

THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR finds the nation in the midst of a growing controversy over a pertinent question: should teachers have the right to spank unruly students

It is a thorny issue that deeply concerns all parents, and not necessarily because their own children may be spanked. In many areas discipline has become an acute problem, and educators warn that, unless the minority of disorderly students is curbed, entire classes will suffer. As one principal says: "When one or two create disturbances daily, they halt the learning process for 30 or 40."

The debate—to spank or not to spank—already involves many educators, legislators, and experts in human behavior. Congress itself is sharply divided on the issue. Even President Kennedy has spoken out on the subject, only to be opposed promptly in his point of view by the chief U.S. education official!

President Kennedy does not believe teachers should use corporal punishment, but the U.S. Commissioner of Education feels that the disciplinary problems in some places are now so bad that spanking is warranted.

Mr. Kennedy said: "We are rather reluctant to see other people administering corporal punishment to our own children . . . So I would not be for corporal punishment in the school, but I would be for very strong discipline at home so we don't place an unfair burden on our teachers."

Francis Keppel, the new Commissioner of Education, favors giving schools limited authority to use physical punishment, however. He would permit principals to wield the rod "under controlled circumstances."

The issue is especially heated in Washington, where the House of Representatives has passed a bill authorizing District of Columbia teachers to use "reasonable force" to make students behave. The District, which does not have self-rule, is governed by Congress.

This measure was strongly backed by Carl F. Hansen, Washington's superintendent of schools. On the other hand, the Rev. George Hagmaier, associate director of the Paulist Fathers Institute for Religion in American Life, terms the plan "a monstrous perversion of sound teaching."

In most states, school boards have the authority to ban or allow spanking by teachers in their own districts. And because of the rising discipline problem, the number of schools permitting corporal punishment of students has been increasing steadily.

Only recently Milwaukee educators asked permission to use corporal punishment because of a series of assaults on teachers by pupils. In Lake Charles, La., 150 parents, describing themselves as "worried, scared, and mad," demanded better discipline at a junior high school.

They told a school board that a minority of students was seriously disrupting classes by being openly disrespectful to teachers and using profane language.

"Reasonable corporal punishment" has been approved in many California districts, and the trend in that state now runs to the use of rulers and straps. Berkeley, Calif., frowns on paddles but has voted that teachers may "shake, strap, or spank" pupils.

How do teachers feel about spanking? The National Education Association conducted a country-wide survey and discovered that 72 percent favored "judicious" use of corporal punishment in the elementary schools, while nearly 60 percent approved of physically disciplining unruly high-school students.

It is interesting that almost as many women teachers as men voted for spanking.

The debate now raging frequently waxes eloquent and emotional. Here are the reasons being advanced for and against the use of the rod, the ruler, and the paddle:

FOR SPANKING

1. Corporal punishment is often the only possible way discipline can be enforced effectively in a classroom.

Pro-spankers point out that there are some wild youngsters who will ignore all other forms of punishment and respond only to the persuasion of the whack. For example, Rep. Graham Purcell of Texas, a former juvenile-court judge, says it's sad but true that "many youngsters understand nothing less than physical punishment." The view is shared by a number of authorities, who add that the alternative is anarchy in the schools. "And then," says a Connecticut teacher, "nobody learns anything."

2. Some children interpret less drastic forms of disciplining as teacher weakness and misbehave all the more.

"The only way children will have respect," declares Rep. G. Elliott Hagan of Georgia, a pro-spanker, "is if you make them respect you." An Indiana educator agrees heartily and adds this pointed observation, based on 32 years' experience as a teacher and principal: "Few things engender so much healthy respect so quickly as a stinging smack when it's deserved. If a youngster who is a real behavior problem just gets extra homework or is told to stand in a corner for his misdeeds, he's likely to think he has the teacher licked and will proceed to walk all over him. But he is apt to change his mind very fast when confronted with the business end of a paddle."

3. There isn't nearly as much emotional damage from corporal punishment as some people fear.

Some psychologists state that the only time emotional harm results from a spanking is when it's unfairly meted out. Dr. Peter G. Cranford, an Atlanta psychologist, declares in his new book, *Disciplining Your Child: the Practical Way*, that if discipline is "fair, consistent, sure, and not brutal, only good can result."

4. British children who attend what we call private schools are widely recognized as among the best-behaved, best-mannered in the world. It's no coincidence that these schools permit caning of offenders.

The rod is never spared in these institutions, not even when the sons of the highest-ranking personages are concerned. Recently, during a House of Lords debate on a proposal to permit whipping of boy criminals, a number of eminent peers cheerfully admitted receiving stinging blows for offenses when they were young. While there certainly are hijinks at these schools, wide-scale discipline problems are virtually nonexistent there.

5. It works!

A number of teachers and school officials report from experience that class-disturbing disobediences are apt to decrease or stop entirely when the teacher has the authority to use or threaten physical chastisement.

AGAINST SPANKING

1. Corporal punishment merely lets the teacher work off steam.

Alfred D. Buchmueller, executive director of the Child Study Association, says: "The very thought of a great big teacher spanking little kids is unpleasant. Teachers have a hard job and become frustrated and hostile. This is understandable. But spanking just lets the teacher release his anger and does not teach the youngster the principles of sound discipline he needs."

2. Spanking is a handicap to learning because you can't beat education into a child.

Dr. Allan Fromme, a New York clinical psychologist, declares that physical punishment "only teaches a child to fear and hate the person who beats him." Resentment builds up not only against the teacher but against whatever he stands for and is trying to impart. Thus learning ability decreases. "The most effective teacher," asserts Dr. Fromme, "is not the one who is hated but the one who is loved."

3. There are a number of alternatives to spanking that are not only more acceptable but more effective.

One better technique is separating the offender from his pals and other students, declares Dr. Lawrence E. Vredevoe, professor of education at the University of California at Los Angeles. Isolate him; make him work by himself and have no contact with fellow students between classes or at dismissal time. "When the troublemaker is removed from contact with his gang, girl friend, or just others," says Dr. Vredevoe, "he soon longs to go back with the group."

Gerald W. Anderson, principal of Union Free School District No. 1, Babylon, N. Y., offers these as more effective alternatives to spanking: special types of schools to handle cases of gross misbehavior, calling in parents for conferences, and suspension from classes. "Despite what people may believe," says Anderson, "a youngster will hate rather than welcome suspension. All his friends are in school, and he has nothing to do. Then, on returning to school, he is forced to work much harder to catch up. We have found suspension a most effective method."

4. Spanking will only make a martyr of the unruly student.

The whipped youngster will end up being a big shot among his friends, who will rally to his cause and thus build more opposition to the teacher, educators point out. Earl B. Douglass, director of the college of education at the University of Colorado, writes: "Corporal punishment serves to antagonize not only the pupil punished but other pupils as well, to arouse the martyr attitude, and usually to arouse parents to fever heat."

5. It does NOT work!

Following a study of many public and private schools, Dr. Vredevoe reports that "corporal punishment was found to be unsuccessful in improving discipline." He has many backers.

As the debate grows warmer, one fact emerges: the school spanking issue, once considered old-fashioned, has come vigorously alive.