Discipline in Educational Context: One Step Back and One Forward

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Samevatting

Dissipline in onderwyskonteks: een stap terug en een vorentoe

Volgens alle aanduidings ly skoolonderwys in Suid-Afrika onder 'n wye verskeidenheid dissiplinêre probleme. Hierdie probleme kan egter nie sonder meer toegeskryf word aan die transformasie wat sedert 1994 in die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing plaasgevind het nie, ook nie aan die koms van 'n menseregtekultuur, insluitende die erkenning van die regte en vryhede van leerders nie. Dit kan ook nie sonder meer toegeskryf word aan die verbod op lyfstraf nie. 'n Ontleding van die situasie in een van die oudste beskawings, dié van Sumerië, toon dat dissiplineprobleme altyd deel was van menswees en van skoolonderwys. Onderwysers moet derhalwe steeds metodes vind om die probleem die hoof te bied. Een manier om dit aan te pak is deur weer eens aandag te skenk aan die diepe betekenis van die term 'pedagogie'. Verder toon 'n vergelyking tussen die oorspronklike Sumeriese opvoeding en dissipline waarop die aartsvader Abraham sy rug gedraai het en die latere Judees-Christelike opvoeding en dissipline dat die tussenkoms en openbaring van die Drieënige God van die Bybel tot groot kwalitatiewe pedagogiese verdieping by laasgenoemde gelei het.

1. Introductory remarks

Since the abolishment of corporal punishment in schools in 1996 (South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996; also see Du Toit, 2007:8), school educators in South

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Africa seem to be experiencing difficulties in maintaining order and discipline in their classrooms. The introduction of a *Manifesto of Human Rights* as part of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act 108 of 1996), that ensconces respect for the dignity of others, seems to have exacerbated the problem. The problem has been widely discussed in a recent series of publications (see Steyn, 2003; Oosthuizen, Rossouw, Russo, Van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2007; De Beer, 2007; Van der Walt, 2007; Oosthuizen, 2008). The problem has not only affected the lives of teachers, but also of parents (Le Cordeur, 2008), also in other countries and education systems (see, for instance, Clark, 2007:7; Scholtz, 2008:4). The purpose of this article is not to dwell on the problem of weak discipline in schools since that has been done too often already in the past. Its purpose is to defend the contention that educators who experience discipline problems should consider taking one step back and another forward.

The step back is a step into the ancient past. It is our contention that discipline problems have always been inherent in human interactions; also, of those between educators and their charges. Problems with the maintenance of order and good discipline in classes are therefore not a phenomenon that can be ascribed to the sudden onset of democracy in a previously repressed society such as that of South Africa. Neither can it be ascribed to the sudden introduction of human rights and the subsequent abolishment of corporal punishment. Deviant social behaviour has always been a feature of human conduct and, we would argue, it can only be eradicated through proper pedagogical interventions. The step forward therefore entails understanding the positive role of education.

Our contention with respect to the two steps is based on our examination of the ancient culture of Sumer (c. early 4th millennium B.C. – late 3rd millennium B.C. (Armstrong, 1996: 456-458; Bahn, 2004: 460)), the Biblical land of 'Shinar' in Mesopotamia, i.e. the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the Middle East. In this regard, Sumer may be correctly termed the earliest civilization in the world (Darvill, 2003:413).

2. Methodology

In our view, deviant behaviour has always been a feature of human conduct, and can be countered in more sophisticated civilisations by means of well-planned education. To test this hypothesis, we consulted transcripts of Sumerian writings, originally in cuneiform writing on clay tablets dating as far back as 2 350 B.C. From these compositions, we gathered information about education in general and schooling in particular in Sumer, and about the maintenance of order and discipline in those ancient schools. We subjected our findings to an interpretive heuristic (Feinberg & Soltis, 1985:75-90) to arrive at conclusions that would be relevant for the situation in modern (South African) schools.

3. General background

According to Tellinger (2005:138), the Sumerian written on the clay tablets embodies the first written language on earth. It is arguably the first language for which we have written evidence, and its literature is the earliest known (The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (henceforth: ETCSL), 2009)), the rival candidate being Egyptian Hieroglyphic (ETCSL, 2009b) at approximately the close of the 4th millennium B.C. (Allen, 1996:765). Sumerian is a long-extinct language documented throughout the ancient Middle East, in particular in the south of modern Iraq. This evidence is spread over more than 3 000 years, the first sources dating to the late fourth millennium B.C. (c. 3100 B.C.). The first writing, as far as can be ascertained, dates to some 5 000 years ago (Schmandt-Besserat, 1996:761), and had a simple and practical information function, being used to keep socio-economic and administrative records on clay tablets (ETCSL, 2009b).

