

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION, PROBLEM STATEMENT, LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH APPROACH

1.1 ORIENTATION

The hallmark of an effectively functioning educational organisation is an effective system of discipline for both educators and learners (Phatlane 2001, 6; Squelch 2000, 36; Wiekliwicz 1995, 86; Savage 1991, 5; Van Wyk 2000, 1).

In schools where discipline is a problem, the culture of teaching and learning tends to move into a downward spiral (Lorgat 2003, 1). Slee (1988, 2) supports Lorgat when he says classroom disruption is a major impediment to learning, and that it is imperative that disciplined educators are both effective and objective towards education administrators and parents. It is true that many studies on school discipline approach the problem from an almost “fix-the-kids” approach (Walsh 1991, 127; Good 1973, 186). Savage (1991; 2) indicates that discipline often carries a negative connotation equated with punishment administered by educators in response to misbehaviour. It is the assumption of this study that in part, the root cause of the problem may be with the educators. This premise is based on the fact that every educator has memories of his/her childhood years as a learner. This “memory bank” includes how educators disciplined him/her when he/she was young (Wolgang 1994, 7). Wolgang claims that in solving present-day problems one will always recall lived experiences and bring these to bear on the current problem. In solving a classroom discipline problem, educators may be tempted to revert back to disciplinary measures employed by educators when they were learners. This is confirmed by Cheesman and Watts (1985, 44) who write:

Behaviour does not occur in a random manner, it could be argued that every action that is taken by a living organism is informed by the experiences to which they have been subjected in the past.

This assumption is also supported by the research of Walsh (1991, 185) who found in clinical research a relationship between severe parental punishment of youths and aggressive behaviour in later years, as well as by the work of Scherg (2003) on psychosocial

traumatisation in post-war situations which indicate high levels of aggressiveness to conflict resolution. These research studies appear to advance the hypothesis that people subjected to physical abuse as a means to maintain order or discipline will be more likely to revert to this type of behaviour in maintaining school discipline.

The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the influence of educators' life experiences on their classroom discipline practices. Many of the current educators grew up during the years of the liberation struggle and were harshly chastised as learners in schools; this was also true in communities where there were clashes with police or other authority figures. Corporal punishment often became the sole means that adults and educators used to maintain control and discipline and they may have modelled their own approach to classroom discipline on this. The banning of corporal punishment in terms of section 10 of the South African Schools Act, Act No. 84 of 1996, may therefore be perceived by educators as the removal of the only available means of maintaining classroom discipline. Such a perception would leave educators with feelings of disempowerment; from this, a culture of disrespect and disregard of authority may develop. This claim is supported by Hardin (2004, 129) who writes: "Many educators fear that if traditional approaches to classroom management are removed as option for dealing with classroom problems, they will be powerless".

Traditional methods of disciplining learners in South Africa are challenged by a new approach to discipline in the new democratic society (Van Wyk 2000, 6). A number of research projects have been undertaken on the impact of this on school discipline, including those by (Mukhumo 2002; Phatlane 2001; Rice 1987; Rosa 1994; Sihlangu 1992 and Van Wyk 2000) but none of these studies has considered the possible influence of the life experiences of educators on classroom discipline practices. My research will take a closer look at the life experiences of educators that can be related to classroom discipline practices in the expectation that this may reveal new insights that will assist decision-makers in coming to terms with issues of school discipline.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem of school discipline is as old as education itself. School discipline and education are therefore inextricably tied to one another because the one cannot exist without the other.

The following statement by Socrates (425 BC) poignantly illustrates that authors already started remarking about the inappropriate behaviour of the youth more than two millennia ago.

Our youth now love luxuries. They have bad manners, and have contempt for authority. They shock, disrespect elders and they love to chatter instead of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up their food, and tyrannize their educators (<http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/Socrates/index.html>).

