dimensions of governmentality and disciplinary power, is used as a theoretical lens to explicate teachers (un)changing perceptions regarding their experiences and practice of corporal punishment within a changing educational and political context. The research objective of ascertaining

teachers' perceptions of their past experiences of corporal punishment is highlighted through the lens of Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power, especially through normalising judgement as a mechanism of control. Foucault's concept of governmentality (1978) highlights the research objective of exploring teachers' perceptions of their current practice of discipline. As a theoretical lens, governmentality explicates how macro-level policies impact on teachers' perceptions at a micro-level of practice.

Bio-power is defined as "diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations' for the sake of generating greater utility, efficiency and productivity and is exercised at the level of life, the species, the race and the large scale phenomena of population" (Foucault, 1979:140). In this research study, the basic idea of bio-power is used to explicate the democratic South African government's attempts to produce subjects who will regulate themselves in accordance with the ideals of democracy and human rights. The Foucauldian concept of bio-power is explained in relation to discipline and control through its two dimensions of disciplinary power and governmentality. Disciplinary power is centred on discipline (political anatomy of the human body) and governmentality focuses on regulatory controls (a bio-politics of the population).

On a macro-level, Foucault's (1978) concept of governmentality, characterised by the maxim 'conduct of conduct' highlights the governing by the state of South Africa through legislation and policies in accordance with specific ideologies, such as democracy. The Schools Act 84 (RSA, 1996) stipulates that the abolition of corporal punishment is an example of the democratic government's endeavour to uphold the Constitution of the country according to a particular "game of truth" (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38). Foucault (1982, 1984:38) refers to discourses that are given credence with certain "epistemes" or periods of time as "games of truth".

At a micro-level, the concept of governmentality highlights the governing of the subject (the conduct of the teacher) through implementing the policies and legislation disseminated by the state. Prior to legislation in 1996, teachers' practices of corporal punishment were considered to be a 'normal' disciplinary technique. Post-apartheid legislation of the abolition of corporal punishment emerges as a "game of truth", and maintaining a healthy state requires that teachers adhere to the new "game of truth" (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38).

The concept of disciplinary power is useful in explaining the workings of power at a micro-level of individual teachers' practices. Discipline, according to Foucault refers to "methods which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, to make individuals simultaneously more productive and more manageable or docile" (Foucault 1977:136). Foucault (1977) elaborates that the success of disciplinary power derives from the use of tools such as hierarchical observation (surveillance), normalising judgement and the examination. In the paragraphs that follow, each of these mechanisms of control is discussed in relation to school discipline and the use of corporal punishment.

Hierarchical observation is a key mechanism of control to discipline pupils; the power of the gaze, surveillance and visibility are mechanisms to control the actions of pupils. Surveillance functions to increase productivity. Foucault (1977:177) suggests that the power of surveillance is less “corporal” in that it is more subtly “physical”. Since the abolition of corporal punishment, research by Govender (2009) has shown that surveillance of pupils is closely linked to the teacher’s assessment practices. Hierarchical observation is a precursor to another mechanism of control, namely normalising judgement.

Foucault (1977:177) explains that at the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism that compares, differentiates, hierarchises, homogenises and excludes and is referred to as “normalizing judgment”. He elaborates that ‘the normal’ is established as a principle of coercion in teaching and disciplinary punishment aims at reducing deviation from the norm. In a sense the power of normalising judgement imposes homogeneity. Another mechanism of control, the examination, combines the techniques of hierarchical observation and those of normalising judgement.

As a mechanism of discipline, the examination in a school context is highly ritualised. Foucault (1977:187) suggests that “the examination in a school was a constant exchanger of knowledge; it guaranteed the movement of knowledge from teacher to pupil, but it extracted from the pupil knowledge destined and reserved for the teacher”. The inclusion of formative and continuous assessment through the introduction of progressivist approaches to teaching and learning has enabled greater negotiation between teacher and pupil. In this sphere, the teacher may hold the balance of power by linking the continuous assessment of pupils to their self-discipline. The value placed on their academic performance now becomes a mechanism to control discipline.

Through the Foucauldian lens of biopower and its dimensions of disciplinary power and governmentality, this research article explores teachers’ perceptions and experiences of the practice of corporal punishment within the backdrop of a changing political context. The concept ‘governmentality’ is used to highlight the government’s abolition of corporal punishment (as a mechanism of control) as a macro-societal change in democratic South Africa which should have led to micro-level governing of teachers’ conduct (perceptions of current practice) in accordance with the new “game of truth” (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38). ‘Normalising judgement’ as a dimension of disciplinary power highlights teachers’ perceptions of their past experiences of corporal punishment.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative study within the interpretative paradigm was aligned with the research aim to “make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning that people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:4).