One composition, entitled *The instructions of Šuruppag* that dates from towards the end of the Early Dynastic Period (c. 2 350 B.C.), contains a father's proverbial advice to his son. This and many other tablets come from schools in which literature served a curricular function. In one of the compositions in his honour, the god Šulgi declares:

> May my hymns be in everyone's mouth; let the songs about me not pass from memory. So that the fame of my praise ... shall never be forgotten, I have had it written down line by line in the House of the Wisdom of Nisaba in holy heavenly writing, as great works of scholarship. No one shall ever let any of it pass from memory ... It shall not be forgotten, since indestructible heavenly writing has a lasting renown (ETCSL, 2009b: 2.4.2.05 lines 240-248).

The Sumerian civilisation was well advanced as far back as 3 000 B.C. (Tellinger, 2005:139). In Tellinger's (2005:140) opinion, 'this civilisation was the origin of all culture and civilisation on Earth, giving us all the foundations of what we know today'. Sumer had thousands of scribes who worked relentlessly at capturing most of their daily activities, including schooling, teaching and education. They captured so much information on their clay tablets that it leaves us with a very clear picture of how organised they were. Among others, these tablets speak of measuring fields, calculating prices and recording harvests of crops (Tellinger, 2005:140). Among the Sumerian 'firsts' are their invention of writing and even printing of pictographic signs (Sitchin, 1978:29).

Sumerian schools formed part of a highly regulated and ordered society. The law code of Lipit-Ishtar, the ruler of Isin, of which 38 laws remain legible on a partly preserved tablet, deals with real estate, slaves and servants, marriage and inheritance, the hiring of boats, the rental of oxen and defaults on taxes. The

purpose of these laws, as explained by Lipit-Ishtar, was that he had acted on the orders of the great gods who wished him 'to bring well-being to the Sumerians and Akkadians'. Even older than this code was that of Urnammu, the ruler of Ur (around 2 350 B.C.), enacted on the authority of the god Nannar. This code was aimed at stopping and punishing 'the grabbers of the citizen's oxen, sheep and donkeys' so that 'the orphan shall not fall prey to the wealthy, the widow shall not fall prey to the powerful, the man of one shekel not fall prey to a man of 60 shekels'. These laws were upheld by a court system in which the proceedings and judgements as well as contracts were recorded and preserved (Sitchin, 1978:41-43). The tablets also cover subjects such as the fees charged by surgeons as well as the penalties they had to pay for misconduct. A surgeon would lose a hand if he damaged a patient's eye during a temple procedure with a lancet (Tellinger, 2005:141).

The clay tablets also tell of the institution of schools, each under the headship of an *ummia* (expert, professor, teacher) (Tellinger, 2005:14). Schools were established in Sumer as a direct outgrowth of the invention and the introduction of writing. The archaeological evidence in the form of remnants of actual school buildings and of exercise tablets indicates the introduction of a formal system of education by the beginning of the third millennium B.C. There were literally thousands of scribes at the various levels of public life, some of whom acted as teachers at the schools. The tablets contain some of their essays on the schools, their aims and goals, their curricula and teaching methods (Sitchin, 1978:41). Important for our subject is the fact that the teachers were known as (for instance) 'the man in charge of drawing' or the 'man in charge of Sumerian' or even the 'holder of the whip' (i.e. 'the man in charge of the whip'. The learners were, quite literally, the charges of the teachers.

Among the schools of Sumer were medical schools where physicians learnt their trade. In these schools, the professors made use of clay models of the various human organs, such as the liver. They also studied anatomy for the purpose of the elaborate dissections of sacrificial animals (Sitchin, 1978:34-35).

4. Anthropological perspectives

The maintenance of order and discipline in a community or a civilisation can only be fully understood against the prevalent anthropology, i.e. view of the human being. In the polytheistic and theocentric environment of ancient Sumer, human beings were not held in high esteem. The clay tablets reveal that human beings came into being/were created as servants of the gods, for the purpose of relieving the gods from doing manual work on earth. The creation (birth) of human beings enabled most of the gods to depart from the earth to their heavenly abode. That man was created to be a servant of the gods did not strike the peoples of the

ancient world as peculiar. Ancient man (sic) did not worship the gods; he or she worked for them (Sitchin, 1978:337), as the following inscription shows:

> *I will produce a lowly primate (a lulu);*
> *'Man' shall be his name.*
> *I will create a primitive (a lulu amelu) worker (an avilum);*
> *He will be charged with the service of the Gods,*
> *That They might have their ease.*

By the same token, children were not held in high esteem, despite the fact that they were regarded as formed in the image of the gods:

> *While the Birth Goddess is present.*
> *Let the Birth Goddess fashion offspring.*
> *While the Mother of the Gods is present,*
> *Let the Birth Goddess fashion a lulu;*
> *Let the worker carry the toil of the gods.*
> *Let her create a lulu amelu,*
> *Let him bear the yoke.*
> *...*
> *The new-born's fate thou shalt pronounce;*
> *Ninki (i.e. wife of the god Enki) would fix upon it the image of the gods;*
> *And what it will be is 'Man'.*

This first man (sic) was so perfect (i.e. such a perfect though lowly being) that Enki adopted him as his own son and ordered all the rest of mankind to be created in the same mould:

> *In those days, in those years,*
> *The Wise One of Eridu, Ea,*
> *Created him as a model of men.*

The gods themselves brooked no disobedience, wayward or rebellious behaviour:

> *The house which rebels against the Lord (i.e. the Lord Enlil, the god who stayed behind with the people in Sumer after the other gods had left the earth, leaving the earthly toil to the newly created people),*
> *The house which is not submissive to the Lord,*
> *The AL.A.NI (a weapon in the form of an axe that produced power) makes it submissive to the Lord.*
> *Of the bad …, the heads of its plants it crushes;*
> *Plucks at the roots, tears at the crown.*

Human beings, being inferior workers created for the purpose of serving the gods, were similarly subject to strict discipline.

