

# **Teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour in the classroom**

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B.A.- Honours (Psychology), D.S.E. (Remedial), Prim. Teach. Dipl. (Music)

Assignment presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of



**MASTER OF EDUCATION**  
(Educational Psychology)  
M.Ed (Psig)

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH**

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December 2002

# DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this ~~research~~<sup>research</sup> project is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.



# ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that a large proportion of learners in schools today is seen as displaying behavioural problems / difficulties, the area of teachers understanding the learners' needs to behave in a certain way is under-researched. A review of traditional psychological literature also suggests that the area of teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour in the classroom is a marginalised subject. It is generally postulated that teachers have a profound influence on learners and how they behave. A teacher's understanding of a learner's behaviour, or the lack thereof, could be accompanied by a host of psychological and social consequences.

The focus of this study will be to determine whether teachers understand the need/function of their learners' behaviour in the classroom. A qualitative study will be conducted. The instrument to be employed in the study is a self-constructed questionnaire and focus group interviews to clarify certain responses to the questionnaire. These will be administered to teachers at two mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel. Content and thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data.

The primary aim of the study is to determine teachers' understanding of their learners' difficult/inappropriate/unacceptable behaviour in the classroom. The understanding of learners' behaviour in the classroom will inform teachers of the intervention strategies and behaviour management programmes to be used.



# OPSOMMING

Ondanks die feit dat 'n aansienlike aantal leerders in skole gedragsprobleme ervaar, bly die begrip van onderwysers aangaande leerders se onderliggende motivering vir hul gedrag 'n braak navorsingsarea. 'n Oorsig van sielkundige literatuur insinieër dat onderwysers se verstaan van hul leerders se gedrag in die klaskamer erg gemarginaliseer is. Dit word algemeen gepostuleer dat onderwysers 'n fenomenale invloed op leerders en hulle gedrag het. 'n Onderwyser se begrip (verstaan) aangaande 'n leerder se gedrag of gebrek daaraan, gaan heel waarskynlik gepaard met verskeie sielkundige asook sosiale gevolge.

Hierdie studie sal voorts probeer om vas te stel of onderwysers die behoefte/funksie van hul leerders se gedrag in die klaskamer verstaan. 'n Kwalitatiewe studie sal onderneem word. 'n Self gekonstrueerde vraelys, asook fokus groep onderhoude, met die doel om sekere response op die vraelys uit te klaar, sal as instrument gebruik word. Die vraelys sowel as die fokus groep onderhoude sal aan onderwysers van twee hoofstroom primêre skole in Bonteheuwel geadminstreer word. Inhouds- en tematiese analise sal gebruik word om die data te analiseer.

Die primêre doel van die studie sal wees om onderwysers se begrip rondom hulle leerders se moeilike/ontoepaslike/onaanvaarbare gedrag in die klaskamer vas te stel. Die verstaan (begrip) van leerders se gedrag in die klaskamer sal meer lig werp op intervensiestrategieë, asook gedragsbestuurprogramme wat deur onderwysers gebruik kan word.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I thank my Creator and Guardian Angels for watching over me, giving me the strength, courage and inspiration to succeed in this endeavour.

A heartfelt thank you to my supervisor, Prof. A.G. Smit, for his invaluable input, insight, skilled guidance, constructive criticism, patience and support.

I thank the research participants (teachers) for sharing their experiences and difficulties with me.

Mahmoud, Meredith and Melony, thank you for believing in me. Thank you for your love, encouragement and unconditional support through this challenging, but transformative process.

Thank you to Kitty for helping me burn the midnight oil and keeping me company until the early hours of the morning. Thank you for 'assisting' me with the readings and typing of the research project.



# **Teacher**

**I have come to a frightening conclusion.**

**I am the decisive element in the classroom.**

**It is my personal approach that creates the climate in my  
classroom.**

**It is my daily mood that makes the weather.**

**As a teacher,**

**I possess tremendous power  
to make a child's life miserable or joyous.**

**I can be a tool of torture or  
an instrument of inspiration.**

**I can humiliate or humour,  
hurt or heal.**

**In all situations it is my response that decides  
whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated,  
and a child  
humanised or de-humanised.**

***Ginott (1975:13)***

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Silent voices in the area of Including Learners with Behavioural Problems

The birth of a new South Africa with its democracy has brought with it many changes. These changes reverberated throughout all spheres of South African society: politics, economics, as well as education. One of the most noticeable changes in education is the inclusion of all learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools (Porter & Stone, 1997). It goes without saying that the aim of all these changes in education is to bring about improvements in the services provided to all learners and their parents (Farrell, 2001: 3).

South Africa has made great strides in the past few years. The Constitution of South Africa contains a Bill of Rights which enshrines the values of a non-racial, non-sexist society and which respects the religions, cultures and languages of all South Africans (Callinicos, 2002: 3). The right to quality education is enshrined in the Constitution, but is meant to be aggressively attained, depending on available resources. The Freedom Charter further states boldly that education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children. Lorgat (2002) says that in addition to the above, the South African Government endorsed the African Charter on the Rights of a Child and the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, the latter on 16 June 1995, South African Youth Day (Lorgat, 2002: 1).

This is a time when real progress is expected in terms of the 'Education for All' commitments made in Dakar, Senegal 2000 when over 185 countries committed themselves to the pledge that no country seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by lack of resources (Lorgat,



2002: 1). Hicks (2002: 4) adds her voice and states that the culture of learning in South Africa has undergone a transformation. Learners need to take the freedom they now have and use it positively to respect their education and their teachers. Without education, this country will go nowhere.

The transformation of education in South Africa over the last six years has created multiple challenges for both teachers and learners. Whatever the source of these changes, their implementation has fallen, to a great extent, on the teachers themselves. This has often meant that teachers are dealing with higher levels of dilemma and tension both in and out of the classroom, as they endeavour to deliver the curriculum in ways which are relevant and meaningful to the diverse needs of their pupils (Eliasov & Frank, 2000).

In South Africa, teachers look for referral agencies to deal with behavioural problems, and to exclude the learners from mainstream education. Porteus, Clacherty, Mdiya, Pelo, Matsai, Qwabe and Donald (2000) claim that in most developing countries, 'exclusion' from education may refer to a wider range of social issues than is generally the case in more developed contexts. Many of the factors leading to the exclusion of learners from appropriate educational opportunities in the former have either been overcome, or are at least less common, in the latter. While exclusion due to behavioural problems constitute only a sub-set of those who are out of school, the problem of exclusion is recognised to be an issue which should not be oversimplified nor disengaged from its social context (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997).

Shakespeare (1996: 191) highlights the tendency to ignore or trivialise children's behaviour and the need and/or function for inappropriate behaviour. It is easier for us to talk about and formulate strategies for changing behaviour, discrimination in education and the rights of the other learners, than to talk about the inclusion of these learners from the mainstream. This raises the question, why this difficulty and why the neglect? A philosophical response might be to



quote that behaviour and the causes thereof is “just like death – one of the phenomena in cultural history that, separated from the public discourse, is wrapped in silence” (Foucault, 1981: 49). An alternative explanation might be that teachers fail to consider the causes for inappropriate behaviour and regard it as unimportant when they have to think of critical issues such as poverty, unemployment, violence, HIV/Aids and other socio-political and socio-economic realities (Rubin, 1984). These explanations do not hold up well when one considers that teachers at schools complain about learners’ behaviour all the time. So perhaps the reticence about the issue of behaviour and the causes for inappropriate behaviour has something to do with the stigmatisation of disability. Hence the collusion of silence. Foucault (1981) points out that repression operates as a sentence to disappear, an injunction to silence, which implies that there is nothing to say about that which we do not identify with.

Thus, in South Africa specifically, economic factors related to poverty and the need to earn (Gordon, 1987), traditional family role expectations (Bekombo, 1981), problems related to the perceived irrelevance of the school curriculum (Palme, 1994) and unemployment resulting in violence are a few of the factors that have been found to relate to exclusion. In an interview study conducted by Persson (1995), teachers justified their choice of excluding learners with behavioural problems due to overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources and lack of special educational support. Gregg (1999: 107) stresses that large classes make it easier for marginal learners to fall through the cracks and for their academic, behavioural, and social needs to be overlooked. BurrIDGE (2001: 16) states that teachers recognise that emotional factors are a vital part of every learner’s capacity to learn and to interact with the environment, and that negative emotions are often the source of learning and behavioural difficulties. She also claims that when negative experiences become overwhelming, the learner cannot move on towards effective learning and a more positive sense of self.



Naicker (1999) states that inclusive education can be defined as a system of education that is responsive to the diverse needs of learners. Engelbrecht and Forlin (1997) add that inclusion is defined as a shared value that promotes a single system of education dedicated to ensuring that all learners are empowered to become caring, competent and contributing citizens in an inclusive, changing and diverse society. Inclusion is against the background of the notion of inclusivity in society, as a question of how mainstream schools can be continually restructured in order to respond positively to all learners as individuals (Department of Education, 2001a).

Machel and Mandela (2002: 1) claim to be part of the Global Campaign for Education and call for government to provide good quality basic education for all children. They wish to add their voices by stating that to deny learners with behavioural problems access to the mainstream education, is to exclude them from meaningful participation in society and to perpetuate inequality. Governments on the continent of Africa often do not prioritise the basic needs of children in their national budgets and call upon our government to do much more to make schooling accessible for all children. Machel and Mandela (2002: 3) urge citizens in developing countries to ensure that their governments have created and put strong educational plans in place. They continue by stating that if we do not achieve the goals for universal education, we not only fail to meet our commitments as communities and citizens, we also fail our children, because all children have the right to learn.

Learners with educational needs (behavioural) experience great difficulty in gaining access to education. Most of these learners have either fallen outside of the system or the curriculum and education system as a whole have generally failed to respond to the diverse needs of the learner population, resulting in massive numbers of dropouts, push-outs and failures. The education minister of South Africa, Kader Asmal, (Department of Education, 2001a: 4) states that an inclusive education system will send out a message to many parents of learners



with special educational needs (including behavioural) that the place of these learners is not one of isolation, but with their peers, in schools, on the playgrounds, on the streets and in places of worship where they can become part of the local community and cultural life, and part of the reconstruction and development of our country. He proposes that only when these learners among us are a natural and ordinary part of society (us), that society (we) can truly lay claim to the status of cherishing all our learners equally (Department of Education, 2001a: 4).

Inclusive education should therefore meet the educational needs within a common, yet fluid contexts and activities. Including students with behavioural problems in mainstream classrooms has received a significant amount of attention on a philosophical level. However, somewhat less discussion has been focused on specific ways to accomplish this task successfully (that is, at practical level). Addressing the needs of a wide range of learners is a daunting challenge for general teachers in schools today. Many teachers report that they have not received training in behaviour management and instructional strategies to help learners with behavioural problems and/or different learning needs. As schools move to include learners with different educational needs in mainstream classrooms, adequate attention to teacher training is lacking (Gregg, 1999:107).

Maintaining appropriate classroom behaviour can be a complex and difficult task. This task becomes more stressful when it is exacerbated by big classes, abolishment of corporal punishment, lack of resources and job insecurities. Many classroom teachers feel that they do not have sufficient training to meet many of the challenges presented by learners with behavioural problems in their classes. The Department of Education (2001a: 4) called on all teachers to work together and to nurture the learners with educational needs so that they can experience the full excitement and joy of learning, and to provide them, and our nation, with a solid foundation for lifelong learning and development. Radford (2000: 86) states that local education authorities have been busy setting out their



behaviour support plans, and it is commendable that these place a heavy emphasis on preventative measures.

The massive changes that teachers have experienced recently, along with the increase in diversity of their learners' needs, mean that teachers have to adapt in many different ways (Creese, Daniels & Norwich, 1995). Teachers have to undergo a paradigm shift as to the way in which behavioural problems are viewed. Dorow, Fisch, Ukry and Ellsworth (1998) postulate that teachers should focus on each child's individual strengths and weaknesses. Labelling and separating learners may further marginalise them and solidify antisocial peer groups, compounding the problem one is trying to solve (Brown, 1997). Kalideen (2002: 4) also emphasises that schools should be characterized by zero tolerance of any form of violent behaviour (including corporal punishment), close monitoring of learners, a unified and consistent application of rules and the core social value of respect. Schools can do more to reduce violence against learners by creating nurturing environments than by placing primary emphasis on trying to control and modify learners' behaviour. In contrast, deficit models that attempt to fix the child, scare tactics, authoritarian approaches, and punishment do not produce the outcomes that policymakers, teachers, principals and society want (Willis, 1996).

Teachers lack the perception and understanding that they are inextricably bound to a learner's reality and displace the problem. The school system is not able to contain tensions or disequilibrium that a learner's problem brings to the classroom context. The problem is dealt with within the pattern of punishment or referral. Although this is the general operational procedure in most schools, it does encourage a 'passing of the buck' pattern of problem solving in the school system. Behaviour problems and intervention are seen as lying outside of the school system.



Many teachers have expressed frustration over ineffective interventions and their inability to alleviate certain behaviour problems in the classroom. Despite the fact that teacher-training programmes include coursework in behaviour management, classroom discipline is one of the top concerns of teachers. In many training programmes, however, teachers are briefly presented with a wide variety of classroom management techniques in an effort to provide breadth to their training. As a result, teachers enter the work force insufficiently prepared to implement any one method of discipline (Myers & Holland, 2000). Furthermore, Wilson, Gutkin, Hagen and Oats (1998: 58) found that once teachers begin teaching, they are most likely to confer with other teachers about behaviour problems that perpetuate a closed system of knowledge with a limited scope and depth. When pressed for intervention strategies, teachers tended to mention the same types of intervention, often in the same sequence.

Often behaviour management is viewed as the application of a consequence following an inappropriate behaviour. This traditional and overly simplistic view of behaviour management is outdated. A functional assessment approach must be included in behavioural consultation (Horner, 1994). The trial-and-error testing of an endless series of intervention needs to be avoided (Myers & Holland, 2000). Functional assessment procedures can ascertain the purpose of target behaviour. Once the function of the behaviour is known, intervention strategies become readily apparent. Antecedent events and ecological changes can be made to reduce the problem behaviours from occurring in the first place. More acceptable alternative behaviours to serve the same function as the inappropriate behaviour can be taught.

The ecological theory underpins the relationship between different organisms and their physical environment. These relationships are seen as a whole. Social context (including socio-economic conditions, ways of life and cultural patterns) has a profound influence on how children develop (Donald, *et al.*, 1999). According to this perspective, behaviour needs to be examined in a social



context to be meaningfully interpreted. Thus, it is difficult to understand the behaviour manifestations of a learner, without knowing about the social context of that behaviour (Meyer & Salmon, 1988).

Vollmer and Northup (1996) emphasise the importance of teachers understanding the function/purpose of learners' behaviour. They stress that if you want to improve relationships, it is important to know the learner in context and his/her background. It makes for a positive experience where the learner feels that the teacher understands and respects him/her and therefore he/she will respect in return. Only recently has the issue of treatment selection based upon the function of the problematic behaviour received consideration. That is, to develop an effective intervention, one must know, or at least have a good hypothesis of the function/purpose of the behaviour (Vollmer & Northup, 1996). Jensen (2001: 32) so aptly states that no more than an auto mechanic can fix an automobile without first understanding the functions and inner mechanisms that led to its breakdown, can a teacher try to 'solve' behavioural problems/difficulties if s/he doesn't understand the learner and the function of the particular behaviour.

Knowledge about behavioural functions should prove to be very useful to teachers in dealing with the myriad of behaviour problems they encounter in their classrooms. Within the research literature (Myers & Holland, 2000; Vollmer & Northup, 1996), a few teachers have been trained on an individual basis to implement functional analysis procedures with the treatments based on these procedures found to be effective. As might be expected, merely asking untrained teachers about the function of a learner's problematic behaviour can yield inaccurate results compared to formal analysis procedures (Horner, 1994). The future direction for functional assessment would be to help teachers in using functional assessment information to develop effective interventions. However, as pointed out by Myers and Holland (2000: 273), to date, we only have a very shallow understanding of teachers' intervention knowledge. The current study



begins to fill that void by providing preliminary information on teachers' views of behavioural problems and knowledge of behavioural functions.

Many teachers claim that they have not been trained to deal with behavioural problems in their basic teacher training, neither have they received adequate training in regard to educating all students. They fear that learners with behavioural and emotional needs will not learn and will run the risk of becoming socially isolated (Roll-Pettersson, 2001: 52). Farrell (1997) tends to agree with these teachers and states that the lack of systemic and ongoing training among teachers may actually have an adverse effect on the outcome of inclusion and prevent teachers from taking the time and effort to understand their learners and their needs.

Losen (2002: 45) posits that learners with behavioural difficulties/problems face many obstacles to equal educational opportunities. The author continues by stating that research on behavioural difficulties/problems suggests that high quality early intervention would make a vast difference, but ironically the delayed, low quality intervention they receive in schools tend to allow minor behavioural problems to fester and become exacerbated. If learners were given quality and culturally sensitive support and services in the least restrictive environments, mainstream classrooms, more learners and teachers would benefit in the long run (Losen, 2002).

Traditional approaches to troubled learners are inherently pessimistic and reactive and keyed to the deviance and dysfunction of the learners. The traditional punitive strategies (coercion, punishment or exclusion) for disciplining inappropriate behaviour fail dramatically with a significant portion of highly troubled learners who do not benefit from the punitive interventions at all. Unfortunately, the 'common sense' punitive response may only cast teachers in the role of enemy, and reinforce the angry or rejected learners' distorted thinking and behaviour. These strategies often fuel an adversarial climate between the



learner and the teacher, and preclude the development of positive peer cultures and safe learning environments. One cannot assume that the punishment alone will teach the learners a lesson. If punishment is indicated, then the crisis surrounding this punishment may itself provide an excellent opportunity for learning and growth (Long, Fecser & Brendtro, 1999).

When behaviour problems persist in spite of interventions, it would seem that a sensible response would be to discard the intervention instead of the learner. Teachers report that punitive strategies are reactive and don't really work, but resort to using them time and again. Long, *et al.* (1999: 6) agree with the teachers and state that there is not a shred of scientific evidence that this punitiveness makes any sense. They need to use strategies like the Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI). LSCI is an advanced, sophisticated and effective strategy of using a learner's crisis as an opportunity to promote insight and change. It employs a strength-based approach of problem solving. The focus of LSCI is on understanding the reasons for counterproductive conflict cycles that capitalises on problems as opportunities for learning and growth. Learners must be seen as resourceful participants in their own healing, not passive patients who need fixing (Long, *et al.*, 1999).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Teachers are caught up in the behaviour problems of their learners in the classroom, and it seems as if they are uncertain about the dynamics of the behaviour.

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

The primary aim of the study is to determine teachers' understanding of problem behaviour of learners in their classrooms.



## 1.4 Research Design

This research study will be approached from a phenomenological perspective. Polkinghorne (1989) points out that phenomenological research is sometimes identified as descriptive and qualitative approaches. Whilst he acknowledges these as important aspects of the approach, he also identifies the structures that produce meaning in consciousness. It focuses on a description of the subjects' experienced meaning (understanding) instead of on descriptions of their overt actions or behaviour. It is for this reason that a phenomenological approach will be taken.

Since the focus of this study is not on the reduction and abstraction to numerical data, but rather on the context and integrity of the research material, a qualitative approach was prioritized (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994). A major claim in qualitative research is that it seeks to understand or explain the world or events from the perspective of the participants, thus focusing on the subject's constructions of meanings of reality or subjective knowing. As Merriam (1998: 6) states, "The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's". In this way a greater depth and breadth of understanding may be achieved. Gale (1993: 81) describes qualitative research as "interpretive inquiries regarding meaning making". According to Mouton and Marais (1990), a qualitative approach enables the researcher to elicit a reasonable degree of connotatively rich meaning.

Qualitative methods, such as the focus group interview have proven to be popular in that this method fills in the areas of uncertainty, contradictions and other gaps in the interviewee's perceptions that may not be accounted for when using a quantitative method (Krueger, 1994).

Quantitative approaches are generally linked with positivism, a paradigm that holds certain assumptions that are widely critiqued by qualitative researchers.



Positivism posits the notion that a reality exists which is observable and apprehendable. It also posits that the researcher is objective and unbiased and therefore the research process is value-free. Furthermore, methodology within the positivist paradigm is “experimental and manipulative” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 110). Burr (1995) notes that objective assessment of people’s (teachers’) understanding is an impossible task, suggesting that any attempts to examine people’s (teachers’) understanding should employ qualitative research methodologies.

Parker (1994: 1) writes, “Qualitative methods have emerged in psychology only fairly recently as an array of alternative responses to those in the mainstream, and it is difficult to define, explain or illustrate qualitative research without counterposing it to those methods in psychology which rest upon quantification”. Quantitative research also defines itself in opposition to qualitative research (see Table 1.1, p. 13) where it focuses on overcoming:

- What are called “experimenter effects” with multiple raters or double blind experiments (Huysamen, 1994: 69 – 71),
- What are called “nuisance variables”, elements of the whole which the researcher does not want to observe with strategies such as matching (Huysamen, 1994: 69 – 71),
- Flexibility with systematic observation that is replicable (Huysamen, 1994: 139).

Clear differences between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms seem to constitute the following binaries (see Table 1.1, p. 13).

**Table 1.1: Qualitative-Quantitative binaries**

<b>Qualitative</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>
Constructivist/Phenomenology	Positivism
Flexible	Fixed
Subjective	Objective
Descriptive	Numerical data
Interpretation	Measurement
Inductive	Deductive
Hypothesis-generating	Hypothesis-testing
Discovery/Emergent	Predictive/Predetermined
Holistic	Reductionistic
Naturalistic	Experimental

(Kincheloe, 1991; Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 1998: 7; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2000)

Qualitative research “has no theory or paradigm, that is distinctly its own” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 3). This type of study lends itself to a more ethnographic approach and it does, however, appear to share more aspects with the ‘new paradigms’ such as critical theory, constructivism and deconstruction in terms of hearing what people have to say and finding out about their cultural life and subjective rules and meanings (Banister, *et al.*, 1994). Burr (1995: 1) states that social constructionism “to a greater or lesser degree underpins all of these newer approaches”. It stands in sharp contrast to positivism in terms of its assumptions. Social constructionism argues that “truths and facts are always perspective interpretations which can only emerge against the backdrop of socially shared understandings” (Durheim, 1997: 177).

Polkinghorne (1989) states that from the qualitative perspective, the richness and profundity of human reality is seen as closely related to the structures and



meanings of natural language. It is also through language and social interaction that the participants and researcher influence each other that indicate that the research process cannot be value-free. Thus, language is of great importance to social constructionists. It is through language that we construct our experiences of ourselves and the world (Burr, 1995) and language produces or constructs what is researched (Lather, 1991). Thus, it is identified with commitment to the logic of natural language as the preferred form for understanding human interaction and uses natural language descriptions such as unstructured interviews for its data and usually presents the results in natural language (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Meulenberg-Buskens (1997) highlights that qualitative research has an emphasis on the interconnectedness and the holistic nature of the phenomena it studies and thus calls for an attitude of personal involvement. Our knowledge is not derived from individual sensory experience but from social interaction of all kinds. The researcher holds a particular view that has an impact on what is being researched. Herein lies the researcher's power. Social constructionism calls for an acknowledgement of this power and a critical way of thinking about this power (Banister, *et al.*, 1994). Meulenberg-Buskens (1997) recognises the researcher's subjectivity as an asset to be exploited rather than a calamity to be avoided. Further, she states that with the full acknowledgement of individual capacity and creative subjectivity, it would be very difficult to deny the personal a prominent place in the context of methodological discourse.

Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that criteria have been developed for trustworthiness including triangulation, peer examination, member checks and the researcher's personal reflections. Self-reflexivity will be seen as an important part of this methodological framework. The researcher will reflect on how his values and personal interest in behaviour management enter into the research and how they may be imposed on the data. As Steier (1991: 7) suggests, "By examining how we are part of our data, our research becomes, not a self-centred



product, but a reciprocal process". The process of self-reflexivity will also allow the researcher to be aware, as Steier (1991) warns, of the possibility that the questions that are important to the researcher may be the wrong questions for the participants and they may indicate this. The researcher will be aware of this possibility and be flexible to change them if necessary.

Interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed and organized into categories of information emerging from the qualitative data. Content and thematic analyses will be used to analyse the problematic behaviour and whether teachers understand their learners' behaviour in their classrooms.

## **1.5 Research Method**

### **1.5.1 Literature review**

The researcher will start searching the literature for human behaviour in general and will also look at the study of such human behaviour. He will try to find a framework for understanding the relationship between normal development and the development of behavioural and emotional problems, and whether there is interplay between child development and environmental changes.

The researcher asks the following questions and will try and find answers for them: When is behaviour regarded as a problem? When are behaviour problems considered to be behaviour disorders? What proportion of pupils show behaviour problems? Crimson Education Consultants (2001) postulate that there are a number of debates on what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, hence the researcher moving towards a definition for behaviour.

In South Africa, there is a paucity of research on the incidence and prevalence of learners' behavioural problems in the classroom. The researcher will search for information on the possible effects of political violence and turmoil on children in this country and whether there is an association between exposure to stressors such as poverty; the witnessing of violence and the experiencing of emotional,



physical and sexual abuse. Webster (2001: 533) proposes that a large number of school-aged children are experiencing personal assault, abuse and are traumatised, and the researcher will look for literature discussing the impact of these on the learners.

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards misbehaviour and their learners who exhibit unacceptable behaviour, and how they interact and/or intervene with these learners will be examined in the literature. The researcher will look at the kind of 'problems' teachers regard as inappropriate or unacceptable in the classroom, and compare it to the frequency in general.

The literature will be perused for intervention systems employed by schools and whether these systems are promoted throughout the whole school. The importance of teamwork and/or a whole school approach will be investigated. The role of professionals such as school clinic (Educational Management and Development Centres, hereafter EMDC) staff and how they support the schools also need perusal.

All behaviour has a function, especially problematic behaviour. The researcher would like to screen the literature to see whether teachers attempt to identify environmental events that are linked to the problematic behaviour and whether they base the intervention strategies on the function of the behaviour.

Labels were introduced with definitions and many learners were placed in special schools (institutions) based on these labels. The researcher will scan the literature for reasons why it is necessary for learners to be categorised, and the effect that labels have on the learner. The role and aims of the special schools would be investigated to seek whether the strategies used in these institutions were successful and whether these special schools were the correct placement options for learners with behavioural difficulties.



The issue of special schools where learners are excluded from the mainstream and the new international philosophy of inclusion will make for interesting discussion. As part of the discussion on inclusive education the researcher will look at the South African Constitution that invites everyone to work towards transforming the New South African society. A number of educational documents will be looked at, for example, The Education White Paper 6 and The South African Schools Act.

In dealing with mainstream primary schools on a daily basis, and experiencing the frustrations that teachers have with inclusion, the researcher is inspired to check the literature to try and find an understanding for the teachers reluctance to implement the inclusive policy.

Teachers usually complain about the lack of support, but have a tendency to keep parents out of their classrooms and to blame and shame them for all the inappropriate behaviour that takes place in their classrooms. The researcher will look for evidence describing the impact that teacher-parent partnerships may have on the learners, teachers, schools and parents. Educational documents will be assessed to see whether the Education Department has anything to say about including/involving parents in their children's education.

Finally the researcher will peruse the literature to find out what kinds of intervention strategies the teachers favour in general, and whether they have had any successes with them. He will also look at whether teachers stick to one particular strategy, do they use a trial and error intervention strategy, are their interventions very punitive or do they use the learners' strengths to teach acceptable ways of behaviour.

### **1.5.2 Empirical study**

Firstly the researcher/interviewer engages in self-reflection on the topic to be investigated. This allows the researcher/interviewer to identify immediately



observable dimensions for exploration. Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that the researcher generates questions to be used in the research process.

### **1.5.2.1 Pre-research questionnaire**

The second step is to design a pre-research questionnaire (questionnaire one) to be used as a pilot study. The pilot study might add dimensions that have been overlooked in the self-reflection. The integration of these two steps then generates a list of research questions designed to tap the fullness of the participants' experience and understanding.

The pre-research questionnaire will be handed to teachers at two neighbouring schools. The teachers will be asked to complete the questionnaires and give personal feedback regarding their overall impression, the length of the questionnaire and the content of the individual items.

### **1.5.2.2 Questionnaires**

Two questionnaires will be developed based on exploratory fieldwork involving a pre-research questionnaire (questionnaire one) and unstructured interviews (the question that will guide these interview studies is: What are critical incidents you experience everyday in your classroom?) with the teachers of two primary schools in Bonteheuwel. The questionnaire will contain open-ended questions in order to obtain participants' own insights and understanding. The research participants will fill in these questionnaires.

The first questionnaire (questionnaire two) (see appendix 1) will contain questions relating to:

- Teachers' understanding of their learners' values, motivation, self/hobbies and social background.
- The kind of behaviour that is problematic to them in their classrooms.
- Teachers' understanding of why learners misbehave in classroom.
- What teachers do with the concerns about learners' behaviour?

- How teachers deal with/respond to unacceptable/inappropriate behaviour in their classrooms.

The triangulation method is going to be used as a strategy to enhance internal validity or trustworthiness. Huysamen (1994: 113) says it is advisable to use more than one measure if the researcher is concerned about the validity of the findings. The second questionnaire (questionnaire three) (see appendix 2) consists of two questions, namely:

- Describe behaviour of learners that bother you on a daily basis.
- How do you respond to the above behaviour?

The questionnaires will precede the focus groups and will be administered to the same sample that will participate in the focus groups.

### **1.5.2.3 Focus Group Interviews**

From the above data two focus group interviews (one at each school) will be held to clarify anything that was found to be unclear from the different questionnaires, or if the researcher needs any explanation or elaboration on certain points or statements that the teachers have made during the filling in of the questionnaires. The researcher will be a participant observer in order to experience the life-world of the teachers (group members) (Huysamen, 1994: 174).

Focus groups are group discussions organised to explore a specific set of issues (Kitzinger, 1994: 103) such as teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour in the classroom. In this respect, the focus group is a technique which when used in a non-threatening environment, generates detailed data about participants' everyday experiences and is crucial in obtaining the insights, perceptions, understanding and attitudes of people in a dynamic group interactive atmosphere (Binedell, 1994).



Focus group interviews normally need to reflect spontaneous responses from the participants as far as possible (Huysamen, 1994: 174; Schurink, 1988), and as a choice of data collection will be utilised to create an opportunity for dialogue for ideas and points of view that might not be elicited through individual interviews. This is in line with Ferreira and Puth's (1988) argument that the informal group situation together with open-ended questions facilitate greater interaction, discussion and stimulation among participants, especially regarding topics that may be more difficult to elicit information on in formal one-to-one interviews. Focus groups have been found to be particularly helpful in eliciting in-depth discursive material and have advantages over individual interviews in that they provide a forum for participant interaction (Shefer, 1999: 171). The focus group also successfully provides a way of exploring the construction of meaning and the dynamic negotiation of meaning in context (Shefer, 1999: 112) that highlights the social interactive processes through which people construct the world and themselves (Shefer, 1999: 171).

Teachers will be asked to explain, clarify or elaborate on statements they have made on some of the learner's behaviour in their classrooms. Spontaneous discussions could be initiated of some of the teachers' responses. The researcher will pose open-ended questions as these come up in the spontaneous development of the interaction between him and the teachers (research participants). Not only do unstructured focus group interviews differ from structured interviews in that they are bound to a previously compiled list of questions, the researcher attempts to understand how the participants experience their life-worlds and how they make sense of what is happening to them. The researcher thus focuses on the first-hand experience of the life-world of the participants themselves, rather than on their interpretation or speculative explanations of it (Huysamen, 1994: 174). This will enable the researcher to gather information and to clarify some of the participants' responses or issues that may arise from the questionnaires.



The researcher will be attentive to the effect of intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental factors on group dynamics as it plays a large role in the extent to which participants feel inhibited to communicate their ideas (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Each group will include eight to ten teachers of the participating primary schools. This size group discourages dominance by certain members and it enables all participants the opportunity to share their understanding thereby providing a diversity of perceptions (Krueger, 1994; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

According to Brenner, Brown and Canter (1985) small group interviews have the following advantages:

- They permit the collection of the most extensive data on each person interviewed.
- They allow both parties to explore the meaning of central themes in the life-world of the interviewee.
- They are neither strictly structured, nor entirely non-directive, but are focused on certain themes.
- They provide the necessary flexibility to adapt methods to the needs of each individual research situation.
- Any misunderstandings can be checked immediately.
- They enable the interviewee to answer the questions as fully as he/she chooses and to motivate his/her responses when required.

As in participant observation, frankness and honesty are required from the researcher to build up a position of trust with the prospective participants. Not only should the participants be assured of complete anonymity, but they should also feel completely free to express their true feelings and opinions without fear of disapproval or condemnation by the researcher. This is especially true when these feelings and opinions are in conflict with the generally accepted norms of the researcher and/or in this case the school community. The researcher should



neither approve nor disapprove of the participants' actions, but show understanding for them (Huysamen, 1994: 175).

The researcher will facilitate these focus groups. Data will be captured by means of an audio recorder with the consent of the participants. These interviews will be transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis. Great care will be taken to ensure each participant that all information given in the focus group will be strictly confidential and anonymous.

