Student teachers investigating the morality of corporal punishment in South Africa

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Practitioners of education in South Africa (SA) struggle painfully between the extremes of its authoritarian and deeply religious roots that prescribe blind obedience to people in authority and their elders, and the demands of open-mindedness, critical thinking and also solidarity required for demo-cratic citizenship. A particular pedagogy was used with some 400 student teachers to investigate philosophically the rights and wrongs of corporal punishment in schools. This article justifies the use of this particular approach to moral education – despite its 'Western' liberal roots – in post-apartheid SA as it opens up a non-judgemental space to explore philosophically what students actually believe. Without moralising or slipping into moral relativism, such philosophical teaching increases student participation, autonomy and self-discipline, and at the same time develops moral reasoning and moral knowledge. Hence, it needs to be introduced as a pedagogy in institutions that educate future teachers.

Keywords: corporal punishment; community of enquiry; moral education; higher education; P4C; discipline problems; authority; South Africa

Corporal punishment in South Africa

Studies suggest that corporal punishment is common in South African schools situated in low-income environments (Vohito 2011, 68).[1] The literature on corporal punishment in South Africa (SA) refers to the illegality of the practice, constitutional infringements,[2] the Schools Act,[3] the South African Council for Educators (2002) and human rights violations.[4] References are also made to the physical, psycholog-ical, behavioural and academic side-effects: 'loss of self-esteem, an increase in anxiety and fear, damage to the functioning of the ego, creation or enhancement of feelings of loss, helplessness and humiliation, enhancement of feelings of aggression and destructive and self-destructive behaviours, a shortened attention span, attention-deficit disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and impaired academic achievement'

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(Maree and Cherian 2004, 76). A link has also been made between corporal punishment and criminal behaviour (Chisholm, Motala, and Vally 2003), as well as the inability to establish meaningful (sexual) relationships (Maree and Cherian 2004, 76–7).

The urgent need for educational reform has been identified by various researchers, and involves educating parents[5] and teachers to use alternative means of punishment (see, e.g. Porteus, Valley, and Ruth 2001; Santrock 2001).[6] The issue is deeply complex and controversial. In a recent ethnographic study in four high schools in the Johannesburg township Soweto, some learners, for example, expressed the view that corporal punishment in their school was legitimate. Interestingly, what *they* regarded as illegitimate was the disturbance of peace in class by misbehaving fellow students that prevented their own access to a proper education. The researchers speculate that the learners have internalised adult discourses which sets the limits for what is possible and what is not (Payet and Franchi 2008, 163–4).

When children are raised in a violent society, they tend to believe that adults only mean business when they resort to violence as a means of punishment (Peters 1966, 275). Religion can play a significant role in limiting the imaginable. Corporal punishment in SA is often justified by reference to the Bible and an 'active Christian ethos' (Vohito, 2011, 75) – 'discipline' is equated with 'corporal discipline' and, historically, corporal punishment is associated with authoritarian and non-democratic societies in which citizens are not prepared for democratic participation but for simple obedience to an authority (Maree and Cherian 2004, 75–6).[7] Especially in SA it is therefore imperative to use educational interventions that are non-judgmental philosophical *investigations*, in order for student teachers to have the opportunity to express what they genuinely believe, rather than echoing what they think the lecturer wants to hear. This is particularly important when the lecturer is seen as an authority (on the basis of her socio-economic status) and of a different gender, race and ethnic background. I report here on an approach to moral education that opens up a space to listen philosophically to students, which is both accepting and critical. Of much concern is that, the main emphasis in the literature seems to be on behaviour modification and not on what I would argue constitutes *moral education*.

What constitutes moral education?

