

It Takes the Whole Village to Bring up a Child: Discipline in Botswana Schools

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Abstract

Discipline is part of human nature and it provides a structure and guidance for individuals within societies. Traditionally in Botswana, discipline is instilled in children from a tender age through teaching them how to be responsible citizens, respect the elders, their peers and themselves as individuals. Children in various Botswana communities are jointly brought up by relatives, neighbours and any other member of society who happens to have the interest of children at heart. Recently Botswana has embraced and emulated different cultures that do not respect the concept of, “it takes the whole village to bring up a child”. Botswana no longer bring up children together as a community and this has led to problems of misbehavior at home and in schools. This concept paper reviews the shared responsibility of bringing up children and the effect this has on misbehavior in Botswana schools. The Researcher has reviewed literature on child upbringing in Botswana and other countries and provided an overview of the observed trends of child rearing in the country. The paper further reviews the traditional ways of shared responsibility and recommends ways of using the strategies to discipline children in school better than what is presently happening. This paper is an analysis of literature about discipline in schools in Botswana.

Keywords: Discipline, Corporal Punishment, Abuse, Community, Human and Children’s Rights.

Introduction

Traditionally, Botswana literally held the adage, “It takes a whole village to bring up a child”. When an elderly person observed any youngster misbehaving, he/she would not hesitate to punish even before they questioned his/her paternity. Every parent in the community had a right to discipline any child. The school and the community collaborated in raising a child. This general societal acceptance reflected the widespread perception that children were the possessions of their parents, rather than individual human beings with fundamental human rights (Gradinger, 2005). However, the Botswana parents’ intention was not to deny the children their rights but thinking it was protection and care. Parents did not hesitate to report misbehaviour to the school leadership and vice versa. Neighbours cared for each other’s children and discipline was universal and all children were canned and reprimanded without any inhibitions. There are proverbs in Setswana that describe the communal care of children such as, “*go tshwarwa ke ntsha pedi ga go thata*” (Garagae, 2008), literally meaning that a task is easy when there is people collaboration.

Sometimes discipline became too severe to a point of abuse. In the traditional courts (*kgotla*) culprits were [and still are in some communities] punished severely through canning either across their bottoms or their backs, so in most instances they would never repeat the same mistake again. A meeting usually ensues in the traditional court where cases are listened to by those closest to the chief including the village elders. Arbitrary decisions may be taken and one who fails to convince the group ends up receiving corporal punishment.

Apart from corporal punishment, children are scolded by either their parents, grandparents, guardians or neighbours if they step out of line. No child is allowed to be rude or disrespectful to their elders. There are instances where scolding may include insulting the child leading to low self-esteem or other social problems. According to the UNICEF Report (2010), “on average, three in four children between the ages of 2 and 14 were subjected to some kind of violent discipline, more often psychological than physical” (p. xv).

However, the 21st century has brought along changes that have eroded the community upbringing of children to more individualized family values. Due to child abuse perpetrated under the pretense of discipline countries have acceded to various Human and Children Rights’ Acts to protect children from abuse and neglect.

Discipline

Discipline has been there since the origin of mankind. Traditionally, communities set standards, values, beliefs and norms to be followed and respected. When children are born in these communities, they abide by the rules and regulations of that particular community. In Botswana there (were) are sayings, proverbs and idioms which controlled children’s behavior. Not only did these aspects warn children, but they also shared wisdom, provided advice and was a learning mechanism. For example, children were warned not to walk backward because their mothers would fall into a hole. This was meant to warn children against danger since walking backward would lead to accidents.

Children belonged to the whole community and every elder had the right to discipline any child who misbehaved. The widespread acceptance can be partially explained by the fact that children were considered to be “chattels” of their fathers and, consequently of those in whose charge their parents left them (Gradinger, 2005). Children shared household chores, headed livestock together and got punished as a group if the livestock destroyed any community member’s crops. It literally took a whole village to bring up a child. However, things have changed. The rich

language that was used before to advise children has been forgotten by most African communities, and modernization has taken over the responsibilities of shared child rearing. Communities are now isolated and the rule of formal documented Roman Dutch Law provides the basis for child rearing. In some instances, punishment was confused to be discipline. Some Batswana parents and teachers used severe punishment as a means to change children's behavior and this was condemned internationally leading to the accession of the Children's Rights.

