

Parents of schoolchildren tend to trust educators who, after all, are highly trained in their specialty and are licensed by the state. And virtually all parents want to believe that those who take charge of their child at school are motivated by genuine, nurturant feelings toward children. Educators recognize this natural and powerful desire. Some honor it and do their best to live up to the standard that is expected of them - the standard for which they were trained. Some do not. Responsible, thoughtful parents should bear in mind that when they send their child to school, they are delegating their most important responsibility to a group mostly of strangers who vary widely in their level of competence. Few people would hand over their car keys so indiscriminately with the same degree of trust.

FICTION - Corporal punishment is used only after all other means have failed and is governed by strict guidelines.

FACT - The number of pupils beaten will always be underreported because school administrators are careful not to alarm the public or draw critical attention to their own questionable practices. Often, violent punishments are used as a first response to trivial offenses. Guidelines, where they exist at all, exist more in policy than in practice. As a general rule, reliance on fear and summary punishment in educational settings is inversely proportional to the level of competence of the educators involved. The least competent tend to be the most punitive. They are also the most resistant to reform and most rejecting of constructive criticism. Some hit children to reassure themselves that they have power over someone. Some enjoy doing it.

FICTION - Teachers' right to resort to corporal punishment must be retained because certain students can't be controlled by any other means.

FACT - Violent punishment causes far more bad behavior than it corrects, if it corrects at all. The more children are subject to educator violence, the more misbehaved they tend to become. The very act of physical punishment destroys trust and engenders hostility toward the institution that is supposed to be serving them. As for children who conform outwardly due to fear of punishment, they are being obedience trained. That isn't education. They are learning the use and abuse of power, and some of them will put those lessons into practice at the earliest opportunity.

FICTION - Well-behaved children have nothing to worry about.

FACT - Wherever pupil beating is allowed, all children worry about it. They know that punishers often act on impulse and rarely have to justify their actions. A steady diet of fear and anxiety, especially in the earliest years, stifles learning and is dangerous to children's psychological and physical health.

FICTION - This method of pupil management has been in use for many years and it is overwhelmingly supported by the public.

FACT - It is true that violent pupil management has been used throughout recorded history. But today, the practice is associated with ignorance and backwardness. In almost the entire developed, democratic world, violent punishment of school children is illegal, and nowhere is it making a comeback. The dwindling number of people who approve of it are themselves most likely products of such mistreatment. Understandably, some feel reassured when they see the same management methods being used on children today that were used on them when they were little. Those who claim that corporal punishment is universally approved and is in the children's best interest are deluding themselves. They cling to that fantasy

because it absolves them of responsibility for their bad behavior toward children.

FICTION - Abolition of corporal punishment will make teachers' jobs harder, resulting in an exodus of good teachers from the profession.

FACT - Were corporal punishment a legitimate part of classroom management, teacher training curricula would include instruction in its proper use. Furthermore, in light of the obvious risks inherent in the practice, that training would be mandatory. But no such training is offered. There is not one accredited college or university in the United States that instructs prospective teachers how to hit children. Any teacher who is incapable of managing students without recourse to corporal punishment should not be in the profession in the first place, and as long as the practice is allowed, places where it is used will remain safe havens for incompetents.

FICTION - Corporal punishment works.

FACT - If it worked, why do punishers keep punishing the same children over and over again? And why are our maximum security prisons filled with violent felons who, virtually without exception, were brought up by these very same methods?

CONCLUSION The number of legal pupil beatings in schools of the United States in the school year 2006-07 was 223,000 according to the U.S. Department of Education. Some researchers believe the true number is considerably higher. No one should be surprised that the children who are subjected to corporal punishment are also the ones most likely to drop out of school early and drift into unsafe, unproductive life styles. As of June 2009, twenty-one states - mostly in the rural south - still allow teachers to punish students by hitting them.

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FICTION
&
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Corporal Punishment in Schools

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Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education
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