#### **1.5.2.4 Participants**

The research group will consist of a convenience sample of teachers of two mainstream primary schools within the Bonteheuwel area where behavioural problems are reported to be the order of the day. It is hoped that the group would reflect differences in gender, age and teaching experience. However, these factors would largely be pre-determined by the existing group (convenience sample) itself.

## **1.6 Procedure**

It is crucial to note, that before proceeding with the research, the researcher needs to secure both permission and support for the study.

- Permission from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) will be obtained to conduct the study in two mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel.
- Permission from the school principals will be obtained to conduct the study (questionnaires and focus group interviews) at their schools.
- Questionnaires will be given to all the teachers at the selected schools after the researcher has explained the nature of the research and emphasised that participation is voluntary.

- An arrangement will be made with the selected schools in terms of setting up a suitable date and time to run the focus group interviews.
- Focus group interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed with permission from the groups.

## **1.7 Analysis of Data**

According to Polkinghorne (1989), the aim of phenomenological inquiry is to reveal and unravel the structures, logic and interrelationships that pertain to the phenomenon under study. Data analysis is the core stage of such research efforts and its purpose is to derive from the data generated, the essential features of the experience under consideration.

Interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed and organised into categories of information emerging from the qualitative data.

Content and thematic analysis will be used in this study to analyse the data to ascertain the problematic behaviour and whether teachers understand their learners' behaviour in their classrooms. Boyatzis (1998) describes content and thematic analyses as processes that are parts of many qualitative methods. An inductive approach to sensing themes (as the first step in analyzing information) and developing codes will be used. This will involve reading all the protocols and acquiring a 'feeling' for them. The next step will be to extract the phrases or sentences that pertain directly to the area of study. After this the phrases, as they appear in the protocol, will be transformed into the words of the researcher, resulting in a list of meaning or significant statements reflecting the essential point of each original statement. Finally, the individual themes will be clustered to produce a further reduction in general themes that are common to all the participants'/subjects' protocols (Polkinghorne, 1989: 53).



## 1.8 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process and work itself, specific ethical issues are considered pertinent, and as such, need to be addressed and included within the study. Issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and respect for participants, with regards to their responses and attitudes are of extreme importance. These important aspects, which in a sense frame the research process, would be made explicit and outlined from the beginning and maintained, by means of an open and self-reflective attitude.

- Participants will be informed that the researcher is an M.Ed (Psych) student at the University of Stellenbosch.
- Participants will be fully briefed on the nature of the research.
- Participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time.
- Informed consent will be obtained from each participant.
- Participants will be assured anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained within the limits of the research process.

## 1.9 Relevance Of The Study

Despite the fact that there is a considerable amount of both literature and programmes pertaining to behaviour management for teachers, the question still remains whether teachers understand the behaviour or are they caught up in the behaviour manifestations?

Squires (2001: 15) states that all schools have learners with behavioural difficulties who use up a lot of time and energy. Teachers have used punishment, peer support and exclusion, but these more traditional approaches and consequences are ineffective in changing behaviour. An alternative approach is to engage the learner in trying to understand how his/her behaviour is linked to his/her thoughts about a situation and the feelings that arise.

A reason for the present study being considered important is that it will allow teachers to identify the function/purpose of learners' behaviour manifestations in their classrooms. This understanding will inform the teachers of which intervention strategies and behaviour management programmes to employ.

## **1.10 Clarification Of Terms**

Inclusive education ... is the inclusion of all learners (with or without special educational needs) in a unified mainstream education system.

Behavioural problems in the classroom ... are learners' problem behaviours that prevent effective teaching and learning in the classroom to take place.

## **1.11 Overview Of Research**

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4 – Presentation of Findings

Chapter 5 – Discussion of Findings

Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations



# CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Human behaviour and normal development

The study of human behaviour is one of the most challenging and complex areas of science. For a long period of time, the study of human behaviour has been the focus of great minds from different fields such as theology, history, literature and science. Though there have been quite significant advances in the psychological, social and neurosciences, no definite explanation of behaviour problems has been proposed. (Epanchin & Paul, 1987)

The study of normal development enhances the understanding of pathology just like the analysis of deviant development contributes to insight about normality. According to Cicchetti (1984), the convergence of these areas has given rise to developmental psychopathology as a field of study in its own right. The development-interactional approach (Monsen & Simeonsson, 1987) posits a continuous interplay between child development and environmental changes. This approach offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between normal development and the development of behavioural and emotional problems. From this developmental-interactional perspective, a number of implications specific to psychopathology could be derived. These implications could be both conceptual and clinical in nature.

From a conceptual frame of reference, a developmental-interactional perspective assumes that development, whether normal or deviant, reflects the learner's adaptation to the environment. Adaptation involves the complementary process of assimilation and accommodation, resulting in qualitative, structural change with development. In assimilation, maintenance of existing behaviour or thought, is predominant while in accommodation, modification is predominant. Although



the ratio of these processes may vary, normal adaptation and development show an acceptable balance (equilibrium) between the two. On the other hand, excessive or inappropriate reliance on one process to the exclusion of the other may be an expression of the distorting and maladaptive behaviours of emotionally disturbed children.

## **2.2 When is behaviour a problem?**

Cullinan, Epstein and Lloyd (1983) ask questions like: When is behaviour regarded as a problem? When are behaviour problems considered to be behaviour disorders? What proportion of pupils show behaviour problems? Montgomery (1989: 5) proposes that one of the main difficulties in defining behaviour problems is that they are socially disapproved behaviours and what one person classes as bad behaviour, another might not, hence value judgments are involved. It is suggested that many learners with behaviour problems have poor social skills and are usually disruptive in the classroom. When they engage in socially disapproved behaviour they have insufficient social skills to negotiate themselves out of the trouble this creates. Bibou-Nakou, Kiosseoglou and Stogiannidou (2000: 124) state that it is well known that teacher perceptions of problem behaviour in the primary school are judged to be 'troublesome' according to the different social norms prevailing in each culture; some behaviours may be seen as more or less desirable, reflecting cross-cultural difference. We do know, however, that teacher perceptions of competent learners favour the learners that are sociable, manageable for teachers and parents, with good academic performance, and engaged in classroom activities.

Crimson Education Consultants (2001) postulate that there are a number of debates on what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. However, all teachers who have spent any time in a classroom will agree that, regardless of what the 'professional academic' definition for acceptable behaviour, when behaviour disrupts other learners and prevents effective teaching and learning to



take place, it is unacceptable. The frequency and intensity of learner's inappropriate behaviours continue to be an alarming problem for teachers.

Long, *et al.* (1999: 4) state that they have observed an increase of more primitive and bizarre learner behaviour in the primary schools. Many learners with behavioural difficulties lack many concepts and much of the understanding needed for classroom interaction and learning (Vacca, 2001:26). Vacca (2001) goes on to say that teachers may believe that these learners are purposefully controlling, stubborn or emotionally disturbed, and behaviours may easily be misinterpreted as oppositional, mean-spirited and sarcastic. Thus, many seriously emotionally disturbed learners are being deprived of appropriate services with the rationalisation that these learners don't have a 'real' problem, but are just choosing to act in a socially maladjusted manner (Long, *et al.*, 1999: 5). Of course, all of us choose how we act and behave, but the key issue is why a learner would decide to keep behaving in a self-defeating manner even when that behaviour is ruining his/her life and constantly getting them into trouble.

Disruptive behaviour was defined as that which interferes with the learning and opportunities of other learners and imposes undue stress upon the teacher. Behaviour problems which were disruptive seem to include attention seeking, continuous talking and muttering, making annoying noises, lack of attention, poor concentration, distractibility, shouting out, wandering about, snatching other pupils' property, annoying and distracting other learners or the teacher, provoking each other by name-calling and unpleasant comments, lack of interest and motivation to work. Although each of these behaviours may be trivial, when they become persistent it is very tiring for the teacher to have to manage them day after day (Montgomery, 1989: 9).

### **2.3 Factors influencing behaviour**

In South Africa, there is a paucity of research on the incidence and prevalence of learners' behavioural problems in the classroom. A number of South African



research on the effects of political violence and turmoil on children in this country reveals that there is an association between exposure to stressors such as poverty; the witnessing of violence and the experiencing of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, and the development of symptoms that include loss of appetite, nightmares, hypervigilance, loss of concentration, memory impairment, etc. and the eventual manifestation of unacceptable behaviour in the classroom (Kruger, 1992). Webster (2001: 533) proposes that a large number of school-aged children are experiencing personal assault, abuse and are traumatised, and the impact appears to be highly emotionally damaging to large numbers of learners. Teachers are likely to encounter these learners in the routine course of the educational process.

The National Centre of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States (Webster, 2001: 534) indicated that over 300 000 children are assaulted annually. This figure is significantly higher than what most people would generally like to believe about how children are treated in a country that places such high regard on the value of human life. Many of our learners reside in families that have a significant number of other kinds of serious problems, and it may be that the presence of these other problems makes the child vulnerable to both neglect and then later abuse. Family-wide problems often associated with abuse include the child witnessing physical or sexual violence between their parents or adults in the household, exposure to adults using alcohol and drugs, or general neglect of the child's basic living needs such as food, clothing, shelter and love. Power, aggression, domination, and control over the child appear as primary characteristics in these relationships. The degree of family-level psychopathology present before the abuse occurs may be a significant influence on how the child reacts to, and emotionally rebounds from the abuse (Webster, 2001).

Ackerman, Newman, McPherson, Jones and Dykman (1998) state that many children often encounter multiple trauma over a continued time period during



their childhoods. Obviously, exposure to multiple traumatic experiences can compound and magnify both the short-term and longer ranging negative effects in an intricate and difficult to predict manner. What seems clear, though, is that children who have been both sexually and physically abused are at very high risk to develop emotional and behavioural problems during their lifetime. Moreover, these learners come from a wide variety of personal and social-cultural backgrounds. This heterogeneity of backgrounds, personal life experiences, and family conditioning will effect how the individual learner specifically reacts to the abuse and/or trauma. Webster (2001: 536) says that it is very difficult to establish with confidence that trauma and abuse are the main effect causes of a learner's emotional or behavioural problems unless the learner explicitly discloses that information.

Wolfe, Gentile and Wolfe (1989) point out that these learners may show moderate to severe conduct problems or present with multiple emotional and behavioural problems. Guilt and shame often are apparent, which can affect the learner's capacity to develop meaningful present and future relationships with peers and other adults, especially teachers. Hennessy, Rabideau and Cicchetti (1994) report that some of these learners will show hypervigilance and heightened emotional reactivity to social interactions where one might see a low level of anger present, even when the behaviours shown by other people tend to be more neutral rather than aggressive in nature. They may misinterpret social interactions as negative and aggressive when, in fact, they are not. Webster (2001: 537) adds that often learners appear to teachers as being inflexible, easily distractible, or as having difficulty dealing well with changes. They may seem to be 'on edge', even when they are involved in relaxed social settings.



## 2.4 Determining whether behaviour is normal or abnormal

During the child's primary school years, he has to meet the accelerating demands of parents, teachers, peers and society. That is, he is expected to adapt to changes (White, 1989) in order to be considered 'normal' (Cullinan, Epstein & Lloyd, 1983). In defining whether the behaviour is normal or abnormal, Cullinan, *et al.* (1983) mention two kinds of standards of normality, namely, 'typical as normal' and 'ideal as normal'. According to the typical as normal standard, normality is defined as what the average child does or as the average performance of some group of children. For example, a regular class teacher with a learner who spends most of the day without interacting with any classmates may ask the learning support teacher if the learner is abnormally withdrawn. Certain setbacks of this approach feature and one of them are that some characteristics of learners with behaviour disorders, for instance, anxiety, are difficult to define specifically and measure reliably. Nevertheless, the typical as normal approach seems mostly useful with directly observable behaviour patterns. The ideal as normal approach emphasises that certain patterns of human behaviour are seen as the way things ought to be. Thus, any deviation from such a pattern is considered abnormal. These ideals are different, for example, those derived from common sense and everyday experience like: learners should not talk and shout answers out in class; learners should pay attention/concentrate; learners should sit still and not wander about; and those that are religious and moral in nature like: learners do not disrupt others; learners do not annoy the teachers and/or do unto others what you would like to be done unto you.

Cullinan, *et al.* (1983) further mention that there are two major classes of disorders common in the above-mentioned two standards of systems, namely: environmental conflict (including aggressive, disruptive, hyperactivity, and social maladjustment problems) and personal disturbance (including anxious and



withdrawn problems). These untreated problems are likely to have significant long-term implications for the psychological and educational development of the learners concerned (Cassidy, James & Wiggs, 2002: 167).

## **2.5 The ecological theory**

When looking at the environmental context of learners the ecological theory underpins the relationship between different organisms and their physical environment. These relationships are seen as a whole. Social context (including socio-economic conditions, ways of life and cultural patterns) has a profound influence on how children develop (Donald, *et al.*, 1999). Many learners often live in hostile environments comprised of fragmented and overbearing families, alienated schools and the destructive social forces of poverty, gangs, drugs, alcohol, guns and promiscuity. These learners bring all the environmental ills of their society into the classrooms. Many learners who are victims of abuse become the victimiser in the community or a terror in school, causing teachers to feel overwhelmed and helpless because the social-emotional needs of these troubled learners often exceed the resources and skills of the teachers (Long, *et al.*, 1999).

## **2.6 The attribution theory**

When teachers complain about personal disturbances or internal learner difficulties they are suggesting that the problem lies within the child, and by implication neglecting and/or underestimating the environmental and/or their own involvement and responsibility (Farrell, 2001: 4). In the attribution theory, a distinction between disposition and situation factors is especially prevalent. According to this, the teachers as observers tend to attribute misbehaviour to perceived stable personal dispositions. The above tendency could be explained either by the absence of specific information or by the teachers' tendency to perceive the learners themselves as the dominant factor. One could infer this finding that children need to be 'treated' without any undue inference by the



teachers. In addition, the above-mentioned teacher perceptions might well act as self-defensive attributions protecting their levels of self-esteem and producing the observed biasing of causal attributions (Oswald, 1995). Many learners have increasing conflict with family and the community, but the adults, including teachers, in their life space are unaware of the nature of the learner's inner turmoil and become frustrated by chronic, escalating troublesome behaviour (Long, *et al.*, 1999: 2).

## 2.7 Percentages of Learners Showing Behaviour Problems in School

Although previous studies (see Table 2.2, p. 33) varied greatly as to the nature of learners studied, the method (and quality) of research criteria for identifying a learner who displays unacceptable behaviour, many of these studies used two levels of behaviour problems that some researchers termed 'noticeable behaviour problems' and 'special services needed' (Bower, 1979).

**Table 2.2: Percentages of Learners Showing Behaviour Problems in School**

<i>Source</i>	<b>'Noticeable Behaviour Problems'</b>		<b>'Special Services Needed'</b>	
	<i>Primary</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Primary</i>	<i>High</i>
Glidewell & Swallow, 1968	11%			3-4%
Mental Health Survey of Los Angeles County, 1960	7%	7%	2-3%	2-3%
Oliver, 1974		15%		1-2%
Roberts & Baird, 1972	17%		3-4%	
Rubin & Balow, 1978	27%		7-8%	
Swift & Spivack, 1975	30%		10-12%	

[Author's (Bower, 1979) summary estimates are based on an examination of numerous studies]



Behaviours that are included in the 'noticeable behaviour problems' category are those that interfere with classroom or school functioning or disturb teachers in any way. These types of behaviour problems are not considered serious enough to justify much, if any, special education assistance. In the 'special services needed' category, only a small percentage of learners who behave in ways that prompt teachers to refer them for special services are given.

In the Bonteheuwel area the teachers reported almost similar figures (see Table 2.3, p. 34) of learners who exhibit problematic/unacceptable behaviour in their classroom.

**Table 2.3: Learners at the two research schools in Bonteheuwel exhibiting problematic behaviours in the classroom.**

<b>School</b>	<b>No of learners exhibiting problematic behaviour in the classroom</b>
School A	3 of 32 = 9,4% to 15 of 25 = 60%
School B	3 of 34 = 8,8% to 14 of 31 = 45,2%

Consequent to these research findings, Cullinan, *et al.* (1983) mention a rule-of-thumb on the prevalence of behaviour problems in learners:

- In any school year, approximately one-third (1/3) of all learners exhibit behaviour problems that concern their teachers.
- About one-third (1/3) show greater degree of problems to the extent that changes from the usual educational procedures are required.
- Around one-third (1/3) of this group (roughly four percent of learners) behaviour problems are serious enough to justify referrals to special education and/or other intervention services.

## **2.8 Behaviour problems that teachers are concerned about**

Montgomery (1989:8) states that when teachers came on in-service training courses on behaviour problems and were asked to list the behaviour problems they were concerned about in their classrooms, if any, they gave the following in order of priority:

- Attention seeking;
- Disruption;
- Short concentration span (talking and walking around);
- Aggression;
- Negativism, disinterest and lack of motivation to work.

Attention seeking and disruption always featured very strongly in the vast majority of teachers' lists (even with the research schools), and in their discussion about classroom problems. In description it became clear that disruptive behaviour was also often a form of attention seeking.

In his study, Gilbert (1997:37-42) surveyed the major reasons for referral of 2500 learners. It was found that for both boys and girls, the most common and frequent was academic difficulties. For boys, the next most frequent was aggressive and antisocial behaviours while for girls it was anxiety and emotional instability. Burrige (2001: 17) states that communicating with words is often difficult for some learners and therefore they express their feelings and emotions through behaviour. It seemed that the effort of holding in anger took up all the energy of some learners, leaving no capacity for doing any work.

Miller (1980) examined emotional and behaviour problems of boys and girls referred to psychological clinics for 'psychiatric and delinquent problems'. Although raters were parents, teachers at schools could also observe the behaviours. A factor analysis of learner behaviour patterns and problems



revealed nine factors, namely: egocentric – exploitive (selfish, undependable, inconsiderate, uses others, vandalises and cruel); social delinquency (truant, uses drugs, steals and has undesirable friends); apathetic – isolation (aloneness, afraid of school, has no fun and no interest); neuroticism (worries, depressed, head and stomach aches and nervous habits); dependent – inhibited (dependent on others, indecisive and has trouble making friends); academic instability (math and reading problems, two grades behind and unable to concentrate); adolescent turmoil (demanding, explosive, modest and concerned with appearance and will not go anywhere alone) and neurological or psychotic abnormality (hyperactive, physically unhealthy and nonsensical speech).

A learner may be regarded as maladjusted who is developing in ways that have a bad effect upon himself or his fellows and cannot without help be remedied by his parents, teachers or other adults in ordinary contact with him. It is characteristic of maladjusted learners that they are insecure and unhappy and that they fail in their personal relationships. A maladjusted learner is one who, for whatever reason, could not cope with all or major aspects of his life. He did not respond to normal discipline in the classroom, participate in classroom routines like most other learners, accept affection and concern from the teacher or his peers, and was likely to over- or under-respond to normal criticism or blame. (Montgomery, 1989: 6) Many of these learners have so many experiences in which others respond to them in ways that do not make sense to them; they have learned to live with and to expect disconnection. In turn, they frequently give responses that make no sense (Vacca, 2001: 26).

## **2.9 A whole school approach to behaviour problems**

It is vital to realise that good discipline that promotes acceptable behaviour, is a prerequisite for good results. Teachers should be aware of their options if behaviour becomes a problem. They should create a system that will help them deal with behaviour problems/issues/difficulties. The system is obviously most effective when it is promoted throughout the school. Teamwork among teachers



can be a very powerful disciplinary tool. This prevents learners playing one teacher up against another and also helps teachers who are struggling with behaviour by giving the learners a mandate for how things are expected to be done. The mandate should be negotiated with the learners and they cannot try to make a teacher feel 'mean' when he/she carries out a behavioural disciplinary action (Crimson Education Consultants, 2001). Demands on human resources continue to make it difficult for schools to refer individual learners to the school psychologists. With increased self-control, understanding and improved management of classroom behaviour there is less need to resort to exclusions on the grounds of dysfunctional/ inappropriate/ unacceptable behaviour. Behavioural difficulties that might have prevented learners' participation in learning tasks are reduced and learning outcomes improved. This results in success not only for the learner, but also for the teacher and the school as a whole (Squires, 2001: 18).

Clarke and Murray (1996) as well as Rogers (1995) stress the fact that a behaviour policy needs to reflect a whole school approach. Teachers therefore need to be clear that they are actively promoting good behaviour that is consistent with the agreed values of the school. The reality, of course, is that schools operate as teams of individuals, each person having different priorities and past experiences. This raises issues about the method of agreeing a joint approach (Radford, 2000:86). Behaviour, however, is an emotional topic (Hanco, 1995). Radford (2000: 86) proposes that teachers may be reluctant to participate in conscious reflection on their feelings, beliefs and attitudes about behaviour. Teachers' former experiences may have been diverse so they may not believe that their decisions will have any worthwhile impact, for example, on reducing their level of anxiety about learners who present challenge. Certainly their views are highly influential but the aims need to be accepted by all teachers for there to be a cohesive school culture (Walters, 1994). It can be worth exploring the meaning of consistency in relation to a whole school approach to behaviour.



Radford (2000: 86) says that a simplified approach that embodies lists of rules, rewards and punishments can provide an emotionally safe solution, but the risks here can outweigh the benefits. Implementation of such systems, without active exploration by the teachers of the underpinning values, can result in punishment without explanations to the learners. Vital learning opportunities for developing deep understanding may be lost. Inconsistency across the school may result and, at worst, confusion in learners (Radford, 2000).

## **2.10 Functional behaviour assessment**

The fact that all behaviour has a function, especially problematic behaviour, and that intervention strategies should be based on the function of the behaviour only recently received consideration (O'Neill, Horner, Albin, Sprague, Storey & Newman, 1997; Vollmer & Northup, 1996). Functional behaviour assessment attempts to identify environmental events that are linked to the problematic behaviour. Functional assessment can be described as a process of understanding the physical and environmental factors that contribute to a person's problem behaviour. Myers and Holland (2000) state that a functional assessment, at a basic level, attempts to determine the purpose (function) of behaviour. By identifying environmental, antecedent and consequent events associated with the target behaviour, a hypothesis about the function of the behaviour can be drawn. A couple of studies have reviewed large numbers of functional assessments and found them to be quite effective at determining the function of behaviour.

By identifying events contributing to, or maintaining, the challenging behaviour, appropriate intervention strategies become more obvious. If, for example, a learner engages in a disruptive behaviour to obtain attention, then a more appropriate manner of obtaining attention is taught. Because reinforcement contingencies vary from learner to learner, interventions should vary from learner to learner. One learner may engage in tantrums to gain a teacher's attention, another may engage in tantrums to obtain objects he/she wants, and yet another



to escape demands from the teacher. To simply pick an intervention strategy based on the behaviour's topography may not reduce the problematic behaviour and certainly does not teach a more appropriate alternative behaviour. By implementing an intervention without knowing the function of a problematic behaviour, one will, at a minimum, waste time with ineffective interventions. Unfortunately, in some scenarios, the chosen intervention could inadvertently reinforce and strengthen the problematic behaviour (for example, applying timeout to an escape function) (Myers & Holland, 2000: 273).

## **2.11 Teachers' beliefs and perceptions about behaviour problems**

Issues in the study of teacher beliefs and perceptions concern the nature and the origin of these beliefs and perceptions, and the relation between beliefs, perceptions, behaviour, and learners' psychosocial and cognitive development. Therefore, considerable attention has been given to the formation of teacher beliefs, perceptions and expectations in relation to the learner's achievement and academic performance (Fang, 1996; Witty & De Baryshe, 1994). Specifically, until now, research into teachers' attribution has been primarily concerned with the explanations presented for academic success and failure and the causal factors of learners' effort and ability (Lovejoy, 1996). Less evidence has been presented so far on teachers' attribution and perceptions of discipline and behaviour problems (Diamond, 1991; Johnson, 1994).

Despite the increasing evidence that teachers' beliefs considerably influence their ways of understanding and acting in the classroom (Davis & Sumara, 1997; Merrett & Wheldall, 1993), the nature and origin of teachers' representations concerning classroom behaviour have not been thoroughly researched (Bibou-Nakou, *et al.*, 2000). Teachers' 'diagnosis' of knowledge and beliefs concerning behaviour problems in classroom is vital, because teachers have a primary role in identifying such problems (Tillema, 1995). Further, learners are particularly



alert to the constructions of their teachers, and seem to experience accurately the sorts of behaviour that is expected of them (Diamond, 1991). Because schools play such a crucial role in learners' lives, teachers should seek to understand the function/reason for learners behaving the way they do in the classroom in order to assist them in their learning process (Vacca, 2001: 26).

## **2.12 The role of the teacher in assessing behaviour problems**

There are many methods for assessing learners' behaviour as well as other problems such as learning, etcetera (Cullinan, *et al.*, 1983). Assessment, as Van Greunen (1990:11) mentions, is useful in aiding with a psycho-educational picture of the problem. One of the most common ways of assessing social, personal, academic and other functioning of learners involves asking someone to provide information about it. The informant may either be a teacher (relevant to the present study), parent, classmate, the learner him-/herself, or anyone else in the position to know the information. Teachers, along with parents, have been the main informants on the difficulties and the developmental differences in primary school children (Bibou-Nakou, *et al.*, 2000).

Kruger (1992:156) and Du Toit and Kruger (1991) state that teachers usually identify learners with behaviour problems easier as they are more objectively involved with them than their parents who are their primary educators. Loeber, Green, Lahey, Frick and McBurnett (2000) add strength to the argument that teachers can serve as useful and reliable informants in identifying learners with behavioural problems in school. Sprague, Walker, Stieber, Simonsen and Nishioka (2001: 200) agree by stating that teachers have been shown to be among the best informants regarding identification of socially maladjusted behaviour. Vacca (2001: 27) says that teachers who lack an understanding of their learners' behavioural difficulties may see a learner who is extremely capable scholastically in a different way than a learner who is not as academically



capable, but have the same behavioural difficulty. Teachers are ideally suited to help their learners through a behaviour crisis. Learners think of their classrooms as a community, and community is invaluable as a cohesive force (Schlozman, 2001: 86). Many traumatised learners may experience a host of difficulties, including depression or social and academic problems. As with all psychosocial problems experienced by learners, symptoms occur along a spectrum. By being vigilant and empathic, teachers can make an enormous contribution to the well being of learners during difficult times (Schlozman, 2001: 87).

## **2.13 Intervention strategies to deal with behaviour problems**

Traditional strategies for disciplining inappropriate behaviour fail dramatically with a significant portion of highly troubled learners who do not benefit from these punitive strategies. When behaviour problems persist despite intervention, the most obvious and sensible thing to do would be to discard the intervention strategy and look for more effective ones, rather than discarding the learner (Long, *et al.*, 1999: 5).

There are a number of debates on the correct way to discipline learners. However, all teachers will agree that, regardless of what system is deemed best for their school, the price of good discipline is hard work, consistency, teamwork and creativity. Effective discipline depends on the degree of success that a teacher has in his/her efforts to create self-discipline in learners. This involves an understanding by the learner that all actions, both positive and negative, have consequences (Crimson Education Consultants, 2001). Teachers also need to start thinking of mobilising the learner's resources and potential strengths instead of dwelling on deficits, dysfunctions and disorders. A crisis can represent a unique time to help a learner come to grips with important life problems and for personal growth, accepting responsibility and enhancing meaningful relationships (Long, *et al.*, 1999).



## 2.14 The role of labels and categories

Labels were introduced with definitions and focusing on labels can have the effect of lowering expectations as to what a learner might achieve. For many learners, their difficulties lie on a continuum and this makes it extremely difficult when they reach a stage where a label should be applied. Children do not typically stay at one place on the continuum and their difficulties may improve or deteriorate as a result of the environmental context. Labels or categories, however, tend to stick with the learner and can imply that s/he will always have this problem (Farrell, 2001: 3 - 4).

Despite the acknowledged problems with the use of category-based systems to describe learners with special educational needs, it is likely that they will continue to be used. After all categories are a part of all our lives. For example, jobs are classified into different types, such as professional or non-professional, schools can be categorized as mainstream or special school, we are all categorized into different racial or ethnic groups. Therefore it is hardly likely that we will refrain from categorising learners who are experiencing various problems when we use categories so freely in all other aspects of our lives (Farrell, 2001). For these reasons learners will continue to be categorized as having particular forms of special educational needs and this is in fact acknowledged, albeit somewhat tacitly, in the Education White Paper 6 (2001a). Furthermore, as Norwich (1999) points out, if we offer some learners additional help that is not available to others, we need some form of words or labels to describe or categorise the learners who receive this help. Gregg (1999: 108) argues that labeling and separating learners with behavioural difficulties may further marginalise them and solidify antisocial peer groups, compounding the behavioural problems.

The problem therefore is to ensure that categories or labels are handled with care. Indeed categories or labels can result in parents and teachers being better informed and supported. For example, in some instances a category or label can represent a clearly defined set of conditions that help us to get an overall picture



of the learner. The term muscular dystrophy gives some indication of the problems that the learner may experience. In addition, the term behavioural difficulty suggests that the learner is probably competent in a range of areas, but has specific problems in other areas. Used in this way categories can provide a snapshot of the learner's problems and may be a useful starting point for the further elaboration of his or her specific strengths and needs (Farrell, 2001: 4).

Labels such as severe and moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, autism and many others are still used and most special schools were designated by the use of one of these labels (Farrell, 2001: 3). Special schools (institutions) for learners with behavioural difficulties have been in existence since the 1930s, first founded as schools for the 'maladjusted' (Cassidy, James & Wiggs, 2001: 167). Throughout the history of these special schools a tension has existed between disciplines about the definition of behavioural difficulties, the need for such schools and what constitutes effective management. With the increasing emphasis on the genetic basis of behaviour and the use of medication, a renewed interest resurfaced and Cole, Visser and Upton (1998) say that this subject is the core of debates that are continuing. Many of the teachers at these institutions claim that it is very necessary to have a thorough understanding of the prevalence and range of behavioural difficulties experienced by these learners, as a way towards understanding and meeting their educational and psychological needs. These teachers indicated that placements were more often triggered by overt disruptive behaviour that was caused by environmental factors relating to a particular context, rather than by identification of specific needs (Cassidy, *et al.*, 2001: 167).

## **2.15 The role of special schools for learners with behaviour problems**

Gregg (1999: 108) claims the purpose of these schools was to educate, but in practice they were correctional and aimed to segregate, contain and reform



disruptive learners. Learners typically, did not choose to attend these schools, but were placed there for different periods of time. A punitive purpose may cause schools to adopt ineffective models for improving learning or behaviour. He stated that these schools that target individuals may divert resources from everyone else. The small teacher-learner ratios and additional services of special schools can cost more per learner than mainstream schools. The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a: 9) reports that only 20% of learners with disabilities were accommodated in special schools in South Africa, while the World Health Organisation calculated that between two percent and three percent of learners in any school system could be identified as disabled or impaired. An application of these percentages to the South African school population would project an upper limit of about 400,000 learners with disabilities. Current statistics (Department of Education, 2001a: 9) show that only about 64,200 learners with disabilities were accommodated for, which indicates that approximately 280,000 learners with disabilities or impairments are unaccounted for. Squires (2001: 15) say that learners get into trouble and the teachers always ask why? and the learners never answer. Teachers think: When will s/he learn? S/he should know better! Nothing we do seems to work. We've tried sanctions, peer support and smiley charts. Any more of this and s/he'll be out. Excluded!

What type of school works best to improve learning and behaviour? Kauffman (1999: 247) contends that special education with its special schools, where learners are excluded from the mainstream, cannot be better than the instruction offered by teachers in the mainstream and warns against placing too much emphasis on the consultation and collaboration role of special educators (experts). He goes on to advocate that teachers should learn more about teaching and learning, how to use the best teaching procedures, how to tune in to their learners' needs and to really understand their learners.



## 2.16 Inclusive education

Farrell (2001: 6) and Roll-Pettersson (2001: 42) stress the belief that learners with disabilities and behavioural problems should enjoy the same privileges, rights and opportunities as the rest of the school population. UNESCO (1994) states that every child has its own individual traits, interests, abilities and learning needs and that mainstream schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all. The South African Constitution compels everyone to work towards transforming a country that has been racially divided where discrimination was in the order of the day, and to establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. This is to improve the quality of life of all citizens, free the potential of each person and to offer education for all in order to build a united and democratic South Africa where each citizen can take up his/her rightful place (Styles, 2002: 14).

The Department of Education in its Education White Paper 6 (2001a: 5) proposes that the education system should promote education for all and foster the development of inclusive and supportive schools that would enable all learners to participate actively in the education process so that they could develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society. The philosophy and principles underpinning inclusive education are the values and principles contained in the Constitution of South Africa and the South African Schools Act; human rights and social justice for all learners; participation and social integration; equal access to a single inclusive education system and access to the curriculum. The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a) further outlines the Education Department's commitment to the provision of educational opportunities in particular for those learners who experience or have experienced barriers to learning (academic, emotional and behavioural) and development or who have dropped out of learning because of the inability of the education system to accommodate their learning needs. Part



of the definition of inclusive education is changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula and the environment to meet the needs of all learners. The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a: 7) continues to state that where these are not met, learners may fail to learn effectively or be excluded from the learning system. The South African Department of Education (Department of Education, 2001a) as well as Sayed and Carrim (1998) state that learners with special educational needs should receive special educational support within the mainstream class whenever possible. Inclusion has become a global agenda; a rapidly emerging, dominant issue within and even beyond special education across national contexts (Clark, Dyson, Millward & Robson, 1999: 37).

