

# **Implementing Child-Friendly Classrooms through Positive Disciplining Practices**

By

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## **Introduction**

Children spend almost one third of their time in schools during their childhood. Therefore, schools are meant to be institutions which provide a safe, caring and orderly environment for students through school discipline. Schools use a variety of disciplinary techniques, among which corporal punishment is used to improve student's behaviour. Research conducted in Pakistani schools reveals that corporal punishment is a common and accepted form of discipline in schools. Teachers use corporal punishment because it results in immediate compliance. Most parents permit and support the use of corporal punishment in schools because it is deeply rooted in the child rearing and disciplining practices of Pakistani culture. Teachers use different forms of corporal punishment depending on the situation. A study in Sindh found that teachers regularly slap and beat students, twist their ears, hit them with the ruler, make them contort their bodies into '*murgas*' and make them stand in the scorching sun for a long time. Research has shown that the behaviour-modifying effects of corporal punishment do not last. Rather than effecting a positive change in children's behaviour, corporal punishment puts them at risk of immediate or long-lasting physical and psychological trauma. Furthermore, the prevalence of corporal punishment in schools has also been cited as one of the major reasons for students dropping out of school. Most importantly, corporal punishment sends the message to children that the use of physical aggression is an appropriate method to resolve differences and conflicts.

For developing a progressive and peaceful society, corporal punishment must be prohibited by law and caretakers of children, both parents and teachers must be educated in positive disciplining methods. The core message must be that "no violence against children is justifiable; all violence against children is preventable" (Report of the UN Secretary General on Violence against children 2006).

## **Initiatives:**

The two of us (Cassandra and Ummelaila) were selected from the Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development to attend a month's training programme at the Plymouth State University- New Hampshire PSU-NH, USA in collaboration with the Idara-e-Taleem o Agahi (ITA) on Promoting Environmental Stewardship and Active Citizenship, where one of the tasks was to develop a master action plan on any issue related to our society to promote active citizenship on return to our context.

To further this initiative, we developed our master action plans at the PSU-NH under the guidance and support of Ms Kim Rawson and Ms Blake considering this issue to be pertinent to our society. The action plan was developed, keeping in mind the realities of our schools where children are becoming victims of corporal punishment daily, we decided to address the issue of reducing corporal punishment as a first step to eliminate corporal punishment from the schools of Karachi.

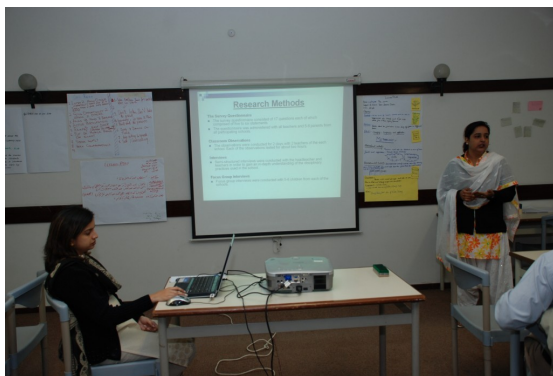
## **Implementation Phase**

The aim of our action plan was to facilitate teachers understanding and application about child-friendly classrooms and to impart the culture of positive disciplining practices through the implementation of a no corporal punishment policy in schools. To achieve this aim, we conducted the following activities: conducted a one week training programme, development and implementation of the policy at the school level.

### *Training Phase*

To address this issue, we conducted a one week training programme at AKU-IED for 10 (2 from the private sector and 8 from the public) teachers from both the government and private sector schools. The aim of this training was to eliminate corporal punishment from the schools of Karachi by educating teachers with the knowledge and skills to use positive discipline methods so as to educate children to realise their full potentials as well and the development of a no corporal punishment policy for their respective schools.

To achieve this aim, a training programme was held from the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2009 to 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2009 from 9 am to 3 pm. The first five days focused on developing participants understanding on the concepts of corporal punishment, child rights and child development, build their capacity to use positive disciplinary strategies and develop a no corporal punishment policy in order to create child-friendly schools. To further the successful implementation of the *no corporal punishment policy*, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2009, we invited Mr Baloch Memon (District Officer- Training and Academic) and his assistant Ms Rehana Naz and principals/head teachers of the participating schools to attend a session where the participants presented their learning and future strategies on implementing their individual *No Corporal Punishment policy* for their schools. This session proved to be beneficial as most of the principals and the DO showed keen interest and support in the implementation of the no corporal punishment policy as they realized the importance of the eliminating this issue from our schools.



