

## CHAPTER 5

### A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of educators' life experiences on current classroom discipline practices. Prior to the discussion on data analysis, an overview providing background information on issues affecting the communities in the vicinity of the schools, the school environment, school governance, school grading (level), class size and community involvement was provided. In analysing the data, I looked for indications of whether their lived experiences (i.e. how they were punished and the examples that were modelled) might have influenced the way in which they are currently practising school and classroom discipline. As indicated in Chapter 4 (on research design), it was deemed necessary to analyse the data at two levels. First, to do a content analysis of the data received from the responses of the nine participants, i.e. to perform a horizontal cross-section of all sets of data which is aimed at comparing the data from all nine participants. This should reveal the type/s of disciplinary actions the educators were exposed to as learners, as well as the range of disciplinary measures presently used by them. In addition, this should reveal the type/s of misdemeanours which the participants deemed as requiring disciplinary action. The second category of analysis undertaken, which is discussed in the next chapter, is the narrative analysis of participants lived experiences. This was done to establish the extent to which lived experiences influence current behaviour while at the same time acquiring a better understanding of participants lived experiences (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 20).

## 5.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE THREE SAMPLE SCHOOLS

### 5.2.1 School environment

Fuller (1987) reviewed more than 50 empirical studies on school environments that produce the most effective schools in Third World countries and came to the conclusion that:

The school institution exerts a greater influence on achievements within developing countries compared to industrialised nations, after accounting for the effect of pupil background (Fuller 1987, 255-256).

Some of his specific conclusions worth mentioning are that school achievement is influenced by the length of the instructional programme; pupil feeding schemes; school library activity; years of teacher training; textbooks and instructional materials.

Vulliamy (1987, 217) found persuasive quantitative evidence of the existence of certain factors that affect secondary school results in Papua New Guinea. These include quality of teaching; style of school administration; extra assistance for weak students; levels of staff morale; and the provision of basic facilities such as water and electricity. On the other hand, Levin and Lockheed (1991) maintain that flexibility appears to be significant in the achievement of effectiveness. They emphasise the importance of material inputs on achievements in economically impoverished schools and argue that there are three basic inputs which are critical in effecting change. These include a well-developed curriculum in terms of scope and sequence, adequate instructional materials, sufficient time for teaching and learning, and teaching practices that encourage participatory learning. According to them, facilitating factors of this process are community involvement, school-based professionalism and a flexible curriculum and organisation.

The above-mentioned research was used to some extent as a yardstick in determining the viability of the school environments where this study was conducted. The three schools which were involved in this research project are situated in the rural area of the former KwaNdebele homeland which is in the cultural heartland of Ndebele traditional practices. As is often the case in traditionally patriarchal African societies, Ndebele women do not

enjoy the same social status as their male counterparts. This fact is also evident in the school environment, where young girls are encouraged to leave school early in their lives to attend to family chores and to be prepared for motherhood by their family members.

Traditionally, parents do not invest in the education of their daughters because it is believed that they will be married during their adolescence and will then focus on raising a family. Young girls are also socialised into believing that males are born to be dominant over females and that they should not presume to compete with their male counterparts in any aspect of social life. As a result, in the school environment girls are inclined to drop out before their education is complete and because of this do not excel to the same extent as boys do – this is also true on the sports field. The practice of *iqude*<sup>1</sup> among the traditional Ndebele communities socialises young girls from the onset of puberty (about 10 to 12 years) onwards into adult practices such as good citizenship, child-bearing, raising a family and the acquisition of general family nurturing skills. Obviously these cultural practices affect school attendance and discipline.

Boys also practise their cultural customs. However, their initiation proceeds differently and is called *ingoma*.<sup>2</sup> *Ingoma* is an Ndebele cultural activity which is followed to initiate boys into manhood and is a highly esteemed practice among the Ndebele people. Boys between the ages of 18 to 21 years are taken out into the bush or nearby mountainous terrain for a period of two months. Before the initiation is due to begin, an entire month is devoted to *ukukhonga*,<sup>3</sup> which involves the preparation of the initiates. During this period the youths spend time together at night, practising songs and psyching themselves up for the most important event of their lives which, among other things, will teach them how to live and behave as socially responsible men. At the end of the initiation period the families of the boys hold huge graduation celebrations called *ukuhlaba*<sup>4</sup> which come after two months in the bush where the boys have been initiated into all their cultural customs, beliefs and practices. The celebration parties continue for another month and cattle are

---

<sup>1</sup> *Iqude* is a Ndebele cultural activity that initiates girls into womanhood and the responsibilities this entails.

<sup>2</sup> *Ingoma* is a Ndebele cultural activity which initiates boys into manhood.

<sup>3</sup> *Ukukhonga* is a one-month preparation period during which initiates psyche themselves up in preparation for initiation.

<sup>4</sup> *Ukuhlaba* is celebration after initiation. It signifies the completion of the traditional initiation ceremony.

slaughtered and presents given to the celebrants. These practices often have a disruptive effect on the boys' school discipline. They find it difficult to observe school rules during the *ukukhonga* period. Late-coming becomes rife because their initiation tutors are usually uneducated and unemployed men who have little regard for the boys' school commitments. Preparations for initiation often continue late into the night and this denies the boys enough time to rest and to do their school work.

The period of *ukuhlaba* is an acknowledgement of the manhood these boys have achieved. They are encouraged to behave like men rather than the boys they used to be before initiation. During these celebrations each youth has to announce his initiation or manhood names to his mother, sisters and younger brothers. These names are derived from a respected list of names used to identify men who are from the initiation school. Time is usually taken off from work and school for these celebrations by most family members.

This long period of absence from school has an adverse effect on school discipline. When boys return from the initiation school, the majority of them refuse to take instructions; especially from women and uninitiated men. They have a perception that they are now men who cannot be ordered around by "junior" members of their community, i.e., women (who make up the majority of educators) and those men who have not been to the initiation school. This period of uncertainty usually lasts for several months while the young men try to adjust to the realities of life that require them to be obedient to their leaders irrespective of their age, gender, and social standing as far as the *ingoma* is concerned.

In addition to the cultural activities mentioned above, there are various factors that contribute to poor discipline in schools. For example, young girls who are from initiation school become involved in unprotected sex and as a result they become pregnant. The government has introduced social grants for these young teenage mothers in terms of the Social Welfare Act, No. 59 of 1996. This provides them with a regular allowance as a poverty alleviation measure. Unfortunately this well-intended strategy is abused by some

young girls and their families who encourage them to become pregnant in the hope of accessing as many of these grants as possible. Furthermore, when they do get the money, they do not always use it for its intended purpose, namely that of taking care of the child. Instead it is sometimes used to buy drugs, cellular phones, liquor and to meet their other personal needs; little or none of the grant is used to feed the child. There are also disciplinary problems that have emerged when young girls access these grants. For example, on the day of the payouts many of the girls miss class because of the large number of teenage mothers who queue at pay stations to receive their money. These long queues are a result of inadequate and sometimes inefficient staff in the Department of Health and Social Development which is responsible for making these payments. The drugs they purchase with these funds may lead to poor attendance, poor performance, disrespect and other behavioural problems that manifest themselves in the school environment.

Another factor that affects discipline in schools, particularly in this part of the Mpumalanga Province is the poor economic state of the learners' families. In the poverty-stricken, disadvantaged rural communities where the three sample schools are situated, parents are often forced to stay near their workplace; this leaves the learners alone (or with elderly family-members) in their homes while the parents are at work. In some instances the parents send the families money to buy food or they come home once in a month. This may well encourage young boys and girls to get involved in sexual activities. The girls do this with the hope of getting money from their boyfriends; unfortunately some of them become pregnant and/or become infected with HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, these adolescents have a tendency of absenting themselves from school because they lack supervision at home. When they do attend school they tend to be arrogant and insolent towards their teachers and frustrate their educators with their constant misbehaviour. In most cases they are referred by their educators to the principal for disciplinary action and when the parents are called in to address these problems, they confess to the educators that they are unable to control their children. These learners become rebellious and do not seem to have any confidence in education; they lack the belief that it can indeed be a means of improving their lives. In

contrast, however, economically balanced families seem able to inspire respect for authority in their children. It is therefore noted that a combination of poverty at home and pressure within the school can be a contributory factor to ill-discipline.