Communal upbringing of children

Historically to date, and in some instances, families have been sharing the upbringing of children. Among the of Menderin of Ethiopia, both the boys and girls run errands, clean the house, make beds, make fire, prepare food and cook (Pankhurst, Crevello & Tiumelissan, 2016). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999) also advocates an education that is directed to processing and strengthening positive African morals, traditional values and cultures. Batswana treasure education and yearn for a change of lifestyle for their children. When family members spend more time in the cattle-post [where livestock is kept or the fields [farming areas]; children are sent to relatives living in villages, towns/cities where better schools are located. Relatives with better opportunities had or still have the responsibility to care for the clan's children, discipline them according to their values, norms and beliefs with the support of the biological parents.

No one questions the discipline procedures followed by the care takers or guardian. Although this system tends to be slowly dying off, there are still families dedicated to assist their own through caring for the children. Children from the host family refer to their bequeathed cousins as brothers or sisters and there is no discrimination among the children. The children share all the necessities and are taught and encouraged to respect one another. Older children within the family are expected to counsel and talk to the younger ones about life in general or even go to an extent of disciplining them.

Uncles were (are) disciplinarians especially for single female headed families. When the children misbehaved, the mother would threaten that she would report them to their uncle. If the uncle was absent, on his return back the guilty would receive their punishment. It could be denial of what they enjoyed most, or head cattle alone (in most cases chores were shared), stamp the corn, weed or harvest, or be flogged. The discipline measure would be administered after some counselling or scolding. If a member of the community is around at the time of punishment they had the privilege to participate in the process. According to Perrino, Gonzalez, Pantin & Szapocznik (2000), parents and other adult family members exert considerable influence as teachers and role models for children through skill building or discipline. It is not so these days due to the modernization of communities.

Communal child care extends to the time of marriage. In some communities the young couples discuss their intention to marry with their maternal uncles and aunts who become the middle person in the negotiations. Sometimes parents are informed by the uncles and aunts about the procedure for the marriage or are consulted to indicate what they require for the lobola [bride price]. The uncles and aunts may even get a cut of the bride price or receive gifts from the groom's family as a token of appreciation for participating in the upbringing of the bride to be. Things have changed to some extent. Though sending children to stay with family members in better resourced areas and better livelihoods, family members are now cautious about leaving their children with relatives due to the high rates of incest, rape and child abuse. There have been incidences of sexual, physical and emotional abuse by family members, fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins and neighbours who are usually viewed as family members, raping young

children and at times murdering them.

What is discipline?

Discipline must not be confused with punishment. In our communities, when children are canded, insulted and broken emotionally, it is viewed as discipline. The term discipline 'originates from the Latin words *discipulus*, which means pupil, and *disciplina*, which means teaching (Oxford English dictionary, 2018). The term discipline is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a branch of learning or knowledge." Discipline is teaching, learning and knowledge, and when pain is inflicted on children there is no guarantee that they will learn and attain knowledge. The pain experienced may lead to worse behavior, hatred and other social problems. Corporal punishment is a discipline method in which a supervising adult deliberately inflicts pain upon a child in response to a child's unacceptable behavior and/or inappropriate language (Andero & Stewart, 2002).

Types of Discipline

For teaching and learning to take place, there should be a conducive environment that entails effective classroom management. Teachers can utilize various strategies to manage students' behaviour and attitudes during teaching and learning. These strategies must be consistent, fair and impartial to enable the students understand the teachers' expectations and change their behaviour for the better. An inconsistent form of discipline leads to confusion and loss of respect for the teacher. If the teacher is not reliable, the students tend to form some ideas about him/her. There are various types of discipline that can be used for better classroom management and child development namely;

Preventative Discipline

Teachers who wish to teach in a better managed environment clearly set expectations, guidelines and rules for behavior. At the beginning of the school year or term the teacher openly explain what the students are expected and not expected to do. This proactive move is a form of intervention to prevent misbehavior before it begins. This provides a non-confrontational classroom atmosphere in which the students know that there are consequences for their actions. In Botswana, especially in basic education, the teachers usually write the rules and regulations on a poster and read them to the students during their orientation period. The poster is displayed on the wall for the whole year or more as a reminder for the students. However, the orientation and display of the rules and regulations does not prevent the students from misbehaviour. When the students misbehave, they may be canded, told to perform hard manual labour or sent out of class, leading them to missing out on the lessons.

Supportive Discipline

Supportive discipline is when a teacher corrects a student after making a mistake. This provides students with suggestions and options for correcting their behaviour before any consequences. At times, teachers can use non-verbal communication. Supportive strategies focus on positive behavior, resulting in less need for corrective interventions (Kyle & Rogien, n.d). However, at times, what is expected to be supportive becomes abusive; for example, a teacher may call a child names and destroy the child's self-esteem.

