Journal #2—Probability of Corporal Punishment:

Lack of Resources and Vulnerable Students

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The issue of students’ rights tends to lead to a discussion on how best to handle discipline of students. One of the more debated topics in discipline of students is corporal punishment and whether or not it (and to what extent) it should be used in public schools. Corporal punishment needs to be looked at closer than other forms of discipline because of the physical nature of it. Han, in his 2011 article “Probability of Corporal Punishment: Lack of Resource and Vulnerable Students,” examines which students are more likely to be on the receiving end of corporal punishment as a means to examine the use of it in schools.

Han made two important discoveries in his analysis that has implications across all forms of discipline, but again takes special focus on corporal punishment because of the physical nature of it. The first discovery Han (2011) made was that principals were 2.06 times more likely to use corporal punishment in higher minority schools and 1.82 times more likely to use corporal punishment on special education students for similar infractions (p. 427). This is a major issue with discipline in general but especially corporal punishment: it can be very difficult or almost impossible to remove biases when disciplining students. Principals may feel physical discipline is more likely for minority students simply because they do not understand the underlying reasons for behavioral issues. The same holds true for students with special needs.

The second important finding Han (2011) made was that principals serving more disadvantaged students had higher perceptions of disorder (p. 428). As Han (2011) explained, “principals’ perceptions influence their decision making. If principals perceive their schools as disordered, they may reinforce discipline and adopt harsher disciplinary practices according to their perception of an acceptable level of order rather than an objective measure” (p. 428). Principals need to adopt rules and regulations that fit the actual needs of the students and not the perceived needs of what the student body is.
Outside of his discoveries from his data analysis, Han touched on other points that are worth mentioning in the discussion of discipline and corporal punishment. For one, Han (2011) noted that “students who observe the action (of corporal punishment) could learn that violence is an acceptable way to attain social goals” (p. 421). Discipline is not something learned just from punishment, but from observation as well. Discipline handed down to students should fit the mold of punishing the student for actions in order to deter future actions. A principal needs to analyze disciplinary practices to make sure they do not have any ill side effects. Similarly, this statement from Han speaks to the culture of a school. Even if students do not engage in violent activities, they may learn violent tendencies if they observe violence in school and it goes unaddressed. Same goes with bullying, tardiness, or any other negative actions. Principals need to work to establish a school culture of respect so that students observe respect and learn to be respectful even when the actions do not involve them.

How can schools work to build that respectful atmosphere, especially in schools where low socioeconomic statuses lead to higher instances of school violence? Han (2011) explained there was “a significant negative relationship between having violence prevention programs and use of corporal punishment” (p. 428). One of the issues with having such programs is the funds needed to start the programs/keep them running efficiently. Principals, then need to be versed both in discipline theory as well as budget management. Principals need to stay on top of research about which programs are effective in limiting violence and other misbehaviors in schools, and principals need to ensure that they are smart with their allocation of resources. Overall, principals need to ensure that discipline is fair across gender and race, that they do not let their perceptions of discipline influence their decision making or policies, and that they are allocating resources wisely to create a culture of respect to limit misbehaviors.
References
