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*Los Angeles Times*

Monday Morning, March 13, 1978

## Violence Sets an Example

By: Kerby T. Alvy

The Los Angeles Board of Education meets this afternoon to discuss, among other topics, the idea of reinstating corporal punishment in local schools. But in light of what psychologists and educators have learned about violence, dropping the 2 ½-year-old ban on such "discipline" here would be a tragic step backward.

For violence—the use of physical force to injure or hurt—is still violence, no matter where it occurs, what it is called, how it is called, or how it is justified. Further, children learn violence mainly by example, especially from persons they depend upon, and so it should come as no surprise that research shows many abused children becoming violent delinquents and criminals and, eventually, abusers of their own children.

This cycle of violence must be stopped and schools have a major responsibility to help. When school personnel are allowed to hit kids, they are teaching violence and perpetuating the cycle of violence. Seeing and adult strike out physically says to the child, "It's OK to hit when you're frustrated, irritated and don't know what else to do."

School personnel, especially teachers, have psychologically powerful relationships with children. Like parents, teachers' acceptance or rejection greatly influence how children feel about themselves, and how they behave. Children who feel accepted operate with a sense of self-worth and usually in very positive ways; children who feel rejected often act in disruptive, disrespectful and violent ways.

Psychologically, these rejected children develop a sense of worthlessness that is brought to the surface whenever their feelings and opinions are ignored, their personal limitations are exposed publicly or they are otherwise subjected to ridicule, sarcasm—and corporal punishment. They have learned to feel and behave in these ways because adults have taught them to do so.

When schools resort to corporal punishment, they are imposing discipline with degradation rather than dignity. And not only are they perpetuating violence, but they are also actually engaging in behavior that they are otherwise legally required to report to the authorities: When a child comes to school displaying bruises, welts and other signs of violence, school personnel are required to report this to the appropriate child-protective agency.

Should this seem to be stretching a point, remember the implements traditionally used on students—rulers, yardsticks, paddles, rackets, straps, belts, bats, and bare hands—make those very same bruises and welts.

Corporal punishment is outlawed in the military, in mental institutions and in prisons. The school is the sole institution in our society in which such punishment is still allowed, despite the complete lack of evidence that this "educational tool" does anything to enhance learning. In fact, continuing to allow corporal punishment in American classrooms flies directly in the face of current efforts to find and teach nonviolent methods of discipline.

For example, some schools have adult-education classes to train parents to better understand and communicate with their children—an excellent opportunity to teach nonviolent and effective methods of discipline. Some schools have Education for Parenthood programs to educate junior and senior high school children about the unique needs of infants and young children, and about the demands and realities of parenthood. Some schools provide special parenting classes for those students who are already parents. All of these programs stress nonviolent child-rearing methods.

Nonviolent techniques of classroom discipline do work and several excellent training programs in their methods have been devised. One is Teacher Effectiveness Training (T.E.T.), which concentrates on communication and problem-solving without resort to threats and intimidation, no matter how subtly

employed by the educator. Recent research indicates that T.E.T.-trained teachers are not only more successful in dealing with disruptive classroom behavior but that students in their classes actually learn more than those taught by other teachers.

Another excellent program, the Social Learning Approach, shows school personnel how they may be unwittingly contributing to discipline problems-and violence-in the schools by creating a punishing learning environment. A study of Los Angeles educators trained by this method to systematically accentuate the positive aspects of learning found that these teachers gave more positive recognition to student progress and had more positive contacts with students generally; that students taught by these teachers spent significantly less time fighting, making unnecessary noise and throwing things; that the costs of vandalism were significantly reduced for schools whose staffs had received the training.

Quite simply, if Los Angeles residents are serious about stopping the cycle of violence, at least in our public schools, they must make their wishers known to their school board. Corporal punishment is brutal, ineffective and self-perpetuating. Rather than even considering its reinstatement, the board should spend its time making nonviolent discipline, and the training programs necessary to introduce it, a top educational priority.

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