5. On education, deviant social behaviour and punishment

The composition *The advice of a supervisor to a younger scribe (E-dub-ba-a C)* is useful for understanding several pedagogical aspects. The composition contains a dialogue between a person who supervises the work of a newly trained scribe on a farm, and the young scribe himself.

> 1-2. (The supervisor speaks:) "One-time member of the school, come here to me, and let me explain to you what my teacher revealed."
> 3-8. "Like you, I was once a youth and had a mentor. The teacher assigned a task to me – it was man's work. Like a springing reed, I leapt up and put myself to work. I did not depart from my teacher's instructions, and I did not start doing things on my own initiative. My mentor was delighted with my work on the assignment. He rejoiced that I was humble before him and he spoke in my favour."
> 9-15. "I just did whatever he outlined for me – everything was always in its place. Only a fool would have deviated from his instructions. He guided my hand on the clay and kept me on the right path. He made me eloquent with words and gave me advice. He focused my eyes on the rules which guide a man with a task: zeal is proper for a task, time-wasting is taboo; anyone who wastes time on his task is neglecting his task."
> 16-20. "He did not vaunt his knowledge: his words were modest. If he had vaunted his knowledge, people would have frowned. Do not waste time, do not rest at night – get on with that work! Do not reject the pleasurable company of a mentor or his assistant: once you have come into contact with such great brains, you will make your own words more worthy."
> 21-26. "And another thing: you will never return to your blinkered vision; that would be greatly to demean due deference, the decency of mankind. Worthy plants calm the heart, and sins are absolved. An empty-handed man's gifts are respected as such. Even a poor man clutches a kid to his chest as he kneels. You should defer to the powers that be and … – that will calm you."
> 27-28. "There, I have recited to you what my teacher revealed, and you will not neglect it. You should pay attention – taking it to heart will be to your benefit!"
> 29-35. The learned scribe humbly answered his supervisor: "I shall give you a response to what you have just recited like a magic spell, and a rebuttal to your charming ditty delivered in a bellow. Do not make me out to be an ignoramus – I will answer you once and for all! You opened my eyes like a puppy's and you made me into a human being. But why do you go on outlining rules for me as if I were a shirker? Anyone hearing your words would feel insulted!"
> 36-41. "Whatever you revealed of the scribal art has been repaid to you. You put me in charge of your household and I have never served you by

shirking. I have assigned duties to the slave girls, slaves and subordinates in your household. I have kept them happy with rations, clothing and oil rations, and I have assigned the order of their duties to them, so that you do not have to follow the slaves around in the house of their master. I do this as soon as I wake up, and I chivvy them around like sheep."
42-49. "When you have ordered offerings to be prepared, I have performed them for you on the appropriate days. I have made the sheep and banquets attractive, so that your god is overjoyed. When the boat of your god arrives, people should greet it with respect. When you have ordered me to the edge of the fields, I have made the men work there. It is challenging work which permits no sleep either at night or in the heat of day, if the cultivators are to do their best at the field-borders. I have restored quality to your fields, so people admire you. Whatever your task for the oxen, I have exceeded it and have fully completed their loads for you."
50-53. "Since my childhood you have scrutinised me and kept an eye on my behaviour, inspecting it like fine silver – there is no limit to it! Without speaking grandly – as is your shortcoming – I serve before you. But those who undervalue themselves are ignored by you – know that I want to make this clear to you."
54-59. (The supervisor answers:) "Raise your head now, you who were formerly a youth. You can turn your hand against any man, so act as is befitting." (The scribe speaks:) "Through you who offered prayers and so blessed me, who instilled instruction into my body as if I were consuming milk and butter, who showed his service to have been unceasing, I have experienced success and suffered no evil."
60-61. (The supervisor answers:) "The teachers, those learned men, should value you highly. *{(2 mss. add 3 lines, 1 of the 2 mss. adds 2 more lines which correspond to lines 67 and 68 in this edition*:) They should … in their houses and in prominent places. Your name will be hailed as honourable for its prominence. For your sweet songs even the cowherds will strive gloriously. For your sweet songs I too shall strive and shall ... The teacher will bless you with a joyous heart.} You who as a youth sat at my words have pleased my heart."
62-72. "Nisaba has placed in your hand the honour of being a teacher. {For her, the fate determined for you will be changed and so you will be generously blessed} *{(1 ms. has instead:)* You were created by Nisaba! May you … upwards}. May she bless you with a joyous heart and free you from all despondency. … at whatever is in the school, the place of learning. The majesty of Nisaba … silence. For your sweet songs even the cowherds will strive gloriously. For your sweet songs I too shall strive and shall ... They should recognise that you are a practitioner (?) of wisdom. The little fellows should enjoy like beer the sweetness of decorous words: experts bring light to dark places, they bring it to *culs-de-sac* and streets."