First, there is confusion about the meaning of 'moral' in the phrase 'moral education'. For some, this is prevalent in the corporal punishment literature, 'moral' implies that educators need to give the answers and instil the right kind of behaviour which *they* value to be morally good; they use 'moral' in the *evaluative* sense (sometimes called 'moralistic'). However, a *prescriptive* approach to moral dilemmas does not educate. Telling my student teachers what the right answers or solutions are when faced with discipline problems in schools, does not entail the performance of morally right actions. As Straughan puts it: '…obedience to an authority is, strictly speaking, irrelevant to the business of ethical decision-making' (Straughan 1988, 74). Freedom from external control is a necessary condition for decisions to be distinctively *moral* decisions, which makes any moral development theory along

Kohlbergian lines problematic as all his Stages up to 5 and 6 assume some kind of obedience to authority (see, e.g. Matthews 1994, Chap. 5). The difficulty, however, is people's lack of knowledge about the distinction between 'moral' in the evaluative sense and in the other, *descriptive* sense, which requires an educational approach with a very different expertise and objectives (Straughan 1988, 32), including an active involvement in moral *enquiry* and dialogue. Moral reasoning and agency involves considering the rights and interests of others, by not making discriminations on irrelevant grounds, and with a clear set of principles or virtues in which a person believes and is prepared to act upon (Campbell 2003, 2). Therefore, moral agency must involve some degree of free choice and independent judgement, and has to start with beliefs that the students genuinely hold (independent of whether they are illegal, unpopular, etc.).

The particular pedagogy I used with my students not only provides the necessary opportunities for students to be honest, but also helps develop ethical knowledge and independent judgement. Moreover, it allows students to experience a process that models how participatory democratic relationships can be established in their own future classroom. The need for punishment diminishes dramatically when teaching and learning methods are used that are engaging and include more learners.

Second, another popular misunderstanding about 'moral education' is the meaning of 'education'. Some hold the idea that moral positions are not grounded in reason, but we adopt them because they *feel* right, or because we feel drawn to them ('moral subjectivism'). Emotions and morality are indeed linked as argued elsewhere (Muris 2009), and people do have an intuitive feeling[8] of the difference between right and wrong, and base their actions on implicit values and principles. Some people call it 'conscience' or 'inner voice', but conscience[9] can be educated and our inner conversation (the conversation we have with ourselves before we make a difficult decision) can be informed, enriched, expanded and changed through pedagogical contexts that help students articulate the 'other side' of their conscience through moral language. Conscience is an embodied response to situations, not merely a rational, intellectual awareness (Schinkel 2011, 514–15). Such moral language (following Hare) should move beyond conventional morality and guide students to explicate and evaluate the principles and values implicit in the affective and bodily dimensions of moral encounters (Schinkel 2011, 516–19). This critical meta-discourse about one's own internalised conventional morality is part of a moral education that moves from heteronomy to autonomy, from discipline to self-discipline. Students should be given rich opportunities to *discover* the deeper reasons for themselves for their own beliefs about, for example, the (im)morality of corporal punishment, and the different meanings people attach to core concepts such as 'respect' and 'fairness'. The ethos of ethical enquiry is imbued with democratic moral values based on the Socratic ideal that education should be founded on principles of freedom and recourse to reason (Nussbaum 2010).

Moral education and democracy

One of the major obstacles in SA regarding democracy as a way of life and education as a means of nurturing democrats (Biesta 2010), is that many South Africans

understand democracy in terms of access to socio-economic goods, despite the highly participatory notion of democratic citizenship forged by the anti-apartheid struggle (Enslin 2003) and laid down in the country's human rights-based Constitution and Curriculum 2005. However, participation requires an approach to democracy that is not limited to the acquisition of socio-economic goods, but aims to develop the democratic habits of mind and skills that are characteristic of a 'thick' or participatory notion of democracy (Sheppard, Ashcraft, and Larson 2011). These dispositions are developed through conceptual investigations (analysis of abstract concepts), an appreciation of the experiential and social context, epistemic independence (thinking and learning for oneself) and engagement in discussions about controversial issues (Sheppard, Ashcraft, and Larson 2011, 75–6). As such, room can be made in class to discuss controversial issues and to contest dominant narratives. This supports a process of 'transformation of individual wants into collective needs' supported by strong reasons (Biesta 2010, 98). Schools (and therefore the institutions that educate teachers) need to make room for people to strengthen their ability to reason and to participate through deliberation in democratic processes.