The Facilitators conducting a session for the DO and Principals



A few teachers presenting their action plans at the presentation



Mr. Baloch Memon (DO- Training and Academic with assistant Ms Rehana Naz attentively listening to the presentations)

### *Policy development at the school level*

On returning to their schools, each of the trained teachers with the support of their principals and letter from the DO Training and Academic and the facilitators (Laila and myself) started implementing their action plans for the successful implementation of the “No Corporal Punishment” policy.

The trained teachers began by setting up a working committee which comprised of the head teacher/ principal, 5 teachers and 5 students representing each grade level of their respective schools. The first task was to educate this committee with the concepts of corporal punishment and positive disciplinary strategies. Once familiar with the concepts, they together reviewed and modified the policy developed at IED according to the needs of their school, making it more contextual and needs based. Later, this working committee conducted workshops for their school teachers, students, administration staff, support staff and parents. It has been seen that mostly children are administered corporal punishments by the gatekeeper or support staff etc. Therefore, a workshop was conducted individually for each of these groups so that they could be aware of the effects of the punishments they use on children and at the same time acquaint them with the positive disciplinary strategies. After which the developed policy was further developed and made ready to be implemented in the schools. Some schools have displayed this outside the principals’ office and in each class, while some have only displayed it outside the head teachers’ office so that all are aware of this policy. The purpose of displaying this policy is not only to hang it on the board but also so that the parents and children can freely register their complaints using the

different mechanism such as a complaint register and drop box without any fear of the teachers and other authorities.

While in some schools, where the reluctance of the school's board made it challenging for the trained teacher to implement the policy, the teacher along with a small working committee began the implementation at the classroom level. In this situation, the positive disciplining strategies were shared with the teachers and those teacher's who consider this issue important to address are using the positive disciplining strategies in their classrooms and have developed a policy for their classroom in collaboration with their students and have come up with monitoring mechanism to eliminate the use of corporal punishment from their classrooms. This attitude of the teacher and students has promoted a child-friendly environment where the teacher-student and student-student relationship has been strengthened. One of the teachers reported; I experience less inappropriate behaviour in my classroom as my students are accountable for their actions. I don't need to shout or hit them anymore". Another reported, "My students have become more disciplined in the classroom".

### *Challenges*

Due to some unavoidable circumstances, the study was delayed. One of the reasons for the delay was that after the training most of the schools were engaged in the examination due to the change in school year in the province of Sindh. Thus, we decided to work with the teachers on a one to one basis to assist them to further train the teachers of their schools and conduct parent sessions as we feel it is important to work as a team to deal with this issue. Therefore, during the months of February, March and April, we supported the teachers to implement the no corporal punishment policy in their schools rather than assisting them in the classroom.

Secondly, the whole process requires at least one whole year to implement as it was time consuming keeping in mind the other office related responsibilities that hinders the implementation of the action plan.

Thirdly, corporal punishment being such a sensitive issue, was not willing accepted by most of the teachers. Some teachers and staff especially the male teachers claimed that they don't need such training or policy as they don't use any kind of punishments in their classroom and other mentioned that in the past everyone was disciplined by giving punishments and improved so now why is this being made such a big issue. The use of corporal punishment has always brought about a positive change and children only listen when punished. Thus, we decided to work with individual teachers willing to use positive disciplinary strategies, hoping that they will change once they see the outcomes of this practice.

### *Successes*

The implementation phase of the study resulted to a number of successes.

Firstly, The District Officer- Training and Academic himself promised to support us in this regard and would like to use our strategy to implement it in other schools of Karachi. What could we want more than this!

Secondly, the teachers learned and practiced the positive discipline strategies to provide students a fear free learning environment. Previously they were not aware of these strategies.

Thirdly, the government school administration learned different ways such as report day, assembly gathering, by word of mouth to involve parents in the activities of the school. In most government schools, parent involvement is not a common practice in most government schools, thus through our activity on conducting a training session for parents, not all but a few parents attended the session.

Fourthly, the implementation of the school based *no corporal punishment* policy to eliminate corporal punishment from their schools. Some of the schools have developed a whole school policy, while others have decided to begin by initiating it at the classroom level. This is also a great achievement.

### **Way Forward**

Reflecting on the achievements of this small scale study provided by the PSU and ITA, we hope not to stop this work here but to further the initiatives by providing timely support to the teachers in their schools for the successful implementation of the policy. We do realize that 4 months are not sufficient to bring about change, thus, to sustain the work we need to continue this work in order to eliminate this issue from our society.