> 73-74. "Praise Nisaba who has brought order to … and fixed districts in their boundaries, the lady whose divine powers are divine powers that have no rival!" (ETCSL, 2009c)

The young scribe has obviously been newly appointed at the farm, having completed his studies at school. The supervisor, who also seems to have been his teacher when he was still young, does not remind the young man of what the latter learned at school but rather informs his charge about what his own mentor had imparted to him (lines 1-2). It can be deduced from lines 3-8 that learners had mentors/ teachers, and that the latter willingly ('like a springing reed') obeyed the injunctions of the teachers. Typical of a communal setup, learners were not expected to take initiative but rather to follow orders. Teachers also commended humility and spoke favourably of their wards if they were humble. Teachers were happy with learners who followed strict orders. Lines 9-15 reveal that learners regarded their teachers as wise men; only fools would deviate from their instructions. Teachers served as guides during writing exercises, and kept their charges on the right path. They taught them to speak eloquently and gave sound advice, among others about time management. Lines 16-20 reveal that the teachers were knowledgeable and modest persons, and that learners perceived their company as pleasurable. Lines 21-26 outline the purposes of education: help the learner; rid him- or herself from blinkered vision; help them learn deference, the decency of humankind; develop the natural gifts of the learner; subjection to the powers that be; and lastly calmness. According to lines 27-28, the supervisor holds the teachings of his own mentor in great esteem, and encourages the young scribe to follow these injunctions.

Lines 29-35 contain an unexpected rebuttal from the young scribe. Whereas one would have expected him to show deference to the words of the supervisor, his former teacher, he responds with words to the effect that the supervisor has just recited words like a magic spell, a charming ditty delivered in one breath. His impatience with the supervisor (disobedience?) emerges when he says that he has already been educated (at school), and that he does not need further lessons. He is no ignoramus or shirker of duty, his eyes have been opened through education and he has already been made into a human being. He feels insulted by having the supervisor repeat to him the wisdom of the latter's own mentor. He supposedly feels already sufficiently formed by the words and guidance of his own mentors at school. In lines 36-49, the young scribe outlines how he has been dutifully and obediently discharging his duties in the household.

Lines 50-53 reveal that educators tended to closely scrutinize the behaviour of their charges. They endlessly inspected it as one would inspect fine silver. In lines 54-59 the supervisor shows that he does not feel satisfied with the response of the young scribe: he does not act as befitting a man of his age and sophistication. In

lines 60-61, the supervisor reiterates the value of obedience and deference to the words of wise teachers. In lines 62-72, the supervisor sings the praises of a good teacher: the goddess Nisaba confers the honour of being a teacher; she blesses the teacher with a joyous heart, and frees him (sic) from despondency; a good teacher is a dispenser of wisdom, a user of decorous words; he can bring light to dark places and to dead-end streets. (Note: Teaching was an exclusively male-dominated profession which was embedded within a male-centric world view.)

The composition entitled *A man and his god* (ETCSL, 2009d) contains several other references to education and pedagogical discipline:

> 1-9. A person should steadfastly proclaim the exaltedness of his god. A young man should devoutly praise the words of his god; the people living in the righteous Land should unravel them like a thread. May the *balaĝ* singer assuage the spirit of his neighbour and friend. May it soothe their (?) hearts, bring forth …, utter …, and measure out … Let his mouth shaping a lament soothe the heart of his god, for a man without a god does not obtain food.
> 10-17. There is a young man who does not wickedly put his efforts into evil murder, yet he spends the time in grief, asag illness and bitter suffering. The fate demon has brought need and … close to him. Bitter … has confused his judgment (?) of it, and covered his … Behind his back they have overpowered him like a … Before his god the youth, the young man weeps bitterly over the malice he has suffered. He is reverent and performs obeisance.
> 18-24. He speaks … of his suffering. In his total exhaustion …, … he weeps. …, … he weeps bitterly. He was able to fill the … for him. He … to him and addresses him:
> 25-34. "Grief …, despair …, and … has been put in place. I am a young man, I am knowledgeable, but what I know does not come out right with me. The truth which I speak has been turned (?) into a lie. A man of deceit has overwhelmed me like the south wind and prostrated me before him. My unwitting arm has shamed me before you. You have doled out to me suffering ever anew. When I go into the house I despair. When I, a young man, go out into the street, I am depressed."
> 35-45. "My righteous shepherd has become angry with me, a youth, and looked upon me with hostility. My herdsman has plotted malice against me although I am not his enemy. My companion does not say a true word to me. My friend falsifies my truthfully spoken words. A man of deceit has spoken insulting words to me while you, my god, do not respond to him and you carry off my understanding. An ill-wisher has spoken insulting words to me – he angered me, was like a storm and created anguish. I am wise – why am I tied up with ignorant youths? I am discerning – why am I entangled among ignorant men?"