A case study design which is a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context (Yin, 2009) was used to provide a rich description of

teachers' experiences, perceptions and practices of discipline and corporal punishment.

Purposive sampling as suggested by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) was used to select seven teachers from primary schools in the midlands region of KwaZulu-Natal who taught when corporal punishment was regarded as an acceptable form of discipline as well as after the abolition of corporal punishment in 1996. All the participants were qualified teachers. There were two female participants: Meg and Deb. There were five male participants: Vee, Alan, Andrew, Brian and Sipho. The ages of the participants ranged from 35 to 60 years at the time of the data collection.

Ethical procedures of obtaining permission from relevant authorities preceded the qualitative data collection from seven teachers. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of teachers who participated in the study.

The semi-structured interview sought to elicit data on the teachers' biographical profile and professional practice. The life history approach, which is concerned with a teacher's total life and career, and not just isolated segments or aspects of it, is useful in delving into early childhood and schooling experiences to explore the changing teacher perceptions of the practice of corporal punishment in times of macro-societal change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). With regard to practices, Bourdieu (1977) claims that while habitus are cultural structures that exist in people's bodies and minds, fields are sets of relations in the world. Through practices, fields condition habitus and habitus informs fields. Weber and Mitchell (1996) suggest that many aspects of being a teacher are rooted in childhood experiences and culture.

Two key questions that guided the interview process are: 1) What are your perceptions of corporal punishment through your past experiences as a pupil? 2) As teachers, how do you discipline pupils since the abolition of corporal punishment?

### Data analysis

Findings from data were presented according to themes/categories and were highlighted through a Foucauldian lens of governmentality and disciplinary power which were viewed through three mechanisms of control, namely, hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and the examination. Two broad categories of teachers' perceptions and experiences of corporal punishment during their own schooling and their disciplinary practices as teachers since its abolition emerged from the data. The reporting of data took the form of narrative descriptions and short excerpts from the transcriptions of the interview.

### Findings

The research objectives eliciting teachers' perceptions of past experiences and their current practices of discipline guided the presentation of data.

The findings on teachers' perceptions of their past experiences of corporal punishment when they were pupils reveal that they were subjected to harsh forms of discipline and corporal punishment and that: 'Being hit was normal'. This theme highlighted a previous "game of truth" (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38) where teachers experi-

enced corporal punishment as a normal practice of generally authoritarian teaching practices.

Teachers' current practices of discipline were characterised by the following themes: 'Teacher confidence and caring in modelling desirable discipline'; 'A loosening of some practices of discipline'; 'Less corporal, more self-discipline.' These themes capture the varied responses to teachers' practices of corporal punishment.

#### 'Being hit was normal'

The findings indicate that for all the participants in the study, corporal punishment was regarded as being normal practice of discipline. From their past experiences, these participants perceived that corporal punishment was used to control behaviour; encourage normalising judgement through subservience to school rules and establish the authority of the teacher as a giver of knowledge. Deb describes her experiences of corporal punishment when she was a pupil:

*In my standard five year, in my school, corporal punishment was a huge thing, a part of life. There was this boy in my class who always came late, never finished his work on time. He'd be beaten every day with like ten rulers on his hands at the back of his hands.*

*I mean being hit was normal. If you spelt something wrong or if you did not write neatly, your page was torn, you were hit for it. And most often you did not even know why you were being hit. If you were late or whatever it was, it was the order of the day.*

According to Foucault's (1977) explication of disciplinary power, normalising judgement was used as a mechanism of control to punish any behaviour that deviated from the norm. Deb's perceptions and experiences of corporal punishment like those of the other participants reveal that corporal punishment was the order of the day and a mechanism through which the teacher's authority as a provider of knowledge and controller of discipline was established.

Maggie's own schooling commenced more than half a century ago and this is how she described her teachers: *Oh, they were awful. They were dreadful when I started primary school in the late 50s...you got hit in those days and hard.* Although Maggie attended a private school, corporal punishment was a normative method of discipline.