### **5.2.2. School enrolment and class size**

Schiefelbein and Simmons (1981, 10-11) found that *inter alia*, larger class size was related to higher performance, or did not affect it, in 9 of the 14 studies they conducted. This finding coincides with Fuller's (1987) conclusion that reduced class size constitutes an ineffective parameter when considering school achievement. He claims that "in most situations, lowering class size with the intent of raising achievements is not an efficient strategy" (Fuller 1987, 287).

In contrast however, research carried out in Wales by Reynolds *et al.* (1989) concluded that more effective schools had smaller class sizes and lower pupil-teacher ratios. These schools were also generally smaller in overall size.

Although it is apparent that the affect of school and class size on achievement have not yet been conclusively established, these issues were considered when the three schools in the sample were visited. All of them, it will be remembered, are secondary schools, offering classes from grades 10-12. Findings at the three schools indicate that School A has 16 classrooms with an enrolment of 483 learners (an average 30 learners per class). School B also has 16 classrooms with 430 learners (an average 27 learners per class). School C has 16 classrooms and 894 learners (average 56 learners per class). In two of the schools (A and B), the enrolment does not therefore pose any difficulty. But in school C, where there is an average of 56 learners per class, numbers may well impact upon achievement.

Since these three schools do not have adequate buildings to house facilities such as libraries and administrative blocks, some of the classrooms have had to be used as staffrooms, principals' offices and libraries. This means that there is a shortage of

classrooms and those that are available become overcrowded making it difficult for the educators to give individual attention to learners. This contributes to the high failure rate, which in turn keeps learners longer in the system. The learners that have failed then tend to overwhelm the schools because there are not enough educators, classrooms, and other facilities necessary to cater for them. These “repeaters” also pose serious disciplinary problems to the educators because they sometimes become unmanageable as far as discipline is concerned. They tend to feel that they know the syllabus and deceive themselves into thinking that they know what is being taught in class. They are reluctant to participate in school activities, often fail to do their home-work and are regularly absent from school.

The fact that all the three schools use classrooms as administrative offices implies that there is no privacy for teachers when teachers need to deal with troublesome learners on an individual basis. Sometimes learners are referred to the principal for punishment – as happened on one occasion when I was visiting the school to collect data for my study. It was made clear to me at all three schools that one of the factors that contributed to the difficulty of managing problematic learners was the lack of space. In addition, the area in which the three schools are situated has a very poor water supply; because of this the schools have erected several pit toilets. During my visit to these schools I observed learners queuing to use toilets and others were sent to draw water somewhere in the neighbourhood – this obviously has a negative affect on discipline because these learners should be in class doing their school work. Then too, after each break time lessons do not start on time because learners have a variety of excuses for being late.

### **5.2.3 School governance**

In a summary of empirical research findings on effective schools, Haddad *et al.* (1990) note that:

Well managed, effective schools share several characteristics: they display an orderly environment, emphasise academic achievement, set high expectations for student achievement, and are run by teachers or principals who expend an enormous amount of effort to produce effective teaching and encourage pupils to

learn, no matter what their family background or gender. Few schools in developing countries display these features (Haddad *et al.* 1990, 57)

They also make the point that:

Many of those who have observed the schooling process in both developed and developing countries conclude that the most important factor in governing how well pupils do in school is school management ... several studies have identified headmaster education and experience as important variables that affect pupil's achievement (*ibid.*).

A summary of research findings in Riddell and Brown (1991, 24-25), provides a number of factors as being basic to effective secondary school management. According to Rutter *et al.* (1979) these are a pupil control system; an appropriate school environment for pupils; involvement of pupils in the management of the school; and the academic development of pupils.

In line with the above-mentioned findings in the literature, the South African Schools' Act (SASA), No. 84 of 1996, section 8 (3) entrusts school governing bodies with the responsibility of ensuring that every school has a code of conduct. A code of conduct is a statement that determines the rules that must be followed by members of the school community. The rules are negotiated with all affected parties such as parents, learners and educators and apply to particular conditions and problems in a specific school. They define what is acceptable and what is unacceptable; they also clarify the rights and responsibilities of all role players. In essence, a school code of conduct aims at developing a community of self-disciplined educators and learners who are responsible for their own behaviour and who respect the rights of others (Lotter *et al.* at [www.kzneducation.gov.za/manuals/sgb/sgbmanual06.pdf](http://www.kzneducation.gov.za/manuals/sgb/sgbmanual06.pdf)).

Furthermore the SASA, No. 84 of 1996, section 16 devolves the power of school governance to school governing bodies (SGB's). Some of the duties of these SGB's are covered by section 20 of the act and they include developing the mission statement of the school; devising a code of conduct; defining school policies; determining school fees to be paid; and recommending the appointment of teachers (Thwebane 2001, 2-3).



SGB's are juristic persons and have a degree of autonomy (Bliss 1991, 169). The importance and authority of the SGB's cannot be overemphasised because the well being and survival of the school, in a sense, depends of the quality of the decisions taken by the SGB (Durman 1995, 62).

The three sample schools included in this research project all have a hierarchical structure which comprises a principal and the school management team (SMT) members (deputy principal and education specialists (ES's)) who receive minimal support from educators; and post level 1 educators. Decisions flow from top to bottom. This leaves the running of the schools in the hands of a few individuals who carry the blame when things go wrong – or wallow in glory if things go right. This structure affects discipline in the three schools under scrutiny because ordinary educators take no responsibility for the decisions made by their SMT's – hence the educators' habit of referring problematic learners to the principal.

According to the SASA, the SGBs, SMTs, the representative council of learners (RCLs), parents and educators are all collectively responsible for the maintenance of discipline in a school. The act stipulates the following roles for the above-mentioned structures:

- The role of the SGBs is to support implementation of the code of conduct for learners; to report any dissatisfaction or anomalies with implementation; they are also expected to take an active role in implementation of the code of conduct and to review the code of conduct annually.
- The role of the SMT's is to make inputs on the formulation of the code of conduct and to review it once a year.
- The role of educators is to contribute to the code of conduct when consulted to do so; to ensure implementation of the code of conduct; to refer serious misconduct to principal; to participate in mechanisms to handle discipline and to review it annually in consultation with other stakeholders. Educators have the same rights and responsibilities as SGBs in the control of discipline.

- It is the responsibility of the RCLs to create the opportunity for others to work without hindrance and to pay full attention; to respect the individuality, convictions and beliefs of others; to treat others in a fair and just manner, to uphold the honest behaviour and safety of the school, to respect and maintain school's facilities and property, to engender and to uphold school spirit by participating in and supporting cultural, sporting and academic activities; to respect the decisions made and react to them in a mature and sensitive manner; to maintain a clean and litter-free environment; to ask for help and advice at an appropriate time and in an appropriate manner. They should also give advice and help to other learners; be punctual in every part of school life; care for school books and return them in the condition in which they were received and to uphold the values of the school when out of school uniform.

([www.kzneducation.gov.za/manuals/sgb/sgbmanual06.pdf](http://www.kzneducation.gov.za/manuals/sgb/sgbmanual06.pdf))

Lastly, it was noted while on my visits to the three sample schools that at the school level, as laid down above, that governance is indeed vested in the SGB's and management in the SMTs. Also, it was observed that SGB representation for every school depends on learner enrolment. The sample schools have their SGB representation as follows: School A = 11; School B = 13 and School C = 15. SMT representation also depends on the number of learners. School A has three SMT members, including the principal and two ES's; School B also has three, including the principal and two ES's; and School C has five including the principal, 1 deputy principal and three ES's. Staffing at schools is also determined by learner enrolment and subjects offered at a particular school according to the Personnel Administration Measures (PAM) document contained in the Employment of Educators' Act of 1998.

#### **(i) Effectiveness of school structures**

In the area where the sample schools are located, the effectiveness of the SGB's, SMT's and RCL's leave much to be desired. Inherent weaknesses of the SGB's include poor educational level of members, non-attendance of meetings and failure to implement policies and procedures. In terms of the Schools' Act, SGB's are required to discipline

learners in compliance with the code of conduct of learners. However, because many parents still believe that corporal punishment is the only effective method of disciplining learners, they find it difficult and challenging to implement the schools' code of conduct.

