

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the opening chapter the purpose of this study was outlined, indicating that it is an investigation of the influence of educators' life experiences on classroom discipline practices. A number of significant questions were then formulated on key issues and an attempt was made to arrive at answers to these questions using the research techniques discussed in chapters 2-6. Many of the current educators grew up during the years of the liberation struggle and were harshly chastised as learners in schools. For many learners corporal punishment was the sole means that adults and educators could use to maintain control and discipline in the school environment. The research findings confirmed that the participants' own parents and educators used corporal punishment to control them, and that when they themselves began their teaching careers they employed the same method of discipline in the classroom. Control was therefore exercised by making their learners obey for fear of pain being inflicted upon them if they did not behave in an acceptable manner. The educators felt that following the same disciplinary method that their own parents and educators had used, with a stick or cane, was an effective disciplinary technique. This is clearly articulated in chapter 5, which provides a content analysis, and chapter 6 in which a narrative analysis is provided of the interviews conducted.

The banning of corporal punishment in terms of section 10 of the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996 was perceived by some educators as taking away the only effective means at their disposal for maintaining classroom discipline. This new regulation left some educators with feelings of disempowerment as they feared that a culture of disrespect and disregard of authority might well develop (Hardin 2004, 129).

Van Wyk (2000), in his study entitled "Positive Discipline: New Approach to Discipline", suggests that while the post-1994 democracy has its advantages, there are also negative implications for the school education system. His study supports the evidence of the nine participants who made it clear that the suggested alternatives to corporal punishment are not proving satisfactory in practice, and yet these, says Van Wyk, are the invention of our new

democratic government. Phatlane (2001) in her study “The Impact of Corporal Punishment on Disadvantaged Urban Secondary Schools” still sees punishment as an effective method of discipline, and she says that “parents of many children are still punishing their children and pass the habit on to the school”. To participants, as revealed by my findings, the crux of the matter is not whether one is for corporal punishment or against it, but how educators can maintain order in the classroom. In their article Joubert, De Waal and Rossouw indicated that the concepts “discipline” and “punishment” have different meanings although they are sometimes used interchangeably (2004: 78). Participants in this study admitted that at times they tend to imitate the people from their past whom they respect. This implies that participants feel justified in using corporal punishment because they themselves have been subjected to these disciplinary measures by their parents and educators.

In her study Rosa (1994) reveals that the father as the authority figure in the home, may well resort to punitive and forceful measures and this is linked to my research findings. Participants indicated that when they were at school their male educators used forceful and harsh methods more frequently than female educators. Furthermore, Dzivhani (2000) agrees with Phatlane (2001) and Van Wyk (2000) that educators feel that the abolition of corporal punishment has resulted in a collapse of discipline in many schools. As a researcher I too was motivated to undertake this study because I am aware that there are many schools where the management of classroom discipline has broken down. Minnaar (2002) in her study “Educators Views on the Influence of Classroom Management on Quality Education”, mentions that what happens in the classroom has a significant impact on the school as a whole. It was observed in this study that late-coming by both educators and learners in the three sample schools led to a situation where the teaching and learning process began late, and this tended to affected discipline in the entire school.

7.1.1 Statement of the problem

Studies conducted in South Africa on school discipline indicate that learner discipline lies at the centre of a culture of teaching and learning (Mukhumo 2002; Phatlane 2001; Rice 1987; Rosa 1994; Sihlangu 1992; Van Wyk 2000). My own experience supports this claim. The major point of concern in this study is: **The influence of educators’ life experiences on classroom discipline practices.**

7.1.2 Delimitation of the study

The study is limited to educators employed at three secondary schools in one circuit of Nkangala region of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. The Nkangala region is in the former Kwandebele homeland. Therefore, any conclusions drawn from the study apply only to the above population, but the research has the potential to be of great value in advancing a reasonably uncharted look at how the life experiences of educators influence their teaching practice.