Vee recalls his experience of corporal punishment when he was a pupil:

*My earliest memory of primary school was being hit on the head with a chalk-board ruler. This was in class one. And I remember it as if it were yesterday. I wasn't using the cards that the teacher gives to copy down the letters.*

Vee recalls his experience of corporal punishment as a pupil which was inflicted as a result of his lack of obedience to the teacher's instructions. Foucault's (1977) explication of disciplinary power through normalising judgement highlights the teacher's position of authority to inflict corporal punishment if pupils failed to conform to the teacher's expectations of homogeneity (in this case, copying from the cards). This example highlights that discipline in the form of corporal punishment was used to

extract productivity and conformity from the pupils.

Alan also indicated that corporal punishment and the use of *'the stick'* was a common method of discipline when he was in school and this was used to curb deviations from the school rules such as *'late coming'*.

Sipho indicated that his experiences of schooling were characterised by fear of corporal punishment by the teacher who demonstrated an authoritarian approach to teaching. He explained: *I raised up my hand. I said, 'Eh, Mr X...the way how you are teaching us Afrikaans is confusing.'*

He said, *'Oh, a child cannot tell me anything, I am a teacher. So just keep quiet and listen to me.'*

Sipho perceived that corporal punishment was used to instil fear to control pupils' behaviour and reinforce the authority of the teacher.

Another teacher participant, Andrew, relates his experience of corporal punishment as a pupil:

*The teacher had some words on the chalkboard. I knew that one of those words did not fit in there and I told that to her. She pinched my cheeks and gave me a slap and asked me if I wanted to teach.*

And I said, *'No.'* When I think back now, I should have told her *'Yes'*. (Laughter) *Yes, that was a bad memory.*

The findings derived from the data suggest that teacher authoritarianism prevailed when Andrew was a pupil. The teacher's perception that she had the knowledge and that knowledge flowed from the teacher to the pupil was an established norm within an authoritarian classroom. When the pupil challenged that norm, a penalty of corporal punishment was given. In Foucault's (1976) terms the pupil was not powerless and power can only be exercised in relations between individuals. The pupil has a choice and in order to protect himself from further corporal punishment and in response to the teacher's question of whether he wanted to teach, he said, *'No'*. By doing so he reiterated the norm of establishing the teacher as authority in the classroom

From the findings of the data, it was evident that corporal punishment was perceived negatively by the participants who experienced corporal punishment as normal disciplinary technique when they were pupils. This next section presents findings on their perceptions of corporal punishment within their own classroom practice.

#### Teacher confidence and caring: modelling acceptable behaviour

Deb's experiences of corporal punishment during her school days led her to the resolution that as a teacher she would not inflict corporal punishment to children under any circumstances. *'Care and confrontation'* sums up Deb's approach to discipline. She qualifies that confrontation does not mean warfare but that a child should take responsibility for his or her actions.

Despite his own experiences of corporal punishment, Vee emphatically states his position in regard to corporal punishment:

*'I don't rule with a firm hand. Corporal punishment is out. I don't use my hands at all on the children. I have a detention programme.'*

Vee adopts an approach to discipline where he also establishes his authority as a teacher without resorting to corporal punishment. His disciplinary practice as a teacher is characterised by an attitude of caring for the pupil.

As a teacher, Andrew also establishes his authority in the classroom. This is how he describes his disciplinary practices:

*I want children to know that I am well organized; that I am good at what I am doing and I try to set a model in my classroom in how I do my teaching.*

To cope with disciplinary problems, Andrew's strategy is to model the behaviour he expects from learners. He establishes himself as an authority through displaying confidence in his teaching approach without using corporal punishment. He indicated that other teachers who taught in the same class, failed to obtain the discipline as effectively as he did. He thus claims that good discipline depends on the teacher's approach, level of preparedness and self-discipline.

Although Deb, Andrew and Vee were subjected to corporal punishment when they were pupils, they assert that corporal punishment is not included in their current practices of discipline. For other teachers, the practice of corporal punishment is more firmly entrenched in their habitus or culturally established ways.

#### A 'loosening' of some practices of discipline

Sipho appears to be a strong disciplinarian who believes that pupils will co-operate if the teacher is able to 'give them something' (alluding to corporal punishment). In the extract that follows, Sipho presents his views on discipline:

*Oh yes, I am (laughs). I belong to an old school of thought because when a pupil has made something wrong, you just give. I belong to that. But now I have to be very careful, I have to loosen some ways so as to meet with these pupils. Ja, with pupils, ja we got a problem. The Department of Education now, in the past we were allowed to give them something. (Laughter). But now it's against the law. So you can be fined or you can walk out of this gate if you are found using it, so we have to exercise certain ways and means on how to deal with discipline.*

Sipho's statement, 'Oh, yes I am,' is indicative of habitus or culturally engrained ways of being which is confirmed by the statement, 'I belong to an old school of thought because when a pupil has made something wrong, you just give'.