There is no doubt that over the past couple of years the issue of inclusion has had a huge impact on developments in thinking and practice in the education of learners with special educational needs both in this country and abroad. South African legislation (Constitution of South Africa, South African Schools Act, Educational White Paper 6, and others) has encouraged mainstream schools to adopt a more inclusive approach to education. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) has also been seen as something of a watershed in enhancing the prospects for inclusion throughout the world. Inclusion stresses that being part of the mainstream or included is a fundamental human right and that the mainstream should adapt to fit the needs of all. The focus is on reconstructing the mainstream so that it responds to the full range of learner diversity (Dyson, Bailey, O'Brien, Rice & Zigmund, 1998: 54). Sebba and Sachdev (1997) describe inclusion as a process, not a state, of a school adapting to fit the needs of all learners. During such a process decisions regarding inclusion are made by those with special needs and their families, not by professionals who may be seen as an oppressive interest group (Dyson, *et al.*, 1998: 54).

Despite the high profile that is currently given to the subject (inclusivity), the whole issue of inclusion remains extremely contentious and there is a whole



range of contradictory views and practices. Lack of knowledge (and training) may result in teachers experiencing less positive attitudes toward inclusion and having less confidence in their own skills and abilities to obtain the supports and resources needed to implement inclusion (Bennett, Deluca & Bruns, 1997; Farrell, 2001:6). Many mainstream teachers are frightened by the prospects of including learners with disabilities (of any kind) in their mainstream classroom, because they have no formal training in dealing with the challenges that these learners face (Merritt, 2001: 67). Teachers are concerned about restructuring schools to support learners with disabilities, because the range of tolerance in the classroom will be moved downward, and result in a classroom that is no longer meeting the needs of high achievers (Gerber, 1995). Another concern is that including large numbers of learners with behavioural problems will make it too difficult for teachers to meet the needs of individual learners because of the demands on their time (Huber, Rosenfeld & Fiorello, 2001: 498). Conversely, training may serve to facilitate the development of positive attitudes, confidence in skills and ability to obtain the needed supports and resources. Roll-Pettersson (2001: 43) states that teachers will need to have training in how to modify curriculum as well as assessments and how to adapt classroom management in order to meet the needs of learners in need of special support.

Roll-Pettersson (2001: 43) proposed that inclusive education increases the need for teachers to work collaboratively and/or consultatively with each other and the community. Other factors described as being necessary for the success of inclusion are:

- availability of support staff (Pearman, Haung & Mellblom, 1997);
- help in adjusting and adapting classroom environments and activities; training in working with learners with behavioural problems and disabilities (Farrell, 1997);
- sufficient time for planning and meeting (Roll-Pettersson, 2001); and
- adjusted class size and administrative support (Bennett, *et al.*, 1997).



Teachers are aware of international trends in education towards inclusion, but they need support in order to change their practice and improve classroom outcomes. In many cases, mainstream classroom teachers have received little or no training in working with learners from diverse backgrounds with a host of different problems and disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Likewise, many learning support teachers have not had much training in the core curriculum or on how to work in a full inclusive setting. Without additional training and support, it is unrealistic to expect classroom and learning support teachers to collaborate effectively (Losen, 2002: 45 – 46).

## **2.17 Parents as partners in behaviour management**

Teachers complain about the lack of support, but have a tendency to keep parents out of their classrooms and to blame and shame them for all the inappropriate behaviour that takes place in their classrooms. Van Wyk (2001: 115) emphasises the fact that there is compelling evidence that teacher-parent partnerships benefit the learners, teachers, school and parents. Teachers should invite parents into their classrooms to assist with their children's behaviour management. Henderson and Berla (1994:1) claim that when teachers work with parents to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. Other benefits to learners include: decreased truancy, improved attitudes of learners to their studies, improved behaviour in the classroom and a decrease in the drop-out rate (Van Wyk, 2001: 117). Many studies stress that these benefits occur irrespective of the socio-economic class to which the family belongs (Haberman, 1992: 33). The South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996: 14) acknowledges the right of parents to be involved in school governance. Governing bodies are a significant feature of a democracy in society and represent a major move towards empowering parents in schools (Van Wyk, 2001: 117). The function of school governing bodies in South Africa amongst others is to adopt a code of conduct for learners within certain limits set by the South African Schools Act. In July 1999 the minister of education announced a national mobilization plan for education and training in South Africa under the



slogan 'Tirisano', that is, working together (Department of Education, 1999: 6). Priority three of the nine-point programme set out by the Minister is titled: Schools must become centres of community life. Under this heading various aspects are discussed, including the role of parents on the school governing body. In another move, the Department of Education has published the Norms and Standards for Educators, in which seven roles for educators have been set out (RSA, 2000: 12 – 25). The role entitled: Community, citizenship and pastoral role, includes the following, "the educator will develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organisations based on a critical understanding of community and environmental issues" (RSA, 2000: 14). This brief exposition of recent changes in South African education indicates that the government is committed to improving teacher-parent/school-family partnerships and wants teachers to be fully equipped to deal with this aspect of their work.

The literature (Van Wyk, 2001: 116) also emphasises the positive effects on parents of improved teacher-parent relations, such as: increased confidence of the parents, better understanding of what is happening in the classroom and a feeling of empowerment, especially in disadvantaged communities (Allen & Martin, 1992: 49). Swap (1993: 10) adds that teachers also benefit when teacher-parent relationships improve, because they experience the support and appreciation from parents and a rekindling of their own enthusiasm for problem solving.

## **2.18 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it became quite apparent that a number of surveys on the prevalence of learners with behaviour problems in schools have been undertaken internationally. The researcher looked at the South African Department of Education's policy documents and the philosophies they subscribed to. It was found that the South African Constitution as well as many educational documents paid much attention to the international philosophy of inclusive education that is



based on the principle of human rights and equality. While inclusive education is an ideal, in practice the opposite prevails. There seems to be a very strong discrepancy between policy and practice. Teachers still discriminate against learners who exhibit unacceptable/inappropriate behaviour, due to the fact that it seems as if they don't consider or understand the function of these learners' behaviour. The researcher also perused the literature for the factors influencing behaviour, teachers' attitudes towards behaviour, their understanding of inappropriate behaviour in their classrooms, and the intervention strategies that they employ to deal with the unacceptable behaviour in their classrooms. Most of these surveys in the literature paid much attention to the teachers' perception of learners' behavioural difficulties with little or no attention paid to the understanding for the need of a learner to behave in a certain way. It is therefore the aim of the present study to make a contribution in the field of research by concentrating on the teachers' understanding of learners' behaviour in their classrooms.

# CHAPTER 3

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In deciding on the most appropriate methodology for a particular study, a number of crucial variables have to be considered. These range from pragmatic considerations such as time constraints and sample size, to the individual strengths and weaknesses of the researcher, such as the ability to establish rapport and verbal or numerical preference (Leedy, 1997). It also includes more philosophical considerations such as the nature of reality, as well as methodological issues such as, the aim of the study and the nature of the research question (Mouton & Marais, 1990).

“First consider your own comfort with the assumptions of the qualitative tradition, that is, you believe that there are multiple constructed realities and that ‘understanding both the content and construction of such multiple and contingent realities is regarded as central’” (Leedy, 1997: 109).

This chapter will revisit some of the debates around some of the variables that were key to deciding on an appropriate methodology. This will include the paradigmatic decisions, research objectives, sampling procedures, collection of data, ethics appraisals, and analysis of the data to be followed in conducting the study.

### 3.1 Paradigmatic Decisions

The present study endeavours to explore the complex issue of whether teachers understand their learners' behaviour in their classrooms. This is an area that has hitherto received very little academic scrutiny. The fact that the literature base in this area is practically very limited or non-existent, in itself suggested the suitability of a qualitative methodology over a quantitative one. Leedy (1997: 109) asserts that where scant information exists on a topic and variables are



unknown, making a quantitative approach with its emphasis on measuring and testing is premature, a qualitative methodology is more appropriate.

“... if the literature base is weak, underdeveloped, or missing, a qualitative design can provide a researcher with the freedom/flexibility needed to explore a specific phenomenon so that important variables might be identified” (Leedy, 1997: 109).

The qualitative paradigm with its orientation discovery and description, allows the researcher the freedom to explore a specific phenomenon in depth and detail without being limited by the predetermined hypotheses and response categories required by a quantitative approach (Leedy, 1997; Mouton & Marais, 1990; Neuman, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Quantitative designs compromise the scope of information that a study might potentially yield because they are designed to merely confirm or invalidate specific predictions. Consequently, quantitative researchers impose rigid systems upon data collection that do not allow the phenomenon as it exists to speak for itself (Patton, 1990).

Contrary to this, the qualitative researcher attempts to understand the multiple interrelationships among dimensions that emerge from the data without making prior assumptions or specifying fixed hypotheses (Cresswell, 1994; Dooley, 1995; Leedy, 1997; Neuman, 1994). Hence, one of the most difficult dilemmas in writing up qualitative research in deciding how much concrete descriptions to include as opposed to analysis and interpretation and how to integrate one with the other so that the narrative remains interesting and informative (Merriam, 1998: 234).

The qualitative researcher can therefore create hypotheses and foci during and as a result of the research. For example, the relative lack of structure



characteristic of this approach, frees the researcher from strict adherence to a specific set of questions, resulting in greater flexibility during the data gathering process. He/she is thus able to explore interesting, often unanticipated avenues that emerge during the process. This results in the potential for capturing a fuller, more complex picture of the phenomenon under study (Lindlof, 1995; Smith, 1995).

The commitment to capturing and describing the unique personal and social perspectives of participants, therefore increases the possibility of the identification of important variables that may broaden one's understanding of the subject at hand. At the same time it may highlight areas that should later be subjected to the controlled focus of a quantitative study. This complimentary process that theoretically flows from all qualitative studies, further facilitates the process of expanding incomplete literature bases and was another persuasive argument for going the qualitative route (Dooley, 1995; Neuman, 1994).

Another compelling argument in favour of using a qualitative approach was that the area of behaviour in the classroom and the need/function thereof appears to be under-researched. This may be compromising the rehabilitation of an already marginalized group of individuals and calls for a reversal of the trend of ignoring or trivializing the issue of factors influencing behaviour resulting in teachers fixating on the manifestations. A methodology that offers breadth, depth and detail would, for all the reasons discussed above, be the method of choice.

The following features of the qualitative paradigm further support the decision to use a qualitative methodology. A principle tenet underlying the quantitative paradigm is the belief in an objective, relatively stable reality that exists independent of the perceiver that can be 'known' and measured through well-designed instruments and strict adherence to protocol. Conversely, the qualitative paradigm embraces the notion that reality is socially constructed,



complex and constantly in a state of flux (Dooley, 1995; Neuman, 1994; Silverman, 1993).

The qualitative paradigm asserts that if no objective reality exists, then reality becomes what the 'actor thinks, feels and defines it to be' (Leedy, 1997: 39). To get at these subjective realities requires entering the research process with an open mind. The researcher has to immerse himself into these multiple realities in an effort to understand the meanings which things, processes or events have for the actor, regardless of the researcher's evaluation of the 'objective' accuracy thereof. The qualitative approach, given its position on the nature of reality, values the perspectives of participants, and relies on peoples' words as the primary database for understanding how individuals construct or make sense of their worlds (Dooley, 1995; Leedy, 1997; Neuman, 1994).

It is also holistic in that it attempts to understand a phenomenon as a whole, without ignoring the social environment within which experiences are located.

Furthermore the nature of the topic (teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour in their classroom) seems more suited to a qualitative approach. Lindlof (1995) claims that many communication scientists concede that inquiries based on the contingencies of meaning are better able to reveal insight into the human condition. He suggests that qualitative methodologies are more suitable for exploring questions about culture, interpretation, understanding and power. Qualitative methodological techniques are more capable of tapping 'what things exist' as opposed to 'how many things there are' (Lindlof, 1995: 63).

A qualitative approach seemed particularly appropriate even on grounds of principle. People with disabilities (behaviour), by virtue of their minority-group status, are generally denied a voice and perceived through the negating or idealizing gaze of the 'normal' majority (Wright, 1983). Some writers stress that the voices and experiences of the disabled are still disturbingly silent politically



and academically, with medical professionals, psychologists and teachers speaking on their behalf (Shakespeare, 1996).

### **3.2 Research Objectives**

The primary aim of the present study is to examine teachers' perceptions of behavioural issues in their classrooms and their ability to address behavioural concerns through appropriate interventions. This study is not an attempt to sample the whole teacher population. The concern is to establish whether teachers' understand their learners' behaviour in the classroom.

The following statements were formulated, based on informal observations and discussions with teachers:

- Teachers do not understand their learners' behaviour in the classroom.
- Teachers do not consider the function of inappropriate behaviour in the classroom.
- Teachers fixate on the behaviour manifestations of the learners in their classrooms.
- Teachers resort to punitive measures as responses to unacceptable/inappropriate behaviour in the classroom.

### **3.3 Sampling Procedures**

After formally receiving permission (04-09-2001) from the Western Cape Education Department (see appendix 9) to do the research at two mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel, the researcher will approach the principals of those two schools. These schools are selected because the researcher had previously worked there as a school psychologist/counselor and knows that a potentially information rich sample is available.

Given the research topic, the researcher feels that the required in-depth focus group interviews will be more likely to yield rich data if the participants and him



are acquainted (Neuman, 1994). The researcher worked at the two schools for six years and has a reputation for being empathic and familiar with behavioural difficulties; therefore he feels he has sufficient credibility not to be dismissed as a condescending person wanting to establish how different these teachers are from other teachers at other schools. The researcher feels that his association with these schools and his familiarity with the history of the socio-economic environment and social evils associated with poverty and the situation under which most of the participants work, will facilitate rapport and the easy flow of conversation (Lindlof, 1995; Mouton & Marais, 1990).

The researcher will approach the principals of the schools with regards to inviting teachers to participate in the research project. This approach is adopted as the researcher feels that his presence during this part of the process can undermine teachers' rights to decline participation in the study. The teachers will be informed broadly about the subject area to be researched. They will also be informed that willingness to participate in the study will guarantee automatic inclusion.

After the principals inform the researcher of the teachers who are going to participate in the research, the researcher will arrange with the principals to visit the schools. At the initial session the researcher will thank the teachers for being willing to participate in the research project. He will also inform them that:

- He is a M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) student at the University of Stellenbosch.
- He will look at teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour at two mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel.
- Participation is voluntary and they can withdraw from the research project at any time.
- Anonymity is assured and that no names are to be written on the questionnaires.
- Confidentiality will be maintained within the limits of the research process.



- The researcher will feed the results back to the schools.

### **3.4 Collection of Data**

Data will be collected by means of questionnaires and focus group interviews. The researcher had to consider which method is the most appropriate in the light of the research problem involved and the particular population in question (Huysamen, 1994: 139).

#### **3.4.1 The Questionnaires**

The researcher decided to use questionnaires, because they have the following advantages:

- Huysamen (1994: 150) states that when the population in which the researcher is interested in (teachers) live or work in a particular place (school), questionnaires may be administered to all of them simultaneously.
- Huysamen (1994: 151) says that the researcher is in full control of the completion of the questionnaires. The researcher is present to tend to queries about the completion of the questionnaires immediately.
- Although this way of administering questionnaires corresponds to the personal interview as far as the presence of the researcher is concerned, it allows for the same degree of anonymity as the typical postal survey (Huysamen, 1994: 151).

Three questionnaires will be developed by the researcher to gain information regarding teachers' understanding of learners' behaviour in the classroom. In addition to questions about demographic variables and general issues, each questionnaire will have a particular purpose and main focus. These questionnaires will precede the focus groups and will be administered (except for questionnaire one) to the same sample that will participate in the focus groups.



**Questionnaire 1** will be a pre-research (piloting) questionnaire. Bell (1995: 65) posits that all data gathering instruments should be piloted to test how long it takes participants to complete them, to check that all questions and instructions are clear and to enable the researcher to remove any items that do not yield useable data. She goes on to state that ideally, it should be tried out on a group similar to the one that will form the population of the study, hence the choice of teachers at two neighbouring mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel. The purpose of a pilot exercise is to get the bugs out of the instrument so that the participants in the main study will experience no difficulties in completing it. The researcher can also carry out a preliminary analysis to see whether the wording and format of questions will present any difficulties when the main data are analysed. The participants' responses will enable the researcher to revise the questionnaire ready for the main distribution (Bell, 1995:65), so after analysing these questionnaires, questionnaire 2 will be constructed with the information to be gained from the responses to the piloting questionnaire.

Prior to the focus group interviews, participants will be required to complete two questionnaires eliciting:

- Biographical information,
- Attitudes towards inappropriate behaviour and
- Behaviour management skills/strategies.

### **Questionnaire 2** (See appendix 1)

Questions to ascertain whether teachers know their learners well are included in this questionnaire. For example:

- Do you have a good understanding of your learners' Values, Motivation, Self/Hobbies and Social background?
- Why do you think some learners lack discipline?
- Have you ever visited a learner's home?

Questions to check teachers' understanding of a learner's need to behave in a certain way are included. For example:

- Why do you think learners misbehave in a classroom?
- Why do you think the unacceptable behaviour sometimes continue after some learners have been punished?
- Do you ever think of the cause of a learner's behaviour?
- Do you think a learner's behaviour is telling you something?
- Do you know what the learner's behaviour is trying to communicate?

The teacher's behaviour management skills/strategies are also examined. For example:

- What do you do when you have concerns about learners' behaviour?
- What is your view on corporal punishment?
- How do you deal with/respond to unacceptable behaviour in your class?
- Do you encourage learners to talk about their behaviour?
- Do you have something positive to communicate to every learner in your class?
- What is the result after action was taken dealing with unacceptable behaviour?

### **Questionnaire 3** (See appendix 2)

Questionnaire 3 will be developed because data analysis is the biggest problem with qualitative research (Merriam, 1998: 234; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, the researcher is going to enhance internal validity or trustworthiness by making use of the triangulation method and employ multiple sources of gaining information to combine various perspectives to be able to explore themes.



### 3.4.2 Focus Group Interviews

Semi-structured focus group interviews offer a versatile way of collecting data and may be used with all age groups (Huysamen, 1994: 145). These focus group interviews will be arranged to clarify any queries, vague responses or uncertainties that may arise from the questionnaires and/or if the researcher would want some explanation or elaboration on any incomplete answers on the questionnaires (Huysamen, 1994).

Interview guides are used in semi-structured focus group interviews that include a list of topics and aspects which have a bearing on the given theme and which the researcher should bring up during the course of the interview, if the participants don't. Some open-ended questions (interview guide) will serve as a question-framing device to prompt teachers in the focus group interviews (Huysamen, 1994: 145). The use of these open-ended questions are seen to have the following advantages:

- It will foreground and objectify the subject of behaviour, and whether it is appropriate or in-appropriate.
- It will also look at teachers' understanding and interpretation of behaviour that can be relatively difficult to approach 'cold', given the highly personal nature of the topic.
- It will also give the participants something tangible to start discussing in the third person, thereby allowing them to distance themselves to some extent from discussing highly threatening and exposing, personal interpretation and understanding.

In order to answer the open-ended questions, participants are expected to identify with the behaviour and/or strategy and in so doing reveal their own inner dispositions, conflicts and experiences (Sunberg, Taplin & Tyler, 1983) in the comfort of speaking in the third person. This format has the following advantages:



- It is regarded as being especially suitable where the phenomenon under study is complex, process oriented, personal, controversial (Smith, 1995) or of a very sensitive nature (Huysamen, 1994: 145).
- Researchers are free to take cues from the respondents' verbal and non-verbal responses and pursue these in addition to the formally set questions. This increases the likelihood that the richest, most detailed data on each respondent may be collected (Smith, 1995).
- The participant is perceived as an expert on the subject at hand and can steer the direction of the interview. The researcher and participant work together to come to the heart of the matter. The researcher's chances of entering the psychological and social world of the respondent are therefore increased, while the power imbalance between researcher and participant is reduced (Leedy, 1997).
- The structure provided by the basic questions identified by the researcher ensures that all the participants are given an opportunity to respond, thereby making comparisons of responses possible if needed. It also allows the researcher to bring into focus areas that may have been avoided consciously or unconsciously by the participants (Leedy, 1997; Smith, 1995).

At its most basic level, the qualitative focus group interview can be described as a situation in which one person encourages another to articulate his/her thoughts, feelings and experiences freely for the purpose of gaining access to the subjective reality of the person being interviewed. The integral components of any focus group interview are therefore the researcher, the informant, the information, as well as the specific context, that is, the focus group interview, within which these components interface (Brenner, 1985; Dooley, 1995).

#### **3.4.2.1 The Qualitative Focus Group Interview and Bias**

Given this dynamic composition some claim that bias is inherent in any research process and because it results in distortion of data and therefore the integrity of



findings, it is important to identify and try to contain sources of bias. In order to do this, researchers working within a positivist paradigm assume an uninvolved distant position, asking only identically phrased questions of participants without any spontaneous verbal expression. This is done in order to minimise the social interactional aspects of focus group interviews that are regarded as the breeding ground for contamination of interview data (Lindlof, 1995; Smith 1995).

There has therefore been much censure of the role of the qualitative researcher, often described as the prime research instrument, who actively participates in the focus group interview in a manner that transforms it into a 'conversation with a purpose' (Lindlof, 1995; Leedy, 1997). Potter and Wetherell (1995) in support of the qualitative approach, point out that the presumed bias-inhibiting stance of the positivist researcher may, ironically, create biased data as the researcher's failure to respond to participant responses could instinctively be interpreted as being negating. This usually causes participants to change their previously expressed sentiments, therefore 'causing' distortion of data.

"Studies of everyday conversation show that if an 'assessment' by one speaker is followed by silence or a failure of the recipient to provide an assessment of their own, this is typically treated as a 'disagreement' with the prior assessment" (Potter & Wetherell, 1995: 85).

According to Brenner (1985), of all the potential sources of bias in the focus group, the respondent poses the greatest threat to measurement adequacy. A number of factors that influence and distort data have been identified. The respondent may, for example, lack motivation and hence damage or destroy the focus group interview by under or inaccurate reporting (Brenner, 1985; Mouton & Marais, 1990). Low motivation may stem from any number of different sources such as a lack of interest in the topic, various contextual and researcher characteristics or even the topic, if questions are experienced as being threatening. Other sources of respondent related distortion include memory



lapses, misunderstandings, embarrassment and the tendency for respondents to make socially desirable responses (Mouton & Marais, 1990; Neuman, 1994).

Silverman (1993) states that all researchers express concern about the various ways in which respondents are not fully candid or intellectually responsible. Some consequently warn against the tacit assumption that participants are naturally co-operative and can be relied upon to provide valid and reliable information (Mouton & Marais, 1990).

“People rarely tell the whole truth, as they see it, about the most important things, but they are generally being evasive or misleading rather than lying. A field researcher must understand this and the reasons for it: primarily a fear of exposure, of being caught in the lie, and an unwillingness to appear less than absolutely ‘moral’ to an academic stranger” (Mouton & Marais, 1990: 65 – 66).

Huysamen (1994: 146) cautions researchers to be careful that resistance is not engendered against them. Often there is the danger that the participants may view the researcher as an intruder. These factors may cause participants to provide biased or even false information. In terms of the present study, the researcher feels that the personal nature of the topic and the fears and taboos around discussing your understanding of learners’ behaviour with an Intern Educational Psychologist, increase the likelihood of eliciting biased data. Similar views are expressed by Mouton and Marais (1990) who contend that people are by and large reluctant to reply to questions that deal with personally sensitive subjects.

In this regard, Neuman (1994) stresses the value of close pre-existing relationships between researcher and participant as a means of avoiding subject-inspired bias. As the researcher shared a close, trusting working relationship of approximately six years with the majority of the subjects, he feels reasonably



confident that the participants will be comfortable discussing their understanding of behaviour or the lack thereof, with him. The inclusion of the open-ended questions is further seen as a way of counteracting, to some extent, this potential self-protective or self-enhancing tendency in the participants (Khan, 2000: 86).

However, the risk of participant effects may also be enhanced by the power imbalance between the participants and the researcher. The researcher is an Intern Educational Psychologist working for the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) interviewing teachers employed by the WCED. Participants may consciously or unconsciously perceive the researcher as a custodian of departmental values and as a representative of a punitive education system. Participants may therefore unconsciously be pressurized into responding in a socially acceptable, tranferential way to impress the symbolic departmental official (Khan, 2000: 86).

The other variable that impacts on the research process is, of course, the researcher. Patton (1990) makes the point that the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in someone else's mind and not to put things into the person's mind. Data can therefore be distorted when researchers are not sufficiently non-directive and 'lead' the respondent to answer in a certain way. Participants' responses may also be influenced by factors such as the researcher's tone, attitude, reactions to the participant's responses and failure to probe or inconsistent probing of responses (Dooley, 1995; Neuman, 1994).

The researcher and the researched are regarded as active collaborators in the constitution of knowledge in the qualitative paradigm (Banister, *et al.*, 1994), and the researcher is expected to have an emotional and intellectual interest in their research topic. Therefore, according to Leedy (1997), the qualitative researcher in particular needs to guard against its surreptitiously entering the research process and going undetected.



Indeed, as phenomenologists and qualitative researchers generally point out, the so-called objective accuracy of participants' perception is not the prime focus of a qualitative study (Leedy, 1997; Neuman, 1994; Silverman, 1993). It is, after all, the way that individuals perceive themselves and their world and how they make sense of this that will largely dictate how they live their lives.

To ensure that the findings of the study accurately reflect the participants' experiential world and not the unconscious shadow material of the researcher, the qualitative approach demands consistent reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Banister, *et al.*, 1994; Cresswell, 1994). This requires that researchers be in touch with who they are, what they feel and how this impacts on the process of research from its inception to its conclusion. To facilitate this process the use of journals and diaries reflecting the researchers' introspection, their thinking around the research as well as the practical details and events related thereto are recorded. These may be included with the usual research data, allowing others to judge the content and analyses in the light of the perspectives and assumptions by which it was shaped (Banister, *et al.*, 1994).

### **3.4.3 Procedures**

The researcher will visit the first two mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel. He will meet with the staff of both piloting schools for an hour and explain the questionnaire (Questionnaire 1). A cover letter describing the research participants' rights, assuring the anonymity of responses, and asking for the teachers' cooperation will be attached to the questionnaire. No identifying information will be collected and after completing the questionnaires, the teachers will drop the questionnaires in a box to ensure anonymity. No follow-up questionnaires will be distributed to these two schools.

Contact interviews will be conducted with two more principals of mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel. Appointments will be arranged to administer the questionnaires (questionnaire 2) (see appendix 1). A cover letter describing the



participants' rights and confidentiality will be attached to the questionnaire. The researcher will be available to handle any queries of the respondents. Bell (1995: 65) states that there are distinct advantages in being able to give questionnaires to participants personally. The researcher can explain the purpose of the study and the researcher is also more likely to get better cooperation if personal contact is established, because he can explain what will be done with the information provided and at the same time stress confidentiality and anonymity (there will be no way of identifying respondents and only the researcher and his supervisor will see the questionnaires).

After these questionnaires (Questionnaire 2) are analysed, a third questionnaire (Questionnaire 3) will be devised. This questionnaire will ask teachers to describe the problematic behaviour they encounter on a daily basis and their responses to these behaviours.

The focus group interviews will be conducted towards the end of July 2002. Before each focus group interview the researcher will check that the participants understand the purpose of the meeting and that they are still willing to be part of the process. The researcher will tell them that the focus group interview can be stopped at any point if they are uncomfortable or unwilling to continue with it. Participants will be assured that the focus group interviews will be treated as strictly confidential and that their identities will be protected throughout. Two focus group contact interviews, one at each participating primary school, will be held. The researcher will thank the group for their attendance and proceed by reading the preamble.

### **3.5 Ethics Appraisal**

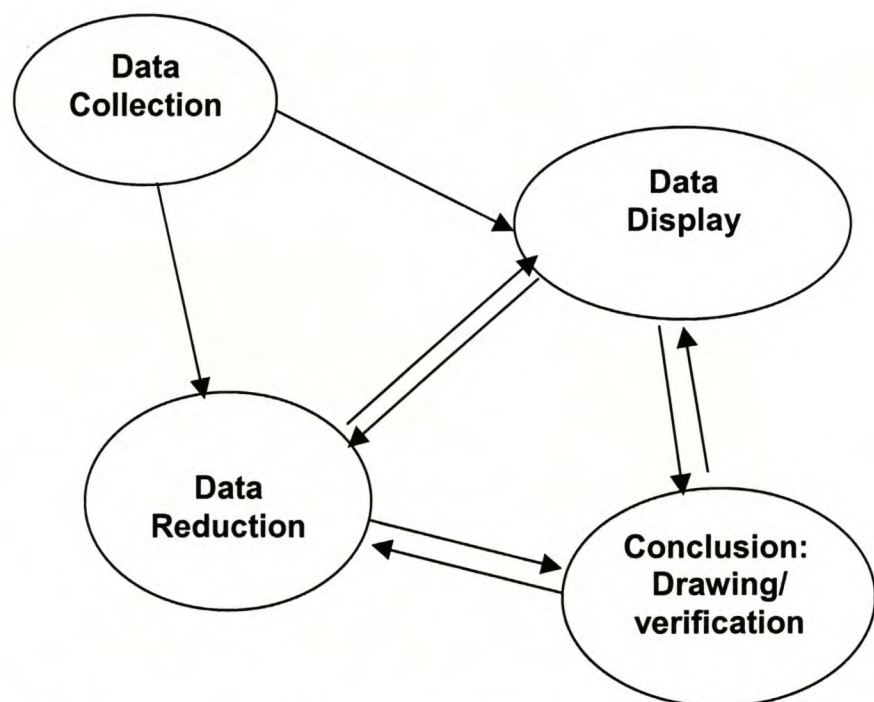
Every effort will be made to respect the dignity of participants and to protect them from psychological harm. The researcher will openly disclose the purpose of the research and the modus operandi to be followed. Participation is entirely



voluntary. The two schools are called school A and B and numbers will be assigned to participants to prevent identification.

### 3.6 Analysis of Data

The ultimate goal of the data analysis is to identify the range and relative influence of primary as well as contributory factors that might explain whether teachers understand their learners' behaviour in the classroom. Merriam (1998) states that data collection and data analysis should be simultaneous processes in qualitative research as qualitative design is emergent. The collection of data and data analysis should exist interactively with one another, and represent a dynamically interactive cyclic process (see Figure 3.1) (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 22-23).



**Figure 3.1: Interactive Model – components of data analysis**

Merriam (1998) posits that data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data and involves different forms of analysis such as consolidating, reducing and interpreting. Miles and Huberman (1994) add that data analysis is a



complex process of making meaning that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between descriptive and interpretation.

### **3.6.1 Transcription**

The transcription of recorded data makes possible the examination of the events of the social interaction between researcher and interviewee by others. In this way others are able to indulge in their own sense-making process and are able to judge the validity of the findings of the researcher (Lindlof, 1995).

All the focus group interviews will be audiotape recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Both focus group sessions will be conducted in both English and Afrikaans. In order to produce as true a representation of the actual interview as possible, all details such as pause, hesitations, unclear speech intonations, non-verbal communication as well as the researcher's comments and questions will be indicated.

### **3.6.2 Reflection**

After each series of activities (questionnaires and focus groups), the researcher will reflect on the findings of the experiences and the data. Following the completion of the fieldwork the researcher will work through the data and start to identify emerging categories and themes.

### **3.6.3 Generating categories, themes and patterns**

Merriam (1998) says the researcher should note things he wants to ask, observe or look for in his next data collection activity. After the first and second activity the challenge for the researcher will be to construct a set of tentative categories and/or themes that capture some recurring pattern, to answer some of the research questions. Mere description is the most basic level of analysis and from there the challenge is to construct categories or themes. Categories and themes



are concepts indicated by the data, and not the data itself. They are abstractions based on data (Merriam, 1998). Categories and themes are most commonly constructed through the continuous comparison of incidents and participants' remarks with each other.

The researcher will read and reread the data, making notes as he goes along and he will write down reflections, tentative themes, ideas and questions to pursue. Units of data (any meaningful or potentially meaningful segment of data, which may range from a single word to several pages of field notes describing a particular incident) or bits of information will literally be sorted into groupings that have something in common (Merriam, 1998). The task will be to compare one unit of information with the next in looking for recurring regularities in the data.

At the end of the data collection process the researcher will organize and refine, rather than start the search for categories and themes.

In conclusion then, qualitative research is a useful way to conduct exploratory research with a population whose voices are not often heard socially and in the available literature. The following chapter presents the findings. It describes the demographic details of the participants, methods of data collection, procedures, ethics appraisals, analysis of the data, and discusses the categories and themes that emerged from the study.



# CHAPTER 4

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings pertaining to the aim of this study are presented in this chapter. The current findings provide information on a variety of issues, including the reported problematic behaviours that bothered teachers in the classrooms on a daily basis. However, the surprisingly high percentages of learners exhibiting problematic behaviours were indicative of the number of learners that teachers view as problematic. Teachers reported that an average of one in five of their learners exhibited unacceptable/inappropriate/problematic behaviours. Such ratios strongly suggest that most, if not all, teachers have faced, or will encounter, learners perceived to have significant behavioural problems.

