



THE EDUCATION CONVERSATIONS

RESTORING OUR TEACHERS' DIGNITY: CREATING ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR TEACHERS

23 April 2019

Setting the Scene

The Education Conversations is an initiative by Kagiso Trust, the University of Johannesburg's Faculty of Education and BRIDGE. Established in 2012 as a platform for education stakeholders and society at large to engage on issues critical to the further development and improvement of education, this dialogue series encourages open discussion and enables diverse voices to be heard.

The current landscape has seen teachers becoming victims of abuse and violence from learners, parents and society in general. The conversation explored some of the contributory factors and suggested ways of addressing the challenges that teachers are experiencing. This overview highlights the main issues and themes discussed, to give a sense of the perspectives and concerns of the panel and audience.

Panel Presentations

Presentation 1

Anne Baker of the Catholic Institute of Education (CIE) described a restorative approach to discipline, which promotes respectful relationships and creates a safe, peaceful climate for teaching and learning.

Anne Baker is the Deputy Director of the Catholic Institute of Education responsible for operations, policy and advocacy. Anne represents SADC Catholic education on the Council of the International Catholic Education Office. She has taught and served in leadership in Catholic schools for 13 years, has co-authored books on conflict management, school governance and restorative justice practices, and has a deep understanding of the challenges faced by schools and school communities.

Background

The banning of corporal punishment left many teachers feeling powerless in the classroom. Disciplinary hearings have not provided a viable alternative, and many schools and teachers are still using corporal and other forms of abusive punishment. In this, South Africa continues to face the legacy of colonial and apartheid approaches to discipline, which emphasised blame and punishment and socialised learners to accept corporal punishment. Many adults who experienced corporal punishment as children view it as 'normal', but it is now known to have long-term detrimental effects on mental and emotional health.

"Restorative discipline is about bringing safety and, more importantly, hope and dignity to all members of the school community."

In an effort to protect children from the damaging effects of corporal punishment and to support schools and teachers with effective alternative methods of discipline, the CIE developed their *Building Peaceful Schools* programme. This is based on the concepts and practices of restorative justice.

Restorative justice began formally in New Zealand's criminal justice system when Maori elders called for an alternative to imprisonment for young men who broke the law that would make them take responsibility for the consequences of their actions and help to put right the harm they caused. It works by strengthening relationships and managing conflict and tensions by repairing harm as a way of building community.

Using restorative discipline in schools

In schools, the restorative approach is essentially about creating a "safe, nurturing, holistic, just and peaceful" school climate. If the school climate is one of conflict and fear, the quality of learning suffers. In schools with a positive climate there is a sense of community, people are treated with respect, rights are balanced against responsibilities, and both teachers and learners are able to thrive.

Instead of using external means such as fear of punishment (and possibly rewarding good behaviour) to control children's behaviour, restorative discipline helps children learn self-discipline and positive decision-making.

On a practical level, restorative discipline uses the circle as a methodology and means of communicating. The process goes well beyond simply establishing what happened. It involves exploring the thoughts and feelings of everyone concerned to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and consequences, as well as determining the restorative action to be taken. Sitting in a circle allows for eye contact, enables listening, and encourages group awareness and respectful interaction. "I messages" encourage people to take responsibility and, because people speak from their own experience, promote understanding. The circle also encourages a sense of empathy toward others in the group, which in turn encourages an attitude of fairness and prompts people to want to put things right.

Trained peer mediators also play an important part in restorative discipline by defusing low level conflicts amongst learners and calling timeously on responsible adults when something serious arises.

Transitioning to restorative discipline

"Keep in mind that we are preparing our children for the 21st century – and that this does not only mean technological readiness. The competencies they will need can only be developed through social and emotional learning which restorative discipline practices help to develop.

The restorative approach works best when the whole school is involved. Anne cautioned that it takes time to transition from retributive to restorative discipline, and that it cannot succeed without a convinced and dedicated change leader. At the same time the change has to begin with the individual, as each of us has our own attitudes towards children, discipline and ways of dealing with conflict based on our unique experiences in our families of origin, schools and communities. It is vital to prepare teachers by helping them to reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs.

In closing, Anne noted the importance of kindness and care in interactions with learners. Part of the challenge for teachers is that "we teach who we are¹". The restorative approach gives teachers the power to influence how they affect, and are perceived by, those with whom they work, especially children.