The 'community of enquiry' pedagogy I use emphasises listening to students in contexts that are meaningful to them, as well as the creation of educational environments that involve their direct democratic participation. The 'community of enquiry' is a dialogical approach that emphasises communication, interaction, reflection and negotiation. As a relational pedagogy it implies 'a relation, an obligation and the infinite attention which we owe to each other' (Papatheodorou 2008, 5). It draws on people's tendency toward autonomy, that is, self-regulation and self-organisation, and throws up some demanding questions about the authority claims of adults, particularly in the light of the moral foundations of disciplinary traditions in schools. Authoritarian forms of teaching (with a capital 'A') rely in the main on deference to external authority, rather than independent critical thought. This is in contrast to authoritarians[10] – teachers in authority – whose authority resides not with individuals but with the process of reflective dialogue (Haynes and Murris 2011, 160–2). So, a teacher may insist on neat appearance and arriving on time in class, but still encourage her learners 'to think independently. R.S. Peters argues that teachers' commands need to be task-oriented and not status-orientated. Authoritarian instruction prevents children from moving away from reliance on authorities to 'the acquisition of the underlying thought or awareness' (Peters 1966, 262). Educators are an authority in their subject, but Peters insists that they should introduce others to 'the critical procedures by means of which such bodies of knowledge have gradually been established and can be challenged and transformed. This is what makes their authority only provisional' (Peters 1973, 47–8).

Educators also have an obligation to be attentive to moral considerations, he continues, because 'the inner structure of the mind mirrors the outer structure of public traditions and institutions' (Peters 1966, 265). Therefore, those in authority need to model a style of self-regulation and a passion for their subject. Punishment can be avoided if teaching is imaginative, classroom management is efficient and learning is enjoyable for its own sake, and not motivated by extrinsic reasons alone such as stickers, exam results, securing a good job or a nice car.

Nussbaum (2010) also argues that a democracy is sustainable only if non-authoritarian pedagogies, such as the community of enquiry, become part and parcel of mainstream education. She claims that it helps people to think for themselves, to develop the imagination, independent thinking and innovation, and that it counters peer pressure and authority. A culture of individual dissent, she argues, is necessary to prevent atrocities and violence. Mutual respect for reason is essential to the peaceful resolution of conflict as a result of differences.

Adopted identities

Students in SA have had few pedagogical opportunities to become more resilient, skilled and courageous enquirers. The practice of a community of enquiry poses special challenges in SA that may be peculiar to the mix of cultures and identities adopted. Another obstacle is that 'community' is often associated with harmony shaped through 'shared values', not conflicting values, which might have a basis in African moral theory. (These tensions are briefly explored at the end of this article.)

I introduced the pedagogy's introduction in SA in 2009. In particular, what I found when working with some 400 third-year BEd students on an Ethics course was its power to open up discussions about deep cultural and racial differences, and the misconception that being tolerant of others implies not publicly disagreeing with someone who holds opposing beliefs. The pedagogy makes considerable emotional demands on a thinker as philosophical teaching includes being open to consider and deliberate fairly the evidence *against* one's own favoured beliefs and points of view.[11]

Moral relativism

Biesta reminds us that otherness or strangeness is not necessarily good and does not need to be tolerated, valued and respected simply *because* it is other or strange. Listening to the voice of others (including 'strangers') in class and building on each others' ideas does not mean that students or tutors have to agree with each other. A community of ethical enquiry thrives on dissensus and disagreement as it enables opinions to be put to the test and subjected to critical scrutiny guided by tutors who need to be able to draw on their own ethical knowledge and courage to be moved and changed by what happens in class. Conflating non-judgemental listening and tolerance with 'moral relativism' is a common problem also amongst students (Erion 2005). This is an obstacle to the implementation of educational initiatives that develop and nurture moral agency and ethical knowledge.