During my visit to the three sample schools, SGBs were found to be very ineffective. They cannot support the implementation of the code of conduct because it is simply non-existent. This is mainly because the majority of parents in the sample area are uneducated and are unable to point out any anomalies or express any dissatisfaction with regard to the implementation of the code of conduct or discipline in general. Due to their unfamiliarity with the requirements of the act, SGB members of the three schools have not drafted, amended or reviewed any code of conduct in their sphere of operation.

According to the SASA, the SMT is expected to make inputs in the formulation of the code of conduct. However, it was observed that in none of the three schools did the SMTs contribute towards the formulation of a single code of conduct. This implies that the SMTs are also failing in respect of formulating and implementing a code of conduct. It was also observed that some learners are frequently absent from school; come late to school and are not punctual in attending their classes, let alone doing their homework. The instances mentioned above are a clear indication that SMTs of the three sample schools are indeed entirely ineffective.

Furthermore it was noted that because there is no code of conduct, the RCLs cannot be involved in any formulation of its terms. In addition, the maintenance of discipline in the three sample schools rests squarely on the shoulders of the principals. The RCLs members thus play no significant role in the maintenance of discipline at their schools, for example, by discouraging late-coming, class absenteeism and the general observation of school rules and regulations.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the RCL's SMT's and SBB's have not accepted responsibility for discipline control and for compliance with a code of conduct. The educators are also inclined to criticise their institution and this contributes towards lax

school-discipline. Some educators seek favour with problematic learners instead of calling them to order. Another factor that certainly contributes to ill-discipline is the fact that some SMTs in the three sample schools became ES's because of their long service and not because they had particular knowledge and expertise in the subjects they are supervising. This means that they cannot take decisions and are prone to refer academic issues to their principals. There is sometimes finger-pointing and disillusionment when dealing with learner and educator disciplinary problems.

## **(ii) Community involvement**

The Department of Education encourages parents to become involved in their children's education either by joining SGB's or by assisting their children individually at home. Parents and the community in general, as partners in education, should share with the educators the responsibility of educating their children. The school and the home both influence the manner in which children approach their learning tasks and this is why the continuity between home and school is vital, albeit difficult to achieve (Polland 1990).

Renwick (1989) found that if parents and educators of kindergarten children kept in touch with each other and communicated on a regular basis, the children adjusted far better to the new environment in the kindergarten. This sense of communication appeared to make a difference in the children's educational progress. Also, it was established that if parents and educators are part of the child's micro-system as identified by Bronfenbrenner (1998), then they directly influence each other and the child becomes involved in this relationship.

In contrast to the findings mentioned above, the communities where the sample schools for my study are situated have no contact at all with the educators or the governance structures of the schools. The result is negligible communication and lack of commitment to the educational process. The poverty levels are high and those parents who have found work in Gauteng often travel more than 160 kilometres to and from their workplaces, leaving their homes early in the morning and returning very late in the evening. Alternatively, they may stay near their workplaces and leave their children alone at home,

which means they spend little or no quality time with their children. In situations where learners do not attend school regularly because of lack of parental supervision, their parents are always reluctant to come to school to attend to the disciplinary issues that involve their children. They usually explain that they only come home once a month and cannot be present at such discussions. The problem of absent parents and learners left on their own is particularly prevalent in the communities where the three schools are located.

One educator commented that some learners absent themselves from school because they do not have school uniforms and lunch boxes, which highlights the extreme level of poverty levels that prevail in the community. The government's basic nutrition programme which is designed to address this problem only provides primary school children with food; the programme does not make provision for secondary schools. This means that some of the learners in the sample schools still attend school on an empty stomach. This matter needs to be revisited by the Department of Education as a hungry child usually lacks concentration and is therefore prone to be involved in disciplinary matters such as poor attendance, not doing homework, and the development of aggressive behaviour and stubbornness. However, the counter-argument is that this is not true for all learners because the behaviour of learners in the classroom also depends on other factors such as family background, stability and unity.

From the findings outlined above it can be concluded that the people of the communities served by the three sample schools are generally poor, travel to and from Gauteng for work that takes them away from their homes for long periods at a time and that they as a result cannot play a significant role in school activities. Also, that they leave their children at home alone which gives their adolescent children an undue amount of freedom in their lives because of lack of parental control. The community therefore has a large number of ill-disciplined learners who have become a problem to their educators. For their part, the educators are ill-equipped to deal with this situation and feel that they have not received sufficient guidance from the Department of Education in the use of alternative measures of disciplining learners. Overall, the school environment does not model good discipline.

Community practices that contribute to this situation include cultural practices such as the initiation of boys and girls; the system of social grants to pregnant girls; drug and alcohol abuse; lack of parental control; and very little community involvement in school matters. Education is not a priority in these communities because it is common practice to take initiates away from school for periods of up to three months. These communities have deeply ingrained traditional customs which interfere with the success of learners at school – and unfortunately parents do not seem to be bothered by the negative repercussions on the education of their children. Traditional practices are sacrosanct and parents frequently refuse to broach the subject with educators.

As mentioned above, boys and girls are taught at initiation school that once they have undergone initiation they are young men; and that women, in any frame of reference, are less worthy. As a result, non-Ndebele educators are regarded as immature “boys and girls” whose advice and counselling is not to be taken seriously. Initiation also exposes learners to intoxicating substances such as liquor and drugs, especially during the celebration period as boys are allowed to drink beer and are also given the freedom to have sexual relationships. It is thus clear that initiation practices are having an adverse effect on education. Educators who are not initiated are despised and closely monitored by the community lest they denigrate this highly regarded tradition. The authority of uninitiated educators is undermined to the detriment of all learners and thus negatively impacts upon the entire education system in the region.

### **5.3 THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

Initially, semi-structured interviews were conducted at the three schools which were referred to as Schools A, B and C. During these interviews, educators’ responses were recorded electronically so that there was no interruption from others who might influence the views expressed. This procedure was followed by the observation of the participant educators in their respective work environments.

During the first interview participants were asked the same pre-formulated questions (see Appendix C) below. The responses obtained were then analysed and categorised to derive their significance as suggested by MacMillan and Schumacher (1997, 502). This information is reflected below in Appendix D. During the second interview, all relevant issues emerging from the previous interview were probed in terms of the participants lived experiences by allowing them to narrate their own individual stories, a portrayal of their lives (Flick 1998, 205). These narrations appear in Appendix F. At the third interview, I compared all responses received from participants with the observations I had made previously with regard to their handling of disciplinary problems.

I observed each of the nine educators, noting their attendance of classes and how they maintained discipline. I also observed them outside the classroom. My observation at the three sample schools focused on a number of aspects, namely: The school environment; time actually spent on teaching and learning (time on task); school resources; and school and classroom discipline practices.

### **5.3.1 Observation**

#### **(a) School environment**

Overall, all three schools had an untidy appearance; school yards were strewn with papers and other litter. On one occasion when I visited a school at 8h05 a grade 12 class was still unattended and the learners were noisily sweeping out their classroom.

#### **(b) Time spent on learning and teaching**

During visits to the sample schools, I noted that according to the information provided by the respective principals, not all schools conduct assembly everyday. It seems the usual practice is to hold assembly on Mondays and Fridays. The one exception is School C, where assembly is conducted on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. In all three schools, the time set for the assembly to begin was not adhered to because learners and educators arrived late, thereby delaying the start of the school day. This same problem was experienced at break times. After break, learners and educators were slow in resuming

their classes. Under circumstances such as these the cumulative impact of the time lost in starting late could result in a massive loss in teaching and learning. In addition, it appeared that learners and educators were unconcerned about this. Such a *laissez-faire* approach to time consciousness carries with it the seed for spawning disciplinary problems and poor learner control.

During my visits to the three schools I also observed that educators seldom complete the syllabus, and this was influenced by time on task by educators.

### **(c) School resources**

It is important to indicate that in terms of the official norms for staffing, all schools were correctly staffed, with education specialists, sufficient educators, administrative staff and general workers. This may be misleading as staff numbers are determined on the basis of total learner numbers, (PAM) but the curriculum in use may result in educators who teach Mathematics, Accounting and Physical Science being over-stretched, because educators in these subjects are in short supply. The result is that these educators have to be prepared to teach subjects from grades 10-12, which in some cases affected their performance.