Corrective Discipline

When a student continues to make the same error even after repeated attempts at supportive discipline, this may result in consequences. The consequences must be consistently applied for them to be effective.

Children's rights in Botswana

Botswana in 2009, repealed and replaced the Children's Act with a new Act, with a view to fully domesticate the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2012). Included in the new Act is the Bill of Child Rights which guarantees the fundamental rights of the child, and further ensures the protection of the child from all forms of violence from persons entrusted with the care of the child.

However, there have been reports in the media, NGOs advocating children's rights and many other forums on child abuse in Botswana. Children have been sexually exploited and Childline Botswana, an NGO, emphasizes that it is a major problem in the country. There is rampant inter-generational sex in some farming areas where older men working in farms and the construction industry as labourers take advantage of the children. This exposes the children to HIV and AIDS infections.

Botswana established a National Children's Consultative Forum (NCCF) emanating from the Children's Act of 2009 (Part VI (34) (1), as an attempt to empower children to influence actions, processes and decisions that affect them. This forum takes cognizance of the children's needs such as their survival, development, protection and participation in all aspects that involve their lives. The Children's Act protect children from abuse through corporal punishment.

Causes of Indiscipline in Schools

According to Botha, Marishane, Merwe, van Zyl, & Zengele (2016), disciplinary problems may arise as a result of internal and external factors. Children may display indiscipline due to various factors such as hailing from dysfunctional and violent families, living in poverty, using and exposure to drugs and different forms of abuse.

Some children live with violent parents or guardians, and orphans hosted by extended families may suffer this abuse more. These children live in abject poverty despite the government rations and in squatter areas where there is constant smoking and drinking. However, not only children from poor environments are exposed to drugs. Children from affluent families have access to lots of money and can purchase the most expensive drugs in the market. Their easy access to money may lead them to undermine the school authority. Ngwokabuenui (2015) alluded that in Cameroon, students were insubordinate to school authority and would assault and insult their teachers, non-academic staff and prefects.

The use of drugs is rampant in Botswana schools. Children use cold syrup and mix it with soda to become intoxicated. Drug cartels hire boys to push cocaine, marijuana and other drugs in schools. A Botswana Report of 2008, expressed concern about the rate of drinking among the youths (Botswana AIDS impact survey III, 2008). This was not a problem before in Botswana, but since the country is used as a gateway by drug traffickers to neighbouring countries, drug abuse is becoming the norm for a lot of people in the country.

Discipline in Botswana schools

Formal education was introduced by colonizers and missionaries in Botswana who propagated corporal punishment. Coming into a society that already believed that "sparing the rod spoiled the child", the colonizers fitted well in the strict Botswana customs. For several decades, school children were caned and punished in different ways such as digging deep holes, cutting trees, collecting garbage, collecting firewood or soil and sand, cleaning the school yard etc. In some cases, several children dropped out of school due to severe punishment.

Schools in Botswana used [some still do] corporal punishment with the belief that it teaches children self-control and acceptable behaviour. The then single Ministry of Education stipulated the size of the stick and the number of strokes to be given to the students. This is a very controversial issue to date. Corporal punishment is lawful in schools. Article 29 of the Education Act 1967 provides for the Minister to make regulations to prescribe “the conditions for the administration of corporal punishment”.

There have been several reports through the media and other sources on indiscipline of children in Botswana schools. Some students have been abused under the pretext of discipline and bold ones may retaliate and mishandle their teachers or the perpetrator. According to the Global Initiative Report on “Corporal Punishment of Children in Botswana” of 2016, corporal punishment is lawful in schools, and would be administered either by the headmaster [school head] or other teachers in the presence of the headmaster. “No instrument of punishment other than a light cane shall be used and no punishment shall exceed 10 strokes with the cane” (p.3). Male teachers are prohibited from caning girls over 10 years old.

The report continues to explain that in primary schools, corporal punishment is regulated by the Education (Primary Schools) Regulation of 1980 that punishment shall be administered when the students have breached a good order or discipline. Those administering the punishment do so as a means of reforming the pupil; and would not worsen the mental or physical disability a child might suffer from. The punishment should be administered on the boys’ palms, buttocks and the back of the legs. For the girls, they would be beaten on their palms and calves. The pupils would receive 3 strokes and if a child has breached good order or discipline, the punishment would be given in the presence of other teachers.

