

DISCIPLINE AND TEACHERS

WHEN TEACHERS WHO PUNISH ARE PUNISHED

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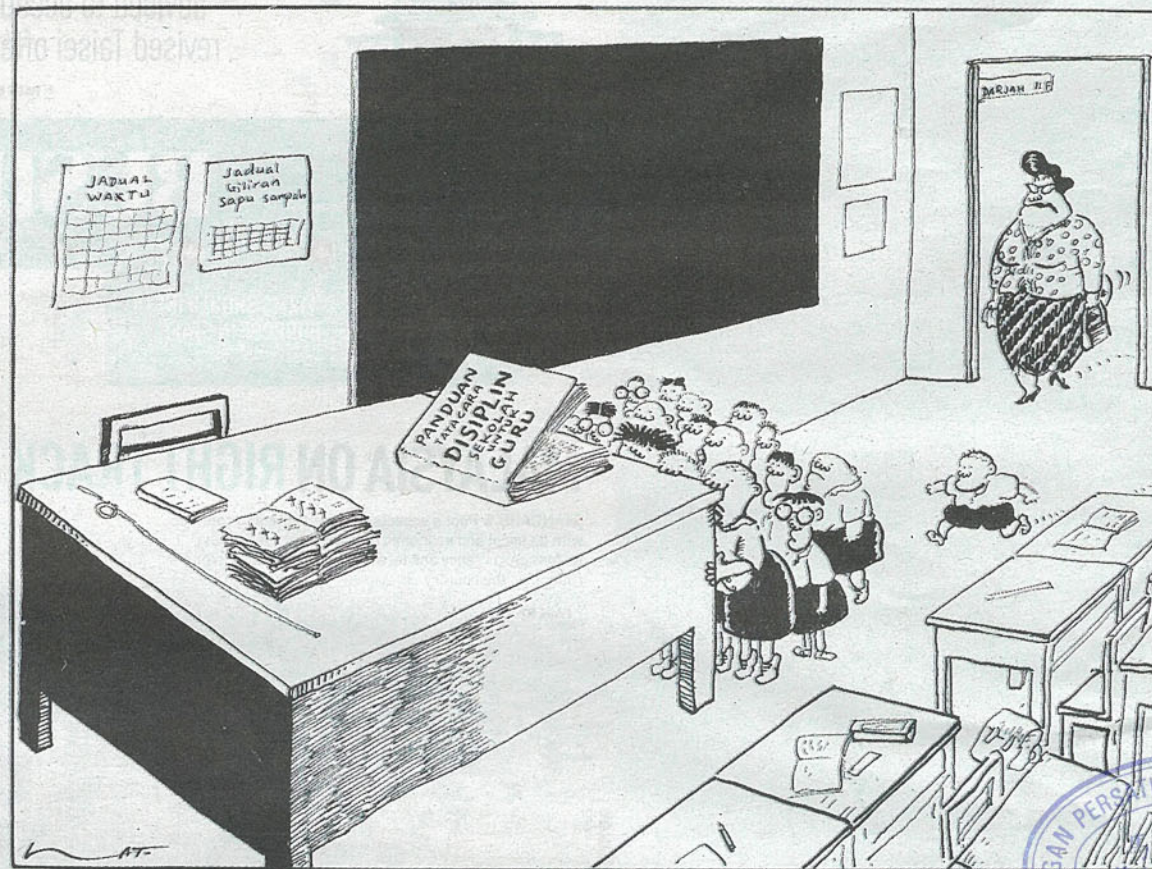
Parents must support any reasonable disciplinary action taken by teachers as it is for the benefit of the child. Don't be too quick to slap them with a legal suit, or literally slap them

“QUIET!” This thunderous exclamation was followed by a piece of chalk flying through the air, thrown in the direction of a student. The small, white missile landed on the forearm of its target, leaving a tiny, red welt. The student smiled sheepishly at the glowering figure before him and remained silent throughout that teacher's class.

This was a common scene in classrooms in those halcyon days of the 1980s and earlier. It was an effective way to stop chatterboxes from disrupting lessons. Other forms of punishment involved students being smacked, rapped over the knuckles with a ruler, or told to carry out difficult physical contortions such as “ketuk ketampi”.

Renowned cartoonist Lat's beloved teacher — the late-Lee Siew San, or Mrs Hew, was always portrayed in his drawings in her trademark beehive hairdo, horn-rimmed glasses and wielding a rotan.

There were also teachers who made their pupils balance wastepaper baskets on their heads or stand on tables. Others recalled being made to walk like ducks or frogs from the assembly area to class, or stand under the searing sun in the middle of the school field. Many had their ears twisted the way one would open a can of soup. Another favourite



Renowned cartoonist Lat always portrays his teacher, the late Lee Siew San, or Mrs Hew, in her trademark beehive hairdo, horn-rimmed glasses and wielding a rotan. PIX FROM NST ARCHIVES

punishment, especially in all-boys' schools, was having one's sideburns pulled, an act described as capable of inflicting more pain than caning.

These incidents are, however, usually recalled with fondness, and referred to nostalgically as the “good old times” when schoolmates gather. At reunions, uproarious laughter will accompany the stories of being on the receiving end of a teacher's ire.

“It made us what we are today,” one will point out, while the others nod in agreement.

Times have changed. If the same modes of punishment were meted out today, they will not only be frowned upon, but lead to fisticuffs, charges of assault, police reports and lawsuits.

This has happened one too many times, the most recent involving a teacher at SK Seri Kelana who was charged early this month with causing hurt to a

9-year-old pupil. It is understood that the teacher had pinched the pupil's ear, an act that wouldn't raise an eyebrow just over a decade ago.

Indeed, teachers now are no longer the forbidding embodiment of discipline and neither do they command the necessary awe and respect from students largely due to a shift in the attitude of parents.

In the past, a student punished by the teacher would receive even worse punishment at home. Now, it's the other way around — the teacher may suffer bodily harm for having the temerity to discipline a student.

Teachers can't take action without having to worry about a parent slapping them with a legal suit, or as highlighted in another recent case, slapped. Literally.

On Wednesday, Tan Seow Yen was sentenced to six months' jail and fined RM2,000 for causing

hurt to her son's teacher L. Vanitha. Tan had slapped Vanitha, then a teacher at a Sungai Bakap Chinese vernacular school, after learning that she had pinched her son.

When teachers discipline students — within stipulated guidelines, of course — they should be given all our support as it's easier to rein in raging bulls during a cattle run in Pamplona than to keep some classes in check these days.

There has been an increasing number of cases involving student misbehaviour. Some of the offences committed would make even the most notorious gangster proud.

A concerned parent must support any reasonable action taken by the teacher as it is for the benefit of the child.

There are admittedly educators without both oars in the water, driven off the edge by ex-



Only HMs can cane

THE headmaster's power to cane students will not be extended to all teachers, but the teaching profession is to undergo “special courses” formulated to help curb student indiscipline. — Page 3



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treme pressure on and off the job. They have been described as “dangerous” but their numbers are small, not more than one per cent of the entire teaching fraternity based on available statistics.

The majority have the best interests of their charges at heart, but they can't instil discipline without having to worry about extraneous threats.

If parents insist on this aggressive stance, there will come a day when teachers will just close their eyes to cases involving bullying and mischief. If that happens, should we then wonder why students have become so out of control?

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