46-56. "Food is all about, yet my food is hunger. When shares were allotted to all the people, my allotted share was suffering. A brother … insulted me, created anguish. He … my …, raised up … and carried off … A hostile … without wisdom wrote on clay (?). He sought the … of the journey. He cut down the … of the road like a tree. He … the supervisor and … my steward."
57-63. "My god, … before you. I would speak to you: my tears are excess and my words are supplication. I would tell you about it, would unravel to you like a thread the evil of my path. … the confusion of what I have done (?). Let the wise … in my plans; tears will not cease. I am less qualified than my friend; I am inferior to my companion."
64-68. "Now, let my mother who bore me not cease lamenting for me before you. Let my sister, truly a sweet-voiced *balaĝ* singer, narrate tearfully to you the deeds by which I was overpowered. Let my wife voice my suffering … to you. Let the singer expert in chanting unravel my bitter fate to you like a thread."
69-74. "My god, the day shines bright over the Land, but for me the day is black. The bright day has become (?) a … day. Tears, lament, anguish and despair are lodged within me. Suffering overwhelms me like a weeping child. In the hands of the fate demon my appearance has been altered, my breath of life carried away. The *asag* demon, the evil one, bathes in my body."
75-81. "In the overwhelming bitterness of my path I never see a good dream – but unfavourable (?) visions daily never stop for me. Anguish embraced me though I am not its wife and … Grief spread its lap for me though I am not its small child. Lamentation sweeps over me as if it were a southerly wind-storm and … My brother cried "Alas"." *10 lines fragmentary 5 lines missing*
97-105. "I weep … and … My god, you who are my father who begot me, lift up my face to you. Righteous cow, god (?) of mercy and supplication, let me acquire (?) noble strength. For how long will you be uncaring for me and not look after me? Like a bull I would rise to you but you do not let me rise, you do not let me take the right course. The wise heroes say true and right words: "Never has a sinless child been born to its mother; making an effort (?) does not bring success (?); a sinless workman has never existed from of old.""
106-112. "My god – the … of forgetting which I have … against you, the … of releasing which I have prepared before you – may you utter words of grace on a young man who knows the holy words "May he not consume me". When the day is not bright, in my vigour, in my sleep, may I walk before you. May I … my impurities and uncleanliness in the health of the city. May you utter words of grace on him who knows the words "When anger and the evil heart came about". Indeed he speaks joyously to him who knows the words "When fear and … burned"."

113-119. "My god, … after you have made me know my sins, at the city's (?) gate I would declare them, ones forgotten and ones visible. I, a young man, will declare my sins before you. In the assembly may tears (?) rain like drizzle. In your house may my supplicating mother weep for me. May your holy heart (?) have mercy and compassion for me, a youth. May your heart, an awe-inspiring wave, be restored towards me, the young man."
120-129. The man's god heard his bitter weeping. After his lamentation and prolonged wailing had soothed the heart of his god towards the young man, his god accepted the righteous words, the holy words he had spoken. The words of supplication which the young man had mastered, the holy prayers, delighted his god like fine oil. His god stretched his hand away from the hostile words. He … the anguish which had embraced him though he was not its wife and had …, and scattered to the winds the grief which had spread its arms round him. He let the lamentation which had swept over him as if it were a southerly wind-storm (?) be dissipated. He eradicated the fate demon which had been lodged in his body.
130-136. He turned the young man's suffering into joy. He set by him as guardian a benevolent protective demon that keeps guard at the mouth (?). He gave him kindly protective goddesses. The young man steadfastly proclaims the exaltedness of his god. He (?) brings forth … and makes known … He refreshes himself … He trusts in you and …
137-143. "I have set my sights on you as on the rising sun. Like Ninmah …, you have let me exert great power. My god, you looked on me from a distance with your good life-giving eyes. May I proclaim well your … and holy strength. May your … heart be restored towards me. May you absolve my sin. May your heart be soothed towards me."
144. *Ĝišgiĝal.*
145-146. An *eršagneša for a man's god. (lines 144 and 145 are written as one line in source)*

Lines 1-9 reveal that a person should learn to proclaim the exaltedness of his god, and to praise the words of his god. He (sic) should also learn to unravel the words of the god. Even his lamentations should soothe the heart of his god. (This composition reveals that the notion of inherited sin ('never has a sinless child been born to its mother'), awareness of sin ('after you have made me known my sins') and absolution of sin was well developed in Sumer.

Lines 10-24 reveal that, in cases of transgression and inappropriate behaviour, it was the 'fate or asag demon' that supposedly brought grief, illness and suffering upon a person. The demon confuses a person's judgment regarding his or her sufferings. In all of his afflictions a person should remain reverent and perform obeisance.

Lines 25-34 describe the shame before his god (guide, teacher) that a young person feels who should have known better but whose knowledge was not correctly applied. His knowledge has turned to lies and deceit ('the man of deceit has overwhelmed me'). The shame leads to despair and depression.