In secondary school (grades 10-12) corporal punishment is regulated by the Education Government and Aided Secondary Schools Regulations 1978. Corporal punishment shall be administered “only on reasonable grounds and only where it appears that other disciplinary measures would be inadequate or ineffective in the circumstances of the case” (art. 21). The headmaster, teacher, boarding master or parent who has been delegated to administer punishment is the one to administer punishment. Some people may be delegated by the permanent secretary in special circumstances. According to article 23, corporal punishment shall be “moderate and reasonable,” and children would be beaten on their palms or across the buttocks, with a light cane not more than 1 m long and at the thickest end not more than 1 cm in diameter or with a suitable strap. The maximum strokes would be 5. Similar to primary schools, a male teacher, except the headmaster, is prohibited from punishing female students. The schools are expected to keep a record of the punishment inflicted on the children.

It is difficult to fathom how those inflicting the punishment would measure the moderation and reasonableness of the flogging. One is bound to use all the strength they have despite the size of the stick and mete out more pain than expected. Sometimes children are punished in rage and end up being hurt. A teacher may hit a child all over the body or the stick may be thrown at the child and injure them.

The former Permanent Secretary in the then Ministry of Education and Skills Development (currently divided into the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science and Technology) spoke about intensifying discipline in government schools to improve poor examinations results. It is important to note the kind of discipline the permanent secretary was alluding to. Schools cannot punish students for poor performance but need to evaluate the learning environment to understand the causes of poor performance.

Instances of child abuse in the name of discipline in Botswana schools

Researchers have identified several factors that lead children to misbehavior, such as family issues, the school, and community-based problems. Some children lack attention from their families and disrupt the teaching to get the attention of the teacher. Others have low self-esteem and want to be popular as the classroom clown while others' misbehaviour is a cry for help, either to express their pain or fear of what happens to them at home. The parents and teachers in Botswana have a weakness for not being able to openly discuss any social issues with their children. However, when children misbehave, they get punished without an understanding of the reasons for the punishment or the consequences of their misbehavior. Children are punished through flogging, undermining their integrity by either using vulgar language or belittling them. Below are some of the common ways teachers discipline children in Botswana.

Corporal Punishment

According to Tafa (2002), corporal punishment is part of the penal system in Botswana and he argues that it is part of a historically embedded cycle of authoritarian coping strategies of teaching, from schools to colleges of education and back to schools, bequeathed to the country by colonialism. Children are caned for various reasons and in some instances may get hurt. A newspaper article by Molefe and Pansiri (2006) covered the story of a primary school child who was hit on the head with a belt buckle in a Setswana class. Students in a grade 11-12 school were given 5 lashes for threatening the school authorities following a suicide of one of the boys. Their parents permitted this punishment to be meted on the students. The boy committed suicide when the school authorities requested him to bring his parents for discussions about his fight with another student (Banda). However, corporal punishment is a controversial issue in Botswana. Childline Botswana, Ditshwanelo (meaning Right) and other stakeholders are against this form of discipline since it violates the rights of the children.

One teacher in a training programme indicated that their school's enrollment was over 1000 and it was difficult to use other means of discipline and that for minor offenses the school resorted to corporal punishment because it was simpler to administer and solved problems immediately.

Use of Demeaning Language

Some teachers and parents use demeaning language when children misbehave. A child could be degraded according to their poor performance, physical appearance, economic and social status. This undermines the child's integrity and dignity and destroys his/her self-esteem.

Physical Activities

A child may be asked to dig a hole, pick up litter or move a pile of dirt from one spot to another. At times children are sent out of class while the rest learn. This denies the child the opportunity to learn and in some cases children take advantage and misbehave in order to have some free time.

Denial of Feeding

Most of the children in Botswana public school come from poor families and rely on the ration provided by the schools. When teachers deny children food, it affects their performance.

Ignoring a Child

In some instances, teachers may ignore a child because they are naughty or are termed dull. This form of punishment makes the child feel unwanted, hopeless and useless. Sometimes children misbehave because they yearn for attention and hope to attract it through misbehavior. The teacher may not ask the child any questions or not mark their books or make comments

that indicate the child is a trouble maker to the amusement of their peers.

Sending the Child out of the Classroom

Sometimes when children go against the set rules and regulations, they may be sent outside of the classroom and miss a chance to learn. This happens when a teacher fails to find an alternative to keep the child busy. Some children complete their work on time and idle while others are still working. This leads to boredom. There is no provision in a Botswana classroom to provide interesting and challenging tasks to high achievers. The curriculum is a one size-fit-all.