I observed that in terms of provision of physical resources, all three schools had an inadequate number of toilets. This created disciplinary problems because learners were found queuing to use the toilets. In all the three sample schools the principals' office was a converted classroom, which poses a challenge because there is no privacy when disruptive learners and late-comers are brought to the principals' office to be disciplined. When asked how the lack of laboratories affected them, one educator indicated that subjects like Physical Science and Biology become difficult to handle when there are no facilities for practical work. Even if these educators try to comprise, learners tend to become bored and disciplinary problems again emerge. All three schools have sufficient classrooms but learners did not clean them and educators did not bother to monitor learners in this respect.



#### **(d) Discipline**

Numerous examples of a general lack of supervision and proper control of learners were observed and this resulted in poor discipline practices in the sample schools. For example, while I was waiting for my appointment with Mr Tlou at School B, I noted that there was noise coming from an adjacent class. Because I was allowed to move around, I went to that class and found the learners were alone. On checking where the educator was, I found the educator in the staff room marking books and not attending to her class. Experiences like this made me aware of the fact that educators are prone to leave their classes at random, leaving the learners unattended. The high rate of late-coming by both learners and educators was also observed. Although educators recorded the late-comers and sent the list to the principal, no action was taken against the offenders. From my observation of examples like this and the way educators were interacting in the classroom, I concluded that educators were unable to handle ill-disciplined learners effectively; even minor offences were referred to the principal. It was almost as if educators were abandoning their responsibility for effective classroom management and discipline thus leading to a situation where the principal was inundated with learners to be disciplined. To me it was a clear sign of poor classroom management which in turn affected overall discipline in the school. Then too, often learners who were told to report to the principal simply failed to do so, going to drink water or waste time elsewhere instead of going to the staff-room. In many schools educators and the principal punish learners for misdemeanors by instructing them to clean the toilets. At School B I observed that learners were cleaning toilets during teaching and learning time. I could not establish whether they were being punished, but the fact of the matter was that they were not with the other learners in class being taught.

I could not, from my observations, find any conclusive evidence that educators were still using corporal punishment, but incidents of corporal punishment are often reported to my office. What I did find during my visit to School B was that the principal had a stick in his hand while trying to control late-coming. When asked why he held the stick he said he was only brandishing it to make the learners afraid so that they would hurry to their

classes. Clearly he still believes that the stick can make a learner to change his or her behaviour.

### **5.3.2 Field texts**

Other than recording what I saw and heard, I also observed the reaction of participants when responding to questions. Mr Tholo, when asked to tell how he was punished in the past, was highly emotional and said that even today he still remembers how his principal punished him while walking on the veranda. He also thinks of the humiliation he felt when he was called “*Ditsebe*”<sup>5</sup> and “*Mosesane*”.<sup>6</sup> Mr Tau seemed to be angry about the abolition of corporal punishment. He emphasised that he has achieved in life because of the punishment he received at the hands of his educators.

## **5.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

### **5.4.1 Background information on the nine sample educators**

Participants in this study were learners during the time when a culture of resistance against the apartheid government was the accepted norm. During that era the intention was to make schools unmanageable, to inculcate a climate of disrespect for human rights and to instil violence in public schools. As indicated in Chapter 4, all the participants had more than 10 years teaching experience. Table 5 gives additional background information on the nine sample educators with regard to their experience, when they started teaching, and where they were during 1976 unrest:

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ditsebe* means ears.

<sup>6</sup> *Mosesane* means thin. Both are personal remarks alluding to his physical appearance.

**TABLE 6 : BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE**

***SAMPLE EDUCATORS***

<b>SCHOOL AND PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>FIRST YEAR AS AN EDUCATOR</b>	<b>TEACHING EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>RESEARCH REMARKS</b>
<b>SCHOOL A</b>			
Tau	1986	20 years	As indicated in Chapter 4, the participant has a three year educators' qualification, He confirmed that in 1976 he was doing grade 7 which in the past was known as standard 5.
Nkwe	1988	18 years	Nkwe holds a three year educators' qualification. In 1976 she was in grade 4, previously known as standard 3.
Nare	1986	20 years	This participant holds a three year educators' qualification. In 1976 he was a grade 6 (standard 4) learner.
<b>SCHOOL B</b>			
Phala	1993	14 years	This participant has a three year educators' qualification. In 1978 he was in grade 1 (sub A).
Tlou	1988	18 years	Similar to the other participants, Tlou also has a three year educators' qualification. In 1976 he was in grade 4, that is, standard 3.
Tholo	1993	14 years	In 1978 Tholo was still doing grade 1 (sub A). He has a three year educators' qualification.
<b>SCHOOL C</b>			
Tshukudu	1989	17 years	This participant has a three year educators' qualification. In 1976 she was in grade 3 (standard 2).
Kwena	1989	17 years	Similar to Tshukudu, Kwena was a learner in grade 3 in 1976. He is a qualified educator with a secondary educators' qualification which is a three year diploma.
Phuti	1993	14 years	She has a three year educators' qualification. In 1978 she was a grade 1 (sub A) learner.

The above table reveals that the majority of participants were at primary school during 1976. The unrest in the country affected all the schools including primary schools. During the period of unrest, learners were denied schooling and educators could not teach as both groups were forced to stage protest marches. Secondary school learners were the main target but even crèches were affected. In 1976 two of the participants were still at crèche level. It is noted from the above table that participants were punished as early as 1976; this is why when they started their teaching careers in the 1986-1993, they all saw corporal punishment as the only effective method of managing classroom discipline.

## **5.5 PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE**

The initial interview was based on a semi-structured interview schedule which was mainly focused on exploring participants' views on school discipline. The questions explored their views on the definition of discipline, namely discipline versus punishment; how participants were disciplined at home and at school; lessons learnt from the discipline received at home and at school; infringements the participants were punished for at home and at school; and how the educators are currently dealing with problematic learners. These questions set the scene for the narrative interviews that were to follow. The preliminary analysis of their responses gave me the opportunity to define a line of inquiry for the narrative interviews that I utilised to explore educators' lived experiences and how they are dealing with the present and the future in their professional careers.

### **5.5.1 Definition of discipline**

Participants understood discipline as way of correcting wrongs and a manner of bringing order to a troubled situation. They further indicated that discipline is monitoring of learners. According to the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, discipline is a teacher-directed activity whereby the teacher seeks to lead, guide, manage or confront a learner about behaviour that is disruptive to the rights of others (Rogers 1994, 11). According to Johnson & Johnson (1990, 5) and Jones (1987, 8) discipline should be viewed as a

corrective measure that will encourage learners to behave well, not to do so because they fear punishment, but because they realise the negative effects of their behaviour on other learners and the school in general.

Participants share the same sentiments about the definition of discipline. For example,

**Mr Tau** explained:

Discipline means bringing learners under control; it is about teaching them to manage themselves well. That is by doing their homework, being punctual at school and attending their classes. Ill-disciplined learners disrespect authority.

**Mr Kwena** shared this view and made the following statement:

According to me discipline has to do with the monitoring of learners so that they can be in line with school policies. Discipline must come naturally. One should discipline herself/himself. Discipline is to bring order to a situation.

Participants understood discipline as correcting behaviour that is unacceptable. **Mrs**

**Nare**, for example said:

Discipline is the way educators create order so that teaching can take place. Without discipline, there will be no proper teaching and learning. Corporal punishment is not discipline, because learners are made to feel pain as a way of keeping order. Discipline is a modern way of instilling responsibility in learners.

Similarly, **Mr Phala** claimed that:

Discipline is way of correcting a learner. This can be when a learner has not done his/her homework or when he/she is late at school or for class.

Participants knew what discipline meant and appeared to have a sound understanding to enable them to participate in a discussion about discipline.

## **5.5.2 Discipline versus punishment**

All participants, when asked how they were disciplined as learners, indicated that they were spanked, lashed, smacked and whipped both at school and at home. It is apparent that for many parents (home) and educators (school), discipline was synonymous with corporal punishment.

Participants understood discipline to mean making someone feel pain; the educators who taught them when they were young made no differentiation between punishment and discipline. Their responses to questions on this issue were as follows:

**Mr Tau:** Yes, because to them discipline meant making me feel pain. Just like my educators, because corporal punishment was allowed, when they punished me they thought they were disciplining me.