### 4.1 Research Design

The research design was characterised by its qualitative, contextual, descriptive, interpretive and exploratory nature. This design allowed for flexibility, evolving and emergent manifestations. A qualitative approach was chosen since a holistic picture was required of the phenomenon (teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour), within the context (in the classroom) where it occurred (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 6). According to Miles and Huberman (1994: 10) the qualitative researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local actors 'from the inside' through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathic understanding, and of suspending or 'bracketing' preconceptions about the topic under discussion. The researcher thus attempted to ascertain the essence and fundamental substance of the phenomenon in order to gain a deep understanding (Mouton & Marais, 1990: 175).

Since the research aims demanded detailed descriptions of the phenomena, the research design was descriptive in nature. Descriptions formed the foundation for the research interpretation and understanding of the phenomena, and the



actions, meaning and feelings of the experience were recorded and contextualised (Mouton & Marais, 1990: 52).

## 4.2 Description of the sample (Teachers)

The demographic details of the participants (teachers from both research schools) are summarised in Table 4.4 and discussed below.

Table 4.4: Demographic details of the participants.

<b>Demographic variables</b>		<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	6	17%
	<b>Female</b>	29	83%
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Single</b>	7	20%
	<b>Married</b>	27	77%
	<b>Separated</b>	0	0%
	<b>Divorced</b>	1	3%
<b>Age Groups</b>	<b>20 – 29</b>	2	6%
	<b>30 – 39</b>	14	40%
	<b>40 – 49</b>	12	34%
	<b>50 and above</b>	7	20%
<b>Years of teaching experience</b>	<b>1 – 5</b>	4	11%
	<b>6 – 10</b>	4	11%
	<b>11 – 15</b>	9	26%
	<b>16 – 20</b>	5	14%
	<b>21 – 25</b>	6	17%
	<b>26 and above</b>	7	20%



<b>Number of learners in classroom</b>	<b>24 -- 30</b>	8	23%
	<b>31 – 35</b>	9	26%
	<b>36 – 40</b>	9	26%
	<b>41 – 45</b>	5	14%
	<b>46 – 52</b>	4	11%
<b>Home Language</b>	<b>Afrikaans</b>	7	20%
	<b>English</b>	17	49%
	<b>Afrikaans/English</b>	11	31%

The sample comprised thirty-five teachers who filled in the questionnaires. The majority of respondents were female (83%) and 17 percent were males. The majority of the respondents were married (77%) and most of the respondents were between 30 and 39 years of age (40%). Most (26%) of the respondents had between 11 and 15 years of teaching experience (range one and 40 years). The majority of respondents taught large classes: 26 percent had between 36 and 40 learners, 26 percent between 31 and 35 learners, while 14 percent had between 41 and 45 learners, and 11 percent had between 46 and 52 (two teachers had 50 and one teacher had 52) learners in their classes.

Seven (20%) of the respondents indicated Afrikaans, 17 (49%) English and 11 (31%) of them identified Afrikaans and English as their mother tongue.

All the respondents, with the exception of five (14%), had experience in teaching learners in other areas and environments.

### **4.3 Methods of Data Collection**

A vast amount of data was collected from a variety of sources (questionnaires and focus group interviews) over a period of time.

### 4.3.1 The Questionnaires

Three questionnaires were developed by the researcher to gain information regarding teachers' understanding of learners' behaviour in the classroom. In addition to questions about demographic variables and general issues, each questionnaire had a particular purpose and main focus.

**Questionnaire 1** was a pre-research (piloting) questionnaire. Bell (1995: 65) posits that all data gathering instruments should be piloted to test how long it takes participants to complete them, to check that all questions and instructions are clear and to enable the researcher to remove any items that do not yield useable data. She goes on to state that ideally, it should be tried out on a group similar to the one that will form the population of the study, hence the choice of teachers at two neighbouring mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel. The purpose of a pilot exercise is to get the bugs out of the instrument so that the participants in the main study will experience no difficulties in completing it. The researcher can also carry out a preliminary analysis to see whether the wording and format of questions will present any difficulties when the main data are analysed. The participants' responses will enable the researcher to revise the questionnaire ready for the main distribution (Bell, 1995:65), so after analysing these questionnaires, questionnaire 2 was constructed with the information gained from the responses to the piloting questionnaire.

Prior to the focus group interviews, participants were required to complete two questionnaires eliciting:

- Biographical information,
- Attitudes towards inappropriate behaviour and
- Behaviour management skills/strategies.



**Questionnaire 2** (See appendix 1)

Questions to ascertain whether teachers knew their learners well were included in this questionnaire. For example:

- Do you have a good understanding of your learners' Values, Motivation, Self/Hobbies and Social background?
- Why do you think some learners lack discipline?
- Have you ever visited a learner's home?

Questions to check teachers' understanding of a learner's need to behave in a certain way were included. For example:

- Why do you think learners misbehave in a classroom?
- Why do you think the unacceptable behaviour sometimes continue after some learners have been punished?
- Do you ever think of the cause of a learner's behaviour?
- Do you think a learner's behaviour is telling you something?
- Do you know what the learner's behaviour is trying to communicate?

The teacher's behaviour management skills/strategies were also examined. For example:

- What do you do when you have concerns about learners' behaviour?
- What is your view on corporal punishment?
- How do you deal with/respond to unacceptable behaviour in your class?
- Do you encourage learners to talk about their behaviour?
- Do you have something positive to communicate to every learner in your class?
- What is the result after action was taken dealing with unacceptable behaviour?

**Questionnaire 3** (see appendix 2)

The researcher originally planned to develop questionnaire 3 to enhance internal validity and trustworthiness. Huysamen (1994: 113) says it is advisable to use more than one measure if the researcher is concerned about the validity of the findings.

Huysamen (1994: 167) claims that the positivist approach requires that a research design be decided on before one commences with data collection while the qualitative researcher usually favours so-called emergent designs. This means that qualitative researchers may adapt their data-collection procedures during the study to benefit from data of which they have become aware only during the research process itself. Therefore, after analysing questionnaire 2 the researcher had a need for participant's expression due to the fact that questionnaire 2 had predetermined groups (explanations) that the participants had to only tick. The behaviours on the questionnaire were categorised and gave the participants some direction. Huysamen (1994: 131) states that leading questions that suggest some responses rather than others should be avoided as this would be like putting words in the participant's mouth. The researcher was looking for depth and detail rather than the superficial ticking of groups, and changed the structure of questionnaire 3 so that the researcher could identify the participants' opinions, attitudes and beliefs (Huysamen, 1994: 132).

Questionnaire 3 (see appendix 2) requested the 'research participants' to describe the problematic behaviours teachers' encountered on a daily basis and how they responded to these behaviours. From the information gathered here, the researcher got an idea of the participants' opinions and attitude towards unacceptable behaviour.

**4.3.2 The Focus Group Interviews**

Two semi-structured focus group interviews (one at each school) were conducted which were guided by a list of issues to be explored so that certain topics could



be clarified, elaborated upon and discussed during the interviews. Open-ended questions served as a question-framing device to prompt teachers in the focus group interviews. This allowed the researcher to respond to the emerging worldview of the participants, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1998: 74). The participants were able to express their thoughts, feelings, opinions and their perspectives on the topic, and they also had the opportunity to clarify vague responses that arose from the questionnaires and the researcher wanted some explanation and/or elaboration on some uncertainties in the questionnaires.

The open-ended questions were designed to act as stimuli to facilitate discussion around the issue of the function of a learner's behaviour and whether the behaviour was communicative. The issue as to whether teachers understand their learners' behaviour in the classroom was raised in the final question, by which time it was felt that sufficient trust and rapport would have been established, to elicit honest responses.

On the issue of participant integrity, Silverman (1993) highlights that the qualitative paradigm goes beyond the positivist obsession of coding participant responses in terms of true or false. It has been argued that ambivalence is a common human condition and that one can and does hold varying sentiments at different times and situations. Participant responses therefore should not be seen as scientific statements that have to be subjected to objective verification but should be regarded as displays of perspective and respected as such (Silverman, 1993). The researcher sometimes during the course of interviewing became aware of this positivistic tendency in himself.

Sometimes, by virtue of the researcher's experience of working with learners with behavioural problems and with teachers trying to manage their learners' behaviour, it seemed that some of the participants were denying the harsh realities of not understanding their learners' behaviour. They appeared to the researcher, to be expressing idealized opinions on subjects they had no first



hand experience of. The researcher had to be constantly mindful that despite what the objective facts seemed to suggest to him, the interviewee might be attaching an entirely different meaning or value to the situation or event. Hence, the researcher administering the questionnaire to two completely 'new objective' schools to convince himself that what he was reading and rereading was correct and the participants' responses.

These focus group interviews were recorded on audiotape cassettes and transcribed for data analysis.

#### **4.4 Procedures**

The researcher visited the first two mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel. He met with the staff of both piloting schools for an hour and explained the questionnaire (Questionnaire 1). A cover letter described the research participants' rights, assured the anonymity of responses, and asked for the teachers' cooperation (attached to questionnaire). No identifying information was collected and after completing the questionnaires, the teachers dropped them in a box to ensure anonymity. No follow-up questionnaires were distributed to those two schools.

Contact interviews were conducted with two more principals of mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel. Once the researcher has analysed the comments on the questionnaires (Questionnaire 1), he changed it slightly to form questionnaire 2. Appointments (dates and time) were arranged to administer the questionnaires (Questionnaire 2). The questionnaires were administered at these two other mainstream primary schools in Bonteheuwel. These two schools became the 'research schools'. A cover letter describing the participants' rights and confidentiality was attached to the questionnaire. The researcher was available to handle any queries of the respondents. Bell (1995: 65) states that there are distinct advantages in being able to give questionnaires to participants personally. The researcher can explain the purpose of the study and indicate



that official permission and approval have been given by the Western Cape Education Department. The researcher was also more likely to get better cooperation if personal contact was established, because he could explain what would be done with the information provided and at the same time stressed confidentiality and anonymity (there would be no way of identifying respondents and only the researcher and his supervisor are going to see the questionnaires).

After these questionnaires (Questionnaire 2) were analysed, the third questionnaire (Questionnaire 3) was devised. This questionnaire asked teachers about the problematic behaviour they encountered on a daily basis and their responses to these behaviours. Teachers had to describe their answers instead of ticking pre-categorised behaviours and responses. This gave the researcher some insight into the attitudes and beliefs of the participants.

The focus group interviews were conducted towards the end of July 2002. Each focus group interview was preceded by the researcher checking that the participants understood the purpose of the meeting and that they were still willing to be part of the process. They were assured that the interview could be stopped at any point if they were uncomfortable or unwilling to continue with it. Participants were assured that the focus group interviews would be treated as strictly confidential and that their identities would be protected throughout.

While all the participants understood the reasons for recording the sessions on tape, most admitted to feeling a little uncomfortable about the presence of the recording equipment at first, but it dissipated as soon as they got into the discussion after a while. In a few cases, the discomfort was caused by fears of how they would sound, rather than the fact that their words were recorded.

Two focus group contact interviews, one at each of the research schools, were successfully completed. The focus groups were generally well attended (100%) and the teachers participating freely and openly.



The researcher thanked the group for their attendance and proceeded by reading the preamble, which reinforced the points discussed in the pre-interview, rapport-building phase of the focus group interview, while the subjects read along silently. After this, the interview would begin properly. The focus group interviews proper, started with the researcher presenting the participants with some of the responses (anonymously) he received on the questionnaires. The researcher then posed some open-ended questions that were intended to provide enough information to illicit discussions from the teachers. He also mentioned some of the responses and asked the participants to clarify and elaborate on some of those statements.

Most of the subjects spoke a mixture of standard English, broken (non-standard) English, *suiwer* (standard) Afrikaans and *kombuis* (non-standard) Afrikaans. Although the researcher's guiding questions were couched in relatively formal academic English and/or Afrikaans, he was happy to use colloquial speech/language to avoid distancing the subjects and to facilitate comprehension and flow. The researcher should have a diverse range of skills including language skills (Porteus, *et al.*, 1998). This was an important ingredient in the study, as it ensured sensitivity to language and translation issues (much of the planning and final analysis was in English, while Afrikaans was often used in the fieldwork), sensitivity to context, and a creative sharing of ideas throughout. A supportive and understanding attitude was maintained throughout the focus group interviews.

The focus group interviews were semi-structured, aiming to explore specific issues within the personal, scholastic, social and socio-economic domains, which might relate to the teachers' understanding of behaviour. At the same time, an open-ended emphasis on 'telling your story' created the space for unique features, emphases and/or interactive relationships between factors to emerge.



The focus groups were central to the participatory research philosophy held by the researcher. He not only provided a non-pressured, person-oriented context for information about the learners' behaviour in the classroom to emerge, but he also created relationships of trust that made the focus group interactions possible and meaningful. Significantly, the focus groups were also designed to be educationally and creatively beneficial experiences in themselves, thus extending their purpose beyond the immediate research goals.

## **4.5 Ethics Appraisals**

Written consent was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department to conduct the research project in the two schools (see appendix 9). Verbal consent was obtained from the principals and teachers.

Every effort was made to respect the dignity of participants and to protect them from psychological harm. This was done through open disclosure of the purpose of the research and the modus operandi to be followed. Participation was entirely voluntary and proceeded only after obtaining the principals' and participants' consent. They were informed that the interview records and transcriptions were available to the participants, the researcher's supervisor and the researcher. In order to maintain and ensure the anonymity of the teachers and staff concerned, no identifiable indicators were used in the study and the two mainstream primary schools were named school A and B and participants were assigned numbers in order to prevent identification.

Given the sensitive and personal nature of the topic and the possibility of emotional distress, participants were never forced into answering questions they felt uncomfortable with. The researcher maintained a supportive, counselling and facilitating role throughout the research procedures. Moments of distress were handled sensitively and participants had recourse to the researcher afterwards if they felt the need to ventilate. Focus group interviews were



followed by a debriefing session where the process could be reflected on and participants could ask questions.

## **4.6 Analysis of Data**

The ultimate goal of the data analysis was to identify the range and relative influence of primary as well as contributory factors that might explain whether teachers understand their learners' behaviour in the classroom. Given the extent and complexity of the data, issues of language and interpretation, the data had to be processed through several stages involving reflection on, and progressive refinement of the analysis.

### **4.6.1 Transcription**

The transcription of recorded data makes possible the examination of the events of the social interaction between researcher and interviewee by others. In this way others are able to indulge in their own sense-making process and are able to judge the validity of the findings of the researcher (Lindlof, 1995).

All the focus group interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim onto computer. Both focus group sessions were conducted in both English and Afrikaans. The researcher decided against translating the Afrikaans text into English and report in English only, as he felt that some of the texture and subtleties of the dialogue would be lost. In this way the potential for misrepresentation of the text during translation would also be reduced (Khan, 2000: 92). In order to produce as true a representation of the actual interview as possible, all details such as pause, hesitations, unclear speech intonations, non-verbal communication as well as the researchers comments and questions were indicated.

Participants' speech was not edited as the stylistics of talk lends itself to latent level interpretation (Lindlof, 1995). The researcher was often struck how, the



manner in which something was said, be it by way of the dysfluent grappling for words, emotive intonation or the unusual combination of speaking a mixture of English and Afrikaans with an American accent, provided a powerful subtext to what was formally articulated. Insights and intuitions that were triggered by the stylistics of participants' dialogue were noted and integrated into the analysis of the data.

Having to transcribe and type the interviews personally was a tedious, trying and sometimes embarrassing experience, when confronted with the researcher's actual response compared to the 20/20, hindsight version of what he could or should have said. It was at the same time an extremely fruitful exercise in that it helped the researcher to integrate the process and content of the interviews.

#### **4.6.2 Continuous reflection**

To ensure that the findings of the study accurately reflect the participants' experiential world and not the unconscious shadow material of the researcher, the qualitative approach demands consistent reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Banister, *et al.*, 1994; Cresswell, 1994). This requires that researchers be in touch with who they are, what they feel and how this impacts on the process of research from its inception to its conclusion. To facilitate this process the use of journals and diaries reflecting the researchers' introspection, their thinking around the research as well as the practical details and events related thereto are recorded. These may be included with the usual research data, allowing others to judge the content and analyses in the light of the perspectives and assumptions by which it was shaped (Banister, *et al.*, 1994).

The researcher and the researched are regarded as active collaborators in the constitution of knowledge in the qualitative paradigm (Banister, *et al.*, 1994), and the researcher is expected to have an emotional and intellectual interest in his research topic. Therefore, according to Leedy (1997), the qualitative researcher in particular needs to guard against its surreptitiously entering the research



process and going undetected. In this area, the researcher's extensive personal involvement with learners with behavioural difficulties through his work and the frequent witnessing of discrimination against them, especially by teachers, may have resulted in his unwittingly entering into an 'us against them' alliance against his subjects. The researcher may have been too emotive in his responses and might have over-compensated for his personal indignation at the insensitivity and ignorance that is typical of so many teachers.

Therefore, after each series of activities (questionnaires and focus group interviews), the researcher reflected on findings of the experiences and the data. After analysing the questionnaires of the research schools, the researcher was surprised to discover that the respondents' perceptions and understanding supported the literature, or vice versa. These findings were in line with what the researcher thought the responses would be, and to make sure that what the researcher found was really what the teachers meant, he then went to two completely different 'objective' schools, and administered the questionnaires with those teachers. The findings were similar to what was found in the two research schools.

Following the completion of the fieldwork the researcher worked through the data and began to identify emerging categories and themes.

### **4.6.3 Constructing categories, themes and patterns**

The research design allowed for categories and themes to emerge from the participants, rather than them being identified before the research began (Cresswell, 1994: 95). This emergence provided rich, context-bound information leading to the patterns that helped explain the phenomenon. The literature and experience assisted the researcher to identify the patterns, categories and themes as they emerged. The 'immersion in the data' process started with the transcription process, in that it facilitated a general, intuitive understanding of the data. It was followed by a more overt process of becoming familiar with the



material through several close readings of the transcribed text on a manifest and latent level. Participants' responses were read and reread in order to gain familiarity with them and at this stage the aim was to use the data 'to think with' (Newport, 1994: 229). In this way categories, themes and patterns of both consistency and variance started to emerge (Miles & Hubermann, 1984). The selection of the emerged categories and themes was inclusive as suggested by Potter and Wetherell (1995) so as not to exclude relevant material. Literature, observation and experience assisted the researcher in formulating the final categories.

Miles and Hubermann (1994) warn against data overload when 'pulling' categories and themes. They advocate a balance between being mindful of the conceptual lenses one is training on the data, and still remaining open to perceiving the unexpected. Despite the researcher's best attempts at focus and parsimony, at first count, he had identified approximately twenty themes that emerged.

These included the following: poverty, unemployment, lack of resources, lack of parental control, single parenthood, lack of parenting skills, parents lacking discipline, parents not interested, no love at home, lack of family stability and support, learners not being disciplined at home, no structure at home, social and environmental problems, social ills like gangsterism, violence, morals/values and principles (drop in moral standards), children's (human) rights, lack of respect, loss of discipline, learners are rude/naughty, learners are attention seeking, learners not being motivated, large classes and abolishment of corporal punishment.

After a protracted process of refocusing on the aims of the study and the researcher's research questions, and through a ruthless process of sifting and sorting, the emergent themes were reduced to relevant categories by clustering those themes together into related semantic fields. The clustering of the themes



into categories was conducted in order “to understand a phenomenon better by grouping and then conceptualising objects that have similar patterns or characteristics” (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 249). The categories were constructed to be internally homogenous and thus inclusive of similar data, but they were also heterogeneous and thus the differences between categories were clear (Merriam, 1998). The categories were designed to reflect the purpose of the study, and they were exhaustive in allowing all the data to be categorised (Merriam, 1998: 136).

Five major categories with various themes emerged. The categories were:

1. Problematic / unacceptable behaviour in the classroom,
2. Causes or factors contributing to learners’ misbehaviour in the classroom,
3. Teachers’ responses to unacceptable / problematic behaviour in the classroom,
4. The result after action was taken dealing with unacceptable / problematic behaviour, and
5. Reasons why learners lack discipline.

The category dealing with **problematic / unacceptable behaviour in the classroom** comprised of six themes, namely: disruptive behaviour, seeking attention from teacher, seeking attention from peers, aggressive behaviour, disobedient behaviour and tangible behaviour.

The **causes or factors for learners’ misbehaviour in the classroom** category comprised the four themes, namely: home (parental) and social background (poverty, unemployment, single parents, lack of control, etc.), disciplinary problems (no discipline at home, parents not disciplined, etc.), lack of attention (not enough attention at home, they are looking for love, etc.) and internal learner-related factors (rude/naughty, lack of motivation, etc.)



The category **dealing with the teachers' responses to unacceptable/problematic behaviour in the classroom** comprised of seven themes, namely: isolation (put in a corner, etc.), reprimand (shout at them, smack, etc.), detention (keep them in during interval, stay in after school, etc.), extra work/chores (give them extra homework, let them do things they don't like, etc.), call in parents, call in principal, and learner centred intervention (talk to the learners, report to TST, etc.).

The **results after action was taken dealing with unacceptable/problematic behaviour in the classroom** category comprised the four themes, namely: definite improvement, sometimes there is improvement and other times no improvement, temporary improvement, and no improvement.

The category dealing with the **reasons why learners lack discipline in the classroom** comprised of four themes, namely: parental influences, environmental influences, the media, and children's (human) rights.

Once these themes had been identified, the relevant segments of the text that reflected them were colour-coded. Coded text that included words, phrases and sentences were assigned to separate category and thematic files on computer. They were then printed out and cut into 'quotation strips'. These quotation strips representing the above five categories with their respective themes were stuck onto white paper, creating a visual representation of the diversity of participant thoughts on each particular category and theme. The researcher found this visual display invaluable in terms of forming a gestalt of participants' views, while simultaneously being able to see the component parts of the overarching category with respective themes.

After having mapped out a specific category and its themes, the researcher returned to the questionnaires and transcriptions to check that the organisational structure that he had put onto the data for the purpose of presenting it, still



allowed the participants' voice to be heard. Quotations (phrases) that best illustrated particular views were selected for use in the writing up of the results. For representation purposes these quotations were translated into English and checked to enhance textual accuracy. The participants' identities were protected at all times.

In reporting the data, the researcher tried on one level to understand the worldview of teachers and to describe their understanding of learners' behaviour in their classrooms. On another level, he tried to make sense of these experiences and meanings by interpreting their latent or meta-communications by looking at these in the light of the broader theoretical contexts, related research and also the researcher's own personal experience of working with learners with behavioural problems.

As with all studies of this nature the researcher is aware that his analysis of the text is by no means a definitive one and that his making sense of the participants' lived experiences was also tinged by his own subjectivity.

## **4.7 Data Verification**

In order to maintain the trustworthiness of the study, data was verified. The truth value of the study (how confident the researcher was with the truth of the findings based on the research design, informants, and the context) was determined using the criterion of credibility. The credibility of the research findings was improved by the use of multiple data sources that included: a literature overview, questionnaires and the recorded focus group interviews. The use of multiple data sources allowed for the confirmation of the findings in a triangulation procedure (Merriam, 1998: 169). Each source of data was a different line of sight directed toward the same point, and by combining several lines of sight, the researcher obtained a more substantive picture of reality (Huysamen, 1994). The triangulated data sources were assessed against one another to cross check the data and interpretations.



Member checks contributed to the credibility of the study. The researcher 'took' the data and interpretations back to the teachers, from whom they were derived, to check whether they were plausible (Merriam, 1998: 169). Merriam (1998: 170) also proposed that the researcher clarify the research assumptions, the researcher's biases, worldview and theoretical orientation at the outset of the research. This bracketing of biases and assumptions helped to increase the research validity (Cresswell, 1994: 25).

In quantitative research reliability is used to refer to the degree to which the same results would be obtained if the study were to be repeated. Thus, in qualitative research the focus is towards dependability. Dependability of the results is obtained when "outsiders get the same results. One wishes outsiders to concur that given the data collected, the results make sense, they are consistent and dependable" (Merriam, 1998: 172). However in this study the researcher administered the questionnaire to two other schools and they yielded similar findings (results).

In conclusion then, qualitative research is a useful way to conduct exploratory research with a population whose voices are not often heard socially and in the available literature. The theoretical foundation for the research methodology was discussed in this chapter. The qualitative research design identified the themes and categories as they emerged. The data collection methods, data analysis, interpretation and presentation were discussed. It was shown how the trustworthiness of the data was verified. The following chapter describes and discusses the categories and themes that emerged from the study as well as the generalisability of the study.



# CHAPTER 5

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Taking existing knowledge into consideration, the present study represents an effort to establish the link between the teachers' explanations of learner misbehaviour and their reactions to that misbehaviour. The position of mastery or understanding on the part of the teachers has been used as the main theoretical framework. This position fits within attribution theory that is concerned with perceptions of causality or the perceived reasons for a particular event's occurrence (Weiner, 1992). According to Davis and Sumara (1997) there is increasing evidence that teachers' attitudes and beliefs considerably influence their ways of understanding and acting to behaviour in the classroom. Motti-Stefanidi, Besevegis and Giannitsas (1996) posit that teachers have positive attitudes towards competent learners who are sociable, manageable, engaged in classroom activities and show good academic performance. As one teacher puts it, "I already know what a learner needs. I know it by heart. He needs to be accepted, supported, activated, and amused; able to explore, experiment, and achieve. Damn it, he needs too much" (Ginott, 1975: 33).

### **5.1 Behaviours that are unacceptable to the teacher in the classroom.**

When one looks at the behavioural problems, you become acutely aware that they are minor problems. Jones, Charlton and Witkin (1995) and Merrett and Wheldall (1993) agree with this and state that there is evidence suggesting that minor problems are usually the main sources of classroom disturbances for the teachers and they are also the ones that teachers claim are the main obstacles to successful classroom management (Diamond, 1991).



**Table 5.5: Problematic / unacceptable behaviour in the classroom**

<b>Problematic Behaviour</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Disruptive (off-task, playing-the-clown, disturbing others)	30%
Attention-seeking from teacher (complaining, etcetera)	19%
Attention from peers	17,5%
Aggressive (fighting, abusive language, etcetera)	16,5%
Disobedient	15%
Tangible (stealing, etcetera)	2%

Table 5.5 is a summary of reported behaviours teachers experienced as problematic on a daily basis. Each category comprised a cluster of more specific, related themes with sub-themes. Most of these sub-themes are not exclusive to one particular theme and they interrelate most of the times, example: playing-the-clown is a sub-theme of 'disruptive behaviour', but it could easily fit into the 'attention from peers' theme.

**Disruptive behaviours** were, by far, the most common classroom problem with approximately one out of every three children exhibiting such behaviours. Specifically, 30 percent of the teachers (see Table 5.5) rated disruptive behaviour as very frequent instances in the daily school routine. Disruptive behaviour was described as off-task behaviour like playing in the classroom while they were supposed to work, playing-the-clown and entertaining the other learners while they were supposed to be busy, and disturbing others while they were working by talking and laughing out loudly. Teachers said:



“They shout at peers while the lesson is in progress.”

“*Hulle maak geluide.*” (They make sounds)

“They disturb others while they are working.”

“They talk and laugh all the time.”

Teachers also regarded walking around as disruptive to the rest of the learners:

“*Hulle loop rond*” (They walk around), and

“They cannot sit still for too long.”

In the focus group interviews one of the teachers stated,

“They must be disruptive because that is how they live”.

Another teacher added that:

*“Een seun... Ek was besig hier onder en toe kom ek daarbo, en toe is hy besig om die kind te wurg. Die kind sit doodstil en sy werk doen. Ek het dit gesien. Niemand het dit vir my gesê nie... Maar wat hy in die klas doen, meneer... jy kan nie byhou nie. Hy soek net aandag en hy vat ander kinders se goed. Hy loop rond. Die een ouma het al vir my gebel en gesê: ‘don’t let my child sit next to... this child, because he hits her... he does anything just to get my attention. But I caught him choking the poor child who was trying to do his work... you see’. [One boy... I was busy downstairs and when I got to the class, he was choking another child who was quietly doing his work. Nobody told me this. I saw it myself. You cannot cope with what he does in class. He is looking for attention by walking around and taking the other children’s things. One grandmother phoned me with a request.]*

These results are similar to studies from other Western countries (Merrett & Wheldall, 1993; Oswald, 1995). Bowling and Rogers (2001: 81) see disruptive or hurtful behaviour as acting out the hurt a learner has experienced in an attempt to get help for healing. As Jones, Charlton and Witkin (1995) observe, disruptive and off task behaviours tend to interfere significantly with the learners’ own



learning, with other learners' learning, and with the teacher's ability to teach effectively.

Learners often become disruptive when they find the work too difficult or too easy. Teachers need to make sure that their lessons are well prepared for their learners. This includes knowing their learners and their abilities well, and they should ensure that their lesson-preparation centres around the learners interests and abilities, as far as possible. Allow the learners to get involved in their own learning process. This will probably alleviate the disruptive behaviour and give the teacher the space and time to teach effectively (Crimson Education Consultants, 2001).

Nineteen percent of the teachers reported '**attention seeking from teacher behaviour**' as problematic (see Table 5.5, p.89). Many of these teachers said that learners would complain to them only for the attention that they got from the teachers. They felt that parents were either too busy or did not care to give their children the much needed attention that they deserved. In the focus group interview one teacher mentioned:

"I have discovered that parents... they don't have time for their children. Parents don't feel it is necessary to hug that child, to love the child, to speak nicely to the child. *Dit is net 'n geskellery en 'n vloekery, en 'n gaan soontoe...*[It is only scolding, swearing and chasing away...] because they are unemployed and because it is overcrowded".

Another teacher agreed with the overcrowdedness and said:

"I think so, because of the overcrowdedness at home and the amount of children that's in the house. They don't get the attention. You see, and when they come to school, that is their way of getting the teacher's attention by being disruptive".



One teacher stated that a lack of attention at home contributes to the attention seeking behaviour in class. She said:

*“Die kind wat by die huis nie aandag kry nie... dit is dieselfde kind wat vir jou in die klaskamer die probleem gaan skep, waar hy dan jou aandag graag wil hê deur verskillende dinge te doen. ... Hy gaan nou vir my iets sê en so... dit is sy manier of haar manier om vir jou dan te sê dat ek wil aandag hê want ek kry dit nie by die huis nie”.* [The child who does not get attention at home... it is that child who will create problems in class by engaging in different kind of things to attract your attention. He wants to tell you something. This is the only way of telling you that he/she doesn't get the attention at home.]

Galinsky (2001: 24) says that in her conversations with teachers about work and family life, she often heard that working parents (especially mothers) have either a good or a bad effect on their children. She states that the study she did, found no differences in the assessments given by children whose parents are employed and by those whose mothers work in the home. This result confirms several decades of research indicating that we can't predict how a child will turn out simply because his/her parents work (Galinsky, 2001:24). Hoffman and Youngblade (1999) point out that maternal employment doesn't automatically affect children. Similarly, a National Development study of early child care (1997) examined 1 200 children and found that employment does not affect the bond between mother and child. Overall, the research revealed that what matters most is how children are raised: What values their parents have; whether their parents follow what they preach; how their parents connect to their children, and whether the children are priorities in their parents' lives.

The finding of this study is consistent with popular beliefs in the literature (Wilson, *et al.*, 1998), but what the researcher of the present study sometimes find erroneous, is that teachers believe that learners' inappropriate behaviours occur to obtain the teacher's attention. It remains unclear as to whether teachers



actually recognise this particular behavioural function as seeking teacher attention or whether the common classroom interventions just happened to address the behavioural function of seeking teacher attention (Myers & Holland, 2000: 278).

**Attention from peers** behaviour was also assessed to be a problem in the classroom to 17,5 percent of the teachers (see Table 5.5, p.89). Teachers stated:

“They want to be the centre of attraction.”

“They always want to be noticed.”

“They seek attention from the peers.”

In the focus group interviews one teacher stated:

“Our children come back to the class and they only talk about what they saw last night. And it’s nothing foreign to them anymore because they can explain to you in the finest detail how that man and that woman slept together. And, sometimes it is very embarrassing for you as an adult, but for the children it’s funny, its exciting, it makes them popular and they know something that they know they shouldn’t be knowing at that stage yet”.

Every child has a need for attention and approval. Whenever the child has achieved success, no matter how small, s/he desires the approval and appreciation of his/her teacher. As one of the teachers stated in the focus group interview:

“I think you must affirm that child and you must make him feel important, and affirm him in front of his peers. And, I think that will help, because ‘my teacher is affirming me now, so next... I will continue... because...’ And then the teacher must also go on affirming and pointing out that he is now behaving”.



Children from parents who are over-indulgent and who allow them to do what they please, often make unreasonable demands on their teachers and expect immediate gratification of their wishes. They also expect the peers to pamper them or treat them differently. They are usually incapable of amusing themselves, and depend on the others in the classroom for amusement. In other words, they continually demand attention from their teachers and peers. They always have difficulties with the peers and find it hard to fit into the class situation because of being uncooperative.

If the approval or affirmation is denied, s/he might attempt to gain attention from the peers through inappropriate behaviour, by: asserting him/herself through fighting and bullying, thieving and/or lying. This does not mean that the child should be praised indiscriminately. By receiving appreciation only when it is merited, the child gains an understanding of approved values. It is important to remember that only the child's attempts and achievements should receive approval, and not his/her character or personality. Remarks should be passed in such a way as to enable the child to form his/her own positive deductions concerning his/her personality. No glorified image of his/her personality should be portrayed by praise, as the aim should be to present a realistic interpretation of his achievements.