These perceptions about learners are as valid today as they were in the time of Socrates (Grossnickle and Sesko 1985, 3, Phatlane 2001 6, Savage 1991 2). What is clear from the literature is that school discipline during twentieth century has become one of the most topical and contentious issue in education being commented upon by parents, educators, researchers, politicians, authors and speakers at public forums. This also holds water for schools in South Africa (Savage 1991, 2, Mseleku 2002). Professor Kader Asmal, former Minister of Education in his speech he entitled “Pride versus Arrogance” said: “until educators experience the concept of child -centred learning as a mechanism to gain rather than lose respect and disciplinje in their classrooms, the tension between repressive and right-centred interpretation of values is likely to continue” (2002 5). He went on to ask how South African educators could presume to talk of every child having the right to basic education in our schools, when many educators fail to report for their teaching duties –and many learners, in turn do not show up to learn

Not only are commentators lamenting the poor state of discipline in our schools, they are constantly searching for and suggesting new ways of dealing with the problems. Speakers at the recent Education Management Association of South Africa (EMASA) Conference in 2004 (De Waal 2004) and at the Brown Conference (McCabe 2004) advocated the so-called “Zero Tolerance Approach” used in some schools in the United States, as the key to solving school discipline problems. This approach argues that no form of misconduct, no matter how trivial, should be tolerated – it must be punished. But everybody does not support this approach. In this regard we should remind ourselves of Glasser’s view (1992) on a punitive approach has bearing:

Right now the system tells the educator to deal with disruptive students punitively and show them who the boss is. Punishment, however, is not part of a quality school program. If you are an educator in a quality school, and disruptive students confront you, you would not immediately defend yourself as if you were being attacked personally, you would not angrily counter attack as if you could squelch their behaviour. As abusive as students may be, they are not really attacking you personally. Their rebellion is against a system of education that does not sufficiently take their needs into account – to them you represent this system. Therefore, if the system is to be changed, you must change what you do (Glasser 1992, 265).

Glasser (1992) raises an important issue that must form part of any debate on school discipline, *vis-à-vis* the role of the learners. From the above extract it can be deduced that learners may view the system of education and the approach to school discipline differently from educators. What educators may see (particularly in the case of adolescents) as rebellious or as attempting to challenge the position of authority occupied by the educator, may be viewed quite differently by the adolescents in search of an own identity.

From these observations it is clear that what is called for is an understanding of the dynamics of school discipline within the context in which it may occur. Studies conducted in South Africa on school discipline indicate that learner discipline lies at the very heart of a culture of teaching and learning (Phatlane 2001, 88). My own experience as educator, school manager and circuit manager in Nkangala Region of Mpumalanga Department of Education, support this claim. As circuit manager, I have noticed that one of the characteristics of an effective school is strong leadership in maintaining effective school discipline. Most of the schools in the circuit where I am manager were established prior to 1985 during the apartheid era in South Africa, but since 1995, there has been a notable decline in learner discipline manifesting in such incidents as late arrival at school by both educators and learners; drug abuse by learners; decline in learner enrolment; bullying by learners; and disregard (such as dodging classes) for school regulations.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.3.1 What is school discipline?

Reflecting on what has been said thus far, it is clear that the term “discipline” has different meanings depending on a person’s particular view. Some see it as closely linked to

punishment (Rice 1987, 4; Van Wyk 2000, 3) but punishment in itself cannot be discipline. At best, punishment is a means to an end, designed to force an individual to remove or to unlearn unwanted cognitive or effective behaviour (Van Wyk 2001, 1). Koshewa (1999), claims that discipline is one of the most abused and misunderstood concepts in education. Hardin (2004, 4), indicates that educators may view discipline as both a noun and a verb. As a verb discipline is what educators do to help students behave acceptably in school; as a noun it is the set of rules established to maintain order. Rogers (1998, 11) sees discipline as a educator-directed activity, whereby the educator seeks to lead, guide, manage or confront a learner about behaviour that is disruptive to the rights of others. Walsh (1991) sees discipline as the process through which the children of today will develop the morals, values and attitudes by which they will live tomorrow. Nakamura (1999, 214) supports the ideas of Rogers (1994) claiming that discipline is training that develops self-control, character, orderliness and efficiency. Savage (1991, 2) agrees with Nakamura, defining it as the development of self control, character, orderliness and efficiency.

