

Abuse in schools

July 2008

*A letter to legislators in paddling states
and to school board members in paddling districts*

We have all heard the standard excuses for preserving the tradition of beating schoolchildren. We know them by heart. They all are based on the assumption that what worked in the past will work in the future, and that the path to responsible citizenship, for some children at least, is paved with punishment and reward. Mostly punishment. But did child beating ever really work as its defenders claim? And were the good old days as good as some people like to imagine? Tell me the dates that are supposed to have been the golden age for bringing up children, and I'll tell you what was really going on at that time. I'll remind you of things that most people want to forget.

Hitting children with weapons has been around a long, long time. But hitting them on the buttocks with a wooden paddle is a relatively recent innovation. A 19th century Virginia plantation owner gets the credit. He found that paddling his slaves on their buttocks caused them excruciating pain, but didn't leave permanent injuries that would reduce their market value. And it worked. Pain is a powerful motivator. If one is trying to achieve total domination of a defenseless victim, and doesn't care about the human cost, hitting is clearly the answer.

Our group recently did a survey in paddling states of colleges and universities that have teacher training programs. We asked if they train future teachers in the correct method for paddling students. We didn't receive one affirmative reply. Were paddling a legitimate educational procedure, it would be taught in the teachers' colleges, and paddlers would be periodically tested and certified for their proficiency in this risky procedure. But they aren't. It isn't taught because it isn't right.

And there's the sexual factor. The buttocks are an erogenous zone. Being struck there can stimulate sexual feelings, and children are especially susceptible. The tragic consequence for many children who are punished by paddling, or who witness it, is that they form a connection between pain, humiliation and sexual arousal that endures for the rest of their lives. Ending corporal punishment in schools will have two results which are unarguable. 1) Fewer children will have their sex lives deranged and 2) the teaching profession will cease to attract and become a safe haven for certain people who are obsessed with domination and control issues.

104 nations have banned corporal punishment in their schools. The US stands out as a glaring exception to the rule. There is no excuse for further delay. Paddling violates the mind and body of every child who is on the receiving end and degrades every educator who uses it to the level of a common bully. The paddle — an obscene relic of plantation days — has no legitimate place in any school in the 21st century. Now is the time to ditch the stick.

Sincerely,



Jordan Riak, Exec. Dir., Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education (PTAVE); Web site: "Project NoSpank" at www.nospank.net; Address: PTAVE, P.O. Box 1033, Alamo, CA 94507; Tel.: 925-831-1661