Research (Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985; Weber & Mitchell, 1996; Trotman & Kerr, 2001) suggests that teachers belong to, can draw upon and are influenced by a latent culture based on the experiences and observations of their pupilhood, namely the apprenticeship of observation. Despite Sipho's critical reflection on the authoritarian nature of his teacher when he was a pupil, he also affirms that he belongs to the 'old school of thought'. To 'give' in Sipho's context means to exercise corporal punishment. Although Sipho still believes in the value of corporal punishment, he expresses the necessity of being 'very careful'.

The exercise of ‘care of self’ in essence means regulating oneself in accordance with the rules of acceptable conduct and prescriptions -and in Foucault’s (1978) terms, governmentality. In this particular case, Siphon has heeded the governmental call for controlling the population’s use of corporal punishment. One sees how the art of governing at a macro-level, by instituting laws and norms which protect pupils intersects with “governmentality” at a micro-level through the teacher governing himself by technologies of self, where he has to ‘loosen some ways so as to meet these learners’.

Similarly, although Maggie reflected on incidents from her own schooling experiences which, she despised for its repressive and controlling mechanisms, she described herself as ‘*a bit of a dragon ... I always have been*’. While she describes her teachers as being awful and dreadful, she explains that she, too, practised the similar techniques of discipline to varying extents in her early teaching and in the recent years. In the extract that follows, she describes her practice of discipline since the abolition of corporal punishment:

*Once in the class, I tapped the child at the back of the head and said, ‘Come on, do your work!’ And she looked at me and said, ‘You are not allowed to do that.’ That is something I would do, you know, ‘a tap on the head’ as you are walking around the classroom. And I had it out with her. I said, ‘Don’t you ever say that again. You are a trouble-maker!’ We chatted it out (laughter). We were not brought up with that rule where teachers were not allowed to hit.*

The teacher claimed that her ways of dealing with discipline had not changed. This is not surprising, given the fact that she has had an absence from teaching for many years. Tapping the child on the head was regarded as normal in her early practice. Although the field of practice has now changed, she is still operating according to the previously acceptable ways of disciplining as a result of the gap in her teaching experience. Maggie’s assertion that ‘we were not brought up with that rule where teachers were not allowed to hit’, draws attention to the challenges of established notions of the acceptability of corporal punishment.

The manner in which the teacher responded was significant. She did not retaliate with further physical punishment but with words: ‘Don’t you ever say that again,’ which highlighted a change in her response.

In the case of Alan, even though, he related negatively to instances of corporal punishment in his past experiences, he too, used corporal punishment. In the extract that follows, he explains his changing practices of corporal punishment during his early years of teaching.

*I started teaching at a high [secondary] school in Zululand...then we were using the stick a lot in the years of corporal punishment...I was young. I started when I was twenty three, and some of my learners were a couple of years younger than me. So there’s been a change...I am much more of a father to them now and given that I am now so much older, and you know, my outlook has changed, a lot. I am absolutely off using the stick.*

The practice of corporal punishment has changed for Alan and the question is whether this is solely as a result of changing policies or “games of truth” (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38). Although Alan indicates that he has changed his practice of discipline, he also admits that issues of discipline can be complex:

*I struggle a lot with discipline the fine line between what is corporal punishment, what is assault of a child. If you squeeze a child on the shoulder, to try and get their attention, is actually view as an assault by the police and the human rights issues come up there. But we try to get on with children, and it works... . But it is frustrating at times.*

In the above extract, the internal battle within the teacher is evident, in terms of the habitus of culturally developed ways of using force to work on the body to gain attention or to subjugate the body. The “game of truth” (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38) as exemplified by laws governing the protection of the child is competing for internalization within the individual. Hence, there is a struggle, where one side is subjugated (physical punishment) and the other is elevated (issues of human rights), which inevitably leaves the teacher in a state that is ‘frustrating at times’. Negotiating the shift between corporal punishment being ‘normal’ and its discontinuity presents a site of contestation for governing one’s practice according to what is considered acceptable and unacceptable.

Alan described the change in his practice.