According to Johnson (1990, 5) discipline is the process by which educators foster work with learners in an effort to cause them to become responsible for their own actions, while Jones (1987, 8) defines it as the business of enforcing classroom standards and building patterns of co-operation in order to maximise learning and minimise disruption. According to Johnson (1990) and Jones (1987) discipline should thus be viewed as a corrective measure that will encourage learners to behave well – not because they are frightened, but because they realise the negative effects of their behaviour. Phrased differently, learners will act obediently in an effort to avoid negative consequences. This same reasoning underpins the notion of “zero tolerance”. These researchers equate discipline to some externally-imposed strategy aimed at producing the desired effect. Such a view ties in with the popular notion of educators that view discipline as a set of rules to restrict learners’ behaviour within the school. School discipline thus represents the rules that inform learners what is right and what is wrong in order to avoid negative consequences. In such an approach, the severity of the consequence becomes a powerful mechanism in controlling disobedient behaviour.

In an environment where aggressive behaviour dominates disciplinary strategies, this may reinforce aggressive measures. Furthermore, it may distract attention from a more positive and affirming approach to discipline, claiming that discipline underpins every aspect of school life (Hyman and Wise 1988, 288). This view sees discipline as the sum of educative

efforts in their entirety, including the teaching process, the process of character shaping, the facing and settling of conflicts and the development of trust. In this sense discipline is a way of nurturing, developing and empowering people to act in a certain manner, not because they are coerced into doing so, but because they freely choose this as being in their own interests and those of the school. Discipline thus becomes a key management function of the school.

According to Kunjufu (1984, 54) externally imposed discipline has not produced the desired results in creating or maintaining effective school discipline. He feels that externally imposed discipline can curb disruptive behaviour, but may do little about changing the inner image, which is so necessary for the development of self-discipline. Bear (1998, 14), stresses that when promoting self-discipline, educators should:

- Work hard to develop a classroom environment that is caring, pleasant, relaxed and friendly, yet orderly and productive.
- Show a sincere interest in the life of each individual learner.
- Emphasise fairness.
- Use cooperative learning activities.
- Encourage learners to believe that they behave well, because they are capable and desire to do so, not because of the sanctions that may result from bad behaviour.

Arising from the brief analysis above, the premise of this study is that teaching and learning cannot be fully effective without positive school discipline. Teaching has never been the mere transmission of knowledge, or the control of learners. It is a profession that depends on quality teaching and learning just as much as on a working relationship built on trust, order and respect. Nakamura (2000, 66) elaborates on this positive approach to discipline by claiming that such an approach sees discipline as a nurturing and developmental process rather than a punitive system.

For the purposes of this study, then, school discipline is viewed as the educators' freedom to teach and interact with learners without untoward interruption.

1.3.2 What does research conducted in recent years in South Africa tell us about school discipline?

That discipline in schools lies at the centre of the current debate among all stakeholders (Phatlane 2001, 6; Savage 1991, 2) is clear by the volume of research on this issue. Van Wyk (2000) in his study entitled “Positive discipline. New approach to discipline”, has indicated that many parents and educators regard discipline as a precondition for learning. He claims that discipline is an indispensable part of the way in which education takes place. A primary school principal for 18 years, he noticed that in his school the punitively-orientated approach was the order of the day. Seeing the new approach to discipline as a dynamic interaction between the educator and the learner, he embarked upon the following research questions:

- Can the traditional discipline at the school be replaced with a positive disciplinary approach?
- Can a sense of responsibility in the child be developed with positive discipline?
- Can a positive discipline approach motivate children and encourage them to develop a healthy self recognition so that they can act with confidence?

He feels that when a positive disciplinary system is applied and educators and learners become familiar with this, many disciplinary problems may be solved. In my own study I assume that educators’ experience of the apartheid era may well be influencing current classroom discipline. Van Wyk, in contrast, feels that the new democracy, regardless of its other advantages, may have negative implications for discipline, leading to a *laissez-faire* approach, but that in time, democracy will be enhanced by a positive approach to discipline.

As mentioned above, some educators and parents regard discipline and punishment as synonymous (Van Wyk 2000, 1). It is therefore important to look into studies conducted on the issue of corporal punishment, such as that by RS Phatlane (2001), “The impact of the abolition of corporal punishment on disadvantaged urban secondary schools”. She wished to answer the following questions:

- Why did the South African government abolish corporal punishment in urban secondary schools?