7.1.3 Research objectives

The following objectives guided the study:

- 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' past experiences influence their current behaviour
- To examine whether impressions gained from educators' life experiences can contribute to positive classroom discipline practices.

The study has reviewed and explored literature that relates to the field of investigation to ascertain whether the life experiences of educators can influence their current behaviour. It was revealed in an examination of the published findings reviewed in chapter 2 that despite access to these theoretical approaches, there are still educators who try to maintain discipline by out-shouting their learners, speaking sarcastically and treating learners disrespectfully. This implies that participants are not taking the time and making the effort to reflect on the way they maintain classroom discipline. Kounin's theory (1971) defines effective managers as those educators whose classrooms are orderly, have a minimum of learner-misbehaviour and a high level of time on task. In chapter 5 it is shown that in the three sample schools the time set aside for teaching was not strictly adhered to; and the educators and learners alike were always late for their classes. Thus, in terms of Kounin's dictum, the participants are not effective managers. The methods they used to deal with disruption led me to conclude that they are unskilled in this aspect of classroom management.

I identified specific behaviours that are unacceptable. One participant left learners alone in the classroom; learners were left to loiter around and frequented the staff room; some learners were referred to the principal, indicating that participants had been unable to keep learners focused on the learning process. The concept of “withit-ness”, as coined by Kounin (1971), was clearly lacking. The educator who left the learners before the end of the period had no knowledge of what was happening back in the classroom. Curwin and Mendler (1980) support the widely held theory that good discipline begins by keeping learner/educator dignity intact. It was found that the participant educators had lost the respect and dignity as learners, their educators had used sarcastic names and punished them for mistakes and misdemeanours they had not in fact committed. This also influenced the efficacy of the educators’ classroom discipline practice.

7.1.4 Method

Information on participants’ classroom discipline practices and their life experiences was collected using semi-structured, narrative interviews, field notes and observation.

7.1.5 Research findings

Conclusions reached are derived from literature findings. The conclusions drawn indicate that educators still feel that corporal punishment can change the unacceptable behaviour of learners. Participants acknowledged the changes that have been made in the education system but are hankering for the power they possessed prior to 1996. The research findings revealed that the nine participants did not make use of a set of rules that are clear, written and communicated, as emphasised in Glasser’s (1969) Reality Therapy. Positive Approach to Discipline (PAD), advocates that educators should respect learners and instil responsibility. This was not seen to be the case. Participants indicated that their parents’ punishment was aimed at making them responsible – my reaction to this was to point out that this made it acceptable (according to the participants) for learners to be punished by their parents – but that this did not give educators the same right. And yet the educators claim in the same breath that they still punish learners because they themselves received punishment from both their parents and educators. Glasser; Ginott; Canter; and Kounin all focus on the right of educator to define and enforce standards for learner behaviour. I found that although participants

talked of using a code of conduct in order to ensure uniformity in correcting behaviour, this was not the case. As can clearly be seen in Figure 8 (see chapter 5), there was no code of conduct in any of the three sample schools.

It became clear both from what I observed and also from the responses participants gave, that they were modelling punitive behaviour. This is in line with moral development theorists (as discussed in chapter 3), who claim that often the use of corporal punishment is an attempt by educators to regain the power they have lost. Eron, Wallen and Leftkowitz (1970) disagree with the proponents of corporal punishment and show in their study that this disciplinary measure in fact encourages rather than inhibits aggressive behaviour in children. Nevertheless, several of the participants in my study maintain that they believe that they are what they are today because of the punishment they received – that corporal punishment made them behave in a manner that was socially acceptable. Suffice to say that what is captured in chapters 5 and 6 is that participants are living testimony that the use of corporal punishment is not necessarily harmful. Miller (1988, 58) supports the content analysis that is presented in chapter 5 and the narrative analysis in chapter 6 when he maintains:

Almost everywhere we find the effort, marked by varying degrees, to intensify and the use of various coercive measures to rid ourselves as quickly as possible of the child within us ... in our children we persecute it with the same measure once used on ourselves and this what we are accustomed to call child-rearing.