*So discipline is an ongoing thing, we are limited, we don’t go for corporal punishment because not only is it the law, but we also are trying our best not to fall foul of that, but to discipline children we are always looking for ways of making it effective where we try highlighting the positives in children.*

For Alan this change was more than an adherence to legislation since his response indicated an attempt to change his perspective by highlighting the positives in pupils, which signified reflection on his practice.

#### Less corporal, more self-discipline

With the abolition of corporal punishment, Brian uses other forms of punishment which are no longer directed at the corporal but the more subtle forms of the physical, as suggested by Foucault (1977). Brian explained his strategies of discipline:

*I am able to cope with learners through different techniques that I’ve learnt over the years. So basically I rely on punishment techniques in terms of giving extra homework. I rely on withdrawing certain privileges, sport privileges, allowing the child to stay in class and basically giving the child a task. Also I have a system of merits and demerits where if the child is performing and not following the rules of the class, the child gets a demerit. The demerit is linked to the assessment and the moment that it is linked to assessment, learners become very concerned. Although I am not enforcing, it is more of a threat that it will be linked to assessment, it does help.*

Foucault (1977) suggests that the examination is used as a mechanism of control to discipline learners. In times of changing policies and contexts the continuous assess-

ment is used as a control mechanism. Brian's statement, 'Although I am not enforcing, it is more of a threat that it will be linked to assessment, it does help,' is crucial to understanding his practice. The punishment is linked to assessment, thus implying that the teacher is now targeting that which may be valued by the pupil. If the pupil values a good assessment, then the pupil will regulate his or her behaviour accordingly. Despite techniques of transparency and criterion-referenced assessment that are stipulated in the National Assessment Policy of 1998 (DoE, 1998), the teacher can manipulate the classroom context using pupils' assessment as leverage. While Brian adhered to the policy by refraining from corporal punishment (alluding to the power of self-regulation to macro-level policies and legislation), the extract also points to the power of agency where the individual teacher shifts the rules to a game of his own making where he links pupil's self-discipline to assessment.

Although the disciplinary control in terms of corporal punishment is no longer regarded as normal, disciplinary control is maintained by other means such as hierarchical observation through the gaze of the pupil and increased measures of visibility. An attempt to link discipline to assessment is evident in the extract from Alan's interview: As facilitator, I walk around the class. I try to use the clipboard saying, 'Right, I am watching today and I am going to give marks here and there'.

By making pupils aware of what he is doing, Alan is attempting to induce self-discipline amongst pupils through hierarchical observation. His role as assessor allows him to control pupils' assessment in exchange for acceptable discipline.

Alan's observation of pupils has some semblance to Foucault's (1977) description of Bentham's Panopticon where the supervisor is placed in the central tower observing inmates housed in the peripheric building. Foucault (1977:200) explains that the effect of the Panopticon is to induce in those being observed "a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power". Similarly, it can be inferred that Alan's aim in Alan telling the pupils that they are being observed is to increase their 'productivity' in terms of their contribution to group work. The pupils are made aware of the teacher's gaze and they will have to regulate their own behaviour to earn the assessment since their performativity is at stake. In this case, Foucault's (1977:77) observation that the power of surveillance is less "corporal" in that it is more subtly "physical" highlights changing practices of discipline.

The discussion that follows explores the significance of the key findings.

## **Discussion**

Against the background of macro-societal changes in democratic South Africa, it is argued that curriculum policy reform and the Schools' Act 84 (RSA, 1996) which, are inspired by the Constitution, highlights fundamental human rights that prohibit the practice of corporal punishment. The objectives of this research to explore changing teacher perceptions regarding the practice of corporal punishment as a "game of truth" (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38) through a Foucauldian lens of governmentality and disciplinary power, was done firstly, by ascertaining teachers' perceptions of their past

experiences of corporal punishment and secondly, by exploring their perceptions and experiences of their current strategies of discipline since the abolition of corporal punishment.

Findings from the research objective of exploring the past experiences of participants through the life history approach and memory work revealed that all the teacher participants in the study were subject to corporal punishment when they were pupils which they perceived as a normal disciplinary technique. Through their experiences, participants perceived that the use of corporal punishment was aimed at reducing deviation from the norm and reinforcing the notion of the teacher as an authority of knowledge. The data findings are supported by Foucault's (1977) observation that a wide spectrum of penalties (normalising judgment) existed for a range of behaviours, such as being late, being absent, inattention, disobedience and incorrect attitudes. This is supported by data findings from Deb and other participants. Alan recalled that he was hit with a stick for being late at school. Vee was hit with the ruler for not copying from the chalkboard exactly as instructed by the teacher, thus indicating that failure to comply with orders of regularity and homogeneity was punished. Andrew was pinched and slapped in the face for challenging the teacher's perception of the hierarchical order that knowledge flowed from the teacher to the pupil. Furthermore, Pongratz (2007) explains that anything that opposed the expressions of hierarchically organised social power was punished. Penalties were given to pupils who behaved in any way that challenged the norm, especially in relation to challenging the teacher's authority.