- Does the abolition of corporal punishment contribute towards indiscipline and disrespect?
- What is the attitude of parents, learners and educators towards corporal punishment?

Phatlane (2001, 35) also indicates that majority of parents in South Africa are bible orientated; they punish their children and pass the habit on to the school. Both the study conducted by Van Wyk (2000) and that by Phatlane (2001), provide useful background information to my study. Their findings indicate that the problem of discipline in schools should not be laid exclusively on the learners; other factors also come into play. This has prompted me to investigate the impact of educators' life experiences on classroom discipline practices. One educator puts it succinctly when he asks: "Why do people so readily condemn educators and corporal punishment without first investigating each case thoroughly?" (Wright 1988, 19). Phatlane concludes that the real issue is not whether one is for or against corporal punishment, but whether one can maintain order in the classroom without punitive measures.

In addition to these studies, there are also recent articles that I have used in my research conclusions and recommendations. Maree and Cherian (2004, 75) have investigated the continuing evidence that corporal punishment is still widely practised in South African public schools, and that learners in rural schools are regarded as a high-risk population in terms of falling prey to corporal punishment. My own study also targets rural secondary schools and has drawn from their findings. Echoing the same sentiments as Phatlane (2001), Maree and Cherian say that over the decades the biblical perspective and ideal of morality and character development have laid the foundation for the justification of corporal punishment. They claim that corporal punishment has become an outlet for pent-up feelings of adults rather than an attempt to facilitate education of their children (2004, 3) and recommend that a national indaba be held on the matter of continuing corporal punishment in schools. Furthermore they make it clear that in their view corporal punishment is significantly linked to the violence and disrespect that are currently so prevalent in our schools.

Similarly, Joubert *et al.* (2004) in their article "Discipline: Impact on access to equal educational opportunities", confirm that one of the goals of discipline in schools is to create an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Administrators, educators and school governing bodies face an important challenge in trying to create and maintain a safe, disciplined environment. It is therefore the responsibility of all stakeholders to understand the

dynamics of discipline; this provided me with the motivation to focus my research on educators, and to find the answers to key questions. Why are they failing to restore discipline in their classrooms? Is it because of the way they were disciplined in the past? Many educators, themselves the product of the apartheid system, may well be in desperate need of counselling themselves.

These same researchers believe that to a great extent parents hold the key to the establishment and upholding of school discipline. As crucial partners in education, they should set the basic principles in the upbringing of their children. Joubert *et al.* indicate that learners who come from disciplined families behave well at school while those who hail from dysfunctional families are often the cause of disciplinary problems in the classroom. In conclusion they strongly emphasise that denying learners equal educational opportunities should be the last resort in trying to maintain discipline. In many schools I visited, the educators tended to chase the guilty learners out of the classroom if they were late or failed to do their homework.

In their article “The role of values in school discipline”, De Klerk and Rens (2004), discuss the view that an educator, as a secondary role-player in establishing values in learners, should take the lead in restoring order in the classroom. The absence of discipline and self-discipline among learners and educators implies that sound values will not be inculcated in the school. They see one of the important causes of ill-discipline as the absence of a sound value system rooted in a specific world view. Incidents of violence in our schools are due, they say, to lack of the values conducive to healthy society and a well disciplined community. They suggest that perhaps it is more accurate to speak of a value or virtue crisis in schools, than of a discipline crisis (De Klerk and Rens 2004, 257). Durkheim (1973) agrees with them that there is a strong link between discipline and values because classroom discipline is the extension of the morality in the class. He sees discipline as more than a mere device to secure superficial peace in the classroom; the morality of the classroom is indeed akin to that of a small society.