Fear of failure creates feelings of anxiety and tension. Teachers should therefore be careful to praise only achievements, which might include exertion, hard work, help, and creative activities. The child will then draw his/her own conclusions and form a positive image of him/herself.

**Aggressive behaviour** was reported by 16,5 percent of the teachers as problematic in their classroom (see Table 5.5, p.89). These behaviours occurred at relatively high rates. Teachers described aggressive behaviours as fighting with the other learners, swearing and the use of abusive language in the classroom. Teachers complained that:



"They were fighting with their peers."

"Some children are mean to others."

"They swear."

"Some of them use abusive language in the classroom."

"*Leerlinge het 'n agressiewe manier van aanspreek.*" (Learners have an aggressive way of talking)

In the focus group interview one teacher said that:

"The children's behaviour... I take the example from the people next door to me. The only language those children hear, is swearing. So it's the norm for them to then come to school and use the same language in the classroom. It is also just like... they get sworn at all the time and chased away all the time; because the less of them there is in the house the better it is going to be for grandma..."

Smith and Barraclough (1999: 336) describe aggressive behaviour as 'behaviour that is aimed at harming or injuring another person or persons'. Aggression can be intentional or unintentional and hurts or upsets the recipient. It includes physical attacks such as knocking, hitting, kicking, or biting of others. Vespo, Pederson and Hay (1995) report that the majority of research studies suggest that conflict resulting in aggressive behaviour is a normal part of most spontaneous social interaction between children. Fights occur relatively frequently and briefly, is usually quickly resolved and lacking in aggression, with normal harmonious play and interaction quickly resuming. Smith and Barraclough (1999: 336) found that children's desire to participate in play, and protecting their interactive space were major causes of conflicts resulting in fights. Disputes over the rules of play and who had entry to an activity were involved in many conflicts in Vespo, *et al.*'s (1995) study. They further state that aggression is usually associated with high affect and usually results in termination of an interaction.



Several authors (Hyde & Plant, 1995; James, 1997) suggest that the distinctions and differences between males and females, especially in relation to aggression, have been greatly exaggerated. They believe that any differences that do exist are a result of teachers using the genetic marker of male/female distinctions as a basis for the differential treatment of learners. More thought probably needs to be given to the nature of interpersonal disputes, and the age and skills of the learners before deciding on how teachers should be involved. Sims, Hutchins and Taylor (1996) say teachers can find themselves in a double bind because they want to encourage learners to handle conflicts and fights independently, but also to discourage aggression. The small number of learners who develop persistent aggressive modes of interacting with peers are likely to develop lifelong patterns of antisocial behaviour (Katz & McClellan, 1991).

Smith and Barraclough (1999: 339) found that children tend to rely on physical rather than verbal (including swearing) means when engaging in a conflict. A significant number also use both physical and verbal expressions such as swearing.

It is believed that children's thinking and learning develop through interactions with other peers and adults. Thus, children will learn how to manage conflicts and fights both through their experiences with peers and through the modelling and intervention that adults provide (Smith & Barraclough, 1999: 341). De Vries and Zan (1995) also believe that spontaneously occurring conflict and fights between children provide an excellent opportunity for extending children's social and moral understanding. Without guidance from adults, aggression can end up as a way of resolving conflicts. Adults clearly play a particularly important role in conflict between children because children are still highly dependent on adult care and supervision. Whether they see themselves as teaching important skills or simply preventing disharmony and peace in class is something that needs to be clarified by talking to teachers.



Lack of love or affection from the parents usually results from the lack of close communication between the parents and the child. In the focus group interview one of the teachers said:

*“Daar is nie tyd by die huis vir kommunikasie tussen ouer en kind nie”*  
[There is no time for communication between parent and child at home].

This attitude usually stems from the failure of the child to live up to parental expectations, or the fact that the child is regarded as a financial burden. The child may receive all material comforts (food, clothes, toys, etc.) but lacks affection. This results in a feeling of insecurity, inadequacy and rejection, and induces the child to do the bare minimum of what is expected of him/her. Behaviour traits such as aggression, a desire for revenge, defiance, temper-tantrums, hypersensitivity, stealing, lying and/or disobedience can develop.

**Disobedient behaviour** was also assessed as a frequent problem in the classroom setting. Specifically, 15 percent of the teachers rated disobedience as frequent instances in the daily school routine (see Table 5.5, p.89). Disobedient behaviour included talking back to the teacher and disobeying or ignoring the class rules. Teachers said:

“They refuse to listen and obey instructions.”

“They refuse to speak softer.”

“They lack respect.”

*“Hulle praat terug.”* (They backchat).

In the focus group interview, one teacher said:

“With the big classes... you can't really control the children... which put us in a situation where the parents really don't have any respect for teachers nowadays... So parents, they, really feel: 'teachers can't hit you'... so that type of thing and the child comes with an attitude... they have attitudes”.



This result is similar to studies from other Western countries (Merrett & Wheldall, 1993; Oswald, 1995).

Many teachers are very demanding to the point where they often satisfy their own needs. Some of them are domineering and force learners into doing what they (teachers) want them to do. They are over-strict, nagging and too ready to reject the learners at the slightest mishap. This attitude of the teachers makes life difficult for the learners, who are extremely sensitive to criticism and see all their supposedly poor performances as potential personal failures. The learners' responses to these kind of teachers are submission and obedience, accompanied by deep-seated feelings of resentment, defiance and hostility. They rarely disobey directly, but show their resentment by procrastinating whenever possible. Fearful of open disobedience, they resort to dawdling and evasion. They obey the letter, but not the spirit of commands and instruction.

**Tangible behaviour** was reported by two percent of the teachers of being a problem in their classrooms (see Table 5.5, p.89). Tangible behaviour included stealing or obtaining physical objects like toys or money. Teachers reported:

“Stealing is a problem.”

“They take things that do not belong to them.”

In the focus group interview one teacher said:

*“Die kind wat by die huis nie aandag kry nie... Of dit nou is dat hy iemand se brood gaan neem, of hy nou iemand... daai spesifieke kind is miskien nie eers honger nie, maar daai kind gaan nou die kind se brood neem, ... Oor hy vir juffrou heel moontlik wil sê dat: ‘nie dat ek honger is nie, maar ek gaan nou jou aandag kry’”* [The child who doesn't get attention at home... He/she may not even be hungry, but he/she will take someone else's bread to indicate to the teacher 'I am not hungry, but I need your attention].



Another teacher reported:

*“Maar wat hy in die klas doen, meneer... jy kan nie byhou nie. Hy soek net aandag en hy vat ander kinders se goed. Hy loop rond”* [Sir, you cannot cope with what he does in the classroom. He walks around, taking other children's things just to attract attention].

Disputes over taking of objects and possessions were found to be a predominant cause of conflicts in the classroom (Vespo, *et al.*, 1995). Jones, *et al.* (1995) observed that the above mentioned type of behaviour tend to interfere significantly with learners' own learning, with other learners' learning and with the teacher's ability to operate effectively.

## **5.2 Causes or factors contributing to learners' misbehaviour in the classroom.**

Understanding a learner's behaviour means that the teacher should think about and understand the cause of and the need for such behaviour. This means thinking about and understanding where the learner comes from (background) and what causes the unacceptable behaviour and lack of discipline, and constructively and consistently seeking to address challenging issues.

The most frequently adopted explanations for classroom misbehaviour were home and social background factors and internal learner-related attributions, whereas teacher-related attributions were not even mentioned (see Table 5.6, p.100). Neither the age of the teachers nor their teaching experience (in years of professional practice) differentiated the teachers' evaluations significantly in relation to the causes and functions of the problems.

Each category comprised a cluster of more specific, related factors. The most important of these are mentioned below (Table 5.6, p.100). Further, the interaction between these factors and indeed between categories was the most



powerful impression left after analysis. This is basic to any interpretation of these findings.

**Table 5.6: Causes and/or factors contributing to learners' misbehaviour in the classroom**

Causes or factors	Percentage
Home (parental) and Social background factors	40%
Internal learner-related factors	23%
Lack of attention	21%
Disciplinary problems	16%

The causes mentioned by 40 percent of the teachers (see Table 5.6) for all the problems of misbehaviour were mainly **home (parental) and social background** factors. Some of the responses were:

“It is a socio-economic area.”

“Social problems.”

“There is lots of poverty.”

“Lots of unemployment.”

“The social background. No morals and values.”

“Bad values and principles.”

“*Die omgewing.*” (The environment).

Lynam (1996) says it is estimated that between three and nine percent of the general population in society have behavioural characteristics associated with conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder or antisocial personality disorder. He also notes that prevalence estimates for these types of disorders have changed with each revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, thereby



reflecting changes in understanding of the problem and increased sophistication in diagnostic procedures and tools.

Sugai, Sprague, Horner and Walker (2000) found supporting evidence for prevalence in the analysis of school discipline problems and referrals. Their analysis of discipline referral patterns in primary schools indicated that six to nine percent of learners accounted for more than 50 percent of office discipline referrals and virtually all serious behaviours (for example, fighting, assault, swearing, stealing). Not surprisingly, early discipline problems at home and in society predict later adjustment problems in school quite accurately (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995). Previous research has shown a moderate-to-strong relationship between frequent disciplinary problems in the context of the community and that of the school situation (Loeber & Farrington, 1998). Sprague, *et al.* (2001: 203) also found a moderate correlation between the severity of community-based behaviour and the frequency of discipline referrals in school. Loeber and Farrington (1998) believe that learners who have chronic behavioural problems in school substantially overlap those who offend outside of school. It is also likely that some learners misbehave frequently at school, but not in the community, and vice versa.

In this study, the teachers attributed classroom behaviour problems either to modes of **familial interaction** among their learners and their parents or to **denial of responsibility** that families demonstrate with respect to their children's inappropriate behaviour. During the focus group interview teachers said:

"They tell me straight: 'Miss it is boring'... even the weekend... when it is a long weekend... 'We don't like long weekends'. Then I say: 'it is your own home... with your mother and your father there, and your granny'... but they tell you it's boring at home."

"I also think it is a form of escape. They don't like to take the responsibility at home. Come the second week of the school holidays: 'O ek wens die



*skool kan net aangaan'* [Oh, I wish the school will reopen]. They don't have time to look after their own children".

In the township (Bonteheuwel) schools the situation is worse as many parents are **unemployed** and are grappling with urgent problems of survival, leaving no time or energy for behavioural problems at school (Van Wyk, 2001: 126). Teachers in the focus group interviews confirmed this, where one stated:

"A lot of the parents' reasons also... they have a lot on their plate... if you're unemployed... you wondering where that piece of bread is going to come from... what hope have you decently got to sit down with the child and decently explain to him that, 'this is how you have to behave boy'... when the child's stomach is empty and you know... isn't that the same way that parents rather chase the child out or swear at the child, because the parent is feeling too guilty knowing that that child is hungry. That child is looking at you for food".

"You know... because of unemployment... everybody is poor and they always looking for money".

Unemployment leads to **poverty**, something the teachers are concerned about because it is a contributory reason for children's misbehaviour at school and in the classroom. Grey (2000: 4) says that the context of poverty for many communities is one aspect that undermines behaviour and disciplinary structures at many schools. Teachers, during the focus group interview, blamed poverty with the lack of basic human needs for inappropriate behaviour in the classroom:

"Some of the children don't even have places to sleep. They do not have a bed. I know of children who are sleeping under a table, in a bath... now you tell me how that child is going to pay attention the next day. The child never even had a decent meal. There is no way that child wants to listen to my nonsense. That child is finding a place... and a lot of children will fall asleep in the class at their desks. Never mind what is happening".



Health-related factors were not mentioned particularly, but Van Wyk (2001) suggests that it relates as much to the broad issue of poverty and provision of health services as it does to the more conventional notion of individual special educational needs. This in no way denies the urgency of making appropriate provision for children who experience special needs so that they can be included in the mainstream system (Department of Education, 1997). What this study does illustrate, however, is that poverty, with its inter-related social issues affecting school attendance, needs to be addressed as a priority if the very notion of 'inclusion' is to have meaning in South African society.

One of the interesting findings of this study is that, despite it being a common occurrence, only a few teachers mentioned community **violence** as having an effect on children's behaviour at school. During one of the focus group interviews one teacher said:

"Well, for me environment means that it's **gangsterism**. Children are exposed to violence, and then they bring it back into the classroom. They see it happening in the road and they come and try it out in the playground. And also environment, the people are living in overcrowded homes, and there is no space to move. The child becomes frustrated. Now he comes to school. He cannot take his frustration out at home because he is forced to be in this overcrowded set-up. Now he comes to school and that is his way of getting rid of his frustration".

During one of the focus group interviews teachers mentioned that the immediate family has an important role to play:

"I would say the families. The immediate family environment of the child... in which the child grows up... The child may have older brothers who are gangsters in his own home set-up, and he doesn't have any **role models** or people to look up to. He might have a father or uncle who has a negative lifestyle pattern. He has no example to look up to, but he also



sometimes... that wanting to be like my father or my brother comes out very strongly amongst his peers sometimes”.

During the focus group interviews it became quite apparent that teachers felt that the school is only a microcosm of the broader society:

“What is the norm for Bonteheuwel? The children’s behaviour... I take the example from the people next door to me. The only language those children hear, are swearing. So it’s the norm for them to then come to school and use the same language in the classroom. It is also just like... they get sworn at all the time and chased away all the time, ... So now when they get to school, ... They must be disruptive because that is how they live... That’s how they survive at home. So the environment really... they are only displaying what is normal for them”.

Teachers connected the **lack of facilities** to the lack of respect and the lack of discipline during one of the focus group interviews:

*“Hier is nie genoeg fasilitiete vir die kind nie... om hom besig te hou na skool nie. Hy is geforseer om in die straat te speel. Daar is nie parke, of soos die Multi-Purpose Centres of sulke goed vir hulle nie... hulle het nie respek vir mekaar nie. Die higher authorities... het hulle ook nie eers respek voor nie. Soos padveiligheid, en sulke goed. Die motors moet padgee vir hulle. ... Dit kom by respek in. ... Hulle luister nie eers wanneer daar ‘n motor aankom nie. Jy kan hoot en hulle gee nie eers pad nie”*  
[Here are not enough facilities for the child to occupy him after school. Therefore he is forced to play in the road. There are not enough parks or facilities like the Multi Purpose Centres. They don’t respect each other, the higher authorities or road safety and the like. They don’t even listen to the hooters of cars and they don’t give way to cars].

**Drugs** was mentioned in the focus group interview as an environmental factor influencing behaviour. One teacher said:



“Also the influence of the drugs ... at home and also in the wider community. When a child gets to school, it’s not foreign for him to stand and smoke around, ...because they are exposed ... especially in this environment, to harsh drugs. So ... for them to grow up with that, and to start using it at a very, very early age.”

It appears that knowledge of behaviours in school and in the community can sharpen an understanding of the immediate and long-term needs of learners. Many of these societal concerns that have an influence on school behaviour have led many (Sprague, *et al.*, 2001: 197) to conclude that schools and community agencies must increase efforts to prevent inappropriate behaviours and to provide programmes that will facilitate education so that these could lead to beneficial changes for the learners, their families, their teachers, their schools and the community as a whole.

In the present study with its socio-economic social contexts the category of **internal learner-factors** was reported by 23 percent of teachers as causing classroom behavioural problems (see Table 5.6, p.100). Some of the comments were:

“They are sometimes just rude.”

“They’re just plain rude.”

“It is naughtiness.”

This finding suggests that teachers tend to adopt a linear and immediate connection between a learner’s problem and disposition and familial factors (either in terms of child rearing or constitutional and personality traits), thereby suggesting that the problem lies within the child, and by implication neglecting and/or underestimating their own involvement and responsibility (Farrell, 2001: 4). The results of this study closely parallel those from earlier research by Oswald (1995). In his study, the teachers attributed school behaviour problems either to modes of familial interaction among their learners and their families or to



denial of responsibility that families demonstrate with respect to their children's inappropriate behaviour. In the attribution theory, a distinction between disposition and situation factors is especially prevalent. According to this, the teachers as observers tend to attribute misbehaviour to perceived stable personal dispositions. The above tendency could be explained either by the absence of specific information or by the teachers' tendency to perceive the learners themselves as the dominant factor. One could infer this finding that children need to be 'treated' without any undue inference by the teachers. In addition, the above-mentioned teacher perceptions might well act as self-defensive attributions protecting their levels of self-esteem and producing the observed biasing of causal attributions.

**Hyperactivity**, lack of **concentration**, lack of personal motivation and boredom were of the factors mentioned by some of the teachers. They stated:

"Some of them are hyperactive."

"They lack concentration."

"Some lack personal motivation."

"Sometimes they are bored."

During the focus group interviews the teachers reiterated that learners lacked concentration. They reported that:

*"Ek sê altyd onse kinders het nie konsentrasievermoë nie en dit is nogal vir my rêrig 'n probleem. Hulle kan nie langer as vyf minute sit en luister na 'n mens... en vyf minute is baie min. As hulle in graad twee kom... graad drie... moet hulle nou al vir 10 minute na jou kan luister of 15 minute. Maar 15 minute... as jy langer as daai 15 minute aangaan, dan mors jy jou tyd... Maar aan die einde van daai vyf minute of daai 10 minute dan kyk hulle vir jou... en jy probeer nou vrae vra om te kyk of hulle geluister het... konsentrasie"* [I always say that our children lack the ability to concentrate, which is a problem to me. Five minutes are very short, but they are unable to sit and listen for five minutes. When these



learners get to grade two or three, they must be able to pay attention for 10 to 15 minutes. You are wasting your time if you carry on for longer than 15 minutes. If you test to see whether they have listened by questioning them after five or 10 minutes, they sit and look at you. ... lack of concentration].

“And also... I think... if things are happening at home, they sit and think about it. They're not here...”

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterized by the triad of overactivity, inattention and impulsivity. Children with ADHD usually present with marked behavioural difficulties, but closer examination reveals emotional difficulties such as low self-esteem, anxiety and guilt. Anxiety is considered an emotional disorder, but children with emotional disorders often present with disturbed behaviour. It is not unusual for behavioural and emotional disorders to occur together (Cassidy, James & Wiggs, 2001: 171).

Specific **academic problems** play a crucial role in behaviour in the classroom. Lack of academic understanding was mentioned. One teacher said, “Don't understand work.” Such problems, however, if unattended to, can in themselves act as risk factors for the development of emotional problems. Gregg (1999, 107) says that big classes and school settings make it easier for marginal learners to fall through the cracks, with their academic, behavioural and social needs being overlooked. Significant reading delays for example, can lead to both behavioural and emotional difficulties (Cassidy, James & Wiggs, 2001: 171). Learners who repeatedly fail academically are apt to give up and display inappropriate behaviour (Gregg, 1999: 107). The one thing that teachers did not mention was the role of the curriculum or programme (or lack thereof) in influencing children's behaviour. Smith and Barraclough (1999: 345) have argued that boredom (“sometimes they are bored”) or lack of stimulation (“some



lack personal motivation”) was often associated with aggressive behaviour in primary school children.

Many of the teachers (21 percent) complained of **lack of attention** from the parents’ side (see Table 5.6, p.100). They commented:

“Seeking attention that they do not get at home.”

“Not enough attention at home.”

“They look for attention because they don’t get enough at home.”

“They are looking for attention.”

“Lack of attention at home.”

“*Soek aandag.*” (Attention seeking).

“They are looking for love, because they don’t get it at home.”

Many families living in Bonteheuwel are experiencing **pressures and stress** which affects the way they relate to their children and the school. As one teacher puts it during the focus group interview:

“Broken homes. They don’t even see their mommy or their daddy. They live with their grandparents. They miss their parents. Some of them only see them maybe holidays or weekends. And the granny can’t always fill that gap. And some of the grannies can’t even read or write, so they can’t help them with their schoolwork... so it is all frustration.”

This often leads to parents avoiding the school, and the impression is created that parents are not interested. Many parents have limited time due to **work** commitments, but particularly so in the case of single mothers. During one of the focus group interviews one teacher stated:

“... And also most parents work. Parents take any jobs these days. They work night shift. More and more women are starting to work night shift now. So, see to yourself. Just like... get on and get what you can, because I’ll bring home a piece of bread at the end of the week.”



In the focus group interview a teacher agreed with the above teacher's statement and said that it is all about survival:

"It is survival... Everybody just wants to survive ... working night shift and things like that... at the expense of their children ... But they have to see that the children are fed... So they don't really have much time to sit with the child and spend quality time."

One teacher, during the focus group interview, implied that parents also don't have the time to be bothered with **trivial things** like behaviour when:

"They have a lot on their plate... if you're unemployed... you wondering where that piece of bread is going to come from... what hope have you ... to sit down with the child and decently explain to him that: 'this is how you have to behave boy'... when the child's stomach is empty and you know... or to find a picture of a horse... good grief... 'Do I now care about a horse when I don't have a piece of bread'."

In Bonteheuwel an additional problem is the fact that parents only get back from work very late and all meetings are scheduled in the evenings when they are tired and have to see to food and other chores. Interestingly the lack of 'spending time with your children' was also mentioned as a reason for misbehaviour (attention seeking) in the classroom. The inference is that children who are left alone are often negatively affected where behaviour is concerned (Boers, 2002: 53).

The **lack of discipline was** reported by 16 percent of the teachers as a factor contributing to learners misbehaving in the classroom (see Table 5.6, p.100).

Teachers complained about:

"Disciplinary problems."

"Learners not being disciplined at home."

"Parents have no discipline at home."

"Learners are undisciplined."



“No structured discipline is given at home.”

During the focus group interview a teacher mentioned that children are not disciplined at home. She reported:

“The norms and the value systems are different. What you teach them here, they can’t apply at home because it is a total different environment.”

Another teacher furiously added:

“...*Want jy kry die kleinspan wat sê, ‘As juffrou my net gaan slaan, dan gaan ek my ma haal’. Want die ouers sê vir daai kind ‘laat jou juffrou net aan jou slaan... dan gaan sy sien wat ek vir haar gaan maak’.*” [You get the little ones who say that if the teacher dares to hit me, I’ll fetch my mother. The parents tell the children that they will sort the teachers out if the teachers hit them].

Parents obviously have a very important influence on the development of children’s social skills and teaching of discipline, but so also are teachers since they work with children in the context of larger peer groups (Smith & Barraclough, 1999: 346).

These above findings (causes and factors) closely parallel that of a research done by Oswald (1995) where he says that teachers as observers tend to attribute misbehaviour to perceived stable personal dispositions. This tendency could be explained either by the absence of specific information or by the teachers’ tendency to perceive the learners themselves as the dominant factor. One could infer from this finding that children need to be treated without any undue inference by the teachers. In addition, the above-mentioned teacher perceptions might well act as self-defensive attributions protecting their levels of self-esteem and producing the observed biasing of causal attributions.



Previously teachers were teachers and parents were parents, or so it seemed (Konzal & Dodd, 2000: 8). Teachers were responsible for teaching learners to read, write, and do sums, while parents had to teach family beliefs and values, manners and discipline. These roles were clearly defined and compatible. Grey (2000: 4) agrees that teachers must teach, learners must learn and parents must parent their children, however, as society became more complex and families more diverse, the teachers at school started to share some responsibilities with the parents at home. Who is responsible for what is no longer as certain as it once seemed to be, and the problems we face are less easily solved. The home and the school are jointly responsible for the child's development. What happens to the learner in either of these is bound to influence his behaviour. Interaction between home and school is the key to behavioural progress. Because home and school are jointly responsible for the learner, it is essential that there should be a healthy and harmonious interaction between them. It is crucial for parents to take responsibility and be involved in their children's education. Keeping parents outside of the school grounds cause teachers to miss out on knowledge and support that could have assisted learners with behavioural difficulties. In the end, both parents and teachers are responsible for behaviour in the classroom.

### **5.3 Teachers' responses to unacceptable/problematic behaviour in the classroom**

There are a number of debates on the correct way to discipline learners with behavioural problems according to Crimson Education Consultants (2001).



**Table 5.7: Teachers' responses to unacceptable/problematic behaviour in the classroom**

<b>Teachers' responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Detention	24%
Call in parents	24%
Reprimand	14%
Learner centred intervention	12%
Extra work/chores	10,5%
Call in principal	10,5%
Isolate	5%

When reflecting on the responses of the teachers, it is important to note the diversity of strategies that were frequently used by teachers (see Table 5.7). Lovejoy (1996) points out that the differentiation of responses to the problematic behaviours in the classroom may well be based on the different causal attributions held by the teachers in this study. Teachers view different methods as being appropriate for different problems and this may be related to their explanatory attribution. Myers and Holland (2000: 272) claims that by identifying events contributing or maintaining the challenging behaviour, appropriate intervention strategies become more obvious. If, for example, a learner engages in a disruptive behaviour to obtain attention, then a more appropriate manner of obtaining attention is taught. Because reinforcement contingencies vary from learner to learner, interventions should vary from learner to learner.



All teachers who have spent any time in a classroom at a primary school will agree that, regardless of what behaviour intervention strategies are deemed best for their school, the price of good discipline is hard work, consistency and creativity (Crimson Education Consultants, 2001).

**Table 5.8: Two kinds of intervention**

<b>Punitive strategies</b>	<b>Learner centred strategies</b>
Detention (24%) Reprimand (14%) Extra work (10,5%) Call in principal (10,5%) Isolate (5%)	Call in parents (24%) Positive assistance (12%): Speak to colleagues, School psychologist, <i>Probleemaanspreking</i> , TST, Motivate learners, Move them closer Discuss class rules and feelings
<b>64% of punitive strategies</b>	<b>36% of learner centred strategies</b>

In relation to the preferred actions, the teachers commonly used 64 percent punitive strategies as oppose to 36 percent of learner centred strategies (see Table 5.8). Some teachers did resort to positive (learner centred) strategies.

### **5.3.1 Punitive strategies**

In relation to the response to misbehaviour the study suggests that teachers tend to adopt more punitive measures to deal with unacceptable/problematic behaviour. Punitive practices were frequently (64 percent) reported, a finding that is inconsistent with the literature. Merrett and Wheldall (1993) posit that punishment is not commonly reported in the majority of literature. They suggest that teachers perceive punitive strategies as not resulting in lasting benefits to



the learner, or on the other hand, it might well be that extreme practices such as punishment are under-reported due to the susceptibility of the questionnaire items to social desirability and fear of censure (Bibou-Nakou, *et al.*, 2000).

Maintaining appropriate classroom behaviour can be a complex and difficult task and therefore teachers resort to punishment. This task becomes more stressful when it is exacerbated by big classes, abolishment of corporal punishment, lack of resources and job insecurities. Ginott (1975:123) states that few teachers believe in the efficacy of threats and punishment, yet they resort to them daily. Out of desperation they blame and shame, reproach and rebuke, threaten and punish. Gregg (1999: 109) notes that he has frequently heard teachers saying that learners with behavioural problems should not be treated well, because they might get the wrong message, so they must pay for their mistakes and poor attitude to teachers. Threats and injudicious punishment result in a loss of interest in all learning. These methods not only fail to correct; they provide the troubled child with justification for past misbehaviour and with an excuse for future offense. Punishment is pointless. It fails to achieve its goal. No child says to himself, while being punished, "I am going to improve. I am going to be a better person – more responsible, generous, and loving." Children know that punishment is rarely administered for their benefit, that it serves the needs of the punishing adult. The fact is, those who rely on retribution invite revenge (Ginott, 1975:122).

Twenty-four percent of teachers indicated (on questionnaires) that they send their learners to **detention**. Some teachers stated:

"Stay for detention/ Send them to detention/ Detention in class."

"Keep them in during interval."

"Address learner in class and report to detention."

"Keep them in during intervals/take away an interval."



During the focus group interviews teachers had different opinions as to the benefits of sending learners to detention. Some said that keeping the learner in class, during interval or after school really helps the child. They said:

*"...As jy die kind alleen vir daai tyd in die klas gaan hê met... onder toesig van 'n onderwyser of onderwyseres dan dink ek daai kind gaan voel daai dag dat: 'ek word nou rêrig gestraf vir dit wat ek gedoen het, want nou kan ek nie met my maats huistoe gaan nie. Ek verloor uit op my speelyd... op my televisie tyd... of wat ook al ek na skool doen... word nou weerhou om te doen' [If you have the child alone in class under the supervision of a teacher, then I think the child feels punished for what he has done. I can't go home with my friends and I am losing out time with my friends. I cannot watch television and I am prevented to do what ever I do after school].*

Other teachers agreed that it is a form of punishment and children do not like for their friends to go home while they are still at school. They said:

"Well, I would say if you send a child to detention you are preventing him from going home early... that is to go and play and be at home."

*"Ja, 'n kind hou nie daarvan as sy maats huistoe gaan en hy bly nog agter nie. Dit is 'n mate van 'n straf" [Yes. A child doesn't like to stay after school while his friends are going home. This is some kind of punishment].*

*"...Daai kind voel nou ek is alleen hier. 'Ek kan nou gespeel het. Ek kan nou op die sokkerveld besig gewees... maar kyk wat moet ek nou doen. Ek gaan miskien volgende keer twee keer dink voor ek dit weer gaan doen', maar saamgegooi in 'n klas... dit werk nie" [...That child feels he is there alone. I could have played. I could have been on the soccer field, but see what I have to do now. Next time I'll think twice before I do it again. But with others in the same class... it doesn't work].*



Some teachers mentioned that sending learners to detention can have positive off-spins. During the focus group interview, one of the teachers reported that keeping learners in during intervals worked for her. She said:

*“Dit het wel vir my gehelp, maar dan moet dit nie na skool wees nie. Ek het hulle gedurende pouses ingehou vir ‘n week. ‘Jy gaan nie speel pouses nie. Jy werk in die klas in’. Daarna het hulle hul huiswerk gedoen. Vir my het dit definitief gehelp. Hulle huiswerk was gereeld gedoen... veral die wie se huiswerk nie gedoen was nie... en vir pouses baklei”* [It really helped me, but then it should not be after school. I kept them in during intervals for a week. ‘You will not go and play during intervals. You will work in the classroom’. After that they did their homework, especially those who never did their homework before, and those who fought during intervals].

One teacher reported, during the focus group interviews, that sending the learner to detention could be positive if the teacher uses the time to address the child's need.

“And also, ... the teacher should be positive ... it gives the teacher more time to sit and help the child individually. I ... heard that detention takes place where children sit ... for a whole hour doing absolutely nothing. ... I find this a complete waste of time, because that is where the teacher can use his energy ...to help the individual ones with their problems in a one-on-one situation.”

A few teachers agreed that sending the learner to detention can be an opportunity to teach him or her. They said:

“Sometimes for the child to just sit quietly in the class, or in detention class... may also be a way to teach him to not be disruptive. ...To teach the child to not ...just get up and walk around in class. ...They just want to go and talk and chat and fight on the other side.”



“Something else that can become positive is when we have talks and have it in the form of storytelling ... to bring out good morals and values and manners and self-discipline, and even to start a little drama ... acting out how you would relate to your parents and your friends and your family at home.”

Gregg (1999: 109) says when he analysed a school’s detention system, it showed that the practice did not improve the learners’ inappropriate behaviours. He found that teachers who used learner centred strategies experienced substantial improvement, while learners in detention programmes showed no improvement.

Fourteen percent of teachers resorted to **shouting (reprimand)** at children. Some reactions were:

“Scold.”

“I reprimand them.”

“I reprimand them and then discuss the consequences of their actions and why it is unacceptable.”

“Put a stop to it.”

The researcher asked the teachers during one of the focus group interviews, ‘why do teachers shout at learners?’ One teacher answered:

“I can’t help them... I try it... try doing this, doing that... then send the child to the office and he comes back and nothing happens. So what else do I do? I am going to shout at him now. I am going to chase him out of my classroom.”

The researcher wanted to know how shouting at learners helps either the teacher or the learner, and one teacher answered:

“It doesn’t help at all. It just really doesn’t help at all, because that child shuts down immediately and the child is wondering: ‘is a smack going to



follow? Is she going to kick me?' Because what normally happens at home when my mommy shouts, she follows it up with a smack. So that child will shut down immediately and just stay in a panic state. But what it does do... is... gives me a chance to air my vocal cords really so that it swells. And then there are some other children that will sit down and be quiet quickly. It might not even work for that same one, but the child will just stand there and shivering in his boots... like which... is a very bad idea, but we are going to do it anyway. ...Because it brings the rest of them to order. It is not particularly aimed at that one child."

One teacher mentioned that shouting helps both her and the learner, even if it is only for a short while:

*"Dit help vir my op daardie oomblik en vir die kind ook... al is dit net vir 'n paar minute... vir vyftien minute en die kind werk... jy kan of aangaan met jou werk, of die kind kan aangaan met die werk"* [It helps for both the child and me at that moment... even if it is only for a few minutes. The child gets down to working... even for only fifteen minutes. You or the child can go on with the work].

Crimson Education Consultants (2001) say that it is not necessary to resort to screaming or to lose control. Remember that respect breeds respect. When you treat learners as participants in an important process (learning), they will usually respond accordingly.

The Department of Education (2001b: 14) suggests that the teachers devise positive strategies, rather than shouting at learners. It is unlikely that learners who seek attention are going to stop doing what they are doing because they are being shouted at. It is even more improbable that negative attention like being responded to with sarcasm will stop them or impact positively on their behaviour.