Erion (2005, 129) summarises the various causes of relativism amongst students. Students might be relativists out of 'personal defensiveness', 'confusion' or 'intellectual laziness'. He speculates that it could also be a sign of a temporary psychological developmental stage, and express 'a protest against absolutism and authoritarianism, or perhaps a commitment to good manners and tolerance'. My own students often express a (not always conscious) commitment to the latter two as reasons for their relativist beliefs. For educators the challenge is to achieve a balance

between respecting the richness of religious and cultural diversity and teaching people that respect for diversity does not imply moral relativism.

This, what Fricker (2000, 157) calls 'an enormously influential Zeitgeist', is hard to dislodge in practice. Paden (Erion 2005, 128) suggests a two-pronged response to student relativism. First, lecturers need to challenge the idea that respect for diversity implies that beliefs cannot or should not be subjected to critical scrutiny. Second, the idea that arguments can *force* someone to change their beliefs can be investigated by problematising the idea that 'force' here is the same as 'the sort of physical compulsion that we would be more likely to recognise as morally problematic'.

Individuals need to learn how to make moral decisions that take account of causes that go beyond the self. This involves the ability to construct reasonable arguments that include all stakeholders (especially the ones we prefer to ignore or forget) in decision-making processes, and to be sensitive to context. In class, I have noticed how students experience the limitations of general codes and principles to guide everyday actions, and how they become painfully aware of the limitations of 'external' authoritarian guidance through traditional (often religious) family values. Students start to realise that they are part of many cultures and that culture includes reference to the often conflicting values of their social class or group, to their place, to their language(s), to their ethnicity, to their religion.

Reasoning is a situated embodied human practice, which is neither a universal, nor a necessary, mechanical application of logical rules (Burbules 1995, 85–88). A situated[12] approach to moral education does not necessarily involve slipping into moral relativism. Tolerance does not imply an uncritical acceptance of what others do or say, because a distinction needs to be made between moral values and what people regard as valuable. Just because someone expresses what is valuable to them it does not follow that a moral value has been asserted. It may be someone's choice to do something, but it does not follow that the choice is morally justifiable, otherwise the implication would be that all choices have equal worth. Reasons need to be sought that are independent of choice, and that are justified on their own merit (Taylor 1991). Students need to be taught the important distinction between a *cultural motivation* and a *moral justification* for an action. It is possible to be tolerant of someone and still disagree with them, not because we feel threatened, but because we have strong reasons to disagree.

Consequentialist and principle-based arguments

Students learn through collaborative enquiry to critically evaluate the reasons and arguments for or against corporal punishment. Many are of a consequentialist kind. The justification for the use of violence is often on the basis of the consequences of the action. Popular reasons are: it improves academic achievement, 'enhances character development, is effective, quick and relatively easy, achieves temporary compliance, makes people feel powerful, contributes to rapid reduction or elimination of unwanted behavioural patterns and facilitates discrimination learning, is needed as a last resort…induces respect, is the only language that children

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understand, and that behavioural problems increase in its absence' (Maree and Cherian 2004, 76). Against corporal punishment, popular reasons are: reduction of self-esteem, increase in anxiety, fear and aggression, (self) destructive behaviours, a shortened attention span and impaired academic achievement.

Philosophical practice requires that everyone in class examines the assumptions on which their moral beliefs rest and also analyses and evaluates the implicit principles of these arguments. One major challenge is the opposing force of instrumental rationality: the calculation of the most economical means to achieve certain ends. Success is measured in terms of efficiency. Learners, but also teachers, are often treated as instruments or 'raw materials' to achieve certain objectives. The treatment of individuals as ends in themselves, as persons with dignity in their own right can be sacrificed to achieve a particular result and is justified by it. The question 'what is the morally right thing to do?' is often subservient to the question 'what is the most efficient thing to do?' when choosing between two courses of action. It assumes that it is possible to address the former question without addressing the moral dimension of the decision. However, the moral point of view is not one among a competing set of perspectives between which an educator can choose. The 'moral point of view' is not optional in this sense. It always asserts itself, because our actions involve the rights and interests of others. Ethics emanates from the realities of educational practice, rather than being applied to these realities (Campbell 2003, 10).