In her thesis “The influence of parental involvement, discipline and choice of values on the scholastic achievement of secondary school pupils, with special reference to the role of the father”, CM Rosa (1994) writes that children of the 1990’s are unlike their nineteenth-century counterparts. She claims that there are many factors that influence the self-actualisation of the adolescent and that the choice of values plays a significant role in achievement and school behaviour. According to her, the home is the foundation for value acquisition. In the home

there is sometimes inconsistent discipline – parents may allow a particular kind of behaviour one day and not the next day (Rosa 1994, 4), and this may confuse the child. Without doubt, over the years the father-figure has played an important role in the family, particularly in a patriarchal society such as ours. Traditionally he has commanded respect in the home but this has gradually diminished in the course of democratisation (Rosa 1994, 5). Rosa’s study focuses on the following research questions:

- Does the family’s perception of the father as the authority figure influence academic achievement?
- Is the method of discipline in the home conducive to academic achievement?
- Does the extent of father involvement in the child’s school-related activities influence academic achievement?

Rosa indicates in her recommendations that disciplinary practices are clearly influenced by an individual’s value system. She also found that authoritarian fathers value obedience very highly and often resort to punitive and forceful measures to suppress wilfulness in their children (Rosa 1994, 79). As she puts it, it is the desire of most parents that their children will become productive adults – but showing direction exclusively through punishment is not the right way. She concludes by recommending more detailed investigation into the influence of choice of values and how this impacts upon individual and family goals.

Dzivhani (2000) in his “The role of discipline in school and classroom management”, agrees with Phatlane (2001) and Van Wyk (2000) in claiming that many educators feel that the abolition of corporal punishment presaged a collapse of discipline in many schools. Grossnickle and Sesko (1985, 3) also believe that linking corporal punishment with discipline is a disturbing factor and should be ruled out. Dzivhani’s focus is to explore the means of establishing effective levels of discipline and classroom management. He argues that school management should enable educators to maintain discipline so that optimum learning can take place (Dzivhani 2000, 68). His study reveals that the school system, including school policy, classroom policy and ways of restoring order in the classroom, are all aspects of maintaining discipline. However, he adds that the learners themselves, and the cooperation and involvement of parents also play a major role in maintaining discipline in the absence of corporal punishment.

Minnaar (2002) conducted a study entitled “Educators’ views on the influence of classroom management on quality education”. This study provided me with useful background material which enabled me to approach my investigation from a different perspective. As indicated earlier, if there is disorder in the classroom, the quality of education becomes the first casualty. Indeed, quality and discipline are two sides of the same coin. Minnaar, a primary school educator, investigated educators’ views on whether classroom management has a direct influence on the quality of education (either enhancing or impeding it), and came to the conclusion that effective and consistent discipline forms the foundation of classroom management. There is no doubt from this study that for the learners to work and achieve good results there must be order in the classroom (Minnaar 2002, 23) and that, in turn, what happens in the classroom has a significant impact on the school as a whole.

Like Minnaar, many educators feel that planning and preparation enhance discipline. In other words, a well prepared educator who knows which learning outcomes need to be achieved at the end of his/her lesson, is one that is more likely to maintain effective discipline in the class. Classroom discipline also depends on the lesson, activities and timing skills of the educator, all of which leads us to the conclusion that the achievement of learning depends to a large extent on the educator’s ability to manage and control her/his classroom.

These scholars have made substantial contributions to our understanding of school discipline and corporal punishment as factors in quality education, but their work has focused primarily on the learners. Clearly, there are also certain aspects of classroom management that influence the quality of education – and managing discipline effectively is one of these. Thus far very little attention has been given on the role of educators and the influence that their life experiences may have on their classroom practices. It is also important to undertake further investigation into the causes of classroom ill-discipline, and while the findings of the above-mentioned scholars will be used as a starting point, alternative perspectives will also be used.

TABLE 1: PASS RATES FOR GRADE 12 LEARNERS IN A NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IN THE NKANGALA REGION

SCHOOL	YEAR			
	1995	1996	1997	1998
School A	31.2%	25.6%	28.4%	28.3%
School B	45.5%	30.5%	19.0%	17.0%
School C	10.2%	23.5%	17.2%	22.4%
School D	14.3%	17.8%	19.2%	27.6%
School E	29.7%	23.2%	35.5%	19.5%
School F	11.3%	33.9%	32.4%	35.4%
School G	35.6%	32.7%	30.3%	13.3%