Eleven percent of teachers said that they give the learners **extra work** as a form of punishment. They stated:

“Minor chores around school and in class.”

“Do some tasks they don’t like.”

“Do alternative work.”

“Extra work.”

During one of the focus group interviews one teacher said:

“I’ve got a problem with extra work. ... the child will just eventually dislike that subject... which ever it is. If you making a child write out or doing an essay or... you just cause that child to hate that ... and why is he doing it? Is he doing it because he wants to... no it’s forced upon him, and anything that you force upon anybody? I mean... force me to do something and I’ll show you. You just develop hate.”

The learner usually sees extra work as punishment. The teacher should rather seek out ways where they can engage with the learner in a positive way, even through simple strategies like giving him or her a task to do (not extra work) like: sending the learner on an errand, or giving them responsibility for something that will acknowledge them (Department of Education, 2001b).

Eleven percent of the teachers indicated that they send their learners to the principal or they **call in the principal**. Their response were:

“Tell/inform the principal/manager.”

“Call the principal in or send to the office.”

“Send them to principal/office.”

During one of the focus group interviews the researcher asked teachers why they would send learners to the principal? One teacher answered:

“Well, I don’t know. I think... but I don’t agree with it... but what I think teachers probably did ... because she thinks if the child did not want to



listen to her, maybe to a higher authority and by sending the child to the principal maybe then the child will. Because normally... to the child... the principal, ... is the top... he is the main or the head..."

Teachers indicated that they cannot resort to corporal punishment, and rather send them to the principal to punish them, but even that doesn't really help. One teacher reported:

"But we are just trying. ... We really don't know what to do. You can't hit them... I mean... corporal punishment is out. So what else ... can we do? Those are the things that we are trying and even more... by sending them out of the classroom... I mean... that is wrong, but just to get rid of them. They don't want to listen. You send them to the office... the principal is just talking to them... send them back... they come back to the classroom laugh-laugh. Why do I send my child to the office? I can't help them... I try it... try doing this, doing that... then send the child to the office and he comes back and nothing happens. So what else do I do?"

One teacher felt that sending a learner to the principal should not be seen as punitive. He said:

"...So that the child can be referred. I mean, through the teacher. I am talking also in disagreement of sending the child to the principal. Reason being that I find it disempowering. ... The other children look at you and see that you can't handle him so you sending him out. The child also feels much better when he leaves the class and he is also scared because he is going to the principal. The principal is going to tackle him. ... One thing positive is that the principal can maybe sit down and ... the teacher should come down with the child and spend some time and maybe have a chat and find out what the child lacks so to refer the child. The principal can start the intervention with the parents and call them in and say we have a problem after the third or fourth time ... this child definitely needs help."



Five percent of the teachers reported that they **ignore** their learners by **isolating** them. Some of the responses were:

“Put them in a corner on his/her knees.”

“Send child to a corner. After four children, others are sent out - only four corners.”

“Send out of class/Chuck them out/Chase out of classroom.”

“Isolate/Separate from rest.”

“Time out.”

During the focus group interviews the researcher asked teachers why they would ignore or isolate learners. One teacher explained:

“I think it is also a way of trying to punish the child by for example, story time. ... This is not what I agree to, but... I think what the teacher is trying to prove is that you will be punished by not partaking in either story time ...or whatever. We are going out for P.E. and the child stays/remains in the class. So that is your form of punishment or go and stand in the corner and you won't partake in the story telling or whatever.”

Many teachers in the focus group interviews felt that this way of intervening is not very effective. They said:

“I think it just makes the child more frustrated and more angry and he can't wait for the next opportunity to give vent to the frustration and anger.”

“I think it is also a form of labeling the child. ... The child ... already feels isolated. Now the teacher is doing it in front of his other peers. It also... in a negative sense makes him powerful.”

It is well known that 'ignoring' on the part of the teacher has been identified as an ineffective strategy (Johnson, 1994). The selection of this measure made by the teachers may relate to teacher beliefs that the adoption of another practice might be time-consuming. Alternatively, it may mean that teachers have to assume



roles for which they have not been trained, or to deal with situations and problems that they feel are beyond their responsibility (Damanakis, 1998). The lack of behaviour management courses, lack of formal training in inclusive practices and/or absence of teacher-consultation services further support these two suggestions.

Ginott (1975: 64) postulates that every teacher can become aware of attitudes that alienate, words that insult, and acts that hurt. Punitive attitudes from teachers carry the risk of creating an impression that bad schools and bad teachers are for bad learners. Not only does this attitude violate constitutional guarantees of equal protection, it does not work (Gregg, 1999: 109). Time and again, experience (Staff, 1997) shows that excellence inspires excellence, while rejection and punishment further alienate learners from both school and society. It is generally accepted that, while punishment (above strategies) removes or subverts unwanted unacceptable behaviour, positive reinforcement changes behaviour.

### **5.3.2 Learner Centred Strategies** (positive responses to behaviour)

Whilst it may be possible to maintain order in classrooms by the fear of graduated responses to misdemeanours and/or unacceptable behaviour, there is a need to address the more fundamental issue of how to motivate learners to behave in a fashion conducive to effective teaching and learning (Radford, 2000:86). Crimson Education Consultants (2001) stress that there should be a system for dealing with learners with behavioural problems in every school. It is not a problem that teachers should be dealing with alone. Behaviour takes place within a particular context. In the case of the teachers the behaviour takes place within the context of the school and the classroom. To this end it would be advisable if the school as a whole deals with inappropriate behaviour collectively within their communal context. Thirty-six percent of teachers indicated that they use non-punitive methods of intervention within the classroom context.



Konzal and Dodd (2000: 8) postulate that previously teachers were teachers and parents were parents, or so it seemed. Teachers taught learners to read, write, add and subtract, while parents taught family beliefs and values, manners and discipline. These roles were clearly defined and compatible. However, as society became more complex and families more diverse, schools began to take on some responsibilities once left to homes. Today, teachers and parents share many roles. Who is responsible for what, is no longer as certain as it once seemed to be, and the problems we face are less easily solved. Keeping parents outside of the school grounds cause teachers to miss out on knowledge and support that could make schools work better for learners with behavioural difficulties. In the end, both parents and educators want to do what is best for the children.

The learners expect the school to establish and consolidate a relationship with their homes, so that knowledge of their home background and family relationships can lead to better understanding of the learner, as well as mutual trust and cooperation. School should never replace the home upbringing, because the home should always be the primary educational situation. A school should only be a continuation of the home upbringing. Upbringing and education cannot be separated, although the distinction could be made that, the home will be responsible for upbringing (which includes education), while the school will do the education (including upbringing) of the child. A number of teachers indicated that they will **inform the parents** of their children's unacceptable behaviour.

They said:

“Contact/notify/inform parents.”

“I approach parents.”

“Write a letter to his/her parents.”

Many teachers have never thought of **involving parents** (family) as a way of improving behaviour and learning in the classroom (Boers, 2002: 52 – 53; Van



Wyk, 2001: 120). Generally teachers used the more conventional ways if involving parents (families) in open-days, fundraising activities, volunteer programmes and parent-teacher meetings. Many parents, especially single and working parents, are not able to participate in such activities, yet they want to help their children succeed in school. However, it does not seem as if teachers make specific arrangements for such parents to become involved in their children's education other than calling them in when there is a problem with their child. As Chrispeels (1991: 371) notes, "Most efforts have been directed at 'fixing' parents rather than at altering school structures and practices."

The absence of a culture where teachers and parents work together as partners, and the lack of understanding of ways in which families may be involved is unfortunate as research shows that school programmes and teacher practices are the strongest and most consistent predictors of partnerships between the school and the family (Losen, 2002: 46; Wanat, 1994: 644). Parental involvement efforts are most successful when teachers assume that all parents want what is best for their children and can make important contributions to their children's behaviour and education at school. It is essential to invite parents to be involved in their children's education and to be part of the solution to behavioural problems (Department of Education, 2001b: 14). In this study teachers indicated that they do involve the parents. They reported:

"I contact parents to discuss the environment at home."

"Notify/contact/approach parents."

"I approach parents: I teach and parents must discipline."

Effective communication between home (parents) and school (teacher) is necessary to strengthen the parents' involvement in their child's behaviour management. Through open and honest communication, parents and teachers begin to understand one another's ideas about learning, discipline and other topics. Such communication helps teachers and parents to work together to



improve the child's performance as well as behaviour that benefit all learners in the classroom (Boers, 2002: 53). Therefore teachers are saying:

"Speak/talk to parents."

Teachers can also **call parents in** as parent-as-active-participant and in doing so; they suggest that parents also have something of value to add to the conversation about their children's teaching and learning (Konzal & Dodd, 2000: 10). Parents should be encouraged to serve on the schools' governing bodies and Teacher Support Teams (TST) and to contribute knowledge about their children and their communities to the mix of information used to make decisions about their children. The goal of this would be for parents to have an equal voice with teachers, and to be partners in taking responsibility in managing difficult behaviour in the classroom. Hence, teachers saying:

"Call in parents/*ouers word ingeroep.*"

"If no improvement, call in the parents."

"If all else fail, call in parents."

Twelve percent of the teachers indicated that they either discuss the learner with the **TST** or they contact **professional services**. Teachers said:

"Inform the TST and together we work out strategies."

*"Identifiseer probleme en gee aandag aan die probleme"* [Identify the problems and pay attention to them].

"Find out why the child behaved in that manner (private)."

"Try to work one-on-one with learners."

During the focus group interviews one of the teachers said:

"We spoke to the (school) psychologist also about it... what can we do. We are asking for help. ... This is now for a long time that we are asking... what else can we do besides what we are busy doing right now? And there are children who... will come to you, who trust you... who will talk to you... you know the children."



The provision of counselling services and the establishment of Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) in the school has long been a significant role for school psychologists. Vollmer and Northup (1996) say that many schools also have prereferral teams (TSTs) designed to help resolve behavioural and academic concerns and school psychologists are often called upon to consult with teachers regarding a variety of behavioural concerns. School psychologists are usually called in to support both the learners and teachers regarding behavioural improvement (assessment and intervention), school-based mentoring, and coordination with family members (Sprague, *et al.*, 2001: 204). The Department of Education (2001b: 14) urges the teachers to contact professionals like school psychologist or community counsellors to assist them in dealing with difficulties or issues of socialisation, learning barriers, emotional difficulties and behavioural difficulties within their classrooms. A well-managed learning environment in which proactive strategies are put in place will reduce the need for disciplinary measures significantly.

A few teachers mentioned that they use the **code of conduct** to intervene when children display inappropriate behaviour. One teacher said:

“Apply code of conduct.”

During one of the focus group interviews a teacher stated that she lets the learners rewrite the code of conduct as punishment. She said:

“Yes... for me it worked because they simply hated it. ...I tried it last term... I don't really hit my children. They didn't like it, but there was absolute silence because they wanted to get done. But they would rather prefer getting a hiding, than writing it out.”

One teacher had her reservations as to the efficacy of rewriting the code of conduct. She reported:



*“Om die kind goed oor te laat skryf... dit werk nie, want die kind gaan net skryf omdat hy dit moet skryf. Ek weet nie of dit werklik help nie. As ek dink toe ek op skool was.... moes ek skryf... en dit het nie gehelp nie. Ek dink nie dit sal nou help nie. [It does not help the child to rewrite things. He is only going to write, because he has to. I doubt it whether it really helps. I had to write out lines when I was at school, and it did not help. I doubt it whether it will help now].*

The school's code of conduct and the classroom ground rules, drawn up in consultation with the learners, play an important role in promoting acceptable behaviour that enhances the effective management of teaching and learning. The aim of the code of conduct is to maintain discipline and a purposeful school environment and should be based on an ethos that is congruent with the South African Constitution that underpins basic human rights. The code of conduct should never be used as a punitive measure, but it should give learners a clear picture of what they should or should not do, which channels of communication they should use, as well as grievance procedures (Department of Education, 2001b: 20 – 21).

Healing is connected to learning. Some young children arrive at teachers in their classrooms already carrying multiple problems of developmental neglect, abuse, hurt and rejection. If learners are storing up hard feelings and have not had a chance to release them, they will be suffering and not present to learn or grow (Bowling & Rogers, 2001: 79). Crimson Education Consultants (2001) posit that one of the best ways of intervening with behavioural problems is to use constructive discipline. This builds positive self-images for the learners and the teachers, and makes the learner increasingly accountable for his/her own learning. Self-discipline is something that needs to be taught, because most people are not born with this quality. Teachers must set themselves up as self-disciplined role models for learners to follow. Teachers need to remember that



learners learn more from what teachers do rather than from what teachers say (Crimson Education Consultants, 2001).

Gregg (1999, 107) claims that a focus on fixing 'problem learners' may obscure or ignore school-based problems. Large classes or schools make it easier for marginal learners to fall through the cracks and for their academic, behavioural and social needs to be overlooked. Children who repeatedly fail academically and socially are predisposed to give up or become alienated with behavioural problems. Teachers may not have received training in behaviour management and instructional strategies to help learners with different learning needs. As schools move to include learners with disabilities in mainstream classes, they may not be giving adequate attention to teacher preparation (Gregg, 1999).

A school's leadership and organisation may not define and support high standards for behaviour and achievement. Many schools label their learners and separate the learners with behavioural problems from the 'others'. Labeling and separating learners may further marginalise them and solidify antisocial peer groups, compounding the problems they are trying to 'fix'. Research (Gregg, 1999: 107) shows that improved school organisation (management, governance, culture and climate) can reduce overall learner disruption as effectively as individual treatment programmes.

Aleem and Moles (1993: 50) remind schools that they can do more to reduce learners' unacceptable behaviour by creating nurturing environments rather than placing primary emphasis on trying to control learner behaviour. In contrast, deficit models that attempt to 'fix the child'; scare tactics, authoritarian approaches and punishment do not produce the outcomes that policymakers, teachers, educationists, parents and society want (Willis, 1996).

The Department of Education (2001b: 24) claims that the purpose of dealing with inappropriate behaviour should be to discipline the learner. Therefore the



intervention strategies should be constructive and not destructive; educative rather than punitive.

## 5.4 The results after action was taken dealing with unacceptable/problematic behaviour

One would assume that since behaviour problems are common and in the order of the day in Bonteheuwel, that teachers would be more skilled in dealing with problematic behaviours. Teachers did not perceive themselves to be more skilled at resolving behavioural problems. These findings suggest college and university training programmes should increase the emphasis on behavioural management skills in pre-service training programmes. Effective continuing education programmes focusing on behavioural management skills are also necessary.

**Table 5.9: The effect of teacher intervention on unacceptable/problematic behaviour in the classroom**

<b>Effect of intervention on behaviour</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Temporary improvement	51%
No improvement	27%
Sometimes yes and other times no improvement	11%
Definite improvement	11%

Children present problems that do not disappear, even when the teacher believes in democracy, love, respect, acceptance, individual differences, and personal uniqueness. Teachers need specific skills for dealing effectively and



humanely with minute-to-minute happenings – the small irritations, the daily conflicts and the sudden crises. A teacher's response has crucial consequences. It creates a climate of compliance or defiance, a mood of contentment or contention, a desire to make amends or to take revenge. It affects the child's conduct and character for better or for worse (Ginott, 1975: 34).

### **Temporary improvement**

Most of the teachers (51 percent) stated that their intervention strategies improved learner behaviour temporarily (see Table 5.9, p.129). They stated:

"Learner subdue for short period/Only listens for a short period."

"They are only quiet for a time/Still continues after a few minutes."

"Quiet for few minutes and continues with misbehaviour."

"Child behaves just for a period of time."

"The behaviour improves for a short time."

"(Behaviour) stops for a (short) while/period then starts/resumes again."

"Temporary improvement – not a big difference."

"Effective for a short while/Only last for a short span of time."

"Problems lay dormant for a while."

"For about five minutes the child will 'look' sad, after that they are back to 'normal'."

During the focus group interview teachers indicated that the change is temporary.

They said:

"...Some children... they change... but the rest... no permanent change."

"Positively for a short while... still not permanent."

"I think ... where we make the mistake. We want to see immediate change. ... If we discipline the child now, we want to see that he behaves now, and sometimes we need to have the goal for a long time. ... Now I haven't done it for a while and he reverted back to his naughty ways."



“The child wants to feel that he benefits throughout the disciplining process, and we become impatient... the child needs something different... a different style... a different approach and sometimes we don't have that... patience to implement those things.”

Research (Gregg, 1999: 109) shows that disciplinary programmes reap no positive long-term gains, and may even increase negative outcomes. Some of the reactive interventions are inherently pessimistic and keyed to cast teachers in the role of the enemy, and reinforce the angry or rejected learner's distorted thinking and behaviour. The learners then behave for a very short period of time, before the inappropriate behaviour resumes, sometimes worse than the first time due to the deviance and dysfunction of the learners.

### **No improvement**

Many teachers (27 percent) have expressed frustration over ineffective interventions and their inability to alleviate certain behaviour problems in the classroom (see Table 5.9, p.129). Traditional punitive strategies fail dramatically with a significant portion of highly troubled learners who do not benefit at all. Teachers said:

“There are learners who simply carry on with being problematic.”

“No change – Learner/child continues with unacceptable behaviour.”

“Continues to misbehave.”

“Repeat misbehaviour.”

“It doesn't help.”

“Learner/child ignores it, little or no effect whatsoever.”

The researcher asked the teachers why they thought there was no change in behaviour after they have done everything possible. One teacher responded, saying:



“It is a negative situation. We show the children all the negatives. If we show the children the positive, we will get a positive reaction. But sometimes it just takes too much effort. It is quicker to shout...”

If the intervention does not work, chances are, the lack of success will be attributed to the teacher (Myers & Holland, 2000: 272). Too many teachers still use one-size-fit-all strategies to intervene. One child may engage in tantrums to gain a teacher’s attention, another may engage in tantrums to obtain objects s/he wants, and yet another to escape demands from the teacher. To simply pick a favoured intervention strategy based on the behaviour’s topography may not reduce the problematic behaviour and certainly does not teach a more appropriate alternative behaviour. By implementing an intervention without knowing the function of a problematic behaviour, one will, at a minimum, waste time with ineffective interventions. Unfortunately, in some scenarios, the chosen intervention could inadvertently reinforce and strengthen the problematic behaviour (Myers & Holland, 2000).

### **Sometimes there is improvement and other times there is no improvement**

Eleven percent of the teachers indicated that sometimes there was improvement after intervention and other times there was no improvement (see Table 5.9, p.129). A few of the teachers said:

*“Soms help dit, ander kere bly dit dieselfde.”* [Sometimes it helps and other times it stays the same]

“Sometimes they cool down, sometimes no effect.”

“The behaviour stops for a while and has no effect on some.”

When teachers were asked why they thought that intervention helped some of the times, they blamed it on inconsistency on the part of the teachers. They said:

“Most of the children seek attention all the time and by just coming out with a programme and say ‘this is what I need to do’ and leave it to the next week is not going to help. The inconsistency is where the teachers



feel that it sometimes work and sometimes don't work, because we as teachers are inconsistent."

"Yes. The reward system... you've got to keep at it all the time. ...You reward the child today, so today there is good behaviour. ...You have to keep on. If you drop it, why don't you see the same results?"

Some teachers blamed the big classes and the lack of acknowledgement for the intervention strategies not helping at all times. One of the teachers stated:

"Another thing is also because of the amount of children in your class. The child is not always acknowledged for something good. ... You will always say this one did something bad, but then this one on the other side did something good for the day but because your class is so full you never acknowledge that child... for the good thing the child did for the day."

White, Algozzine, Audette, Marr and Ellis (2001: 7) say that although no intervention works all the time for every learner, a reasonable expectation for any discipline programme is reducing inappropriate behaviour over time.

### **Definite improvement**

Only a small percentage (11 percent) of the teachers indicated that there was a definite improvement after intervention (see Table 5.9, p.129). Teachers said:

"Sometimes there is an improvement."

"Normally they try and behave, because they are embarrassed."

"Normally it takes a while of talking before behaviour improves."

"Better."

The researcher asked the teachers when they experienced the change in behaviour to be permanent, and some of them answered:

"When it helps... I think you must affirm that child and you must make him feel important, and affirm him in front of his peers. And, I think that will



help, because 'my teacher is affirming me now, so next... I will continue... because...' And then the teacher must also go on affirming and pointing out that he is now behaving."

"... For a month or two months to see if it is a permanent change. But for those two or three days or even a week... there was a definite change in your class. In the whole classroom situation."

Knowledge about behavioural functions should prove to be very useful to teachers in dealing with a myriad of behaviour problems they encounter in their classrooms. Within their research literature (Northup, Wacker, Berg, Kelly, Sasso & De Raad, 1994) a few teachers have been trained to implement functional analysis procedures with treatments based on the procedures, and they found it to be effective.

## **5.5 Reasons why learners lack discipline**

The reasons why learners lack discipline could be closely related to the function of or the need for a particular learner to behave in that way (unacceptable or inappropriately). The focus of this study was to examine whether or not teachers, through training, experience, or intuition, considered the function or purpose of problematic behaviours and do they understand the need for the behaviour when deciding upon treatment interventions.

The reasons why teachers think some learners lack discipline centred on the following themes: parents, environment, children's (human) rights and media (see Table 5.10, p.135).



**Table 5.10: Reasons for learners' lack of discipline**

<b>Reasons for lack of discipline</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Parental influences	68%
Environmental influences	22%
Children's (human) rights	7%
Media	3%

### **5.5.1 Parental influences**

Parental influences were mentioned by 68 percent of the teachers as being a reason why learners lack discipline (see Table 5.10). Most teachers seem to agree that parents should teach children 'values, attitudes and behaviour' at home (Van Wyk, 2001: 123). Teachers working in deprived communities (Bonteheuwel) state that this is often difficult to achieve.

The family is a major agent in society assisting learners as they move from childhood to adolescence and eventually adulthood. No one can adequately take over this role. Studies such as those conducted by Public Agenda (Farkas & Johnson, 1997) show that many teachers view most (township) parents negatively.

In this study teachers stated that:

**"Parents don't teach their children discipline at home."**

"They don't get taught discipline at home."

"Children are not disciplined at home."

"Not reprimanded at home."

"Parents don't understand discipline."



“Lack of understanding.”

“Parents are no example.”

“Parents are not disciplined themselves.”

During the focus group interviews teachers admitted that many of the parents and grandparents are illiterate. Many teachers also mentioned that the parents did not have the skills to rear children, yet they complained that the parents never taught the learners discipline at home. They stated:

“And the granny can’t always fill that gap. And some of the grannies can’t even read or write, so they can’t help them with their schoolwork... so it is all frustration.”

“And the other thing is also that they are not taught at home how to behave... how to be disciplined... so it is difficult when they come to school. The norms and the value systems are different. What you teach them here, they can’t apply at home because it is a total different environment.”

The researcher drew the teachers’ attention to the fact that many of them said that the learners are not taught at home. He then asked them whether they thought parents had the skills to teach the children, and one teacher responded:

“I don’t think so... I don’t think so.”

In South Africa it is estimated that 37 percent of the population is unable to read or write (Shindler & Bot, 1999: 1). Many of the parents in Bonteheuwel are illiterate and the teachers also wanted parents to teach and model respect, language usage (swearing) and discipline to their children at home, while the professionally trained teachers have failed to do so.

Every child needs **discipline**, but s/he should be taught to discriminate between right and wrong, and the child must be helped to apply this knowledge. The



child's developing abilities and emotions should be directed and disciplined into socially acceptable channels. Children feel secure with grownups who set standards and limits, instead of leaving them to do exactly as they wish. Lack of discipline and control cause careless attitudes towards schoolwork, learning, homework and school in general. The child who is left to his/her own devices does not develop a sense of responsibility.

One teacher said that learners have: "No sense of **right and wrong** at home." Parents should never grant a child's request and later refuse a similar one. Inconsistent conduct confuses the child and prevents him/her from discriminating between right and wrong. A parent should also guard against undermining the other's discipline, by granting a request that the other parent has already refused. The child must always know that s/he faces a united front as far as the parents are concerned, and that it is of no use to approach the other parent when one of them has already made a decision.

Teachers in Bonteheuwel also claimed that:

"Parents are afraid of their children."

"No parental control."

"Parents don't have skills to raise a child."

During the focus group interview some teachers said the following:

"...Many have children... parents are not taught how to rear that child. ... And I think that is also the problem with the parents. They were not taught. It is a cycle that we all go through, but you don't have the skills. She is doing it her way and I am doing it my way, and we both think we are doing it right.

"In grade one ... when a parent comes to see you and say: 'I don't know what to do with this child. He doesn't want to come to school. You must



please talk to him...' the child is seven years old... who is going to be talking to the child when the child is 10, 11 ... 12?"

Farkas and Johnson (1997) found that their study revealed that although most parents try to do their best with their children and, indeed, are doing a good job, some parents do not have good **parenting skills** ("Parents don't have skills to raise a child"). Moreover, parents benefit by being alerted to different and more effective ways of creating or developing learning opportunities and stimulating experiences for their children by parenting programmes (Wolfendale, 1992: 9). Farkas and Johnson (1997) plead with teachers to ensure that they respect those parents who are raising their children well, whatever their lifestyle. They must also encourage those who are not doing such a good job to find help so that they can enquire effective parenting skills.

Many teachers mentioned the general **apathy** of parents to the school. One stated that on the whole parents just leave their children at school and then expect the job to be done. Teachers in Bonteheuwel schools agree, adding:

"Parents don't really care, and think it is the teacher's responsibility."

"Parents are not doing anything."

"They don't have time to look after their own children."

During the focus group interview the teachers stressed the fact that parents very seldom acknowledge their children, because they do not care for their children the way they should (effectively). Teachers stated:

"I feel that part of a child's development and growth is to acknowledge, to confirm, to love, to care. A child thrives... for me a child thrives on that and he doesn't get it at home, ..."

"Yes... and holidays is a burden ...absolute burden."



*“Die feit dat ek met 10... 12 rapporte gesit het... wat deur die vakansie by die skool agter gebly het... wat sê dit vir jou? ... Stel daai ouer rêrig belang? Graad een ... die kind het nou ... formele skool begin... wat sê dit vir jou? Dit sê vir my verskriklik baie.”* [The fact that I sat with 10 to 12 progress reports during the school holidays... what does it tell you? Are the parents really interested? The child is in Grade one. He only started formal schooling. What does it tell you? It tells me very much].

At birth, an infant, although helpless and dependent, possesses the potential to develop. This potential can only be developed by the parents through loving care and through the creation of a sense of safety in the child, which is achieved through gentle handling, affection and consistent and kind treatment (Donald, *et al.*, 1997). The authors continue by stating that consistency is the cornerstone of a child's upbringing. Children also need acceptance and acknowledgement of his/her existence. Parents should strive to create a constant atmosphere of shelteredness, tranquility and stability in the home, so that a relationship of trust and confidence is built up between parent and child, which help the child to feel secure and calm. The parental home provides a safe haven for the child from which s/he can explore his/her own little world. The child who feels safe strives to be a person in his/her own right and wants to explore and experience the world around him/her on his/her own, so that eventually s/he can be free to form his/her own sense of values, make his/her own decisions and have an urge to learn and to use his/her brain.

Other teachers gave similar explanations, where they complained that:

**“Parents are not interested.”**

“Parents not interested in progress of their children.”

“Parents don't want to contribute or get involved. They send the children to school and forget about their needs.”

“Lack of structure and parents not ensuring that learners have what is needed at school.”



Parents should accept their child as an individual, and show appreciation and acceptance of even the most hesitant efforts. In this way the child will feel that s/he means something and his/her self-confidence will develop naturally. Sarcastic and humiliating remarks by a parent harm the learning process and inevitably create a barrier, with the result that the child may even refuse to learn. Parents should accept their child unconditionally, and never strive to mould him into the person they would have him/her be. They should take an interest in their child as a person and not only in their child's achievements. The child should be loved consistently and not only when s/he achieves success.

Parents should always bear in mind that every child is an individual in his/her own right, with his/her own unique development, ability and potential. For this reason every child should be dealt with in accordance with his/her own characteristics, so that s/he may progress to the best of his/her ability. Expectations should be realistic and parents should never have expectations in excess of the child's potential, as the child, is striving to comply with these, and may suffer a limitation of his own potential and ability. On the other hand, it is unwise to set standards that are too low, as the child will then have little, or no, motivation to learn. Great care should be taken never to compare the child with others who might achieve better and score good grades.

Some teachers implied that parents don't spend enough time with their children. They mentioned:

**"Single parenthood."**

"Parents are just too busy working long hours."

*"Geen ondersteuning tuis."* (No support at home).

During the focus group interview teachers were concerned that:

"... Most parents work. Parents take any jobs these days. They work night shift. More and more women are starting to work night shift now. So



see to yourself. Just like... get on and get what you can, because I'll bring home a piece of bread at the end of the week."

"It is survival... Everybody just want to survive and then... like... working nightshift ... at the expense of their children ... But they have to see that the children are fed... So they don't really have much time to sit with the child and spend quality time."

Galinsky (2001: 24), in her study, asked teachers and children what they want most from their parents. Teachers guessed that the children would wish for more time with their parents. Surprisingly, more time was not at the top of the children's wish lists, but she found that the more time children spent with their parents, the more positively they felt about the way they were raised.

Over-protection also appears in cases of single parent homes and where parents are too **busy working** for long hours. Parents develop guilt feelings because the child may have been unwanted or is a nuisance and these attitudes prevent the child from developing independently. Parents with guilt feelings do too much for the child, with the result that the child has insufficient opportunities for independent activities.

One teacher mentioned that most of the parents don't care for their children, but there are those who spoil their kids at home. Some of the teachers said:

"They are **spoilt**."

"Children are allowed to do as they please."

During the focus group interview one of the teachers confirmed that some of the children are spoilt at home. She said:

"Now the other thing is the tolerance level of children is very low. ...The other thing is... many children are spoilt, because if they say they want it,



their parents will go and buy it... it doesn't matter how expensive it is. ... They want to try their tantrums at home... they want to try it here."

Love and affection are essential for the healthy development of a child, but excessive affection has a detrimental effect, in that the parent is too indulgent and over-protective. The parent who smothers the child with love impedes the child's development of independent behaviour patterns. The child receives everything s/he desires and is permitted to do what s/he pleases. The child can become self-centred and egoistic. S/he becomes selfish, immature, and incapable of mingling on equal terms with his/her peers (Sims, Hutchins & Taylor, 1996).

### 5.5.2 Environmental influences

Twenty-two percent of the teachers in the study stated that environmental influences are responsible for the lack of discipline in learners (see Table 5.10, p.135). Teachers mentioned:

"Due to the environment."

"Social background."

"Social/home problems."

"Parents are just too busy with drinking and drugs."

"Society."

During the focus group interview teachers mentioned:

"Also the influence of the **drugs** and so on at home and also in the wider community. When a child gets to school, it's not foreign for him to stand and smoke around... and it just snowballs after that, because they are exposed ... especially in this environment, to harsh drugs. So ... for them to grow up with that, and to start using it at a very, very early age."

The ecological theory underpins the relationship between different organisms and their physical environment. These relationships are seen as a whole. Social



context (including socio-economic conditions, ways of life and cultural patterns) has a profound influence on how children develop (Donald, *et al.*, 1999). According to this perspective, behaviour needs to be examined in a social context to be meaningfully interpreted. The pattern is all too familiar. A child has increasing conflict with family and the community, but the adults, including teachers, in his life space are unaware of the nature of the child's inner turmoil and become frustrated by chronic, escalating troublesome behaviour (Long, *et al.*, 1999: 2). Thus, it is difficult to understand the behaviour manifestations of a learner, without knowing about the social context of that behaviour (Meyer & Salmon, 1988).

Many learners often live in hostile environments comprised of fragmented and overbearing families, alienated schools and the destructive social forces of poverty, gangs, drugs, alcohol, guns and promiscuity. These learners bring all the environmental ills of their society into the classrooms. Many learners who are victims of abuse become the victimiser in the community or a terror in school, causing teachers to feel overwhelmed and helpless because the social-emotional needs of these troubled learners often exceed the resources and skills of the teachers (Long, *et al.*, 1999).

Growing up in an urban society is stressful, and even well-adjusted learners can become temporarily upset when their attempts to become independent, win group approval, develop ethical values and seek intimate relationships go awry. Children who provoke hostile encounters with others often import dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours developed in the family or on the street, to school. Many learners can often not separate the emotional problems they have experienced at home and in the community from the current problems they have at school. The slightest frustration or disappointment at school can open old wounds and trigger characteristic patterns of self-defeating behaviours. When teachers lack the tools to manage such situations, crises can become disasters (Long, *et al.*, 1999).



Bowling and Rogers (2001: 79) ask whether there could be anything more important to society to pass on to children than that the core of their being is good? What could be more important to give children than a sense of love and peace with themselves, the environment and the world? If young children think they're bad when sad or angry, they can't experience that peace. Society very easily passes over the expression and/or denies them those emotions and feelings. As all teachers know, learners come to school carrying with them whatever has happened to them elsewhere in the environment.

If society embraces its families, friends and children and accepts their feelings, it could create an environment of healing (Bowling & Rogers, 2001: 79).

### 5.5.3 Children's (human) rights

Children's (human) rights were mentioned by seven percent of the teachers as a reason why learners lack discipline (see Table 5.10, p.135). Teachers complained that:

"Learners know their rights."