As part of the Ethics course, the students have been exploring the rights and wrongs of corporal punishment. As a guideline, they used the definition as introduced in the lecture: corporal punishment is 'the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but no injury, for the purpose of correcting or controlling the child's behavior' (Straus and Donnelly 2005, 3). The fact that corporal punishment is illegal does not bother all (student) teachers in the sense that it does not inform whether as a matter of fact they will or will not use corporal punishment. As one student put it: 'hitting learners is just the norm'. Judgements about the rightfulness or wrongness of this kind of punishment seem to depend more on students' memories of their own school experiences, their backgrounds and current school practices in and around Johannesburg. Making student reports: 'it's a taboo so people don't really talk about it'. I suspect that, as a result, many conversations about corporal punishment have little depth and knowledge base.

Student teachers reported on their own experiences during teaching practice and how they had witnessed physical abuse in schools with baseball bats, rulers, blackboard erasers and even sjamboks. One student observed a learner being beaten because he did not have 'his shirt tucked in his trousers'. Another student reported that white teachers ask black colleagues to 'sort out' misbehaving young black learners, before returning them to class. Sometimes senior management is also involved. Reportedly, even older learners are asked by teachers to discipline younger learners physically.

Various arguments for and against corporal punishments surfaced during the lectures and tutorials. The students have been asked to imagine what they would do

if they saw a teacher about to hit a badly behaved boy in class during teaching practice. *Against* taking action, the following rich arguments were offered:

a. It is good for the boy. He needs discipline. He can then get on with his work.
b. Teacher can get on with lessons, so that is good for the other learners.
c. Teachers are like mothers and after all they are in 'loco parentis'. Parents do it, so why not the teachers?
d. Even my university tutors tell us to drop it.
e. Respect should be maintained. Teacher is older and deserves respect.
f. If the teachers didn't do it in this school he might get hurt himself.
g. The boy will become scared so he won't do it again.
h. I was hit at school and it didn't do me any harm.
i. He deserves it ('Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth').
j. Other learners will behave better now (deterrence).
k. It will improve his character.
l. Punishing him leads to less unhappiness overall.
m. I don't want to be a trouble maker. They might not want me at the school anymore, so I let Wits down.
n. The school might not want to take more student teachers anymore, putting a strain on other schools.
o. It might have been the first time.
p. It's unprofessional. It undermines the teacher.
q. Teacher may lose her job and/or be reprimanded.
r. I am a guest.
s. It is the norm in my community to hit children.
t. I might fail if I complain.

I spent much time collecting and discussing the various arguments for and against. We explored the argument that, because it did not harm *them* when they went to school (see 'h'), hitting learners is not harmful. This was identified as a good example of the naturalistic fallacy. The pedagogy makes room for students to learn an ethical language through enquiries that are directly related to their own lived experiences. For example, I explained the fallacy and then challenged them to justify this 'jump' in reasoning: e.g. someone could argue that children have less experience and therefore do not know as well as adults what is good for them. The students learned—that—just because something 'is' the case, it does not follow logically that something 'ought' to be the case.

Like the reasons offered in the corporal punishment literature, most of the above arguments focus first and foremost on the *consequences* of the decision not to intervene when confronted with it. For example, students expressed a real concern about possibly failing their teaching practice if they intervened, but concern about the consequences for the teacher's future also emerged. After all, they said, they did not know enough about the school to make informed judgements. Perhaps it had been a mere 'one-off'? One measured response was offered by a black male student:

For me taking action depends on the right one has as a student teacher. I think that we are not yet allowed to exercise my power or authority. I have limitations and I do not know much about what is happening in that particular school. Therefore, I still believe that one must try to analyse the situation before reacting merely out of impulse without thinking about the consequences.

Although at first sight the argument that corporal punishment is morally justifiable because the teacher can get on with her lessons is a consequentialist argument, real

principled concern was expressed about the fairness of spending too much time on one learner at the expense of all the others. After all, the other learners have a right to an education too. Also, many students genuinely believe that hitting learners is good for their moral character and makes them a better person, as one student comments:

> You are helping a child to be a better person by hitting him, so that is the morally right thing to do.