I see the quotation above as supporting what participants say in chapters 5 and 6, and using this evidence have compiled a list of classroom discipline practices associated with poorly disciplined classrooms. Needless to say these chapters identified approaches that are effective and others that are ineffective in establishing and maintaining an orderly classroom environment. These have been of assistance in answering the research question, namely whether classroom discipline practices are influenced by educators' lived experiences.

Ineffective approaches noted from participants' responses include:

- Participants not believing in their own ability to restore classroom discipline; always referring problematic learners to others; blaming the government
- Participants failing to apply disciplinary steps when confronting classroom discipline; wanting to imitate their own parents and educators

- Modelling self-monitoring was also lacking; one participant left learners alone and there was noise coming from the class that caught my attention.

Effective approaches noted from participants' responses include:

- One participant talked of making classroom discipline practices a class project, implying that learners would discipline the offenders. The idea is linked to peer tutoring structures (Greenwood, Carta & Hall 1988); these structures lower the incidence of misbehaviour in the classroom.
- Most participants mentioned that discussion with the offender is an acceptable method of correcting behaviour. It is by talking that certain aspects of a school's ethos are made known, including the communication of a school's rules.

Interpreting what participants said about tongue-lashing, as shown in chapter 6, conforms with the theories of discipline put forward in chapter 3. Remediation is undertaken by educators who talk to the offenders about their mistakes. The elements of discussion also emphasise the five basic needs outlined by Glasser (1969):

Learners feel a sense of belonging to a particular class by participating in the formulation of class rules. They also believe they have the power to control their own lives when they participate in making choices and decisions that affect them. This results in teaching and learning becoming enjoyable and fun. In addition, when learners are allowed to make choices, they tend to assume responsibility and became self-directing and free. Although talking/discussion in this section of the study is regarded as an effective approach, narrative interviews also revealed that the talking technique could be used negatively, and participants mentioned that in certain instances the psychological damage caused by what their educators said to them in anger, still affects them. This is supported by certain theories discussed in chapter 3. In concluding, it is worth noting that there is a measure of inter-connection between chapters, adding new insight on the influence of educators' life experiences on classroom discipline

Before presenting recommendations it is important to mention the following findings:

(a) Participants' understanding of discipline

All the research participants understood discipline as a way of correcting unacceptable behaviour; they further saw discipline as providing order to a situation. This implies the realisation that for effective teaching and learning to take place, there should be order in the classroom. This correlates with the findings of discipline theorists Rogers (1998, 11); Johnson (1990); Walsh (1991, 127); Good (1973, 186) and Oosthuizen *et al.* (1994, 60).

(b) Discipline versus punishment

It was noted during the interviews that there was some confusion between discipline and corporal punishment. All research participants maintained that as far as their educators and parents were concerned, corporal punishment and discipline were synonymous. When they were asked to explain their understanding of discipline, nothing was mentioned which related to corporal punishment. However, when asked how they were disciplined as learners at home and at school, all of them responded with words like stick, slap, lash – which to me was an indication that currently there is still confusion between discipline and corporal punishment.

(c) Lessons learnt from discipline received at home and at school

It was indicated by all participants that discipline taught them fear rather than respect for authority figures. They knew that their educators were capable of inflicting pain on their fellow human beings. Participants indicated that they have learnt to reason with the learners before punishing them. One participant claimed that because of the humiliation he experienced as a learner, he now avoids labelling (the use of unflattering names) to address learners, names such as “stupid” and “fool”. At home, parents set rules to be obeyed by their children. These rules made it clear to them what is expected of them, so that they can adapt their behaviour accordingly (Oosthuizen *et al.* 1994, 26). Participants mentioned that they also learnt to be responsible and adhere to set rules. It was, however, observed that compiling classroom rules presented a great challenge. If rules are there, they are not followed.

