

IS CORPORAL PUNISHMENT STILL IN USE IN SCHOOLS?

Friday, April 8, 2011

I paid a visit to a colleague teacher this afternoon at the A.M.E. Zion Schools at Mamprobi and in almost all the classrooms that I passed by, as in all basic and most Senior Highs there was one or two canes on the table of a teacher, or the teacher was holding a cane while teaching.

Very often, one could hear a child be beaten in one class or another. I tried to find out from my colleague if they were still using the cane in their school and the quick answer she gave me was 'as for this children, the only language they understand is this' which is not far from the language of most teachers that 'the only language the African child understand is the cane'.

She made me understand the difficulty in handling the children. Personally, she does not believe that children can only be controlled with the use of the cane and therefore, does more talking than caning.

Unfortunately as a nation we are raising a generation of children that believe that they deserve to be treated like animals even though in the civilized world today, animal trainers are no longer allowed to maltreat their animals in the name of training.

These children would tell their teachers if they do not cane them they would not do the right thing. This was even seen on television when some children from various schools within the city of Accra were interviewed last year after a conference on corporal punishment in schools.

*After my departure from the school, in a chat with a medical doctor friend, he asked "**is corporal punishment still in use in schools**". This is a question I have always been asked by most people and to me I have come to understand that we are not in touch with the reality in our schools.*

Yes, it is still in use for minor offences such as not understanding a lesson taught by a teacher; making mistakes while copying from the blackboard whether one is handicapped and cannot see well or not; for parents not paying school levy or failing to attend PTA meetings which are beyond the children's control; making noise in class while the teacher himself is tired during the hot afternoon even though our Parliamentarians who are supposed to know better do same and no one whips them other than the Speaker of Parliament shouting 'order, order, order...'

*I understand why most people are not aware of its use in our schools today; this is because it is mostly used against children in our rural areas more than those in our cities. This goes to confirm the fact that **a child's parent's geographical location and financial status would determine how he or she is legally abused by the very adult he or she is supposed to bond with and trust.** If a child happens to be in Accra and in the so called International Schools, he or she is free from such violence in the name of discipline, yet those children are doing better than those from schools where the educators and society demand total obedience and respect from their students.*

Even children in the Nursery are also subjected to this cruel and barbaric method of discipline; children who are yet to differentiate right from wrong. Even when they are late, they are being

caned to teach them how to respect time. How could this be? Children who have no control over what time their parents prepare them for school. So long as the educational authorities keep silence over this, this inhuman treatment of our young ones would continue and our children would grow to accept the fact that they can only do the right thing when they are treated like animal.

We are teaching them that resorting to violence and hurting other people is not only okay, but that I is an effective and appropriate way of getting people do and behave the way one wants them to. Children are like sponges... they absorb everything adults do and say, because this is who they look to when they're fashioning who it is that they are.

They are like barometers recording whatever happens around them, that's why we need not send them a mix message. If it is right for a male teacher to hit mature girls on their buttocks, how could they resist the male molester who demands to touch their buttocks and eventually assault them sexually?

When the state fails to provide quality education by monitoring what happens in our educational institutions, particularly our private institutions, fundamentalist would hijack the system and we all know the price the future generation would pay for this.

Merely inflicting pain on miscreants is inefficient, influencing the subject only for a short period of time and effecting no permanent change in the behaviour. The purpose of punishment should be reformation and not retribution.

There are teachers in this country who oppose the use of corporal punishment in schools and assert that corporal punishment is violent and unnecessary, may lower self-esteem, is liable to instill hostility and rage without reducing the undesired behavior and is likely to train children to use physical violence. Unfortunately they have no choice other than to stay in such environments where they undergo daily psychological trauma as their students who are at the receiving end.

In fact, the majority of research suggests that corporal punishment has little to no positive long term effects, actually decreases the effectiveness of other forms of punishment, and introduces a whole mess of other complications including increased drop out rates. Why then do some schools insist on using an ineffective, outdated practice? Since more countries have outlawed corporal punishment, what is so different in Ghana that we cannot do same? Are the students somehow worse behaved? Are the teachers less capable of non-violent classroom management?

As a civilized country, we must join the rest of the developed world and implement a complete ban on corporal punishment. Dodging the issue and pretending that it is not in use any more or its use has come down is irresponsible and neglectful to the hundreds of thousands of kids physically abused by the educational system every year. If we were able to outlaw physical punishment of women against the protest of most men who thought they could not live with their wives without resulting to violence, I am convinced that we can do without violence in education and at home by simply spending quality money in teaching our parents positive parenting and our educators alternatives which other schools are using including some few public schools whose teachers were courageous and bold to take the high way of experimenting it..

As a nation we may be in violation of international law by our non-compliance with the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – to which Ghana is a signatory. The UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child found that "corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment are forms of violence and States must take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate them"

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