Such arguments are taken seriously in a situated approach to moral education. After all, the moral judgements of my students are (also) an expression of the cultures they have been born into.

Corradi-Fiumara (1990, 31) reminds us to pay 'thoughtful attention' and to listen philosophically to our students, which requires a particular kind of pedagogical effort, attention, and bodily presence (see, e.g. Stickney 2010, 72–3). Such listening is 'both accepting and critical, trusting and diffident, irrepressible and yet consoling' (Corradi-Fiumara 1990, 90). Such radical and critical openness to the 'other' avoids objectivist/relativist dichotomies: by staying with the 'intermediate' it is possible to reach beyond the given. In practice, this requires a self-critical awareness of one's own procedures and assumptions that opens up a space to think 'otherwise'. It is the *experience* of the embodied process, not necessarily the right answers or products of the enquiry process that is educative, although the process requires content knowledge to be publicly reproduced, analysed and reconstructed.

For example, the arguments in the list marked with 'n', 'o' and 'q' were initially identified as excuses, or rationalisations, but perhaps too hastily by me, the lecturer? Initially my thought was that although hitting the learner may have been the first occasion it happened, nevertheless if it was thought to be wrong, then the morally right thing to do would be to intervene – whether one was a guest in the school or not. Dismissing as an excuse or rationalisation, the idea that speaking out undermines the teacher was openly discussed in class, and the enquiry focused on what it means to be 'a guest in school' and 'a professional' in different cultures. Despite having witnessed something illegal, some argued that maintaining harmony and good relationship was paramount (especially as a guest in school). Similar enquiries were initiated about students' concern about 'letting down' the university (loyalty?) and the argument that the teacher is older and therefore deserves respect (e). Implicit moral and cultural values surfaced and their explication made it possible to engage in conceptual enquiries about notions such as respect, its culturally situated meaning and the problematisation of the idea of universal validity. In the tutorials, students discovered the different meanings they and others attached to core concepts, such as 'respect'. It became apparent that for many black African students and lecturers the notion of respect was closely related to manners, and associated with obedience to rules, elders and to the community.[13] This was contrasted with a notion of respect that implies equality and equal worth between people whatever their social status.

African moral theory and ethical enquiry

I thank my students' courage in disclosing illegal practices and the honesty they brought to our enquiries that we could start to explore the moral complexity of

corporal punishment. However, despite my positive experiences with the pedagogy I was still concerned that I might have been silencing some students by imposing a pedagogy that emphasises philosophical thinking that has its origins in the west. In Africa, individuals often see themselves as part of a larger order – their community and/or a hierarchical cosmic order. Taylor argues that a critical attitude towards authoritarian moral guidance is 'the other side' of the democratisation 'coin' (Taylor 1991).

In my reasoning approach to moral education, was I assuming a western preference for an autonomous Enlightenment subject at the expense of solidarity and harmony? (see, e.g Metz 2009). Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) are critical of the rash generalisations involved in speaking of 'the west' and 'Africa'. They argue that the alternative proposal to use African moral theory to underpin democratic education in SA assumes dangerous essentialism – akin to 'apartheid political and educational ideologies'. They maintain that this involves ascribing a shared cultural identity to all Africans, thereby ignoring the extent in which communal identities are dynamic and individuals can choose to shift identities (Enslin and Horsthemke 2004, 551).

The notion of *ubuntu* is central to African moral theory and is the idea that a human being is defined by her relationship with other beings: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ('I am, because we are') (Horsthemke 2009, 205–6). However, *ubuntu* is far from unique and is also part of 'western' humanist and post-Cartesian philosophies (Enslin and Horsthemke 2004, 552). It has also been claimed by an African philosopher of education that *ubuntu* is in harmony with the non-dualist nature of the community of enquiry pedagogy which nurtures students to think for themselves through thinking with others (Ndofirepi 2011, 250). Commitment to pluralism in discursive practices should make us cautious about the ethical and political dimensions of issues of power and who decides what counts as rational and reasonable (see, e.g. Fricker 2000, 2007).