Lines 35-45 give us insight into how disobedience and wayward social behaviour was punished. The 'righteous shepherd' (the god, the teacher?) becomes angry with the young person, and looks upon him with hostility. He does not speak to him ('does not say a true word to me'). The 'righteous shepherd' does not protect him from 'the man of deceit', therefore his words come out all wrong and he is misunderstood. Despite his wisdom and powers of discernment, he finds himself in the company of ignorant youths and men. In lines 46-56 we learn that the supervisor was regarded as the steward or mentor of a younger person. A supervisor could also punish disobedience, deceit and the incorrect application of wisdom.

In lines 57-63 we learn about the anguish suffered by a person who has transgressed: he is tearful, seeks supplication, tries to unravel the mysteries of god, feels confused about his actions, and feels inferior towards others. Lines 64-68 confirm that the young man did not feel himself responsible for his deeds. In line with his lament that he was overpowered by 'the man of deceit'/'the fate demon' he now states that he feels himself overpowered by 'deeds'. In his shame, he calls upon his mother, sister, wife, and the expert singer to lament before his god on his behalf. Lines 69-119 contain a prayer to the young man's god in his despair and despondency. Lines 120-129 describe how his god heard his prayer and changed his life.

The composition entitled *A diatribe against Engar-dug* (diatribe B) reveals to us something of people's attitude towards a transgressor. The author stops short of physically attacking Engar-dug:

> **Segment A**
>
> 1-2. Engar-dug, …, fool, …, child raised in …, disgraced man, madman … leather, dropping … from a wall!
> 3-11. Engar-dug, croaker (?) among singers, a man without good judgment, braggart, …, a man …! – open (?) the house, I have a quarrel with you! In appearance a monkey, a rogue, a witness without shame, not accepting a verdict, a slippery place which respected men avoid, despising (?) the leader of the work-force, a man who does not … a festival, a pig spattered with mud, …! Loving crosstalk and deceit, …, having got stuck into a quarrel he … coming out mouthing insults. A warrior on duty but holding back, …

> 12-21. Engar-dug, blocked at the anus, … speech, … vomit (?)! A man without …, a tail stuck in its mouth, …, limping cripple who … people in the broad streets! Choosing words carefully, weak, bragging and constantly shifty in his advice and counsel, … the lamentation priest and snake-charmer …, a disgraced reputation among the singers, a dog not producing sound from the lyre but emitting a battle-cry! …, he sweeps (?) the house. He gives instructions, …, and does not speak to …, turning … to evil …. *unknown no. of lines missing*
>
> **Segment B**
>
> 1-5. In his …, a thief from his brother, he provides no water whatsoever. Whether a quay is built, whether he … the town square, whether he pierces his nostrils (?), whether the gatekeeper … the sign – thus he never goes anywhere, … the guard.
> 6-12. Engar-dug, your holy song is finished, your greatness …, your insults … the city squares, your lies are made obvious! …, Engar-dug, …, … like a francolin …, …, the snake-charmer … *2 lines fragmentary; unknown no. of lines missing* (ETCSL, 2009).

Engar-dug clearly was the epitome of a person not educated or behaving according to Sumerian communal norms. He is vilified because of his behaviour as a person without good judgment, a braggart, a rogue, a false witness who does not accept a verdict, a despiser of authority at the workplace, a double-talker and deceiver, a quarrelsome person, a person who shirks his duties on the battlefield, a person who constantly changes his advice and counsel, and who generally seems to turn to evil.

Two other compositions give us a glimpse of life and education in Sumer. In the composition *The message of Lu-diĝira to his mother* (ETCSL, 2009f), Lu-diĝira attests of his mother that she never disobeys orders and that she serves humbly before her mistress (lines 9-20). She has a loving heart that never becomes sated with pleasure (lines 40-46), and she is a woman that will show you compassion (?) like Aruru (lines 47-52).

In the composition *The instructions of Suruppag* (ETCSL, 2009g), the father Suruppag gives a series of instructions to his son, and warns him not to transgress his father's words (lines 1-13). Among these instructions are warnings not to curse strongly (line 50), not to use violence (line 61-62), and not to be deceitful (line 67).

The punishment of a person did not stop at vilification only. One school alumnus described on a clay tablet how he had been flogged for missing school, for insufficient neatness, for loitering, for not keeping silent, for misbehaving, and even for not writing neatly (Sitchin, 1978:41, 360). Wilds and Lottich (1970:30-

31) tell of a report by a 'school father' approximately 2 000 B.C. about a 'school son' who dreaded being tardy 'lest his teacher cane him'. Finally, after having been beaten by the teacher, the 'school son' invites the *ummia* (expert, professor, teacher) home to dinner. In the process of being wined and dined, the teacher realizes that 'his charge is a sincere seeker of knowledge', and in a speech declares him 'to have carried out well the school's activities' and that he has now 'become a man of learning'.