**Mrs Nare:** When we were still learners, discipline to our educators and parents meant punitively punishing us.

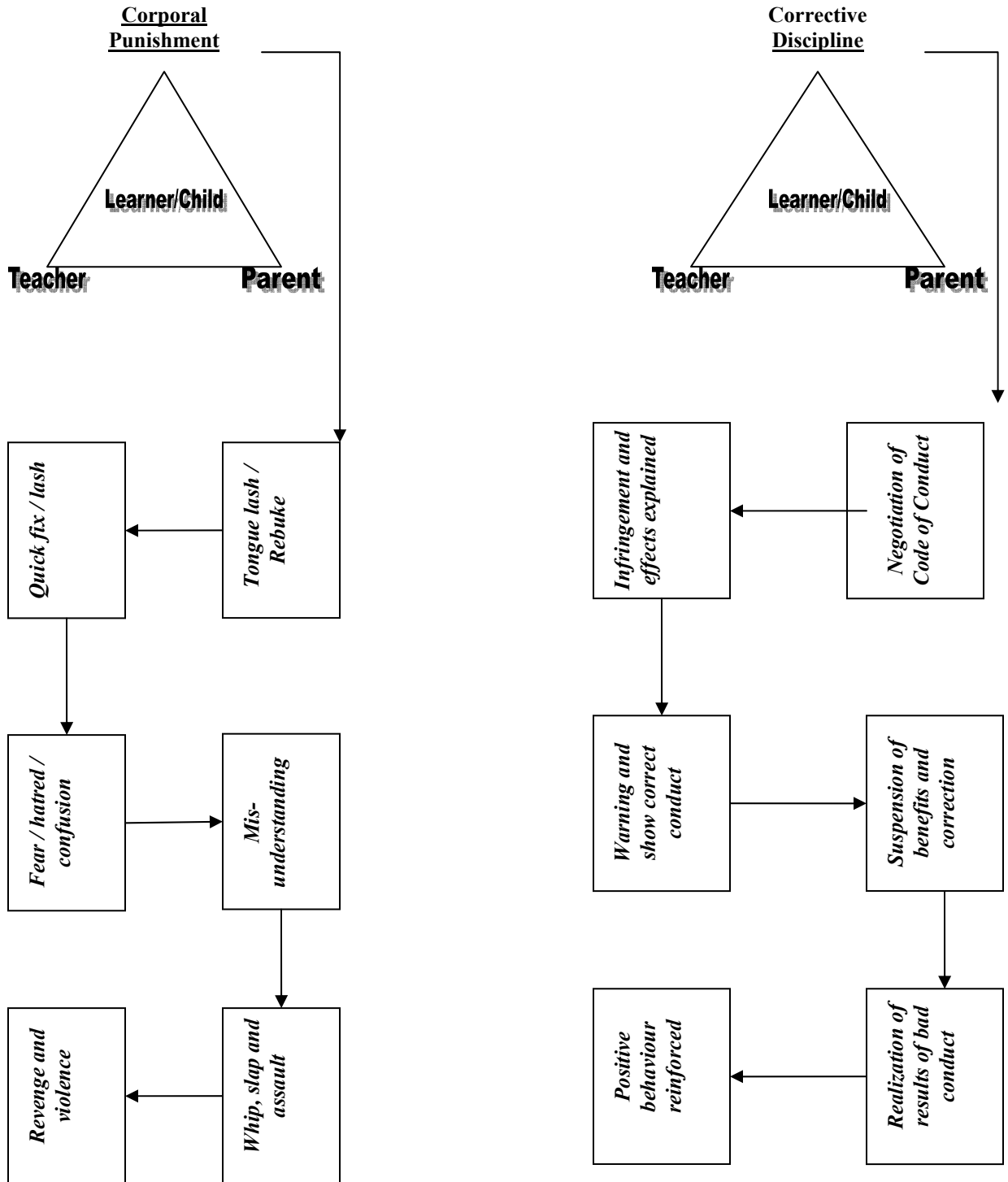
**Mr Nkwe:** To my parents and educators there was no difference between discipline and corporal punishment. Educators used corporal punishment as a form of discipline because they were afraid of losing control and of being terrorised by learners.

**Mr Phala:** Yes, I used the word “punish” interchangeably with “discipline” because when my educators and parents used the word discipline they meant punishment. To them corporal punishment was the only effective way of correcting wrongs. When educators used a lash they thought that they were disciplining me. It is only now that I realize that discipline is corrective and punishment punitive.

In these statements the participants’ understanding of the concept discipline and that of their parents is well captured. To their parents and educators, discipline categorically meant punishment. The meaning of discipline, as revealed in their experiences (Trahar 2006, 28), shows that they saw no difference between punishing and discipline. Educators would be heard to say, while selecting a cane: “I’m going to *discipline* that class”. Similarly, parents who were “grounding” (withdrawing benefits from) a child would tell the offender, “I’ll discipline you!” All the experienced educators who were interviewed believed that discipline and punishment were closely interlinked and this must certainly be reflected on their classroom discipline practices (Monk & Winslade 1999, 2)

Figure 2 below illustrates the perceived connections between the issue of “discipline” and that of “punishment”.

FIGURE 2: DISCIPLINE VERSUS PUNISHMENT



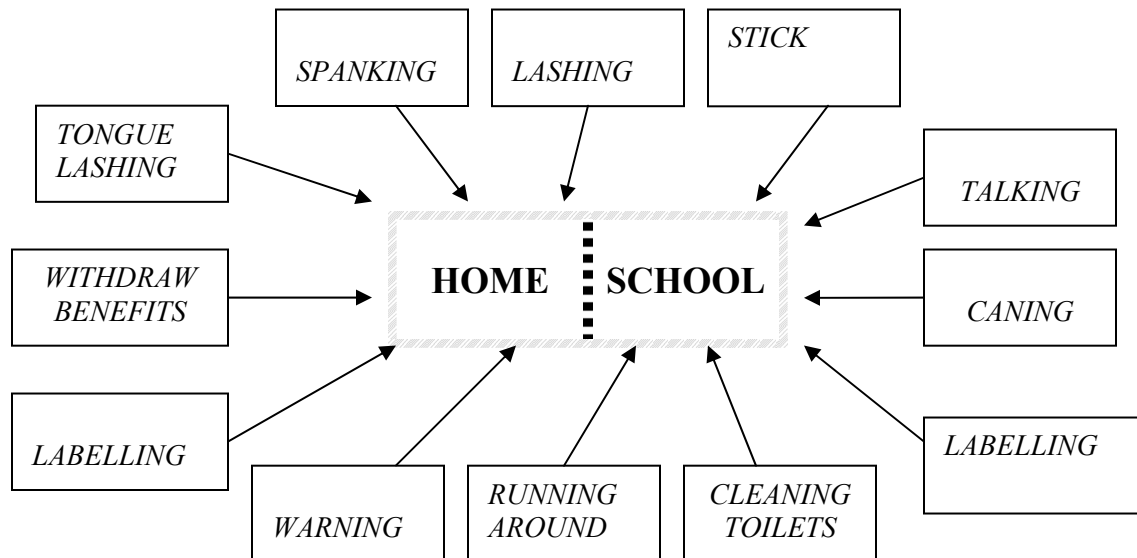
The above figure provides a number of words associated with punishment and others associated with discipline. Several of the participants used the words fear, lash, and tongue-lash in their responses and code of conduct.

Educators admitted that these days learners are difficult to handle and they expressed the opinion that educators were not provided with sufficient guidance to make the transition from physical punitive punishment to self-discipline of both learners and educators.

### 5.5.3 How educators were disciplined as learners

In analysing what the participants said use was made of the figure below.

**FIGURE 3: FORMS OF DISCIPLINE AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL**



Words indicated in the above diagram reveal that participants still associate discipline with punishment. Participants described how the use of physical force or emotional degradation would inflict pain (both at home and at school); this they saw as discipline.



This is well illustrated in the story related by **Mr Tholo**:

*At home my parents used a stick. I was also tongue-lashed. My mother withdrew certain benefits, for example, if I did not do what she wanted me to do, she would leave me behind when she went to town. My mother called me names like “wena sekobo”<sup>7</sup> meaning “you ugly one”. My sisters called me “ditsebe” because of my big ears.*

**Mr Tau** said:

At home my parents used a lash to discipline me. At primary school my educators also used a stick to call me to order. At secondary school other educators would first indicate your mistake before giving you punishment.

Currently, many educators still feel that learners should be disciplined in a fashion similar to the way they themselves were disciplined in the past. This sentiment is captured by **Mr Nkwe**, who said:

According to me, discipline has to do with the monitoring of learners so that they can be in line with school policies. Currently we are having problems because corporal punishment has been abolished.