Reaction of children to discipline

In his study on crime and school violence in Botswana, Matsoga (2003) stated that schools had no or incomplete records of violence perpetrated by the students. Most of the incidents referred to in this paper were reviews from newspapers. There have been various occurrences of school children destroying property, fighting the teachers to avoid corporal punishment, dropout of school or even committing suicide. In some cases, there have been strikes or students staying away from classes leading to the destruction of the learning and teaching environment. When such incidences occur, those deemed as ring leaders would be suspended or expelled from school. The government has spent large amounts of money in repairing damaged property. There were cases where parents were required to pay for the damage caused by the student.

What can the Botswana community and teachers do?

The Botswana society is conflicted over the use of corporal punishment as a measure for discipline. The traditionalists are in support of it while the contemporary society is against it. The elderly members of the society still uphold the belief of sparing the rod and spoiling the child". Various NGOs that advocate the rights of children condemn the use of corporal punishment and believe there are other ways of disciplining children. Most traditionalists believe children have become unruly due to abolition of corporal punishment. There are traditional courts in Botswana that still flog offenders.

Since corporal punishment is controversial there are other ways of curbing indiscipline among the youths. Botswana have an indigenous system called the kgotla [traditional court] where meetings, issues concerning community development, disputes or any other issues are discussed and there is no comment ignored as the saying goes, "*mafoko a kgotla mantle otlhe*". This means any comment made by any member of the community at the traditional court must be heeded and supported. Communities could use these forums to develop traditional ways and means of instilling discipline in children without hurting them. There could be counseling sessions held for the parents who at the moment fail to communicate with their children openly. The meeting could be a collaboration between the teachers and the parents to enable the parents appreciate that teachers are their partners, and it is necessary to work together to improve the behavior of children. At the moment, parental involvement is very low in schools; whether in rural or urban area, and the teachers lament that parents visit schools during celebrations or when summoned for the misbehavior of their children. Some parents fail to even visit the schools to collect their children's performance reports.

There should be clubs established in schools to encourage peer counselling. There is still a large number of well-behaved children in schools who could be used to counsel their peers about good behavior. When children listen to their age mates, they are able to open up to them and communicate more than when they are in the company of elders.

Parents have formed clusters that work towards community development in both rural and urban areas. This is another forum to use to develop discipline strategies that are compatible with their

norm, beliefs and values. These clusters could be used for meeting children in smaller groups and listening to their experiences and reasons for misbehavior. It could also be a forum for the youths of that particular community to share their experiences and work of solutions appropriate for their age, not just accepting solutions imposed by the elders. Parents could visit schools more often to check on their children's performance and assist teachers in the classroom to appreciate the behavior of their children and the disciplinary strategies the teachers use in the classroom.

Most Batswana parents find it difficult to open up and discuss sensitive issues with their children. Parents could talk to their children about life in general and the importance of avoiding misbehavior in more cordial meetings rather than talking to children after the misbehaviour has been displayed. They could partner with teachers and provide counselling to their children especially sharing with the children the values, norms and beliefs that are a foundation of their culture.

Conclusion

Discipline is part of human development and Batswana believe in docile, well behaved and respectful children. When the modern child challenges his/her parents or teachers, it comes as a shock and the elders get frustrated and compare the child to how they themselves behaved as children. It is difficult to acknowledge that children in these modern times are exposed to various environments that influence their thinking, beliefs, norms and values. Batswana elders still want to meet a child they can chastise and correct regardless of whether they are related or not. There is a wish that things were still as easy as in the past when children belonged to the whole community. Children nowadays stun and baffle their own parents let alone a stranger. Teachers are faced with challenges of misbehavior of children and without the support from the parents in counselling children, teachers tend to ignore some of the behavior displayed by the children leading to poor performance. Teachers are afraid to talk to children because they are never sure of their reactions. Teachers have been threatened and beaten by the students. Students have refused to receive corporal punishment leaving teachers with no alternative but either to throw them out of class or not assist them in any way.

Disciplining children in schools has become a difficult task especially when teachers fail to find other alternatives to deal with misbehavior. Schools that were in the past known to perform well are now failing to meet the set standards of education. The quality of learning in various schools has plunged since teachers spend more time dealing with misbehavior instead of concentrating in teaching the students. The concept of the whole community coming together to share the responsibility of caring for children does not exist anymore. Families have separated and lost the extended family kinship. There is no longer, "taking the whole village to bring up a child."

The trend for schools to not keep a record of the disciplinary cases is a serious weakness and negligence of duty that requires attention. If records are not available for researchers to review, it insinuates that schools are condoning to the wrong discipline measures perpetrated on the students. Keeping records would enable the schools identify the recurring misbehavior and develop appropriate discipline strategies to deal with it.

The parents, teachers, community, chiefs and other leaders require training on dialoguing with children instead of resorting to corporal or other forms of destructive discipline.

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