During the focus group interviews the teachers mentioned:

*Die kinders weet dat ons hulle niks kan maak nie. Dit is ook 'n groot probleem, want jy kry die kleinspan wat sê, 'As juffrou my net gaan slaan, dan gaan ek my ma haal'. Want die ouers sê vir daai kind 'laat jou juffrou net aan jou slaan... dan gaan sy sien wat ek vir haar gaan maak'. [The children know that we cannot cane them. This is a very big problem, because the little ones come to school saying that they will fetch their mothers if the teachers should hit them. The parents tell the children that they will see to the teacher if the teacher hits them].*

*"Miskien nie hulle regte nie, maar hulle weet 'juffrou kan nie aan my raak nie. Ek kan dit maak en ek kan dat maak... en my ma gaan sê en hulle*



*kan polisie toe gaan'.*" [Maybe not their rights, but they know that the teacher cannot touch them. He feels that he can do as he pleases because his mother can report the teacher to the police].

*"Dit is al reg wat hulle ken* [this is the only right that they know]. They know their right, but they don't accept responsibility."

"...You can't really control the children... and also where their rights are concerned... which put us in a situation where the parents really ... have no respect for teachers nowadays ... So parents they really feel: 'teachers can't hit you'... that type of thing and the child comes with an attitude... they have attitudes."

Mittler (2000) states that all people have rights, including children whom many adults tend to overlook as human beings. It is also suggested that the main argument driving the inclusion movement has centred on the issue of human rights (Department of Education, 2001a: 11). It is argued that it is a basic right for all pupils to attend their mainstream school and be fully included in its academic and social processes. Any form of segregation is seen as a potential threat to the achievement of this basic right (Farrell, 2001: 7). It is also subsumed within the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and, perhaps most importantly of all, the Government, through the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a) also stresses the right of all learners to attend a mainstream school if their parents wish it. Low (1997) argues, the right is for all learners to receive a good and non-discriminatory education.

Joss (2002: 5) says that children have to fight for their rights, after all it's their right and only if they do, will teachers (and adults) begin to treat them with respect. But the question is why do children have to resort to desperate measures to get their due? Larisma (2000: 5) recommends that teachers give learners the opportunity to make choices and accept responsibility for the



choices that they have made, as responsibilities go with rights. Teachers have to engage the learners in decision-making and by doing so, they teach learners to be discerning and consider what is appropriate.

Teachers should be fair when punishing their learners, as they have a right to know why a certain form of behaviour cannot be accepted. The learner should not be forced into blind obedience. The Department of Education (2001b: 21) says that every learner has the right:

- to be treated fairly and responsibly;
- to show respect to others;
- to be taught in a safe and disciplined school environment; and the responsibility to uphold school security and be co-operative;
- to be treated with respect by the teachers and the school;
- to express opinions politely.

Teachers in the study complained that **learners have lost respect** for authority (adults: teachers and principals). They said:

“Learners have no regard for authority.”

“They are just rude.”

“Plain rudeness.”

Remember that respect breeds respect. When you treat learners as participants in an important process (learning), they will usually respond accordingly (Crimson Education Consultants, 2001).

Many school problems originate from excessive demands made on learners by teachers and principals who refuse to accept them as they are. The school and the teachers demand too much, often to satisfy their own ambitions. Demanding teachers spend time and energy in an attempt to teach the learner to act in accordance with their ideas. They fail to appreciate that they are too domineering or that they are forcing the learner into preconceived patterns of



behaviour. They want the learners to be model children and they are very quick to express dissatisfaction with their behaviour (Joss, 2002).

It is of the utmost importance that a child develops according to his/her own potential. Teachers should also take the learners' point of view into account and attempt to manage difficult behaviour with understanding and kindness, rather than in accordance with an inflexible idea of what the learners ought to be. The learner must never see authority as suppression, as authority should provide a feeling of security. Fair treatment develops a learner's independence and ability to adjust socially. Authority is harmful when it unduly limits a learner's freedom (Joss, 2002).

Long, *et al.* (1999: 21) claim that if schools were serious about educating their learners and reduce inappropriate behaviour, they need to have a policy or an intervention plan. School crises are real, and will only get worse if the only option is to send learners to the principal for disciplinary action or have them sit outside the vice principal's office to cool down.

#### **5.5.4 Media**

Many learners come to the classroom in the morning with many hurts caused by the media. The media was blamed by three percent of the teachers as the reason for learners' lack of discipline (see Table 5.10, p.135). One teacher said:

“Violent movies and TV.”

During the focus group interviews the teachers mentioned that the media contributes to the way learners behave in the classroom. They said:

“I'm talking specifically now about **television**. Nowadays... I'm not even talking about blue movies that you have to bring into the house. I'm talking about what is shown right there. Our children come back to the class and they only talk about what they saw last night. And it's nothing foreign to them anymore because they can explain to you in the finest



detail how that man and that woman slept together. And, sometimes it is very embarrassing for you as an adult, but for the children it's funny, it's exciting, it makes them popular and they know something that they know they shouldn't be knowing at that stage yet."

"Also the **books**. The Cosmopolitan and the Hustler and those things... very explicit... and I mean... all the breast... everything is just so explicit. And they get all excited, because I mean... They bring it to class."

"I think the **excessive watching of videos**. ... Which means it comes down to the point that it is something that they thrive on weekends. It is a mechanism where parents know where the child is. The child is in the house. He doesn't need to go out at night so they get him a video. The child is exposed to violence all the time. Watching action movies and he comes here... I think it affects the child's behaviour. When he sees fighting in the streets, it becomes like normal... gang fights... Something switches off within the child about what is right and wrong. The child is programmed to this type of behaviour."

The researcher wanted to know how the television, the books or the videos influence the child's behaviour in the classroom. One teacher said:

"They ... expose themselves. Some of them expose themselves in the class. Some of them... they touch the others. The girls touch the boys, or the boys touch the girls. ... And we are talking about grade fives. So its not as if ... it doesn't affect them. It does!"

The researcher also asked the teachers whether they think other **learners are traumatised** in the process of certain children sharing their stories in class, and one teacher stated:

"I think some of them might be, because I'm now specifically speaking about my class. I have a child in my class who was raped. She is like



promiscuous at this... moment because ... she's wearing short skirts. Men are very ...appealing. So in that sense... I feel... it is not a good thing."

Bowling and Rogers (2001: 79) agree that one of the most common problems mentioned in the mornings at school is the emotional upset. These learners then come to school with active and unresolved emotional problems, hurting and these feelings manifest in inappropriate behaviour. Many of these problems originate at home watching TV, with peers in the movies or some atrocity in the community that they have read about the previous night or in the morning. Many learners watch TV in the morning before school and all the killings and violence (for example, the September 11<sup>th</sup> issue, or the explosion of the spaceship Challenger) have a negative effect on them. These learners may hurt, be so upset and troubled by their thoughts that they are unable to concentrate on their classroom assignments or to profit from academic instruction (Long, *et al.*, 1999: 21). Teachers sometimes think that if they stop inappropriate expressions, they stop the hurt. Where do these feelings go when they get stopped? Every teacher knows the answer. The feelings either erupt as fighting, kicking, hitting, screaming, swearing, or they are pushed inside and the learner retreats and clings to a blanket or thumb. It makes sense to Bowling and Rogers (2001: 80) that these patterns, continued and compounded by other hurts, would lead to more chronic behaviours later in life.

Like adults, children are also sensitive and vulnerable to hurts. The hurts can cloud the inherent nature of children. But in Bowling and Rogers' (2001: 79) view children come with an ability to heal through natural physical expressions such as laughing, crying, trembling with fear, raging, yawning, stretching, and animated talking. Most teachers have ample opportunity to see learners make use of these. When teachers gently support this process, children can release some of their stored hurts inflicted by the media.



Teachers' knowledge of **functional assessment strategies** was not expected during the focus group interviews/discussion. Functional assessment, perhaps, is more of a way of viewing behavioural problems than it is a specific methodology (Myers & Holland, 2000: 278). That is, behaviours are viewed as having a purpose or function and there are a variety of methods to ascertain functions of behaviours. The results of this study found that few teachers supplied intervention strategies that would be appropriate to most of the implied behavioural function.

## 5.6 Observations

- **Teachers do not understand their learners' behaviour in the classroom.**

Smith and Barraclough (1999: 346) state that the value of teachers knowing children really well, so that they are able to understand and interpret their behaviour within a joint frame of reference, cannot be over-estimated. Many seriously emotionally disturbed learners are being deprived of appropriate services with the justification that these learners do not have a 'real' difficulty, but are just choosing to act in a socially maladjusted manner (Long, *et al.*, 1999: 5).

According to Katz and McClellan (1991: 6) teachers cannot always discern the underlying causes of the social behaviour they encounter. The results of the focus group interviews and the questionnaires included in the empirical investigation indicate that teachers don't understand or have a limited understanding of their learners' unacceptable/inappropriate behaviour in their classrooms.

The participants in this study created the impression that they understand their learners' behaviour. When one looks at the responses to the causes or factors contributing to inappropriate behaviour, you really think that the teachers are in touch with their learners. They identified the



environmental influences. They knew that if the learners' basic human needs were not met through poverty and unemployment, it is going to manifest in behavioural problems. They also expressed themselves very eloquently when it came to role models, gangsterism and violence. They were fully aware of the fact that if the child comes from an environment, be it the home, where violence is used to resolve conflict, that will be the child's only model to resolve conflict in his life space.

However, when you look at the intervention strategies that teachers use to 'discipline' learners, you become acutely aware that most of the strategies are punitive that don't allow for learning. Most of these punitive strategies are also aimed at the child, as if the 'problem' is within the child. If teachers then say that the environment forces the child to behave in a certain way, why then not address (punish) the environment? The researcher feels that if he compares the reasons or factors contributing to the inappropriate behaviour with the intervention strategies used by the teachers to address the inappropriate behaviour in the classroom, it is quite clear that the teachers do not understand the need for learners to behave in the ways that they do. The learners' behaviour is an indication of how he/she feels at that point in time within that context. So, the learners' behaviour is a normal response to an abnormal stimulus.

- **Teachers do not consider the function of inappropriate behaviour in the classroom.**

Teachers do not consider the need for a learner's behaviour in a particular context. Smith and Barraclough (1999: 345) state that previous observational studies have suggested that teachers often do not see what triggers off a particular behavioural incident, so it is important for them not to jump to conclusions about causes. The teachers in this study tended to blame families, particularly those in poor socio-economic environments for the learners' unacceptable/inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. This



is to be expected as teachers in South Africa get little help in developing their skills and knowledge in assessment of behaviour and developing behaviour management strategies. Teachers do not receive training in this field during their pre-service training. This lack of initial training is also not compensated for by in-service training, except in some EMDC circuits.

The widespread attention given to functional assessment was originally sparked by Iwata, Dorsey, Slifer, Bauman and Richman (1994). These researchers used functional analytic procedures and were able to demonstrate that self-injurious behaviours, similar in typography, served different functions for different individuals. A couple of studies (Neef, 1994) have reviewed large numbers of functional analyses and found them to be quite effective at determining the function of behaviour.

- **Teachers fixate on the behaviour manifestations of the learners in their classrooms.**

Often, behaviour management is viewed as the application of a consequence following an inappropriate behaviour. Myers and Holland (2000: 278) say this traditional and overly simplistic view of behaviour management focuses on the behaviour manifestation and not the real issue, and is long outdated.

As noted several years ago (Gresham, 1991) a functional assessment approach must be included in behavioural consultation. The trial-and-error testing of an endless series of interventions needs to be avoided says Iwata, *et al.* (1994). Once the function or the need for the behaviour is known, intervention strategies become readily apparent where more acceptable alternative behaviours, to serve the same function as the inappropriate behaviour, can be taught.



During the focus group interviews many teachers attempted to prove that they understand the learner and many agreed that behaviour is communicative. One of the shortcomings, however, was that they did not consider the need and/or the function of the child's behaviour in the classroom. Behaviour is sparked by feelings. Most teachers understand the context or home environment of their learners and they agree that many learners don't get the attention, love and care that every child so rightfully deserves. They can explain to you that many children only come to school to get their piece of bread for the day, yet they blame and scold at the child who comes to school and 'take' another learner's bread before the teacher hands out the daily bread! They also mention the lack of role models and the exposure to violence, and that they become use to it and accept it as 'normal', yet they punish the child if he/she resolves conflict with violence.

- **Teachers resort to punitive measures as responses to unacceptable/inappropriate behaviour in the classroom.**

Most of the teachers believed that their behaviour management skills were fairly adequate when they were initially asked about it. Looking at the response of the teachers to their intervention strategies, one notices that 64 percent of teachers resorted to punitive measures. When these teachers were asked whether their punitive intervention strategies helped, they all had a resounding "no".

The Department of Education (2001b: 1) agrees with the fact that punishment (isolation, scolding, etcetera) does not help. Punishment has done untold damage to countless learners, often resulting in feelings of alienation and even patterns of defiance and violence. Punishment is by its very nature anti-human (dehumanising) and abusive and does not subscribe to the country's philosophy of human rights. Whilst many teachers are comfortable with the changes and have managed to identify



and implement alternative strategies (this was evident in the study), others are battling to find alternatives to corporal punishment in their classrooms (Department of Education, 2001b: 4). In a society like ours, with a long history of violence and abuse of human rights, it is not easy to abolish corporal punishment and make the transition to respect for human rights. Schools and teachers have a vital role to play in this process of transformation by nurturing these fundamental values in children.

Teachers need to reflect on their own approaches to discipline in order to identify what they are getting right and where they perceive gaps in their approaches. This should help them to identify their specific needs and skills they need to develop. These findings suggest college and university training programmes should increase the emphasis on behavioural management skills in preservice training courses. Effective continuing in-service education courses focusing on behaviour management skills are also necessary.

## **5.7 Generalisability and Limitations**

The generalisability of these results is a primary limitation of this study. Participants of this study were not randomly sampled from across a broad spectrum of areas. The narrowness of the sample (Bonteheuwel area) in our study limits the generalisability of our findings in relation to the cross-cultural context.

Furthermore, our results are based on questionnaire measure and focus groups with obvious advantages and disadvantages. This constitutes a limitation of this study, because results derived from the utilisation of a questionnaire format may not be an accurate reflection of teachers' actual use of various alternatives for coping with misbehaviour, or of their perceptions and understanding of the extent of disruptive behaviour. The teachers' perceptions and understanding were elicited by asking them to comment on behaviours that actually occur in their



classroom (focus groups). In addition, we do not know if the teachers, in fact, exercise the practices they said they did. Actual classroom observation and multiple measures should be considered for future research in this area. Therefore, the results may not necessarily be generalised to all teachers. There is, however, evidence to suggest that this kind of assessment is highly related with direct observation of problem behaviour in the classroom and teachers' responses (Teegarden & Burns, 1993).

The percentage of learners exhibiting behaviour problems may be an overestimate. Since all teachers in a school building were surveyed, some learners exhibiting behavioural problems that have more than one teacher (subject teaching) may have been counted more than once. Furthermore, no definition of terms (for example, aggression) was provided to the respondents. Thus, there may be some inconsistency from teacher to teacher in the behaviours considered as aggressive, noncompliant, destructive or disruptive.

Despite these methodological limitations this study reveals that the results are helpful and useful in measuring teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour in the classroom. It also became apparent that this study was not only measuring teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour in the classroom, but also shed light on the realities of teaching such as: how teachers perceive inclusive education and their fears and doubts relating to implementation, as well as the lack of support for learners with special educational needs.

Kauffman (1999: 247) says that placing learners with behavioural difficulties in special schools is not the answer and he contends that "special education can be no better than the instruction offered by teachers" in the mainstream. Teachers mentioned that the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a) advocates inclusive education for all and it is possible for them to conceptualise that environmental factors need to be modified in order to optimize the potential for the social and educational inclusion of learners with behavioural needs, but



how to do this remains a question. The majority of teachers expressed a need for regular and ongoing in-service training, opportunities to observe other teachers and access to behaviour management courses. These findings justify a call for concern because they as Kauffman (1999) suggest that teachers are not adequately equipped to meet the needs of their learners, and that teachers of learners with behavioural problems in their classes are not prepared to meet the challenging needs of their learners. Training in this area is a prime need of teachers and could reduce stress and troublesome behaviour between teachers and learners.

The following chapter concludes the research project and offers recommendations to enable teachers to make an attempt to understand their learners' behaviour in their classrooms. Finally, some guidelines are suggested for teachers to manage their learners' behaviour effectively within the classroom.



# CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 CONCLUSION

It could be concluded that the behavioural landscape of schools is changing. Learners at schools are different from those of a decade ago. Teachers are concerned about the growing inclusion of a number of learners with emotional and behavioural disabilities into the mainstream classrooms and the increasing level of diversity common in South African schools today. People in and out of education are expressing concerns regarding discipline and the role that the school and teachers play. Within this context, much concern is generated by the presumption of elevated behaviour problems in certain groups of learners (White, Algozzine, Audette, Marr & Ellis, 2001: 8).

According to the Crimson Education Consultants (2001) the classroom can be a miserable, frustrating or intimidating domain for any teacher if discipline is not present as a foundation for effective teaching and learning to take place. Exacerbating this feeling are the increasing class sizes found in many schools and the increased demands placed on teachers by Curriculum 2005 with Outcomes Based Education. Many teachers in the study claimed that if the size of the class were smaller, they would have been able to control their classes better by giving individual attention to those learners who need it.

Many teachers admitted that they don't know what to do anymore and they indicated that they were 'looking' for alternative approaches to discipline their learners in the absence of corporal punishment. What count in education is attitudes expressed in skills. The attitudes that count are known. In fact, teachers are tired of hearing about them again and again at every conference and convention. As one teacher put it, "I already know what a learner needs. I know it by heart. He needs to be accepted, supported, activated, and amused;



able to explore, experiment, and achieve. Damn it, he needs too much" (Ginott, 1975: 33).

The United Nations Children's Fund states that a child-friendly learning environment is a complex interplay between community, learners and parents, and involves empowering of all stakeholders in skills and values consistent with human rights and spiritual values (Lorgat, 2002: 2). Roll-Pettersson (2001: 43) suggests that different systems have different roles and tasks to fulfill even in regard to the same learner. Consequently, it is theoretically plausible that teachers working in different school systems will have different needs in regard to the same learner. Konzal and Dodd (2000) urge teachers to invite parents in as partners to not only assist in managing their children's behaviour, but at the same time to take responsibility for their children.

Maintaining appropriate classroom behaviour can be a complex and difficult task. This task becomes more stressful when it is exacerbated by big classes, abolishment of corporal punishment, lack of resources and job insecurities. Many classroom teachers feel that they do not have sufficient training to meet many of the challenges presented by learners with behavioural problems in their classes. Ginott (1975: 27) states, "I became aware that college failed to prepare me for my job. Teaching children takes at least as much skill as flying a jet. In college they taught us to drive a tractor, while telling us it was a jet. No wonder we crash every time we try to take off".

The group of Bonteheuwel teachers considered classroom management skills to be of major importance to them. This is further supported by studies reporting a rather superficial coverage of educational and psychological topics based on behaviour, discipline, rewards and punishment (Bibou-Nakou, *et al.*, 2000: 132). We are now faced with the question of how can psychological knowledge be adapted for teachers in such a way that they gain the capability of solving their problems in a personally responsible manner. Training in this area is a prime



need of current teachers and could reduce stress and troublesome behaviour between teachers and learners (Merrett & Wheldall, 1993).

Teachers work hard; children make demands and teachers have to respond endlessly. Some teachers, however, work too hard. They spend time and waste energy on battles that can be avoided, on skirmishes that can be skirted, and on wars that can be prevented. In each school there is a gigantic waste of human resources. Time and talent are devoured by needless conflicts and useless quarrels (Ginott, 1975: 49). Sprague, *et al.* (2001: 204) say that dealing with a number of learners with behavioural problems, puts a great demand on the skills and resources of school personnel. Burrige (2001: 17) purports that discouraged and angry learners can make their teachers feel frustrated and ineffective, so it is important for teachers to recognise what is happening, avoid reacting at an emotional level and use effective strategies for teaching troubled and troubling learners.

The provision of counselling services and the establishment of Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) in the school has long been a significant role for school psychologists. Vollmer and Northup (1996) say that many schools also have prereferral teams (TSTs) designed to help resolve behavioural and academic concerns and school psychologists are often called upon to consult with teachers regarding a variety of behavioural concerns. Wilson, Gutkin, Hagen and Oats, (1998) noted that teachers' resistance to consultation services and prereferral interventions remains a pressing concern. Myers and Holland (2000) postulate that although much has been written on the consultation process, the school psychology literature appears to be silent on how school psychologists choose interventions. It is possible that interventions are selected based merely on what is popular, customary, or personally favoured.

Patterns of practice in this service area could focus upon the activation of teachers' existing knowledge and problem-solving capacity. In addition,



reconstructing teachers' beliefs about misbehaviour problems and their corresponding actions in the problem situation could be worked out between school psychologists and teachers. Ginott (1975: 64) postulates that every teacher can become aware of attitudes that alienate, words that insult, and acts that hurt. To see the world through children's eyes, a teacher needs infinite emotional flexibility. The chronological distance and psychological chasm that separates children from adults can be bridged only by genuine empathy; the capacity to understand and to respond accurately to a child's needs. It is believed that our understanding of teacher reaction to classroom behaviours could be greatly improved through this assessment. It is essential to deal directly with teachers' beliefs about learner behaviour in modifying their educational and disciplinary strategies (Lovejoy, 1996).

Overall, this study can be regarded as an attempt to show the importance of integrating teachers' perceptions into classroom practice, and of delimiting the contexts in which these perceptions operate. This is founded on the belief that teachers need to be helped to appreciate and identify, for themselves, the range of causative factors underlying and maintaining problem behaviours and to increase their ability to develop new understanding and responses to classroom problems.

Proactive, whole school intervention programmes are considered best practice in addressing the challenge of maintaining discipline and managing behaviour (White, *et al.*, 2001: 3). LSCI is a promising whole school intervention programme designed to support the teachers, learners and parents in meeting the needs of these learners by establishing unified attitudes, expectations, correction procedures and team roles, as it is believed that behaviour and discipline are not only classroom issues. It impacts on the whole school. Classroom and school strategies should be congruent. These rules and regulations should apply equally to everybody in the class and school (Department of Education, 2001b: 13).



One of the interesting findings of this study is that, despite it being a common occurrence, 'community violence' was shown to have only a minor effect on children's behaviour in the classroom. The little bit of violence that the teachers still reported is far too much if one considers that we are in the process of establishing a tolerant and non-violent society, of which the school is only but a microcosm.

Our South African Constitution guarantees the right to human dignity, equality, freedom and security. By using physical and/or psychological means to 'discipline' or punish the learners, teachers take these rights away from the learners (Department of Education, 2001b: 4). In conclusion, we are to have a positive culture of learning and teaching in our schools where the environment is safe and conducive to effective teaching and learning.

## **6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.2.1 For Teachers**

#### **6.2.1.1 Be prepared for your class**

The first and probably the most difficult step is for the teacher to remove the blame from the 'uncaring learners' or the 'undisciplined class' and try to reflect on what he/she can do to improve unacceptable behaviour. This means thinking about and understanding the behaviour of learners; where they come from (background) and the factors causing the unacceptable behaviour and lack of discipline, and constructively and consistently seeking to address challenging issues. Any plan for successful discipline must provide the transition from external control to self-control (Crimson Education Consultants, 2001).

Make sure you, as the teacher, are well prepared for your learners and their challenges. This includes knowing your learners and their abilities well. Your preparation should centre, as far as possible, on their backgrounds, their interests and their abilities. Learners often become disruptive when they



encounter the work too difficult or too easy. Allow them to get involved in the learning process. This builds positive self-images for the learners and teachers, and makes the learner increasingly accountable for his/her own learning. Self-discipline is something that needs to be taught. Most people are not born with this quality. Teachers must set themselves up as self-disciplined role models for learners to follow. Remember, learners learn more from what you do (acceptable behaviour displayed) than from what you say (Crimson Education Consultants, 2001).

Schlozman (2001: 87) emphasises that teachers need to meet learners where they are. This does not mean condoning the inappropriate behaviour. Instead, teachers need to be aware of their learners' moods and empathise with their fears and feelings. An unempathic lesson, especially when learners genuinely feel that their lives are in danger or not worth living, will serve only to further impress upon learners that they must manage their terrible anxiety and intense emotions on their own. Helping learners reach just beyond their current level of functioning will create in the learner a sense of mastery and a heightened sense of well-being.

#### **6.2.1.2 Support your learners with their specific educational needs**

Never let your learners struggle with their emotions and behaviour alone. It is impossible to shield learners from constant outside environmental influences, but teachers must let learners know that they are safe and not alone with their fears and feelings. Many learners are overwhelmed with what is happening in their life space and their behaviour prevents them from interacting with their schoolwork. Teachers should directly address learners concerns about safety, assuring them of the security of the classroom. By being vigilant and empathic, teachers can make an enormous contribution to the well being of learners during difficult times. At a time when a sense of community is essential, the classroom can become a potent force for healing (Schlozman, 2001: 87-88). To support learners manifesting in unacceptable behaviour, teachers:



- Should be empowered to deal with behaviour problems themselves.
- Should not immediately assume a malicious intent.
- Should understand that the behaviour is usually a normal response to an aberrant environment.
- Should understand that the behaviour has a communicative intent.
- Should understand that the behaviour is a result of unmet needs.
- Should not try to eradicate the behaviour, instead, they should try and understand the behaviour.

### **6.2.1.3 Effective classroom strategies**

Teachers should attach appropriate consequences to unacceptable behaviour and also make sure that action (disciplinary measure) is carried out promptly. Realising that actions (unacceptable behaviour) have consequences, is one of the most important steps towards self-discipline. It is generally accepted that, while punishment removes or subverts unwanted unacceptable behaviour, positive reinforcement changes behaviour. Most learners will respond to the consistent use of one of the following techniques (Bowling & Rogers, 2001: 80; Jensen, 2001: 33; Merritt, 2001: 70; Vacca, 2001: 31):

- Begin early to build a classroom community (family). Treat every learner as a worthy member of that community. Give all the learners the same opportunities and treat them fairly.
- Project a positive attitude of acceptance, respect and warmth. Be patient and take time to build a trusting relationship with the learner. Make eye contact with a calm and 'straight' face.
- Highlight the learner's strengths, both publicly and to the learner. Use these strengths constructive in situations where the learner would want to resort to unacceptable behaviour.
- Provide frequent feedback and individual attention. Compliment learners who are displaying acceptable behaviour. Never draw comparisons, for example: 'I wish John was as good as Peter!'



- Don't let your learners struggle with their emotions alone. Stand close to the uncontained, restless or misbehaving learner. The teacher could even place a gentle hand on the learner's shoulder and expect positive improvement. Sometimes a learner withdraws at first, but if we stay close and continue the attention, the learner's feelings come out.
- Establish routines so that learners can predict coming events. Give advanced warning of activity changes by posting an outline of the day's activities on the board. Respond to individual learners and show or tell them what is expected of them.
- Stop talking when learners speak while you are speaking. Wait until the noisy offenders are silent (the general rule is that only one person may speak at a time). The teacher can time this period and claim this time back during interval (break) or after school.
- Good behaviour should be reinforced positively. If learners receive rewards for good behaviour and punishment for bad behaviour, they will change their behaviour in order to qualify for the rewards.
- Speak to learners who exhibit unacceptable behaviour and explain how their behaviour interferes with your ability to teach and with the rest of the class to learn effectively. Make them understand that you need their cooperation to make the learning experience an exciting one.
- Teach social concepts directly and concretely, and make sure that you also teach generalisations.
- Break lessons down into smaller units to avoid overwhelming the less capable learners and prevent it manifesting in unacceptable behaviour.

#### **6.2.1.4 The role of the school's code of conduct and classroom rules**

The school's code of conduct and the classroom ground rules (a few simple rules), drawn up in consultation with the learners, play an important role in promoting acceptable behaviour that enhances the effective management of teaching and learning. The code of conduct or the ground rules should include:

- A clear indication of what is seen as unacceptable wrongful behaviour.



- Categorising of behaviour offences in terms of severity.
- Clear and simple methods for dealing with each category of offence (decided in consultation with all stakeholders: the learners, teachers, parents, governing body and the school management team).

Jensen (2001: 33) says that identical language to that being used in the classroom should be used to remind learners of the code of conduct and the classroom ground rules. Teachers also need to take cognisance of the following:

- Do not bend the rules. A consistent approach by everyone on the team is crucial.
- Focus on specific behaviours. Instead of insisting on a general standard of good behaviour, make a rule, e.g. all learners keep their hands to themselves (no stealing). When learners have learned to follow that rule, focus on another specific behaviour.
- Set priorities for which behaviours you wish to address first.
- Don't give ultimatums. Give choices, presenting options where both outcomes are acceptable: 'Would you rather finish this today or tomorrow?'
- Provide encouragement, just as you would do with all learners. Encourage learners to think positively about themselves and to view their problems as opportunities to generate new options for their lives.
- Help learners recognise multiple interpretations of any event and support them to choose the most empowering one.

#### **6.2.1.5 The role of functional behaviour assessment**

It is clear from the results of this study that a strong need exists for promoting a functional approach to assessing and treating challenging behaviours in the classroom. Training teachers about functional behaviour assessment could make behavioural assessment procedures more efficient and cost-effective, because teachers would be less in need of consultation services (Myers & Holland, 2000). Rogers (1997) provides many examples to demonstrate how the quality of language used by a teacher can make a fundamental difference to the



culture of behaviour of the classroom. At one extreme, teachers may convey that learners are partners in creating a calm and respectful environment, or at the other extreme, that there is no need to take responsibility because someone else will determine what happens to them. Rogers (1997) reminds teachers that the tone of voice, as well as body language, can be as important as words.

#### **6.2.1.6 Parents as partners in behaviour management**

Teachers should invite parents into their classrooms to assist with their children's behaviour management. Henderson and Berla (1994:1) and Boers (2002: 52) claim that when teachers work with parents to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. Other benefits to learners include: decreased truancy, improved attitudes of learners to their studies, improved behaviour in the classroom and a decrease in the drop-out rate (Van Wyk, 2001: 117). Many studies stress that these benefits occur irrespective of the socio-economic class to which the family belongs (Haberman, 1992: 33). The South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996: 14) acknowledges the right of parents to be involved in school governance. The function of school governing bodies in South Africa amongst others is to adopt a code of conduct for learners. In July 1999 the minister of education announced a national mobilization plan for education and training in South Africa under the slogan 'Tirisano', that is, working together (Department of Education, 1999: 6). Point three of the nine-point programme includes the role of parents on the governing body. In another move, the Department of Education has published the Norms and Standards for Educators, in which seven roles for educators have been set out (RSA, 2000: 12 – 25). The role entitled: Community, citizenship and pastoral role, includes the following, "... the educator will develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons ...based on a critical understanding of community and environmental issues" (RSA, 2000: 14).



## **6.2.2 For Educational Support Services**

### **6.2.2.1 EMDC**

Determining the best ways in which to meet the needs of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties presents a complex picture. Most behaviour problems exhibited by pupils can be catered for in the mainstream, provided teachers are supported in their efforts with in-service training and help from the Educational Support Centres (school clinics) and the Educational Management and Development Centres (EMDC). This help should enable them to identify pupils' needs and assess the forms of intervention that might be appropriate; as well as to help them evaluate and redevelop these interventions as this becomes necessary (Montgomery, 1989: 8). School psychologists, school social workers and counsellors, learning support advisors and consultants with special training can support teachers and learners in the school and can educate and inform parents about behaviour problems/difficulties. With the proper and effective intervention, the experience of the learner with behavioural problems/difficulties, and those who interact with that learner, can be a positive one.

### **6.2.2.2 School Psychologists**

School psychologists are in a key role to provide continuing education training to teachers on a group or individual basis. Such training may occur through traditional in-service didactic forms or through consultation services. For training in functional assessment to be effective, however, Watson and Robinson (1996) advise that more than didactic instruction in the rationale will be necessary. Direct (supervised) training emphasising a competency-based approach will be advantageous. Unfortunately, it appears as if little research has been done with regard to training teachers in functional assessment. Much needs to be learned with regard to how the knowledge of functional assessment would affect the behaviour of teachers and others using the procedures (Horner, 1994). Future research will need to address efficient and effective ways to help teachers become more skilled in handling challenging behaviours.



### **6.2.3 For Educationists**

The South African minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, in his 2002 budget speech said “the society to which we aspire, will not come about through belief alone... It is a society we seek to create... We have a responsibility for remaining activists for a more compassionate society. A society that is intolerant of discrimination” (Coleman, 2002: 4). This bold call needs to result in imaginative interventions that go way beyond tinkering with ineffective behaviour management programmes that are fundamentally flawed if teachers don't understand their learners and the context of their behaviour.

### **6.2.4 For Policy Makers**

Internal learner related factors were also particularly common in this study, suggesting that it relates as much to the broad issues of the environment, unemployment, poverty, violence and provision of services as it does to the more conventional notion of individual special educational needs. This in no way denies the urgency of making appropriate provision for children who experience special needs so that they can be included in the mainstream system (Department of Education, 1997). What this study does illustrate, however, is that poverty, with its inter-related social issues affecting school attendance, needs to be addressed as a priority if the very notion of ‘inclusion’ is to have meaning in South African society.

Future studies should focus on interpreting availability of and need for resources and support on a much larger population of mainstream teachers who have learners with behavioural difficulties and emotional needs. Follow-up interviews with teachers are needed in order to understand the type, nature and scope of their needs.