Anyone wanting to know more about restorative discipline is welcome to contact Anne Baker on

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Anne Baker, Deputy Director,
Catholic Institute of Education

¹ Parker Palmer, in the book *The Courage to Teach*

Presentation 2

Eddie Kekana of SADTU presented a broad analysis of the issues and proposed a comprehensive, collaborative approach to restoring conducive school environments and teachers' dignity and confidence.

Eddie Kekana is currently the Provincial Chairperson of the South African Democratic Teachers Union in Gauteng. He is also the Deputy Chairperson of the Government Employees Fund and serves in SADTU's Curtis Nkondo Professional Development Institute as its Director. Eddie has been in the teaching fraternity since 1988, and is currently serving as Principal of the Winnie Mandela Secondary School in Tembisa. He has participated in various education formations promoting quality and equality in education, such as the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) and the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC).

Impact on society and economic development

South Africa's social and economic development is critically dependent on our ability to provide both quality and equality of education. This is being threatened by high levels of ill-discipline and violence in schools, and disregard of teachers' authority. Schools are no longer providing safe environments for teaching and learning, and in some cases the quality of teaching and learning is declining.

Mr Kekana emphasised the need for a collaborative approach to what is essentially a societal problem, and welcomed the opportunity provided by *Education Conversations* to explore the issues. Teachers were integral to interacting with learners and played a critical role in society. A failure to mitigate the challenges being experienced by teachers would lead to teachers leaving the profession, and this would have serious implications for society.



Eddie Kekana, Gauteng Provincial
Chairperson, SADTU

Discipline and parental involvement

"We cannot over-emphasise how troubled our educational landscape is currently. Unless we resolve these challenges and find ways to protect and nurture teachers, we risk compromising the productivity of our institutions and our development as a country."

Eddie Kekana also noted the close relationship between school discipline and parental involvement in their children's education, and suggested that together these two factors held the key to solving the problems in the educational environment. He called on parents to accept their central role in raising their children, and to become more closely involved in school processes – by maintaining communication with teachers, volunteering in schools, participating in learning at home, and helping their children to make decisions about their educational future.

Here is a brief summary of the main points addressed by Mr Kekana:

Key factors contributing to the erosion of school environments and decline in the respect afforded to teachers:

- Disrespect and violence on social media
- Poor socio-economic conditions, ill-discipline and violence in communities
- The rise in drug abuse, with learners being targeted by drug pushers
- A rise in alcohol consumption amongst young people
- Family disintegration, child headed families, and a lack of care for children

- Parents' poor behaviour, and children's imitation of this
- An escalation of poverty in some communities
- Improper relationships between teachers and learners

Proposals for creating conducive school environments and restoring the dignity and confidence of teachers:

- The involvement of well-trained learner leaders
- Clearly articulated, viable discipline policies, conduct codes and rules
- SMTs to be proactive and effective in carrying out their responsibilities
- Collaboration of stakeholders including law enforcement, social development and community building organisations in fostering safe school environments
- Increased parental accountability for the well-being and discipline of their children
- Increased parental involvement in educational processes
- Increased positive involvement of the broader community in raising children (including other professions, NGOs)
- Revising initial teacher education programmes to focus on developing relevant skills that will motivate teachers and give them confidence

"Collaboration is critical to ensuring a safe educational environment. Let us join hands to face the challenges and to work together to create safe schooling conditions characterised by utmost discipline, order and mutual respect, to attain our national objectives as a society."

Presentation 3

Linford Molaodi, NTA best teacher awardee, concentrated on issues affecting teachers' professional identity and the particular challenges experienced by young teachers.

Linford Molaodi recently won the best teacher award in the category *Excellence in technology enhanced education* at the National Teaching Awards for 2019. For the past three years he has taught in the rural area of Ga Masemola, where he is confronting under-resourced environments with his shoe-string methodologies. He formed a community of practice to help physical science teachers deepen their content and pedagogical knowledge through experiential learning techniques. He also assists principals with professional development strategies and provides advice to circuit managers on ICT integration in schools. He is a founding member of TeaSterl Projects, an organisation encouraging educators' use of ICT in teaching. Linford is currently completing an (MEd) in Information and Communication Technology at the University of Johannesburg.

Linford believes that teachers have brought many of the challenges they are currently experiencing on themselves. He also believes that teachers hold the key to restoring their dignity and prestige, and can achieve this by improving the way they present themselves. In essence this would mean protecting their professional identity, and earning the trust and respect of learners and parents.