The significance of these findings reveal that although corporal punishment was viewed negatively by all participants regarding their past experiences, their responses to using corporal punishment since its abolition are varied, multiple and complex.

Although some teachers like Deb, Vee and Andrew state that their current practice of discipline does not include corporal punishment, the findings indicate that they still operate within authoritarian classrooms. Adherence to norms is still valued despite a policy change to learner-centred teaching methods. These teachers find creative ways such as detention systems, withdrawing privileges and modelling expected behaviour to elicit homogeneity and co-operation in the classroom. Teachers such as Brian and Alan link or threaten to link learners' behaviour to their assessment. These are some alternatives to corporal punishment that they use to obtain compliance from learners.

For older teachers like Siphon and Maggie, disciplining through corporal punishment is more firmly entrenched in their habitus. Although Siphon still believes in the value of corporal punishment, he has to 'loosen his ways' as part of care of self as a result of the legal implications of corporal punishment. For Maggie who was not 'brought up with the rule where teachers are not allowed to hit', the changing "game of truth" (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38) regarding corporal punishment necessitates a changing response to its use as a disciplinary technique. For these teachers their original perceptions regarding the effectiveness of corporal punishment may be more enduring as a result of the conditioned structure of habitus.

The significance of these findings indicates that although teachers in the sample may have varied perceptions regarding the use of corporal punishment, the authoritarian approach to classroom control still holds. The teachers have indicated that in their approach to discipline alternatives to corporal punishment is aimed at obtaining compliance from the learners. These findings concurs with Morrell's (2001) research which attributes reasons for the persistent and illegal use of corporal punishment to the legacy of authoritarian education practices and a belief that corporal punishment is necessary for orderly education.

### **Recommendations**

Theoretical and practical recommendations emerge from this study that takes cognisance of teachers' perceptions and views with the aim of curbing corporal punishment by providing teacher development support.

The significance of the findings of the exploring teachers' past experiences of discipline indicate that corporal punishment was the penal mechanism for 'normalising judgement' which is closely aligned with authoritarian approaches to teaching and learning. Further, teachers' perceptions on the use of corporal punishment as disciplinary technique since its abolition are varied. They respond to the legislation regarding the abolition of corporal punishment in multiple, creative and complex ways.

This raises questions about whether quality education can be achieved through ad hoc measures of discipline. Data has shown that teachers are self-regulating subjects of the new "game of truth" (Foucault, 1982, 1984:38) regarding the abolition of corporal punishment. Although teachers regulate their disciplinary techniques according to legislation, some teachers still see value in using corporal punishment. Lessons can be drawn from those participants who feel more confident about their classroom management. In cases where teachers are confident in their teaching methods; secure in their relationship with pupils and present a keen sense of caring for the pupils, alternatives to corporal punishment are used to discipline pupils. A practical recommendation that emerges from this is that teachers require support with teaching methodology of learner-centered approaches so that they do not feel threatened to assert their authority as the giver of knowledge. Some teachers, however, are 'frustrated' since the response of corporal punishment is more firmly embedded in their practices of discipline. Teacher frustration is compounded as a result of the ambiguities and lack of clarity on what constitutes acceptable forms of discipline. A practical recommendation is that teachers be shown workable models of how discipline can be achieved through alternative methods.

In terms of theoretical recommendations, further research is required to see to what extent 'hierarchical observation' and the 'examination' as self-regulatory disciplinary tools can be used most productively to enhance the culture of teaching and learning in South African classrooms and classrooms globally.

Although Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus effectively describes the deep cultural conditioning of teachers with regard to corporal punishment, further research

is required on habitus in relation to authoritarian approaches to teaching as enduring cultural and societal practices.

It is recommended that further research be conducted on teachers' approaches to teaching and classroom management with the aim of enhancing teacher professional development and support so that teachers experience a shift in mind-set whereby alternatives to corporal punishment are valued. Geltner (2014) argues that cultures that allow corporal punishment to be inflicted on children are retaining a relic of an unenlightened past and out of step with the process of civilisation.

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