6. Discussion

Analysis of life in ancient Sumer revealed, firstly, that educators in general and teachers in particular enjoyed great esteem. Teachers were seen as the mentors and stewards of their wards, wise men (sic) who could bring light in the dark places (e.g. the minds of the learners). They were seen as the guides of the young men (sic), as men with joyous hearts who revelled in the idea of making their wards human beings (i.e. well-educated, sophisticated members of Sumerian society, wise young men who understood the meaning of *namlulu* – humanity (Wilds & Lottich, 1970:32)). The learners held their own schoolboy training in high esteem, as can be seen from the following words of a learner, addressed to an unworthy opponent:

> I was raised on Sumerian. I am the son of a scribe. But you are a bungler, a windbag. When you try to shape a tablet you can't even smooth the clay. When you try to write a line, your hand can't manage the tablet … You 'sophomore', cover your ears! Cover your ears! Yet you claim to know Sumerian like me! (Wilds & Lottich, 1970:35).

Teachers also had a good command of their subject (such as speaking and writing) and taught the subject well. In doing so, they widened their learners' view of the world, taught them decency, and scrutinized their behaviour.

In the second place, Sumerian teachers ('big brothers') demanded unqualified obedience and obeisance. They expected their learners to follow their guidance, orders, injunctions and advice, convinced that this would help the latter subject themselves to authority and achieve calmness in their lives. A 'big brother' would, for instance, set the pattern for the day's work in the school: the making of a fresh clay tablet, the execution of a written assignment, and the resulting praise or penalty.

The headmaster *(ummia)* appears to have been a demanding figure that brooked no disobedience and transgression of his rules (Wilds & Lottich, 1970:35).

Deviant behaviour was an insidious problem for which teachers had to find counter-measures. They occasionally resorted to violent means, including strong language and physical violence in the form of corporal punishment (administered by the 'man in charge of the whip'), despite the fact that educators seemed not to approve of violence (see the instructions of Šuruppag).

The gods, teachers and other superiors could punish unacceptable behaviour by refusing to talk to the transgressor, and by showing anger and even hostility towards him. Sumerian schools even had specialist teachers who were known as 'the man in charge of the whip'.

A reading of the Sumerian texts reveal, on the other hand, that learners (even after having completed their school education) enjoyed sufficient freedom to become impatient and even rebellious towards their supervisors, as can be observed in the behaviour of the young scribe. The texts also show that a person who has transgressed against the communal mores could feel deep shame and suffer great anguish in the presence of his god and his elders, and that such behaviour (for instance, lies and deceit) could cloud his judgement.

The purpose of (school) education, as we have seen, was the general upliftment, well-being and guidance of the learners. Because of the general morality prevailing in Sumerian communities, a transgressor could feel deep shame towards his god and his elders, not least because of the vilification suffered at the hands of other members of the community, as can be observed in the case of Engar-dug. Because of the theocentric life in Sumer, perpetrators and criminals tended not to blame themselves for their misdeeds but rather blamed extraneous forces for leading them astray, such as the 'fate-demon' or 'the man of deceit'. They subsequently appealed to their gods to punish and remove such forces. The notion of sin against one's god and other people was well developed.

As humankind progressed through the ages, corporal punishment as a means to combat disobedience and wayward behaviour has tended to be replaced by other approaches, not least of which was closer attention to what education actually entails. In the case of Sumer, we noticed that the rulers were deeply concerned about the well-being of the people.

As recently as 1996, education and schooling in South Africa arrived at a point where corporal punishment could finally be declared illegal. Space does not allow a detailed discussion of how the problem of disobedience and wayward behaviour among learners can be eradicated through other means. Suffice it to say that modern teachers have to move a step forward by taking the meaning of

'pedagogy' more literally. The word is derived from the Greek *pais* (literally a boy, figuratively a learner of either gender) and agoo (to lead or guide). Recent reflection on what these terms actually mean has revealed that agoo entails positive actions on the part of the educator to guide, lead, enable, equip, disciple (i.e. make followers) and unfold (both the inherent potential of the learner and the learning contents so that it can be mastered by the learner) (see Van Dyk, 1993:156-165, for a Biblical interpretation of this process). *Agoo* also entails the moulding of character, the acquisition of spiritual-moral and practical obedience and holistic student development (Naidoo, 2008:131, 140). Greater focus on these aspects of education in schools would make redundant the search for methods to punish deviant behaviour, or to retaliate in cases of misconduct.

The history of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham places all of the above as well as the Sumerian situation in proper historical context, and also provides a starting point for a discussion of the discipline problems in Sumer from a Biblical perspective. As far as can be ascertained, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 B.C.). Abraham, originally an inhabitant of the city of Ur of the Chaldees (near the Persian Gulf) and later of the city of Haran or Charran in North-West Mesopotamia (Shinar, Sumer), lived between 1 900 and 1 600 B.C. (Van der Watt, 2003:110,111). The Triune God of the Judean-Christian faith called him and his family to leave the land of their birth, Sumer, and to trek to Palestine, where he became the covenantal and spiritual father of all Judaeo-Christian believers. The book Genesis seems to suggest that the Lord called Abraham and his family away from Sumer because it was such an idolatrous country, where even the children of Eber (Heber) had degenerated. Also Abraham's own father Terah had served other gods in Sumer, but moved with Abraham to the Promised Land. He died before arriving there (Henry, 1993: 33).