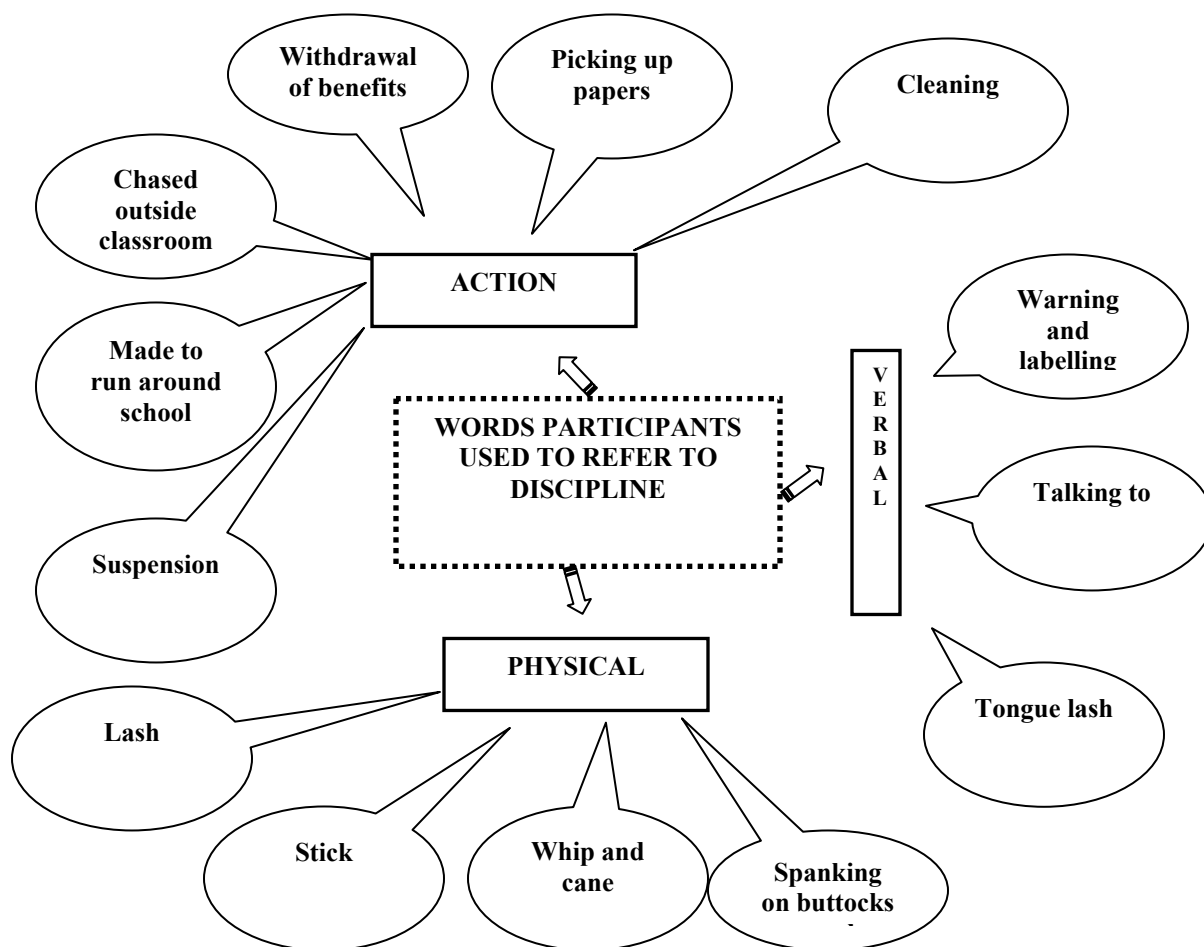
An analysis of the words participants associated with discipline reveals that they considered discipline to mean the use of physical force or the emotional degradation of learners. However, very often this process was combined with the parent or educator explaining to the child/learner the seriousness of the misdemeanour before punishing them. Here are two examples:

**Mrs Nare**: My parents lashed me. My parents indicated the wrong things I did before punishing me.

**Ms Tshukudu**: At home I was first warned for the wrong things I did. My parents gave us rules such as we mustn't come home late; we must not fight and that we must always wash the dishes before doing homework. Failure to obey these rules meant punishment.

In the figure below words used by participants referring to the “discipline” they received in the past have been categorised according to their physical, action and verbal nature.

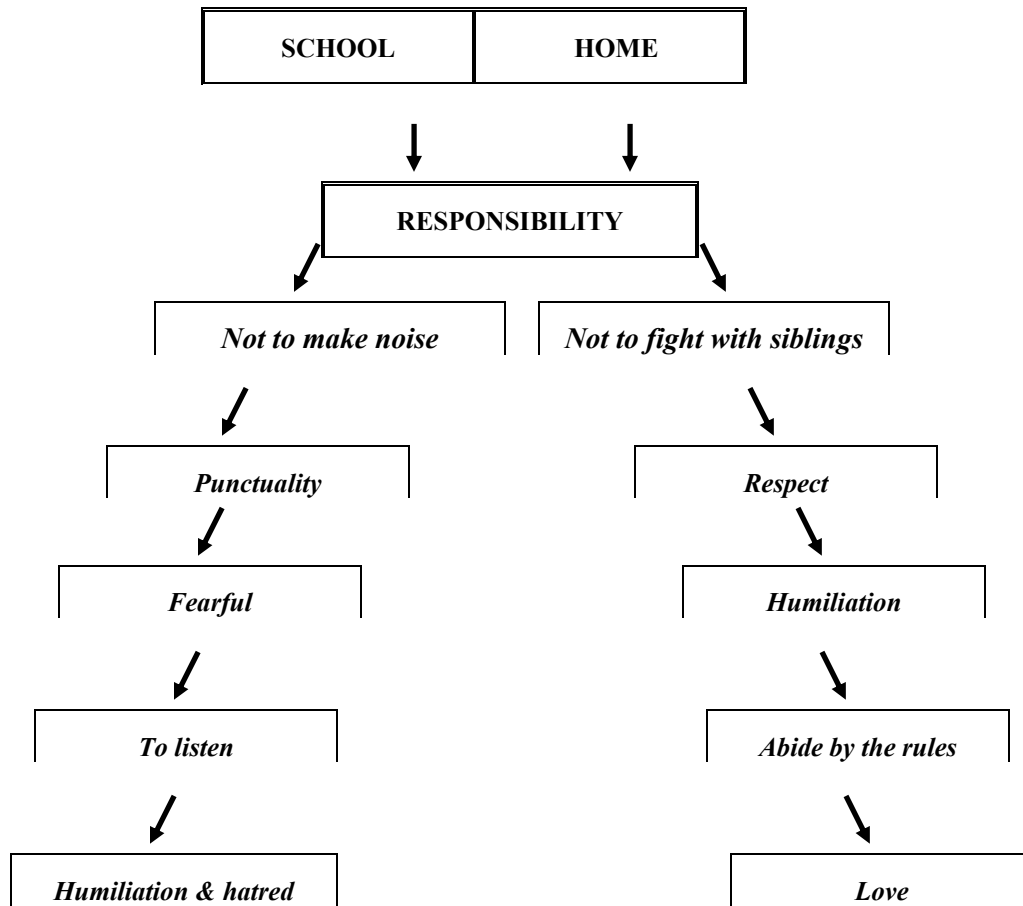
**FIGURE 4: WORDS USED BY PARTICIPANTS WHEN DESCRIBING THE FORMS OF DISCIPLINE TO WHICH THEY WERE EXPOSED**



#### **5.5.4 Lessons learnt from the discipline they received at home and at school**

The figure below represents lessons learnt from the discipline the participants received at home and at school.

**FIGURE 5: LESSONS LEARNT FROM BEING DISCIPLINED AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL**



Participants in their responses indicated that they were humiliated and learnt little from the discipline they received from home and at school. For example:

**Mr Tholo:** I learnt very little. I learnt that if you misbehave as a child, elders and parents will humiliate you by calling you names. Discipline was not explained to me.