The key ideas as summarised here:

Having respect for the profession – Many teachers present themselves unprofessionally on social media, and he urged teachers to exercise restraint when posting.

Earning trust and respect – Teachers need to earn trust and respect by ensuring that what they offer provides value. It is not enough to simply provide content. This is easily obtainable from various sources, and learners today expect more. Teachers need to be able to engage with their learners on issues, inspire them and develop their critical

"The Fourth Industrial Revolution will not replace teachers *per se*, but it will replace tasks within the teaching profession. If teachers are just administrators in the classroom, they can be replaced."

thinking abilities. Teachers should also keep abreast of ICT developments in the education space, mentor learners and contribute to the development of community.



Linford Molaodi, NTA best teacher awardee for excellence in technology enhanced education

Discipline and parental involvement – Teachers need to be able to lead and inspire parents to help them discipline the children. In Linford’s experience, teachers who earn the trust of learners and parents are unlikely to experience disrespect and ill-discipline.

Creating a peaceful environment – Linford sees this as a normal part of teaching. “As teachers we need to understand that part of our professional identify is to create peace in our world. Whenever we come up with a solution we need to ask ourselves whether it is peaceful, and if it is not, to stop doing it.”

Love for children – Teachers’ attitudes and behaviour towards children are crucial. Some teachers dehumanise the children they teach, for example by referring to them as “material” (“the material I have to work with this year ...”). Teachers would do well to reflect on the personal qualities they demonstrate in their classrooms by asking, “Am I a good teacher? Would I be the ideal

teacher to teach my own child?”

Developing a sense of community within the school – Principals, SMTs and teachers all share responsibility for developing the school community. It can be disrupted if, for example, the leadership displays ignorance or arrogance, or older staff members treat younger members disrespectfully. It is also important to develop a spirit of sharing, especially to spread good ideas and practices.

Negative experiences of young teachers – Many young teachers are capable of making a real difference in their schools, but they are restricted by the obstacles placed in their path by authoritarian school leadership. Conditions are worse for young women teachers, who also have to contend with patriarchal attitudes.

“Creative and competent young teachers are leaving the profession because the implicit system is suffocating their autonomy and diminishing their contributions.”

To address these problems, Linford called for effective mentoring and for the establishment of a dedicated forum, within the DBE, to represent the interests and address the needs and grievances of young teachers. It should be led jointly by young teachers and experienced teachers who understand the value of mentoring.

Q&A Session with the Audience

This section highlights the main areas of discussion.

Programme Director, Professor Maximus Sefotho, urged audience members to be constructive in their deliberations. “Solutions for South Africa lie in our own hands. Are the existing theories applicable to our context now? Where do we go from here?”



Approaches to discipline:

- Government did not manage the change from corporal punishment well, or do enough to empower teachers with alternatives. This is a systemic issue that needs a huge investment, determination, and willingness for the long haul. It is not something you can give teachers a crash course in.
- We cannot take a blanket approach, but need to be open to looking at each problem and finding its causes. We need to equip learners with other ways to deal with problems, instead of using violence.
- Discipline in schools is a broader problem that we need to deal with as a country. Many young people face unemployment after they complete matric, which surely has a negative effect on their motivation to study, which then impacts on discipline in the schools.
- Leadership is important – when the leadership is strong in a school, there will be discipline.
- Parents are eager to send their children to schools that achieve good results, and are willing to accept the use of corporal punishment by these schools.

My wife and I were both beaten as children, so we were two people produced by a violent context. When we had our first child, it was hard to know how to discipline. We soon realised we had to create a violence-free household. When you do that, it means you have to invest more with your child, engage more, and talk more. Many years later we could reap the results of that approach, and our children were acknowledged in their schools for their self-discipline. This was because we stayed focussed, and said, “We draw the line.”

Can we as parents, teachers and government do the same, and commit to raising children without violence?

- Poor discipline in schools is not just a South African problem. All over the world we see parents abdicating their responsibilities. Adults lack self-discipline, and this trickles down to children, so they don’t learn to discipline themselves.
- Teachers are not trained to work with children’s emotional and social challenges, and they cannot be expected to deal with them on their own. There needs to be collaboration in the school space between teachers, social workers, and educational and counselling psychologists to intervene on these aspects and give children proper support.