In the past decade numerous studies have been conducted in South Africa on the issue of classroom discipline. An overview of these studies is provided in Table 2 below, where the focus or title of their study, main findings and main recommendations are summarised. Note that some of these studies have also been discussed in more detail above.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF STUDIES CONDUCTED ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE IN SOUTH AFRICA

AUTHOR	PROBLEM STATEMENT	MAIN FINDINGS	MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS
Van Wyk ER (2000)	Positive discipline. New approach to discipline	Different styles and approaches to discipline have different effects on students. To students, positive discipline implies negative consequences when somebody misbehaves; to be obedient and behave well is to know how to behave appropriately. Some parents wanted corporal punishment to be reinstated because they were not satisfied with the discipline in schools.	It was recommended that educators should receive in- service training in classroom management. It was recommended that both educators and learners be invited to these sessions. It was recommended that learners should know that they belong to the school and have a say in how things should be done, including the implementation of discipline.
Phatlane RS (2001)	The impact of corporal punishment on disadvantaged urban secondary schools	Educators in the defined area cannot imagine a disciplined school without resorting to corporal punishment. Parents express the wish that corporal punishment be reinstated in schools Historically, corporal punishment and child rearing were synonymous. Punishing learners was never considered a social problem.	There is a need for better alternatives to corporal punishment. It is recommended that educator training should be improved to provide educators in schools with alternative forms of punishment. The following aspects should be investigated: * The comparison of matric results of the same schools before and after the abolition of corporal punishment. * A study of positive alternative methods of discipline in the classroom.
Rosa CM (1994)	The influence of parental involvement. Discipline depends on a choice of values. The scholastic achievement of secondary school pupils is influenced by the home, with special reference to the role of the father.	Fathers' involvement in discipline. Leadership and choice of values could partially explain the variance in academic achievement.	A more detailed investigation is needed into the influence of the choice of values on an individual's family life goals. The discrepancy between parents' and their children's attitudes to discipline; parental involvement; choice of values and father's role in the family should all be explored more fully.
Minnaar LM (2002)	Educators' views on the influence of classroom management on quality education.	Effective classroom management creates effective classroom discipline. Classroom management is influenced either negatively or positively by the learner discipline.	Discipline appears to be a component of classroom management. Education cannot take place satisfactorily without consistent discipline.
Dzivhani MD (2000)	The role of discipline in schools and classroom management: A case study.	Educators view the maintenance of discipline at school as the responsibility of parents, educators and learners. Parents should be involved in their children's affairs and discipline learners in the home.	A clear system should be established that could be followed in maintaining discipline without the use of corporal punishment. Counselling services should be established in schools.
Cohen S (1996)	Educators' and pupils' attitudes and practices regarding the abolishment of corporal punishment in schools in Gauteng.	Educators do not want corporal punishment abolished. Positive reinforcement is most frequently used as an alternative to corporal punishment. Learners are sent to the principal for corporal punishment.	Pupils and educators should be involved in the campaign to devise alternative strategies to corporal punishment. Recommends that more studies be undertaken on self-discipline.
Rice JE (1987)	Attitude of educators towards corporal punishment.	There is no evidence to suggest that positive disciplinary strategies are regarded as an important goal in schools. Male educators are more inclined to favour corporal punishment as a disciplinary strategy than are female educators.	Teaching programme need to address the issue of effective methods of discipline. Educators need to be well-versed in alternatives to positive discipline strategies. Self-discipline should be the goal of today's educational system.

From the above table, it is evident that all seven researchers, although they have touched either on discipline or punishment, have not investigated the influence of educators' life experiences on classroom discipline practices. This present study is therefore well justified although the above-mentioned studies provided useful background information for my specific area of research.

In the study by Van Wyk (2000), styles of managing discipline and the need for different styles in different situations were raised. Both these matters are linked to the issues I discuss in chapter 2, where the different theories of discipline are examined. The work by Jones (1987) was also relevant here in the discussion on determining the specific type of discipline required in certain situations. In her findings RS Phatlane (2001) mentions that educators consulted in her study considered corporal punishment as a way of disciplining learners. In my study the nine participants declared that their own parents and their educators used the words "discipline" and "punishment" interchangeably. Here too there are interesting investigative parallels.