(d) Infractions for which they were punished

It was clear that all participants were punished for late-coming, not doing their home-works, noise making, intimidation, defiance and failure to obey the rules set by their parents. Although participants indicated that they were punished for these offences in the past there were no set rules laid down in the school procedures to the effect that failure to obey the rules was punishable. Currently the situation is different. SASSA of 1996, insists that each school must have a Code of Conduct, a set of classroom rules to which all learners must comply. Two participants mentioned that some parents do not respond when called to witness disciplinary action against their children.

(e) Dealing with problematic learners

All research participants echoed the same sentiments that it is usually repeaters, boys and older learners who cause disciplinary problems. They also mentioned that they discipline learners by warning them, followed by detention, suspension and ultimately recommending for their expulsion. It was clear from the responses that none of the participants has gone as far as recommending the suspension of a learner, which to me indicates the likelihood that these three sample schools have never used a code of conduct, although they have had to deal with highly disruptive learners. One participant mentioned that she gave learners additional work, requested them to remain behind, and then helped them to do their work.

(f) The impact of corporal punishment on participants' current classroom disciplinary practices

Participants viewed punishment they received at home differently from that imposed at school. The notion "discipline is a scripturally-based principle" (Oosthuizen *et al.* 1994, 60) comes to my mind. Educators, just like parents, are sanctioned by the scriptures to mould children, they argued. Why now is punishment only justifiable by parents? Even corporal punishment, they argue, which is the most severe form of discipline, is sanctioned by the book of Proverbs. This to me implies that it is acceptable, even desirable, that children be disciplined by their parents rather than their educators. The two participants who are in favour of reverting to the use of corporal punishment argue that educators are acting on

behalf of the parents; they base their argument on the fact that in their own case the punishment they received as learners has been a formative influence in their lives.

(g) Significant incidents in the participants' past

It was established in the interviews conducted with participating educators that certain of them were intolerant, and that this encouraged them to misdirect their anger. Participants' educators did not take the trouble to inform them why they were being punished, and some of these unfortunate incidents remained indelibly imprinted on their memory. One outcome of this is that the participants all indicated that currently, before disciplining learners, they inform the offenders why they are being disciplined. When they themselves were learners they were indoctrinated into accepting that pain was the only effective disciplinary measure. Today some of the same educators, when asked not to use a stick, run out of options – there was even one participant who said that he could not cope with ill-disciplined learners and has decided to leave the teaching profession. Another participant indicated that he experienced cruelty in and outside the school throughout his school-life, and that when he started teaching corporal punishment was still legal, so he had made wide use of it. While several of the interviewees said that when they began teaching they were afraid of corporal punishment, they nevertheless used it because it appeared to be the only way of bringing order to the classroom and ensuring that learners toe the line.

Participants who had previously used corporal punishment all indicated that they had been forced to adjust their classroom discipline practices. When SASA abolished corporal punishment in 1996, they were frustrated in their efforts to maintain good discipline in their schools. Poor matric results and generally inadequate learner competencies persuaded them that physical punishment is the only means of ensuring that learners work hard and pass well.

(h) Current behaviour in terms of classroom discipline practices

The research conducted revealed that there were both positive and negative reflections of participants' experiences. This was evidenced by the use of certain words and statements by educators when they labelled learners (negative), such as *sekobo* (ugly) and *mosesane* (thin). Positive reflections were contained in such words, as “I am what I am because of corporal punishment”. It also became apparent from participants that the manner in which their parents

and educators punished them influenced the way in which they are currently dealing with classroom discipline.

The participants grew up understanding coercion and therefore persuaded themselves that coercion is the only way to keep order. They also said that in their youth they had to live with fear of harassment, torture, detention and even the threat of being killed. They admitted that sometimes they gave their learners homework they were sure was not going to be done. As educators today, they are frustrated if learners do not do their homework. All research participants mentioned that the lack of educator efficiency in the classroom contributed towards ill discipline.