Another key feature of African moral theory is decision-making through *consensus* (Metz 2009). The community of enquiry pedagogy put forward in this article thrives on *dissensus* – not consensus. Also, moral judgement rests on critique, not on convention. It assumes that each student is unique, an end in herself and free in the sense that she has the potential to do something that has not been done before (Biesta 2010, 82). Drawing on Arendt, Biesta reminds us that moral agency is always in the context of existing with others, and we manifest ourselves through our actions. The ontological move from essence to existence offers the most profound critique of the utilitarian *ubuntu* principle. The pedagogy's interdependency of self and others, of emotions and cognition, exposes the false dichotomy between liberalism and communalism, objectivism and relativism. The real emancipatory force of post-modernism, Biesta argues, is not to be found in affirming our own tribal identities,[14] because subjectivity is not about identity (an essence we all share), but is relational and existential. Transformation at a deep level[15] involves thinking about subjectivity differently. Subjectivity is not about reproducing the implicit values of the rational community, but has to do with acting in a public space (Biesta 2006, 61) and with taking responsibility for our actions. This requires moving beyond the binary opposites and dichotomies we think with and live by in SA. Philosophical teaching makes it possible to start talking about our experiences in more subtly differentiated

ways and to minimise the social distancing which is the result of discourses in terms of race. As one student comments:

> And black people are different. Some of us are from Natal and some of us from Limpopo and I have different ideas about corporal punishment.

His comment confirms what Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011, 5) recognise as the complex diversity not only across students, but also *within* each group of students, where race might be the only commonality, and a combination of factors such as religion, demographics, culture, age and gender may influence students' beliefs about corporal punishment.

An atmosphere of trust in class has made it possible for at least some students to be honest and to disclose even their own abusive practices during teaching practice. Student teachers (as well as staff[16]) need to be taught reasonable paths through the moral maze, and should learn to distinguish for themselves the arguments they (often implicitly) use to defend their choices about how they punish their learners. Laws and rules will make little difference, unless our (student) teachers believe in them. Any optimism about the eradication of physical punishment in Africa, because of recent legislations and policies (see, e.g. Vohito 2011), is not only misplaced,[17] but also dangerous as it drives the practice underground.

There is an intricate link between, on the one hand, the teaching and learning methods educators use in class, and on the other, the need for punishment. I have argued for a pedagogy that makes room for students to explore in a non-judgmental manner the beliefs they live by as starting points for rigorous ethical enquiry into the deeper reasons for those beliefs as a means to develop ethical knowledge. At the same time, a necessary condition of the pedagogy is to connect with students' own experiences as starting points for philosophical enquiries. This results in students being more engaged and stimulated and therefore less likely to misbehave. The role of punishment is dramatically reduced when teaching and learning methods are used that are engaging and more inclusive. So, the course's benefits were twofold. Room was made for student teachers to develop their moral reasoning and moral knowledge by engaging with the beliefs students as a matter of fact hold, without moralising or slipping into moral relativism. Second, it offered students the experience of a relational pedagogy that they themselves could introduce in their own future classrooms. This in turn might reduce the possibility as teachers to opt to resort to dehumanising disciplinary measures.

Notes

1. Our own quantitative study with some 1500 student teachers, however, suggests a more complex picture. For example, suburban schools in white, middle class affluent areas are also implicated in this illegal practice. The children living in these suburbs do not attend the local government schools, but private schools, whereas black children from townships

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are transported daily to these schools. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss all the complexities our study revealed.

2. For a comprehensive overview, see Prinsloo (2005).

3. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 states that 'No person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner'(Section 10(1)) and 'Any person who contravenes subsection (1) is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a sentence that could be imposed for assault' (Section 10(2)). From Maree and Cherian (2004, 72).

4. See, e.g., the reference to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child in Clacherty, Donald, and Clacherty (2004).