Participants indicated that at home they learnt to be respectful. Three of the participants confirmed this by relating as follows:

**Mr Phala:** I learnt to respect authorities and that if I did not do my work I would be seriously punished.

**Mrs Tlou:** I learnt to fear my educators; at home I learnt to respect and abide by the rules set by my parents.

**Mr Kwena:** I learnt to listen and to obey rules. At home I also learnt love.

The feeling of humiliation and hatred was more prevalent in schools, hence participants believed that corporal punishment was the best way of bringing about responsibility. This was indicated by both Mr Nkwe and Mrs Nare:

**Mr Nkwe:** From being disciplined by my mother I learnt to be responsible; from my educators I learnt that I would be made to feel pain if I did not do my work.

**Mrs Nare:** At home I learnt that for me to grow and become a responsible person, I must not do wrong things and that if I did not listen, I would be made to feel pain. At primary school I only learnt that wrongdoing was associated with pain. At secondary school I learnt that punishment is the only way to make learners read and do their work.

Fighting at home and also at school, is unacceptable. Two participants recalled that they were punished for fighting with their siblings:

**Mr Tau:** I have learnt that there were certain things that I must not do at home. I learnt not to fight with my sisters. At school I learnt not to make noise in class and that I must always be early at school.

**Mr Phala:** I learnt to respect authority and that if I did not do my work I would be seriously punished.

Participants explained that the discipline they themselves had received when they were at school was humiliating and that it taught them to be fearful of authority. However, they had learnt responsibility from the discipline they received at home. Currently, the participant educators are faced with learners that are fearless and disrespectful. When they try to discipline them, they talk back. This reminds the educators of the way they were punished for similar behaviour. They conclude that the best way of disciplining learners is through corporal punishment because learners will fear them.

Mrs Nare was convinced that corporal punishment made her respect her educators because when she had talked back to her educators she had been severely punished. This is how she put it:

**Mrs Nare:** I used to call fellow learners names when my teacher was busy teaching. At secondary school I talked back to my educators. For all this I was severely punished.

### **5.5.5 Infringements for which participants were punished at home and at school**

According to the evidence provided, at times the participants were punished for similar offences. They were punished for fighting either with their siblings or with other learners. Here are three examples:

**Mr Tau:** At home I was punished for breaking the rules; for example, not collecting wood after school. I was also punished for defying my elder sister and also for fighting with my younger sister.

**Mr Nare:** At home I was too stubborn; I used to fight with my brother.

**Mrs Tlou:** My parents set rules to be obeyed; if I and my siblings failed to obey them, we were punished. We were expected to clean our bedroom before going to school; fetch water from the river every afternoon and we were not supposed to fight with other children. At school I was punished for dodging study classes; for not writing tests and for defying the instructions of our educators.

At home participants were punished for not adhering to family rules but at school no participant indicated that he or she was punished for not obeying the code of conduct. Here are two examples:

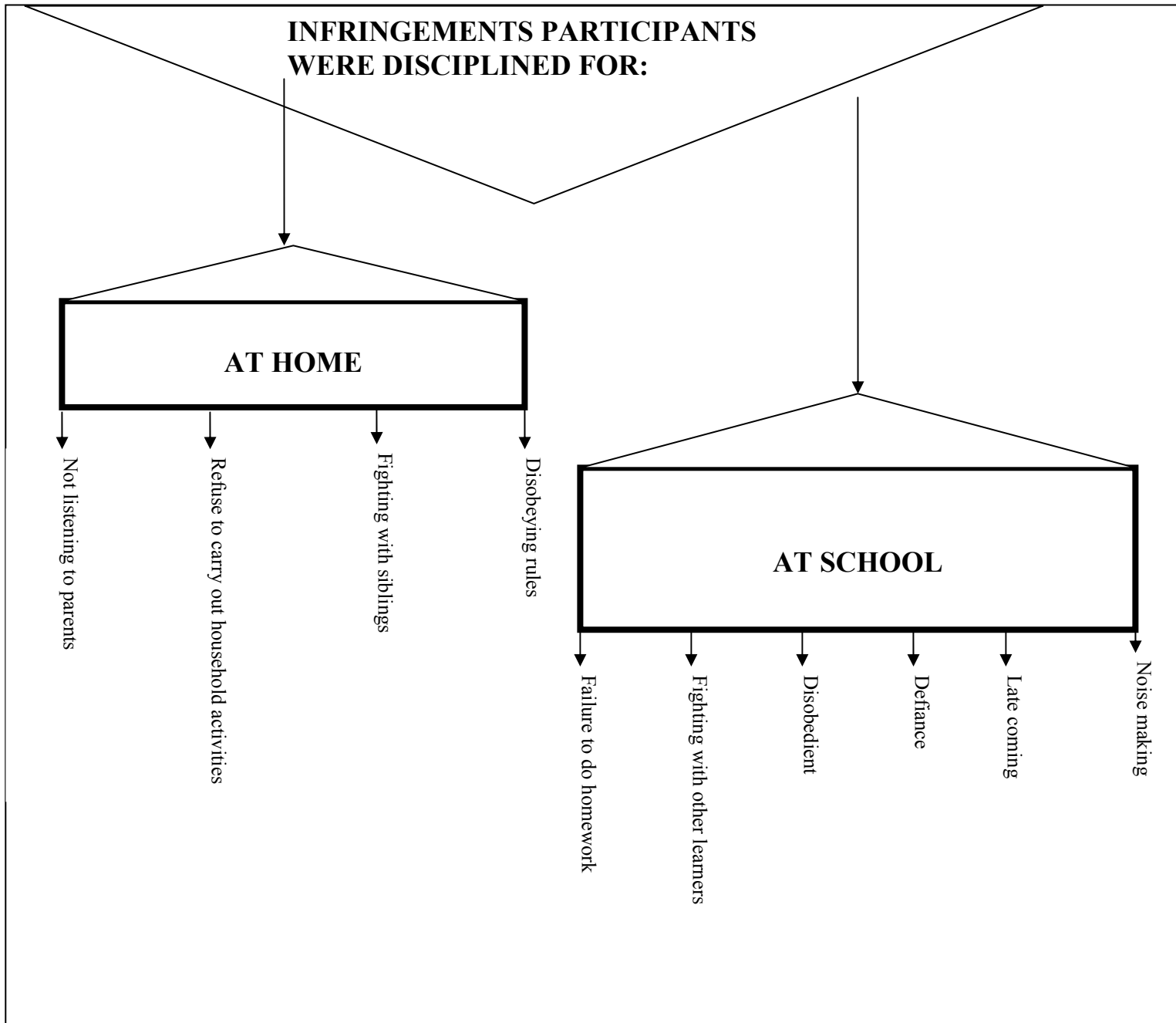
**Mr Tau:** At home I was punished for breaking a rule

**Mrs Tlou:** My parents set rules to be obeyed; if we failed to obey them we were punished.

It should be noted that the misdemeanours the educators remember committing in their youth are remarkably similar to those they now complain bitterly about in their learners; this could be an indication of lack of self-insight and reflection. They wish they could use the same strategies that were used by their parents and educators so they could punitively punish their learners for the same behaviours – without trying to come to terms with why learners behave in this manner. According to the cognitivist theory (discussed in Chapter 2), we need to understand the causes of behaviour rather than only focussing on suppressing deviant behaviour.

Participants were punished for different offences at home and at school. These offences are outlined in the figure below.

**Figure 6: INFRINGEMENTS FOR WHICH PARTICIPANTS WERE PUNITIVELY PUNISHED  
AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL**



### 5.5.6 Dealing with problematic learners

In responding to the question in connection with problematic learners at their schools, all nine educators indicated that the large majority were boys, repeaters and older learners (above legal school age). Two participants indicated that they used the school code of conduct to manage them.

**Mr Nkwe:** I use the school code of conduct to discipline them. Sometimes they remain behind after school; this is, of course, determined by the nature and seriousness of the offences.

**Ms Phuti:** I use code of conduct to discipline them. I also request them to stay behind after school depending on the offence.

Seemingly participants believe that talking to these learners can instil some sense of propriety into their heads. This is what three participants had to say on the issue:

**Mr Tau:** I talk to them strongly by telling them that if they do not listen, we will suspend them from class. I firstly give them a warning. If they continue with their deviant behaviour, I then involve the SMT and the SGB. If there is no change, we suspend them.

**Mrs Tlou:** Most of the time I talk to them, showing them their mistakes and the possible consequences. Some of learners do change, like if, for example, they were not doing their work they now start doing it.

**Mr Tholo:** I talk strongly to them and indicate that they must not waste the time of other learners. I do not give them any room for misbehaviour.