During the interviews I held with participants they revealed their experiences, both negative and positive. These have clearly contributed to the manner in which they discipline learners today. They indicated that they are currently using ‘talking’ (meaning explaining to the learner where he or she has gone wrong) as a form of discipline. It was revealed during interviews that in the past their parents and female educators tongue-lashed them. Labelling was also used by their educators and this has discouraged them from calling learners “stupid” or “fools”.

(i) Aspirations for the future

The educational future of some of the participants is not promising. They are still clinging to the past and one of them is even considering exiting the system if not allowed to revert to the use of corporal punishment. This means that they have lost hope and have given up trying to manage their learners. Four of the research participants mentioned that if the SASA regulation on discipline is to be retained, they would have no option but to use the new approaches of discipline. They have come to realise that they have no option but to abide by the new laws or exit the system. Seemingly, their unionisation and political awakening did not prepare them for the advent of the transition from corporal punishment to self-discipline.

The findings gleaned from the data that have been analysed and interpreted in this study are provided briefly in the table below.

TABLE 8: RESEARCH FINDINGS

ANALYSED AND INTERPRETED DATA	FINDINGS
(a) Participants' understanding of discipline	All participants saw discipline as an attempt to create an orderly environment that will enable teaching and learning to take place.
(b) Discipline versus punishment	Participants still see discipline as punishment.
(c) Lessons learnt from discipline received at home and at school	Words such as fear, humiliation, slap and stick dominated the discussions. This was interpreted that learners were afraid of their educators and the stick. That is why they obeyed the rules.
(d) Infractions for which they were punished	Participants were punished for similar offences.
(e) Dealing with problematic learners	All participants mentioned that generally boys and learners who are repeating their classes were problematic.
(f) The impact of corporal punishment on participants' current classroom discipline practices	Educators reflected on both positive and negative incidents of the current classroom discipline practices.
(g) Significant incidents of participants' past	It was indicated by all participants that there are incidents in their past that are still affecting them currently, especially when managing classroom discipline.
(h) Current behaviour in terms of classroom discipline Practices	The current behaviour of all participants as regards classroom discipline has been influenced by what happened to them in the past.
(i) Aspirations for the future	Participants revealed that they could not change what is currently happening in their schools in terms of classroom discipline practices. Unless corporal punishment is reintroduced, they have an option but to live with the situation.

Considering these findings, the observations I have made and the analysis based on published theoretical research, I conclude that educators' lived experiences have had a varying impact on their current classroom behaviour.

This study has attempted to show that the educators' lived experiences have an influence on their classroom discipline practices. Overall, as expected, the evidence provided by the educators revealed that their lived experiences have indeed impacted upon the way in which

they are currently teaching. However, these findings require further investigation with a broader sample size.

7.2 A possible way forward

In response to the problem formulated in chapter 1, I will now attempt to chart a possible way forward.

Findings cited in this study include what ten research documents have revealed about corporal punishment and discipline. Of these, three are published articles in academic journals; one is a PhD thesis; and there are six MEd. dissertations. Four of these studies are concerned with corporal punishment while six are concerned with school discipline. Three of the studies focus on secondary learners; two discuss rural secondary schools. All seven, including the PhD thesis, were conducted among South African learners. From these studies a list of elements that corroborate my research findings has been compiled, including the following points.

There was commitment on the part of educators to establish and maintain appropriate student behaviour as an essential pre-condition of learning. There was also a lack of clear and specified rules known to everyone in the school and poor parental involvement. These elements assisted in answering the research problem and addressing research objectives.

There was correlation with theories mentioned in chapter 2 and 3 about current discipline methods; talking; and peer tutoring. The study revealed that none of the three schools had clear, written school rules, (chapter 2) and this allowed educators to express their emotions in a way that attacked learners' sense of self (chapters 3 and 5). Democratic discipline in the classroom as outlined by Dreikurs' model (chapter 3) was lacking; learners were unaware of punishable offences, because no platform was created by their educators to talk about what is expected of them. In chapters 5 and 6 all participants expressed a desire for better ways of managing classroom discipline and for the involvement of parents in supporting the school. Wayson and Lasley (1984, 419-421) also support this notion and say that rather than relying on power and enforcing a punitive model of behaviour control, staff should share decision-making power widely in order to maintain a school climate in which everyone wants to be self-disciplined.