Rosa (1994) discusses the role of the father in disciplining children; Mr Kwena in this present study adopted his father's style of discipline after the abolition of corporal punishment. Similarly the work of Minnaar (2002) proved useful for the insight it provided, particularly with regard to his view that for effective teaching and learning to take place, one needs to consider classroom management. He also emphasises that the way educators manage their classroom can impact negatively or positively on teaching and learning. Dzivhani (2000) sees discipline as the joint responsibility of parents, educators and learners and in my study I have observed that this is indeed true. As indicated in chapter 5, it is often the case that the parents do not respond to the call by the school to discuss their children. Furthermore educators do not always live in the villages where the three sample schools are situated, and this poses a challenge in so far as their involvement in community activities is concerned. In his study Cohen (1996) reveals that educators are still of the opinion that corporal punishment is the right method of disciplining learners, and this is an issue discussed in some length in chapter 5. Mr Tau,

Mr Nkwe and Ms Nare regarded corporal punishment as the only effective method and wished that they were permitted to revert back to this practice, which bears out the findings of Rice (1987), who discovered that male educators were more inclined to favour corporal punishment. Of my participants, Mr Tholo and Mr Tshukudu mentioned that in their youth, their female educators talked with them while their male educators had resorted to corporal punishment.

From the foregoing overview of recent studies conducted in South Africa either on discipline or corporal punishment, it is clear that there was background information that proved useful for my investigation. The research results of my study revealed that educators behave the way they do because of what happened to them when they were learners; and that furthermore, an educator is the most appropriate agent of change within our schools. Indeed, all educators are informal changers of behaviour (Cheesman and Watts 1985, 8). While my investigation explores whether educators' life experiences can influence such changes of behaviour, the common feature in all the above-mentioned studies is classroom discipline.

1.4 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is of necessity a limited one and includes educators employed at three secondary schools in one circuit of the Nkangala Region of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. The Nkangala Region is in the former Kwandebele homeland. The conclusions drawn from the study thus apply only to the above population. Nevertheless, seen in broader perspective the research undertaken has the potential to be of far greater value; it advances a reasonably uncharted look at how the life experiences of educators influence their own teaching practice. The questions asked of participants were designed specifically for the study. Schools in the Nkangala area were the focus of a great deal of violence during the liberation struggle when conflicts that had erupted in the metropolitan areas spilled over into Nkangala. There was thus ample opportunity to study how educators reacted to these circumstances and how this impacted upon the way they

subsequently implemented school discipline. Given the reasonably small sample size (as indicated above) the findings of the study cannot be randomly generalised to apply to all rural educators; instead it is suggested that they should be replicated in other school environments to enable us to build up a more comprehensive picture of the extent to which lived experiences have a bearing on the way educators conduct their teaching practice.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were:

- To understand and interpret the life stories of educators.
- To examine the influence of educators' life experience on classroom discipline practices.
- To examine how educators' life experience influences their present behaviour.
- To examine whether impressions gained from educators' life experience can contribute to positive classroom discipline practices.

1.6 RESEARCH METHOD

The basic aim of this study was to investigate and analyse the influence of educators' life experiences on their classroom discipline practices. The nine participants were asked to indicate how their life experiences influenced the way in which they implemented discipline in the classroom, and to formalise this process several qualitative research methods were used.

1.6.1 Description of the sample

The sample of the study consists of educators who were learners during the period from 1974-1980. All participants are currently educators in secondary schools in the Nkangala Region of Mpumalanga Department of Education and began their teaching career from 1983. To obtain the sample, each educator who was interested in being part the study and

who met the above-mentioned criteria was requested to submit his/her name to the school principal. The study was limited to one circuit after the withdrawal of educators in other circuits. I then personally visited all the participating schools and interviewed each of the interested participants.

1.6.2 The research instrument

Questionnaires were delivered to participating schools. In the first section of the questionnaire the participants were requested to relate certain professional information about themselves, including their experience as an educator, the total number of learners in their classes and the specific grade of each class.

Semi-structured interviews were based on classroom discipline practices and whether the participants felt that their lived experiences affected their classroom discipline practices. For example, open-ended questioning began with “Can you tell me something about...?” Each educator was observed twice – within and outside the classroom.