The book Genesis reveals a fundamental difference between Abraham's relationship with the Lord and that of the Sumerians with their gods. Abraham's relationship with the God of the covenant was characterised by covenantal closeness, faithfulness, nearness, care and castigation, whereas in the case of his former compatriots, the Sumerians, their gods were either oppressive secular taskmasters or absent transcendent forces (leaving behind some of their members to govern over the servile human beings). Abraham's faith was monotheistic; that of the Sumerians polytheistic.

It emerged in the discussion above that the concept of original sin had already been firmly ensconced in the lives and existence of the Sumerians. This did not change for Abraham and his family when they left for Canaan (Palestine). Deviant behaviour tended to be ascribed to the inherent sinful nature of humankind, in the case of the Sumerians because of human beings having been made as lesser

beings, servants of the gods (their earthly and divine masters), and in the case of the Hebrews, the later Jews and the Christians because of the original disobedience/fall into sin of the first people created by God. The difference between the anthropologies of the Sumerians and of the Judaeo-Christians can be seen in how transgressors, the ill-disciplined were disciplined. As indicated in the discussion of the contents of the Sumerian clay tablets above, Sumerian educators tended to be harsh and relentless in meting out punishment, and not much love seems to have been lost between educator and educand. In some cases, the latter even resisted what they regarded as unreasonable discipline and punishment by their educators and supervisors. The Judaeo-Christian faith views the human being in a different light; human beings are seen as having been created in the image of Triune God, educators are hence expected to treat their charges with great respect, love and tolerance. The appearance and involvement of the Triune God of the Judaeo-Christian Bible in the lives of Abraham and the other patriarchs brought about a qualitative change in approach to education and discipline. This change found embodiment in the following Jewish injunction to parents: "Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home or when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:3-9). This injunction speaks of greater educational (parental) love for, involvement in the lives and responsibility for the children than used to be the norm in traditional Sumerian education.

This qualitative change gained even greater depth in Jesus Christ's incarnation as the Son of God. Sumerian education and discipline were characterised by directness, its punitive nature and harshness. It was premised by the inherent sinful and degenerate, servile nature of the child as human being. This approach to education and discipline as well as that of the Jews pale in comparison with education and discipline stamped by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Because of His incarnation children of the covenant are no longer seen in Christian circles as inherently sinful and therefore condemnable, but rather as fully redeemed in and through Jesus Christ, and hence as eminently educable. The omni-presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts furthermore imbues devout Christian parents with the wisdom to educate purposefully, carefully, lovingly and with devotion: "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may

understand what God has freely given us" (1 Cor 2:12). The Spirit inspires both parents and children to act responsibly with respect to one another (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21). It also provides Christians with guidelines for holy living (Col. 3:1-17).

The essential qualitative difference between the original Sumerian education and discipline as described above, and education and discipline in Biblical perspective emerges when considering the contents of 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Instead of expecting blind obedience and obeisance from children (educands), and instead of seeing children and young people as inferior beings and servants that have to be harshly disciplined in order to keep them toeing the line, Christian parents approach their children as gifts of the Lord, created in the image of God, to be cherished and lovingly guided and disciplined (in the sense of 'discipled', i.e. making faithful followers of them) according to Biblical guidelines: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work". This quotation shows that in principle Christian education has made great qualitative progress since its humble beginnings in Ancient Sumer, Abraham's land of birth.

7. Conclusion

The above analysis of life, education and schooling in Sumer shows that the problems that modern-day teachers in South Africa have to contend with are not new. They are as old as humankind itself, and educators (teachers) have through the ages searched for appropriate means to combat the insidious problem of weak discipline in schools. In ancient and relatively unsophisticated civilisations, such as that of Sumer, educators (teachers) understandably resorted to violence and corporal punishment in retaliation or as punishment. They lacked the sophistication of the later classical Greeks who understood that in the face of unacceptable behaviour, the teacher had to resort to other methods such as helping learners acquire a measure of self-discipline, among others through helping the learners master an appropriate value system (Le Cordeur, 2009:11). South African educators have progressed yet another few millennia through the ages since these Greek insights surfaced (among others those of Socrates and Plato). We have no cause in the 21st century to resort to violence (corporal punishment); we need to take proactive value-inculcating *pedagogical* steps to pre-empt deviant behaviour. Education and pedagogical discipline clearly made huge strides since the days that the patriarch Abraham turned his back on Sumer, the land of his birth. Intervention by the Triune God of Scripture has brought about a qualitative sea-change in Judaeo-Christian education. A study of education in Sumer takes us back to ancient history, and places education and discipline in historical perspective. A

study of education and discipline in Biblical perspective teaches us that although human nature as such has not changed through the centuries, Bible-based pedagogical methodologies for dealing with deviant behaviour have made great strides through the ages.

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