The notion of “one size fits all” is related to the conclusion mentioned by three participants (chapter 5), as they felt that corporal punishment is the most effective method for all disruptive behaviour, and this is not the case. This was revealed by theories of discipline in chapter 2. The findings have both theoretical and practical implications. From a practical perspective, learners, educators and school administrators may find several important lessons here. Since classroom discipline is associated with teaching and learning, schools that wish to enhance the commitment of educators and learners should strive towards making the education enterprise a cooperative business, where parents, learners and educators work together to eradicate disciplinary problems in schools. This vision is also supported by Cotton who maintains that “School personnel, students and parents call attention to the high incidence of related problems in the school environment, problems such as drug use, cheating, insubordination, truancy and intimidation” (Harvard Education letter, 1987) available online at <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/5/cu9.html>.

Despite the limitations previously indicated, the findings offer perspectives that education administrators, educators and other stakeholders could use to improve classroom discipline.

(a) *For parents*

A model of home/school collaboration to be designed in order to increase parental involvement in the school and to improve communication between educators, learners and parents.

There should be training of School Governing Bodies, as representative of parents, on positive behaviour management.

Parents should not shift their responsibility to educators.

It is recommended that the SGB be capacitated on the role of parents within the school environment.

(b) ***For the school management team***

Effective schools have principals who are, in fact the instructional leaders of staff. It is recommended that the principal, as the head of SMT, encourage educators to handle all classroom discipline problems that they can reasonably manage and that support will be given to educators' decisions. The principals should be active and involve with all parts of their educational community

The principal should enhance educators' skills as classroom managers and disciplinarians by arranging for appropriate staff development training.

It is recommended that the SMT and SGB to take their rightful position with regard to formulation and adoption of school rules and a code of conduct.

It is recommended that the SMT be trained continuously on general management skills.

(c) ***For educators***

Effective schools have an atmosphere that is orderly without being rigid, quite without being oppressive, it is recommended that educators create the climate that is warm and responsive, emphasizes cognitive development, innovative and provides a learner support system.

It is recommended that educators emphasize more on time on task. The more time spent in instruction, the greater the learning that takes place, the lesser classroom discipline problems.

It is recommended that implications should exist for improved use of time and curriculum content.

It is recommended that learners be informed on the consequences of misbehaviour.

Educators should also create chances for learners, particularly those with behavioural problems, to experience success in their learning.

(d) ***For the Department of Education***

It is recommended that the Department of Education with the help of social workers and psychologists, consider providing counselling to educators who have suffered traumatic experiences. Educators should be equipped with coping mechanisms that they can implement in the future.

Making “ Self Discipline” more probable is a goal of effective and artistic teaching (Hunter 199, 5), it is recommended that Department of Education continuously monitor effective classroom teaching through their curriculum implementers, this will promote self discipline of both learners and educators.

It is recommended that Department of Education, through their Human Resource Development (HRD) section should provide guidance to educators on the alternatives to corporal punishment.

7.3 CONCLUSION

This study was qualitative and narrative in nature, it provided insight into educators’ life experiences specifically on classroom discipline practices. At the same time, it raised many questions that suggest a need for further research. It must be acknowledged that many aspects of this study could be replicated with other participants to determine whether the themes identified here hold true for educators in other settings.

Because it was revealed that classroom rules and disciplinary procedures (the use of a code of conduct in particular) were lacking in the three sample schools, the following topics might well be explored to good effect:

- (i) An investigation on whether classroom rules can improve classroom discipline practices.
- (ii) Stakeholders’ attitude with reference to educators, parents and learners towards discipline policies.

One of the positive research findings is that life experiences, either positive or negative, affect classroom discipline practices. Although this finding is assumed, the study appears to

be one of the first to confirm this assumption. Further research using qualitative methods would help to either confirm or refute this assertion.