5. Morrell argues that a neglected explanation for the use of corporal punishment in school is the support for it in the home and that there is therefore a tension between the prohibition of corporal punishment in schools and the increase in parental involvement in the affairs of schools (Morrell 2001).

6. What is not questioned, however, is the need for punishment in the first place. A conceptual distinction needs to be made between discipline and punishment, but there is no sufficient space in this article to discuss the conceptual complexities. See especially Peters (1966, Chapter 10), who argues that discipline is the submission to internally or externally imposed rules or some kind of order, whilst punishment might be one way – but very difficult to justify mean – of preserving discipline (267–8). Punishment needs to be avoided as it produces estrangement (273, 279). See also: Peters (1973).

7. Representing 16 million Christians in SA, the South African Council of Churches called for an abolition of the corporal punishment of children in the home and elsewhere in 2009 (Vorito 2011, 78), but it seems to have made little impact on everyday beliefs and actions in SA schools.

8. I agree with Musschenga (2009) when he argues that intuitive moral judgments can be wrong and that deliberate moral reasoning is not only necessary to complement intuitive judgements, but also to critique and override them. Conscience can be a guide for both good and bad moral actions.

9. For a critical analysis of the ambiguous notion of the internal voice of 'conscience' as a guide for ethical decision-making, see Straughan (1988, 78–80). He concludes that *rational* conscience is not an 'inner' authority individuals can choose to 'obey', but refers to judgements and decisions individuals have chosen freely to accept as morally valid and are committed to (79). Conscience in the *irrational* sense is irrelevant for moral education as the internalisation of social rules and commands does not inform about the *moral* dimensions of any given situation. The concept of conscience has a useful purpose though in that it highlights the 'feeling' component of ethical decision-making: 'moral agents necessarily *care* about moral issues, *feel committed* to moral principles, *regret* moral mistakes and are *ashamed* of moral failings' (80).

10. This distinction I have taken from Law (2006, 17).

11. For example, this year I set the following assignment to my 550 second-year BEd students in a *Philosophical Reasoning* course. With the support of some articles and the internet, they had to write a dialogue about the pros and cons of affirmative action as an admission policy for the selection of students coming into higher education. The best dialogues were subsequently performed in front of the staff and other students, and used as a starting point for a debate about the fairness of affirmative action in this particular context.

12. The term 'socially situated' is widely used in feminist philosophy and Fricker suggests that it was first used by Donna Haraway in 1988 (Fricker 2007, 3, footnote 2).

13. This is so engrained within cultures in Southern Africa that I have not only seen examples of students, but also of lecturers, who are reluctant to challenge or make requests of colleagues in senior positions on the basis of respect.

14. For example, you often hear the claim that people do not choose their identities. These subjectivities are 'given', but such constructions of identity are essentialist and unhelpful for transformation at a deep level.

15. As opposed to the superficial approach to transformation that assumes that change in prejudice with regard to difference can be measured in quantitative terms (e.g. the numbers of generic black members of staff in senior management positions in H.E.), the

necessity to generalise (all whites, blacks, etc.) runs counter to the necessary move to de-essentialise human subjectivity.

16. It was ironic that when I presented an earlier version of this paper at a conference an academic in the audience responded with the consequentialist argument that children need corporal punishment in order to prepare them for society (assuming that the aim of education is primarily socialisation).

17. Discussions about different theoretical constructions of childhood in relation to punishment is curiously missing in the SA literature on corporal punishment, which mainly focuses on children's rights and legal infringements. See, e.g. Durrant and Smith (2011, 27–42), where evolving theories of childhood are included in their global overview of corporal punishment, but not referred to in the section about Africa, where the solution and the optimism for change is located in legal measures (80). Moreover, Smith's (2011) chapter is limited to ecological, psychological and sociological theories of childhood, and ignores philosophical and ethical perspectives. I have argued in this article that transformation of school practices has to be located in relational experiential encounters that critically challenge the beliefs people as a matter of fact live by, and this includes philosophical engagement with prejudices about (black) children.

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