One participant indicated that he refers problematic learners to the SMT; this is what Mr Phala had to say on the matter:

**Mr Phala:** I request them to remain behind for remedial work. Those who defy me I refer to the SMT. Parents are usually invited to come to school; but sometimes they do not come.

One participant, Mr Kwena, explained that he negotiates with problematic learners to remain behind and this is to their own benefit as many of them are repeaters:



**Mr Kwena:** I negotiate with them to remain behind. Then I explain to them that I want to assist them, and that for me to succeed in helping them I need their cooperation and commitment. As most of them are repeaters I will tell them that they have already wasted a year which will never come back to them. I will also tell them that they must set the pace for their fellow learners.

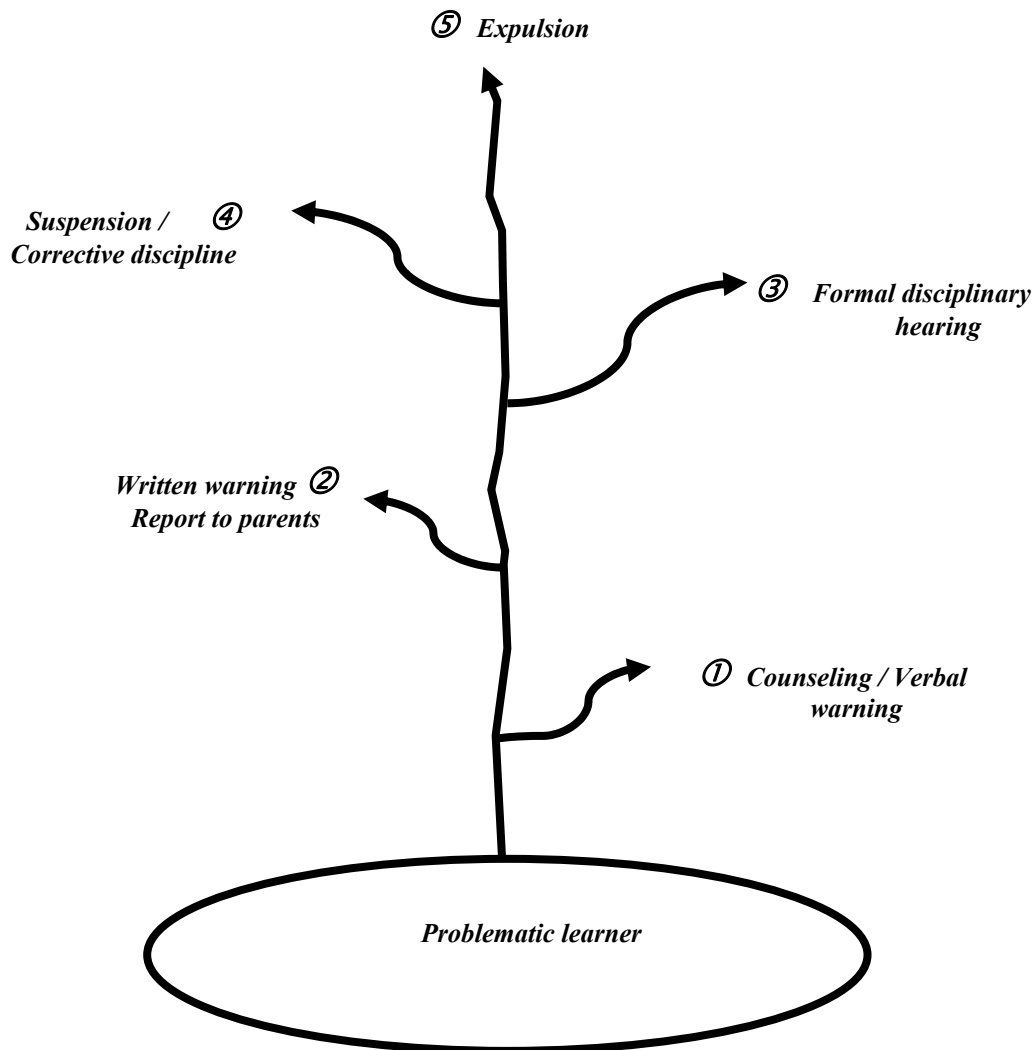
There was only one participant who declared that she had never experienced any trouble with problematic learners. This what she said:

**Ms Tshukudu:** I have never encountered a problematic learner because I give them clear instructions and I prepare my lessons. I know that teaching at a secondary school demands thorough class preparations.

Poorly-disciplined learners are prone to lose interest in their schoolwork and neglect their studies. As a result they destroy their healthy teacher-learner relationship. Mr Phala experienced this (see his evidence above) when he tried to assist learners and his efforts elicited a negative reaction.

Taking an overview of the participants' responses, there was only one educator of the nine who indicated that she has never had a problematic learner because she prepares her work thoroughly and her lessons are always interesting and inspiring. It was also noted that the active participation of SGB's in the disciplinary procedure was wanting. Four educators indicated that even if one calls parents to come and address their children's problems, they usually fail to arrive. It became evident to me that each teacher handled problematic learners differently. For example it was only Tau, Phuti and Nare who made use of a code of conduct to handle them, despite the fact that the South Africa Schools Act indicates that each school should have a code of conduct for learners. Figure 7 below explains the use of the code of conduct to discipline problematic learners.

**FIGURE 7: DEALING WITH PROBLEMATIC LEARNERS**



From the above figure one can deduce that learners must be made fully aware that all misdemeanours have consequences. This should instil a sense of responsibility rather than fear among learners and educators. A learner who becomes problematic is made aware of this on a number of occasions when his/her misbehaviour is dealt with. If the misdemeanours continue the disciplinary action gradually becomes more serious, leading to the apex of the tree (which is expulsion). At every stage (represented by a branch) it is essential that the learner be informed of the rising severity of his /her actions in an effort to warn and correct. This is a non-retributive approach which the SASA of 1996 recommends to every school and discipline should be handled by following the model above.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

The central argument of this study is that lived experiences influence current behaviour. The qualitative content data analysis and interpretation revealed clearly that educators' life experiences do in fact influence their classroom discipline practices. It became evident to me that educators are still encountering disciplinary challenges in their classes and this can be attributed to the way they were disciplined as learners.

However, before a detailed analysis of the school environments of the three sample schools was undertaken, the educational background prevailing in the three communities was reviewed. The focus fell on a number of factors including the individual school environment; enrolment; class size; school governance; effectiveness of school structures; and community involvement. The "ideal" situations described in the literature were compared and contrasted with observations made at the three participating schools.

On analysing the data further, the study revealed that the way educators manage discipline today is related to the manner in which they were disciplined when they were learners. The apartheid education system continues to have a negative influence on learner discipline because it condoned the use of corporal punishment. Since the abolition of all corporal punishment in terms of SASA in 1996, the morale of the members of teaching profession has become an area of concern. This can be attributed to various factors which include the lack of orientation programmes on the use of alternatives to corporal punishment. A sudden shift from one well-known single method of restoring order in classrooms to modern ways of managing discipline needs gradual adaptation and re-orientation. It was also noted that educators learnt good practices from the disciplinary measures they were subjected to in the past; both at home and at school.

When referring to the similarities and differences between qualitative research results and literature study in Chapters 2 and 3, and relating these to the influence of educators' lived experiences on classroom discipline practices, I concluded that the participants interviewed adopted the disciplinary approaches of the people they interacted with in the past. This includes both their parents and former educators. One educator adopted his father's style, another educator adopted his former principal's method, and one educator still avoids labelling learners because his educators and his parents called him names.

Educators indicated that they are currently disciplining learners differently because of the various disciplinary measures they were subjected to as learners. This is apparent in the evidence of the four educators who maintain that the punitive punishment they received as learners has influenced the way they are disciplining learners today. The scars of the “discipline” they were subjected to still haunt them whenever they are faced with a disciplinary problem. Mr Kwena felt humiliated by the punishment he received from school but appreciated the way his father “disciplined” him and adopted his style. Ms Phuti’s finger is today deformed because of the punishment she received from a former primary school educator. She is simply not prepared to physically punish any learner – and would not do so even if it was allowed. In his youth Mr Tshukudu had a particularly strict principal and he has adopted his style. He disciplines learners by not saying anything to them, just as his principal did. He just stares at them and this makes them uncomfortable. As a result they immediately stop misbehaving.