1.6.3 Collection of data

The data for the study was collected by means of interviews, observation, field text and the narration of educators’ lived stories. The available literature was carefully reviewed before the questionnaires were drawn up in order to identify the subject area for questions to be used during interviews. Interview questions were compiled prior to the interviews and observation.

The term research design refers to the planning and structure of an investigation that is to be used to obtain evidence and provide answers to research questions. Design indicates how the research is set up, what happens to the subjects and what methods of data collection will be used (Macmillan and Schumacher 1997, 1). The purpose of the research design is to provide the most valid and accurate answers possible to investigate the research topic.

This study approached the problem from the perspective that present day behaviour is co-determined by lived experiences and the meanings that individuals have constructed. Understanding the meanings constructed by the participants and how these influence present behaviour, compelled the researcher to adopt a qualitative approach.

1.6.4 Narrative research

Narrative enquiry begins with experience as expressed in lived and told stories (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 40). The study focuses on the influence of educators' life experience on classroom discipline practices. Individual educators' stories were collected and analysed. Understanding the educators' life experiences was a key aspect of this study. Creswell (2005, 479) gives the primary characteristics of narrative research as follows:

- experiences of an individual – social and personal interaction
- chronology of experiences – past, present and future experiences
- live stories – first person, oral accounts of actions obtained through field texts
- restoring – from the field texts
- coding the field texts for themes or categories
- incorporating the context or place into the story or themes

In-depth structured and unstructured interviews were used. I conducted interviews and transcribed the conversation from a tape recorder. When the raw data had been transcribed key elements were identified. Observations and field notes were added to the data collected and this provided rich, descriptive information on the classroom discipline practices of the participating educators. Starting by observing these educators in their day-to-day involvement in the schools, I was able to identify those who used different approaches to classroom discipline.

In the initial stage of the study I chose to be a non-participant observer, taking careful note of how educators disciplined the learners. Critics of participant observation as a data gathering technique point to the highly subjective and therefore unreliable nature of human perception (Merriam 1998, 95). According to Merriam, no one is able to observe

everything accurately. It was necessary to decide on a starting point and I therefore included the following elements drawn from Merriam (1998, 97) in my observation schedule:

- Physical setting: What is the physical environment?
- Participants: Who will be my participants?
- Interaction and activities: What will happen? How will people interact with one another?
- Conversation: How will this be captured? Tape recorder and field notes will be used to avoid misunderstanding.
- Researcher's behaviour: My role will be clear as a researcher.

1.7 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter one deals with the orientation of the study, the statement of the problem and discusses the research approach. It also provides a review of the relevant literature.

Chapter two deals with theories of school discipline. It provides a literature study involving an overview of eight models of discipline, including the Skinnerian model; Kounin model; Ginnott model; Dreikurs model; Canter model; Jones model; Gordon model, Curwin and Mendler model.

Chapter three deals with the influence of lived experiences on current behaviour while chapter four gives a detailed discussion on the research design. Chapter five provides a content analysis and this is followed by a detailed narrative analysis in chapter six. Chapter seven is a concluding chapter that draws together the findings of the investigation.

1.8 CONCLUSION

Currently our schools are run in an atmosphere free from torture, harassment and fear. This is an essential requirement if educators are to focus primarily on teaching and

shaping the lives of our children rather than dealing with the consequences of bad behaviour and ill discipline. It is to be hoped that this research will make a meaningful contribution to classroom discipline practices; this will also encourage school administrators and managers to strive towards the enhancement, growth and well-being of educators so that they are able to perform to the best of their ability.

For many learners and educators classroom discipline has become a battlefield. Many programmes and methods of dealing with this issue have been tried and re-tried (sometimes with new names), but maintaining discipline will always remain an integral part of schooling. It is therefore important that educators should know more about their own behavioural patterns and how these influence others, and on the teaching they provide (Curwin and Mendler 1988, 2). In this chapter the background to the research problem was provided. Discipline, being a key concept, was defined and a brief discussion was given on the research conducted in this field in South Africa in recent years. The method to be used in the study was outlined and the structure of the research was also indicated.