The teachers’ role

- Dignity goes along with respect – a teacher cannot just claim respect, but has to earn it by doing more than just delivering content. As a caring professional, teachers are there as a parent, a friend, and a mediator of knowledge and learning. Teachers who show this kind of care for learners will earn respect and trust. They will be able to provide better value as teachers, because learners will feel they can express opinions, which then gives the teacher a context for engaging with them.
- Teachers are now in a different situation and need to see a different role for themselves. Information is available everywhere, so there is no shame if learners know more about something than the teacher. We need to approach this with humility.
- With the 4IR we are going to see many teaching tasks becoming automated. But this will not affect those areas of value where teachers are essential, such as developing

“It is a fact that we live in a violent, conflict-ridden society. Some of us, when talking about discipline, see ourselves simply as victims, and the school as a mirror of that society. Let us rather see the school as a window, that we can look through and see a better society emerging.”

critical thinking skills, problem solving and working with others. For these areas teachers must have the ability to be flexible (for e.g. by showing that there is more than one way to work through a problem.) This requires teachers to have a higher level of understanding, and the confidence to demonstrate flexible thinking in front of a class. These are the kinds of practices and methodologies that lead to self-dignity, and we need to proclaim them in the classroom.

- We are in a system that does not recognise the value of creativity in teaching.
- Teachers have to be prepared to create critical, creative classroom environments. A lot of the educational structures that teachers use depend on memorisation and neglect the evaluative, so they don't engage children critically. If the classroom environment doesn't engage learners critically, they will get bored and the teacher can easily lose control of the classroom.
- As teachers we need to start with "I" and not wait for Government to find solutions.
- Teachers have a role to assert themselves and their authority within the school and classroom so that their work will be recognised by society. There are many good teachers out there, who are prepared to give their all, and we need to give credit where it is due.



Teacher competence

- There is a strong link between teacher competence and dignity, which is manifested in respect.
- In comparison with other professions where new entrants have to meet stringent requirements, the process of becoming an accredited teacher is not as rigorous. There is a political incentive for this but it also means there are gaps in ITE and the balance between quantity and quality of teachers is compromised. That is where the root of the problem with teacher competency lies – we are so desperate to get teachers that we compromise the process of training.
- Our teachers need a lot of motivation. Management theory identifies the requirements for people to feel motivated in a working situation as: clarity on what is expected; the competence to do the job; the necessary opportunities and resources; and constructive feedback on their performance.
- Fitting in professional development can be really challenging and teachers need to have options. Short online courses make it possible for teachers to access relevant courses that are interesting to them, and that they can do themselves, even on their phones, in their own time.

"The focus in schools is all on the needs of learners – teachers also need to be cared for."

Challenges of younger teachers

- Young teachers are frustrated and demotivated by having their efforts to teach more creatively stifled by school management. This point was illustrated by a young science teacher who explained that his school's Wifi was only turned on when the deputy was teaching. "We young teachers bring in videos and other IT resources, but mostly it ends up that we can't use them. If we try to stand up to management it turns into a fight, which is traumatising for us. There needs to be an anti-bullying programme for school management."
- "We are bombarded with what is wrong in education. It would be helpful to have information on the good things that work, especially for those of us teaching in township and rural schools"
- One of the worst experiences as a new teacher is dealing with the negativity of other teachers. "We find that many teachers really don't want to be teachers. We constantly get asked why we are teaching, and told we won't last a year. "

"It has been wonderful to hear the voices of the younger speakers and students. It is touching and exciting and gives hope for the future."
(Audience member)

Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks



Professor Caroline Long, Department of Childhood Education, Soweto Campus of the University of Johannesburg

Professor Long reiterated the importance of teacher agency, proposing that teachers use goal setting to energise themselves and take action towards achieving those goals. Everyone has the capacity for agency, although a negative environment could inhibit one's ability to express it. Professor Long urged teachers in this situation to work together to create or support the kind of conditions that would enable all the teachers in that environment to achieve their goals.



Mankodi Moitse, Kagiso Trust

Mankodi expressed the hope that teachers had found the conversation affirming, and recalled Sydney Hook's words: "Everyone who remembers his own education remembers the teachers ... The teacher is the heart of the educational system".

This session of **Education Conversations** confirmed the value of the dialogue series, as well as the value of supporting and drawing from one another. By combining their efforts, education stakeholders could improve the system and "build beautiful schools". The various audience inputs had been timely reminders of the importance of "what makes our young people and communities whole" and that "all learning matters". Mankodi also called for young people to join hands, "keep on learning" and ultimately become job creators.