Information gathered through surveys and interviews will hopefully serve to improve content in teacher education and in-service training for teachers serving learners with various needs, including behavioural needs, in the mainstream and



to offer learners a disciplined environment (White, *et al.*, 2001: 4) conducive to effective teaching and learning.

### **6.2.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion then, what is good and fair for any learner in a democracy, ultimately depends on doing what is good and fair for all or, as John Dewey (1990) puts it, that all parents and the community should want, what the best and wisest parent wants for his child. No parent or teacher should accept less for any child than they would demand for their own. Teachers should bear fully in mind that we are all part of this democratic state, and democracy supremely implies tolerance and understanding. Therefore, teachers are expected to understand the child against his/her background, as well as his/her behaviour within a particular context and the function thereof. This will enable the teacher to help the learner with a specific (behavioural) need effectively and appropriately within an inclusive setting.



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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE 2**

# **Teachers' understanding of their learners' Behaviour in the classroom**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- ◆ Thank you for participating in this research project.
- ◆ The researcher is a M.Ed. (Psychology) student at the University of Stellenbosch.
- ◆ The researcher will look at teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour at two primary schools in Bonteheuwel.
- ◆ Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from this project at any time.
- ◆ Anonymity is assured (please do not write your name on the questionnaire).
- ◆ Confidentiality will be maintained within the limits of the research process.
- ◆ The researcher will feed the results back to the school.

## **INSTRUCTIONS**

- ◆ Please read each question carefully.
- ◆ Answer all questions.
- ◆ Give an honest response to each question.
- ◆ Remember not to write your name on the questionnaire.



**APPENDIX 1** (continues)**Teachers' understanding of their learners' Behaviour****Please tick**

GENDER	<input type="checkbox"/> male	<input type="checkbox"/> female		
MARITAL STATUS	<input type="checkbox"/> single	<input type="checkbox"/> married	<input type="checkbox"/> separated	<input type="checkbox"/> divorced
AGE GROUP	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-29	<input type="checkbox"/> 30-39	<input type="checkbox"/> 40-49	<input type="checkbox"/> 50 & above
HOME LANGUAGE	<input type="checkbox"/> Afrikaans	<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Afrikaans/English	

**Fill in**

YEARS of teaching experience _____
SCHOOL _____

How many learners are in your class? _____
How many learners exhibit problematic behaviours in your class? _____

**Please tick**

1. Do you have a good understanding of your learners'

◆ Values	yes / no
◆ Motivation	yes / no
◆ Self/hobbies	yes / no
◆ Social background	yes / no

**2. Please CIRCLE the relevant behaviours that are problematic to you in your classroom:**

**Disruptive** (off-task: playing-the-clown/ disturbing others) / **Aggressive** / **Disobedient** / **Destructive** / **Noncompliant** / **Escape** (avoiding a particular task/person/setting) / **Attention from peers** (drawing attention to themselves by obtaining physical contact/laughs from peers) / **Tangible** (obtaining physical objects like toys/money) / **Attention-seeking from teacher** behaviour.

Any other:.....

**Please complete**

3. Why do you think learners misbehave in a classroom?

.....  
.....

4. What do you do when you have concerns about learners' behaviour?

.....  
.....

5. What is your view on corporal punishment?

.....  
.....

6. How do you deal with/respond to unacceptable behaviour in your class?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



7. What is the result after action was taken dealing with unacceptable behaviour?

.....

.....

8. Why do you think the unacceptable behaviour sometimes continue after some learners have been punished?

.....

.....

9. Why do you think some learners lack discipline?

.....

.....

**Please tick**

10. Do you ever think of the cause of a learner's behaviour?	Yes	No
11. Do you think a learner's behaviour is telling you something?	Yes	No
12. Do you know what the learner's behaviour is trying to communicate?	Yes	No
13. Do you encourage learners to talk about their behaviour?	Yes	No
14. Do you have something positive to communicate to every learner in your class?	Yes	No
15. Have you ever visited a learner's home?	Yes	No

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE 3**

# **Teachers' understanding of their learners' Behaviour in the classroom**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- ◆ Thank you for participating in this research project.
- ◆ The researcher is a M.Ed. (Psychology) student at the University of Stellenbosch.
- ◆ The researcher will look at teachers' understanding of their learners' behaviour at two primary schools in Bonteheuwel.
- ◆ Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from this project at any time.
- ◆ Anonymity is assured (please do not write your name on the questionnaire).
- ◆ Confidentiality will be maintained within the limits of the research process.
- ◆ The researcher will feed the results back to the school.

## **INSTRUCTIONS**

- ◆ Please read each question carefully.
- ◆ Answer both questions.
- ◆ Give an honest response to each question.
- ◆ Remember not to write your name on the questionnaire.





## **APPENDIX 3**

# **FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE**

## **Themes to be clarified**

### **Factors / causes:**

Environment

### **Responses to inappropriate behaviour:**

Detention

Isolation (standing in a corner, etc.)

Send to the principal

Code of conduct

Shouting and scolding

Extra work

### **Effect of the responses on behaviour:**

Sometimes it helped and sometimes it didn't help

Temporary change

Permanent change

### **Why do teachers think learners lack discipline:**

Media

Parents don't care or take responsibility



**APPENDIX 4**  
**Neil-Owen E. de Waal**  
**M.Ed (Psychology) – Student**

**61 Riebeeck Street, GOODWOOD, 7460**

Phone: (H) 021-5918873 (W) 021-6383151/2 (Cell) 082-4411894 (Fax) 021-6379198

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**15 August 2001**

**Attention: Mr. P. Presence**

The Director: Curriculum Management (Research Section)  
Western Cape Education Department  
Private Bag 9114  
Cape Town  
8000  
Dear Sir

**Re: Research Proposal – Teachers' understanding of learners behaviour in the classroom**

I am currently employed by the Western Cape Education Department as a School Psychologist at the Athlone School Clinic (Central Metropole EMDC).

I am reading for the Masters Degree in Educational Psychology at the Stellenbosch University. One of the requirements is a research project in the study field of Educational Psychology, hence me writing to you. I would like permission to work in two of the Primary Schools in the Bonteheuwel area.

I am aware of the disruption such a project could cause in the school programme. I undertake to:

- not disrupt the functioning of the school during school hours
- explain to teachers that they are under no obligation to assist in this project
- make all the arrangements concerning this project myself
- carry all the financial expenses myself
- not hold the Western Cape Education Department responsible for anything that might happen to me at the schools whilst working on the project
- work in close collaboration with Mr. E. Hassen, Head of ELSSEN in the Central Metropole EMDC
- supply the Schools and the Department with a copy of the completed research project

I hope you will consider my request favourably.

Thank you.

Yours truly  
Neil-Owen de Waal

APPENDIX 5  
Responses to APPENDIX 1  
**Teachers' understanding of their  
learners' Behaviour**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Please tick**

GENDER	male=17%	female=83%		
MARITAL STATUS	single=20%	married=77%	separated	divorced=3%
AGE GROUP	20-29=6%	30-39=40%	40-49=34%	50 +=20%
HOME LANGUAGE	Afrikaans=20%	English=49%	Afr/Eng=31%	

**Fill in**

YEARS of teaching experience : <i>from 1 to 40 years</i>
SCHOOL : <i>n/a</i>

How many learners are in your class? <i>24 to 52</i>
How many learners exhibit problematic behaviours in your class? <i>range</i>

**Please tick**

2. Do you have a good understanding of your learners'

◆ Values	34% yes / 66% no
◆ Motivation	54% yes / 46% no
◆ Self/hobbies	46% yes / 54% no
◆ Social background	34% yes / 66% no



## 2. Please CIRCLE the relevant behaviours that are problematic to you in your classroom:

<b>Disruptive</b> (off-task: playing-the-clown/ disturbing others)	= 31	89%
<b>Aggressive</b> .....	= 17	49%
<b>Disobedient</b> .....	= 15	43%
<b>Destructive</b> .....	= 4	11%
<b>Noncompliant</b> .....	= 4	11%
<b>Escape</b> (avoiding a particular task/person/setting) .....	= 4	11%
<b>Attention from peers</b> (drawing attention to themselves by obtaining physical contact/laughs from peers) .....	= 18	51%
<b>Tangible</b> (obtaining physical objects like toys/money)..	= 2	6%
<b>Attention-seeking from teacher</b> behaviour.....	= 20	57%
Any other: <b>Attitude of learners</b> .....	= 1	3%

### Please complete

#### 3. Why do you think learners misbehave in a classroom?

Don't understand work. (2)

Sometimes they are bored.

Hyperactive.

Lack of concentration.

Problems at home. (3)

Socio-economics / Poverty. (4)

Social background. (2)

Unemployment.

Social background - no morals and values.

Bad values and principles.

Social problems.

Omgewing / Environment. (4)

Children can't deal with what they are feeling.

Lack of personal motivation.

Absence (missing) of one or both parents.

Single parents. (2)

Lack of parental control.

Parents fault.  
They were not taught.

Disciplinary problems.  
Not being disciplined at home.  
Not disciplined at home. (2)  
No discipline at home.  
Lack of discipline at home.  
Lack of discipline.  
Undisciplined.  
No structured discipline is given.

Rude.  
Sometimes just rude.  
Just plain rude.  
Naughtiness.  
Naughty. (2)

Not enough attention at home.  
Seeking attention which they do not get at home.  
They look for attention, because they don't get enough at home.  
Lack of attention at home.  
They are looking for attention.  
Attention seeking.  
Seek/ing attention. (4)  
*Soek aandag.*  
They are looking for love, because they don't get it at home.

#### **4. What do you do when you have concerns about learners' behaviour?**

Firstly speak.  
Speak/talk to learner/him or her. (6)  
I speak to them. (2)  
Speak about 'right' behaviour.  
Speak to learner and repeat class rules.

Scold.  
Reprimand. (2)

Stay for detention. (2)  
Keep them in during interval.

Separate from rest.  
Chuck them out.  
Chase out of classroom.  
Time out.



Apply code of conduct.

Assess learner's work.

Negotiate with child/class.  
Deal with it myself.

Ignore them.

Meetings with parents and child.

*Praat met hom/haar en ouers/* speak to learner and parent. (2)

Call in parents. (9)

If no improvement, call in the parents.

Speak/talk to parents. (5)

Contact/notify/inform parents. (5)

I approach parents. (2)

I contact parents to discuss the environment at home.

Tell/inform the principal/manager. (2)

Call the principal in or send to the office.

Inform the TST and together we work out strategies.

Reassure them that they are special.

##### **5. What is your view on corporal punishment?**

Must be implemented. (6)

Must be implemented under certain circumstances.

They should bring it back/need to be brought back/*bring dit terug*. (8)

It wasn't all bad. It should not have been taken away, but better supervised.

Corporal punishment should be allowed, but with conditions as to how.

Controlled punishment should be used as a deterrent.

Corporal punishment is necessary. I am a mother and will not kill, but discipline.

Sometimes it is needed just to discipline them.

*Teruggebring word om dissipline te handhaaf.*

Yes, within limits.

Necessary

Good – it's when it is abused, then I totally don't agree with it.

I was punished at school and it made me a better person. Nothing wrong.

At school we were punished, why can't they be punished?

We will have better behaved children.

Not acceptable to me to practice. I am not willing to implement it and try to have the parents to punish them within limits. I use alternative punishment strategies.

It is illegal.  
 Banning of it was a good decision.  
 No, we cannot go back to colonialism.  
 Discipline becomes a problem because the child is given a hiding in love.  
 Brings/breeds violence. (2)  
 It may worsen the situation.

**6. How do you deal with/respond to unacceptable behaviour in your class?**

Address class.  
 Speak to them a number of times.  
 Speak to learners in a strict manner.  
 Speak / talk / *praat* to the learner/child/him or her. (5)  
 Talk to them. (2)  
 Talk about the repercussions of bad behaviour.  
 Have a pep talk about manners and behaviour.  
 Negotiate with the learner.  
 Speak to learner, then to peers and then to parents.

Detention/*detensie*. (12)  
 Send them to detention.  
 Address learner in class and report to detention.  
 Detention in class.  
 Keep them in during intervals/take away an interval. (3)

Punish/punishment. (2)  
 I reprimand them. (2)  
 I reprimand them and then discuss the consequences of their actions and why it is unacceptable.  
 Put a stop to it.  
 Taking away privileges.

Minor chores around school and in class.  
 Do some tasks they don't like.  
 Do alternative work.  
 Extra work.

Time out.  
 Put them in a corner on his/her knees.  
 Send child to a corner. After 4 children, others are sent out -only 4 corners  
 Send out of class.  
 Isolate.

Call in parents/*ouers word ingeroep*. (4)  
 Write a letter to his/her parents.



Speak to parents. (2)

Notify/contact/approach parents. (3)

If all else fail, call in parents.

I approach parents: I teach and parents must discipline.

Send them to principal/office. (4)

*Identifiseer probleme en gee aandag aan die probleme.*

Find out why the child behaved in that manner (private).

Try to work one-on-one with learners.

## **7. What is the result after action was taken dealing with unacceptable behaviour**

Sometimes there is an improvement.

Normally they try and behave, because they are embarrassed.

Normally it takes a while of talking before behaviour improves.

Better.

*Soms help dit, ander kere bly dit dieselfde.*

Sometimes they cool down, sometimes no effect.

The behaviour stops for a while and has no effect on some.

Child sometimes tries to change.

Learner subdue for short period.

They are only quiet for a time.

Quiet for few minutes and continues with misbehaviour.

Only listens for a short period (a few minutes). (2)

Child behaves just for a period of time.

The behaviour improves for a short time.

(Behaviour) stops for a (short) while/period then starts/resumes again. (5)

Still continues after a few minutes.

It shows positive response for a while especially if parents are persistent.

Temporary improvement – not a big difference.

Effective for a short while.

Problems lay dormant for a while.

Only last for a short span of time.

For about 5 minutes the child will “look” sad, after that they are back to “normal”.

There are learners who simply carry on with being problematic.

No change – child continues with unacceptable behaviour.

Learners tend to continue with their behaviour.

Daar is geen “back-up” tuis om ondersteuning te gee.

Continues to misbehave.

Repeat misbehaviour.

Ignoring the problems.

It doesn't help.  
 Learner ignores it, little effect.  
 Child ignores it. No effect whatsoever.

**8. Why do you think the unacceptable behaviour sometimes continue after some learners have been punished?**

Taunting the **teacher**.  
 Seeking for teacher's attention.  
 Attention seeking learners demand the teacher's attention all the time.  
 He just disobeys the teacher.

It comes from home: children need love and understanding.  
*Leerders se houding teenoor ouers.*  
 Abuse at home.  
 Culture at home.  
**Parents** are not interested in their children.  
 No communication at home.  
 Inconsistency of parents. They don't always sustain.  
 The parents were not stern/strict enough in their punishment.  
 Parents don't carry out punishment at home.

**Environment** plays a role.  
*Omgewing.*  
 Because of home environment.  
 It's just their way of life.  
 They don't have resources / equipment.

**Child** tries to be noticed.  
 Disrupt other learners.  
 Needs the attention – thrives on it.  
 He wants attention. (2)  
 He had the attention and needs more.

Child may have **psychological problems**.  
 Child's personality.  
 Child feels degraded.  
 He is confused.  
 Stubborn.  
 Doesn't want to listen/learners just don't want to listen. (2)  
 Just naughty.  
 Sometimes just rude/*ombeskof*. (2)  
*Ongehoorsaam.*  
 He is undisciplined. (2)  
 No sense of discipline.  
 Lack of respect.



Learners know their **rights**.

They want to do as they wish.

Knows that he can get away with it.

They know you can't hit them very hard so they do it again.

Learners are use to such **punishment**, nothing new to them.

Learners are used to being punished in that way.

Used to punishment at home and it is just one of those things – I can go on...

*Hulle is nie bang vir die straf nie.*

No respect/regard for **authority**. (4)

Authority becomes a problem for the child.

Do not know why.

## 9. Why do you think some learners lack discipline?

### Parents

No parental control.

Parents are afraid of their children.

Single parenthood.

Parents don't have skills to raise a child.

Lack of understanding.

Parents don't understand discipline.

Spoilt

Not reprimanded at home.

They do not get disciplined at home. (6)

Lack of discipline at home. (4)

They don't get taught (discipline) at home / word nie tuis aangeleer nie. (5)

Parents not interested. (2)

Parents are not doing anything.

Parents not interested in progress of learner.

Lack of structure and parents not ensuring that learners have what is needed at school.

Parents don't (really) care. (5)

Parents are no example.

Parents are not disciplined.

No sense of right and wrong at home.

Children are allowed to do as they please.

Parents are just too busy: working (long hours) (2)

drinking

drugs

*Geen ondersteuning tuis.*

(Due to) **Environment** (5)

Society

Social background.  
Social / home problems. (6)

**Media:** violent movies and TV

They know their **rights**.  
No regard for **authority**.  
Plain rude / just rude. (2)

**Please tick**

	Yes	No
10. Do you ever think of the cause of a learner's behaviour?	35 <b>100%</b>	0 0%
11. Do you think a learner's behaviour is telling you something?	35 <b>100%</b>	0 0%
12. Do you know what the learner's behaviour is trying to communicate?	15 43%	20 <b>57%</b>
13. Do you encourage learners to talk about their behaviour?	34 <b>97%</b>	1 3%
14. Do you have something positive to communicate to every learner in your class?	28 <b>80%</b>	7 20%
15. Have you ever visited a learner's home?	21 <b>60%</b>	14 40%



## APPENDIX 6

## Responses to APPENDIX 2

**Teachers' understanding of their learners' Behaviour**

**Please describe behaviour of learners that bothers you on a daily basis.**

***Disruptive (13)***

Off-task: playing (2), talking (5), laughing (1)

Disturbs others (2)

Shouting (*geluide*) at peers (while lesson is in progress). (6)

Walking around / rondloop. (8)

Cannot sit still for too long.

***Tangible***

Stealing / taking things that do not belong to them. (7)

***Attention from peers (4)***

Wants to be the centre of attraction.

Always wants to be noticed. (2)

Seeking attention. (4)

***Attention from teacher (5)***

Complaining

***Disobedient (4)***

Refuse to speak softer.

Refuse to listen and obey instructions.(5)

Lack of respect. (3)

*Terug praat.*

***Aggressive (4)***

Fighting (with peers). (20)

Children who are mean to others.

Swearing / abusive language (2)

*Manier van aanspreek.*

***Other***

Not interested in schoolwork / lack of motivation / lack of concern. (4)

Telling lies. (2)

Run away from school.

**How do you respond to the behaviour?****Talk** / speak to learners / *praat met hom*. (17)**Isolate** on mat.

I put them in a corner for ½ hour.

Put out / time out. (2)

**Reprimand**. (5)

Shout at them.

Act firmly.

I always expect an answer.

Punishment – smack the person back.

Ground him.

Scold him.

(Send them) **Detention** / *detensie*. (14)

Keep them in during interval / break. (2)

Give extra work during intervals and after school.

Stay in class with them during long break.

Give them **extra homework**.

Keep them (the child) busy. (2)

Let them do things they don't like.

Let them clean the classroom / chores in class and around school. (2)

Chores after hours / keep after school. (2)

Send them to **principal** / office. (6)

Speak to/ inform the principal. (2)

Call **parents** in / speak to parents / *praat met ouers*. (14)

Inform parents / write a letter to parents. (2)

Encourage parents.

Parents must take responsibility.

**Positive Assistance**

Speak to colleagues.

I seek professional (psychologist) help. (2)

*Hulpverlening en probleemaanspreking* / see how I can help them. (2)

Report to TST

Motivate learners.

Discuss the class rules and learners feelings if others misbehave.

Try to move them closer to me.



## APPENDIX 7

### Transcription of Focus Group Interview

#### School A

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for availing yourself for this session. Remember the last time, I told you I'd hope to come back again. There are just a few things that I'd like to clarify with you. Some of the questionnaires were answered, but there were few uncertainties, and what I am basically doing now in this group is to clear out things. If there is any other point that you feel you need to mention you are more than welcome to do so. Afrikaans mag gepraat word. Ons gaan dit in altwee tale doen. En as jy voel jy wil Afrikaans en Engels sommer mix, dit is fine. All right? Goed mense. Ons het gekyk na die faktore. Ons het gekyk na die gedragsprobleme, the behaviour problems themselves and I think you quite adequately defined your different problems. They spoke about disruptive behaviour, they spoke about teacher attention behaviour, learner attention behaviour. That was quite clear.

A few uncertainties came out when we looked at the reasons, the causes, and the **factors** for inappropriate behaviour. Parents were mentioned and quite clear answers were given, but the **environment**, die omgewing was ook genoem, en met omgewing was ek nie heeltemal seker wat bedoel was nie. Kan u miskien vir my 'n bietjie meer inligting gee. As u nou dink onderwysers het genoem, omgewing. Wat dink u het hulle bedoel met omgewing?

*Well, for me environment means that it's **gangsterism**. Children are exposed to **violence**, and then they bring it back into the classroom. They see it happening in the road and they come and try it out in the playground. And also environment, the people are living in overcrowded homes, and there is no space to move. The child becomes frustrated. Now he comes to school. He cannot take his frustration out at home because he is forced to be in this overcrowded set-up. Now he comes to*



*school and that is his way of getting rid of his frustration. That is how I feel.*

Would you say seeking attention is added to that... goes with that?

*I think so, because of the **overcrowdedness at home** and the amount of children that's in the house. They don't get the attention. You see, and when they come to school, that is their way of getting the teacher's attention by being disruptive.*

O.K. Thanks for that. You mentioned two things: you mentioned the overcrowdedness and you explained the child comes to school and manifest in that kind of behaviour. You also mentioned though, the violence, the gangsterism. You said he sees the **gangsterism** and then he comes to the playground, to school, and he engages in that. Why do you think he engages in violent behaviour then?

*You see, the child grows up with that and **he thinks that is the norm**. That is the way he must behave to be one of these... the guys.*

That explains it. O.K. Thanks very much. Any other comment on the environment. So you have mentioned the violence and the gangsterism and the overcrowdedness. Could there be anything else perhaps?

*I would say the families. The immediate family environment of the child... in which the child grows up. For example: The child may have older brothers who are gangsters in his own home set-up, and he doesn't have any **role models** or people to look up to. He might have a father or uncle who has a negative lifestyle pattern. He has no example to look up to, but he also sometimes... I think... when it comes to children, it seems that it is a form of safety to him when he mixes with other children. That strongly behaviour or that wanting to be like my father or my brother comes out very strongly amongst his peers sometimes.*



O.K. So you say that the lack of positive role models.

*Yes, positive role models.*

There are role models: the fathers and the brothers, but that's negative because they are gangsters already. And so if my role models engage in violence, then violence is O.K. You wanted to say...?

*'n Ander factor is. Hier is **nie genoeg fasiliteite** vir die kind nie... om hom besig te hou na skool nie. Hy is geforseer om in die straat te speel. Daar is nie parke, of soos die Multi-Purpose Centres of sulke goed vir hulle nie. So hulle is geforseer om in die straat te speel en dit is een van die redes.*

Goed juffrou. Nou hy is geforseer om in die straat te speel, maar hoe beïnvloed dit sy gedrag?

*Daar is g'n... hulle het nie **respek** vir mekaar nie. Die higher authorities... het hulle ook nie eers respek voor nie. Soos padveiligheid, en sulke goed. Die motors moet padgee vir hulle.*

O.K. So dis hoekom...

*Dit kom by respek in.*

Goed, so wanneer hulle dan skool toe kom, is hulle so gewoond... hulle luister net nie. O.K. goed.

*Hulle luister nie eers wanneer daar 'n motor aankom nie. Jy kan hoot en hulle gee nie eers pad nie.*

Goed dankie juffrou.

*Also the influence of the **drugs** and so on at home and also in the wider community. When a child gets to school, it's not foreign for him to stand and smoke around, you know, and it just snowballs after that, because they are exposed ... especially in this environment, to harsh drugs. So it*

*is not funny for them to grow up with that, and to start using it at a very very early age.*

How does that influence his behaviour? Does the teacher reprimand him and he brushes it off, or exactly how...?

*You see, it is not always easy to just point out those children, because they do it on the sly. They are very very cute when it comes to hiding their habits. When it comes to cigarettes, it's easier to smell out those children and to talk to them and to show them the negative side of it. But because it is influenced and it is enforced at home, it is very difficult to bring that child to see the other side of it. And the drugs... the child is taken or the child is... he must go and buy the drugs for the older people. So, in that sense it is very difficult to teach that child the wrong of what he is doing or of what he is being asked to do.*

Anything else? Otherwise we can go on to the next point. The next point was responses to inappropriate behaviour. There were punitive interventions as well as positive interventions, but the two things, the three things that stood out and weren't quite clear, were that teachers would send children to detention; teachers would send children to the principal, and the third thing was to isolate children. Putting children on the carpet alone, putting children in corners. So I would just like to go back to those three and deconstruct those a bit. **Detention:** What do you think the reasons would be for teachers to send children to detention? If I ask for the reasons, I am possibly looking at the benefits. What do teachers see as a benefit for sending children to detention, and maybe what would be the downside of sending children to detention?

*Well, I would say if you send a child to detention you are **withholding a privilege** from him of going home early... that is to go and play and be at home. Is that what you are looking for?*

Yes, that is the kind of thing I'm looking for...



*Ja, 'n kind hou nie daarvan as sy maats huistoe gaan en hy bly nog agter nie. Dit is 'n mate van 'n **straf**.*

O, 'n straf meganisme. All right. Is daar enige ander rede?

*And also, I think... also for me, the teacher should be positive in the sense that the teacher... It gives the teacher more **time to sit and help the child individually**. I mean, from a particular school we heard that detention takes place where children sit and for a whole hour doing absolutely nothing. They just have to sit there. I find this a complete waste of time, because that is where the teacher can use his energy that he can't take out in the class, because of the amount of children that he is teaching to help the individual ones with their problems in a one-on-one situation.*

That is very positive. So you say detention can be positive other than preventing him from going home early, so serving as a punishment. O.K. Any other reason maybe?

*Sometimes for the child to just sit quietly in the class, or in detention class. It may also be a way **to teach him** to not be disruptive. You know. Certain ways that they show in the class. To teach the child to not respond in that way and for example, now a days you find children... it is not funny for them to just get up and walk around in class. Right, without any clear instruction of what they wanted to do. They just want to go and talk and chat and fight on the other side.*

Isn't that also possible in your detention after school, because there are lots of children there, and there is one teacher supervising these children. Isn't the possibility there for the child to get up and walk around, rather than what you're intending is for him to sit and maybe do a bit of introspection?

*Then you must also not have too crowded... then discipline... fro detention classes, because we already have overcrowded classes during*

*the normal school day. So, you should limit detention classes... the size of it.*

Do you think your overcrowded classes contribute to behaviour problems?

*Definitely!*

*I agree.*

*Definitely.*

If you had fewer learners, how would this have helped?

*Because then you can focus on the individual child.*

Good. Thanks very much.

*Sorry, can I also just say something? With detention. Something else that can become positive is when we have talks and have it in the form of **storytelling**. You know, to bring out good morals and values and manners and self-discipline, and even to start a little **drama**... you know... acting out how you would relate to your parents and your friends and your family at home. I don't know?*

O.K. I can see how that can be positive. So what you are saying is that these children are not coming here to do homework, they are not coming here to sit and do nothing, but they are going to come here and they are going to learn.

Yes.

So your interaction now is going to have meaning. Yes. So you are going to make it meaningful and you're thinking of maybe storytelling. Yes. You're thinking of teaching the correct behaviours... Yes. And also maybe add drama in groups.

*That is what I have been doing when I have the detention. I think Mrs. R. was with me also one day, you know. Where you... and you really encourage them to improve their behaviour by reflecting on the stories.*



Right. Can you see if somebody puts down detention on the questionnaire, how confusing it is because then I don't know whether it is positive or whether it is negatively meant? But when you sit down here, you can actually see... you can then go into it. The other thing that came up quite often is: **teachers sending children to the principal**, and I was wondering why teachers would send children to the principal. Why do you think teachers would send...?

*Well, I don't know. I think... but I don't agree with it... but what I think teachers probably did or done, was because she thinks if the child did not want to listen to her, maybe to a **higher authority** and by sending the child to the principal maybe then the child will. Because normally... to the child... the principal, that person, is the top... he is the main or the head of the house.*

Right. You did say that you don't think... you don't agree with it, but do you think, for these teachers: do you think it helps them? Do you think the child's behaviour changes?

*I don't think so. No, I doubt it very much.*

O.K. A couple of you have said no. Why do you think it doesn't?

*Dit kan 'n bad reflection op die onderwyser wees want dan kan die hoof mos nou dink hoekom kan jy nie die kind discipline nie. Hoekom moet sy dan die kind discipline?*

Ek verstaan... ek verstaan wat u sê, maar soos juffrou gesê het... die juffrou voel sy wil anders doen né en sy kan nou nie meer nie, en sy hoop dat die higher authority kan nou hierdie kind probeer reg kry. So ja, wanneer ons kyk na... ek verstaan wat u sê... dat die hoof kan dink maar hoekom kan sy nie, maar hierdie juffrou het ook 'n rede gehad hoekom sy die kind gestuur het. Moontlik het sy gedink dat iemand anders se insigte moontlik hierdie kind help. So ja... maar ek wonder nog steeds hoe dit die kind kan help?



*So that the child can be referred. I mean, through the teacher. I am talking also in disagreement of sending the child to the principal. Reason being that I find it disempowering. As a teacher. The other children look at you and see that you can't handle him so you sending him out. The child also feels much better when he leaves the class and he is also scared because he is going to the principal. The **principal is going to tackle him**. But I mean... one thing positive is that the principal can maybe sit down and ... the teacher should come down with the child and spend some time and maybe have a chat and find out what the child lacks so to refer the child. The principal can start the intervention with the parents and call them in and say we have a problem after the third or fourth time this child definitely needs help.*

Ok. Again the opposite view. When I saw the 'send to the principal', I did see it as negative because sending to the principal... I did see it as higher authority kind of... a powerful person and children need to be scared of the principal and this cane-wagging principal. This is what came up in my mind, but again now the other side is saying maybe that you can come down to the principal and have like a little **case conference** and look at what the problem is and possible solutions to that. So again you could have positives and negatives again. Die ander enetjie is die een waar die onderwysers kinders **op die mat laat sit alleen** en dan sê die onderwysers ook wanneer die kind wil toilet toe gaan, dan moet die kind net daar bly, en dit is die een. Die ander een is om die kind in die **hoekie te laat staan** en te kyk... so gedraai te wees dat hy vas teen die muur kyk. Ek het net gewonder wat dink u dink die onderwyser moontlik hoe dit vir hulle kan help?

*Daar is 'n stukkie in die Bybel wat sê: Gaan na die mier (muur) en raak wys.*

*I think it is also a way of trying **to punish** the child by for example, story time. If the child was... I again... again I ... this is not what I agree to, but... I think what the teacher is trying to prove is that you will be punished*



*by not partaking in either story time or act, or whatever we are going out for P.E. and the child stays/remains in the class. So that is your form of punishment or go and stand in the corner and you won't partake in the story telling or whatever. I think that maybe... that is her way of...*

Do you think... do you think it benefits the child?

*I don't think so.*

Why do you think it doesn't benefit the child?

*I think it **just makes the child more frustrated and more angry** and he **can't wait for the next opportunity to give vent** to the frustration and anger.*

*I think it is also a form of **labeling** the child. And the child afterwards... he is going to feel that... he already feels **isolated**. Now the teacher is doing it in front of his other peers. It also... in a negative sense makes him powerful. It is going to get worse... it can either get worse, because... depending on his home background where he comes from. He is going to feel that this is the way to go. I mean... to give you an example: A few years back with our previous principal, two principals, we had a few kids who broke in here at the school and they were seen the Friday and then the Monday they were taken out at the assembly. Then the principal at the time said 'get the police here'. The police was here on the premises at the time and they took these children out, but because they took these children from the assembly, these children already felt grand. They felt cool, because they were now looked at because the police came to fetch them. And when they were sitting in the bakkie... but these were all tactics to scare the children... but it had the complete negative effect on those children, because they sat in the van in front of the school. So the children came past and they were laughing and they were giggling. And we, the teachers with the principal were standing in the foyer. I told the*



*principal, Mr. P at the time, ... you know... this thing... this was wrong. We thought they would be scared of the police.*

And the children saw them as heroes?

*...They were stigmatized and... by the teacher doing that with the child in her class she can create that type of negative role model within that child as well.*

Then teachers were asked what is the effect of these responses to inappropriate behaviour. Some said there was permanent change; some said there was no change; some said there was temporary change and some said sometimes it helped and sometimes it didn't help. And I'm just wondering for... especially for the **sometimes-it-helped and sometimes-it-didn't-help**. Why do you think interventions sometimes help and on other occasions it doesn't help?

*I think it's because people... they are **inconsistent** in what they are doing, and once you call in the parent, you must keep tags on that child and have a programme whereby he is represented all the time... to see what he is doing and what he is up to. It must be checked at all times, because if the child knows that that type of programme exist with that type of... he is being watched all the time. Not in a negative sense, but also in a positive sense where the child can be helped. As I said that most of the children seek attention all the time and by just coming out with a programme and say 'this is what I need to do' and leave it to the next week is not going to help. The inconsistency is where the teachers feel that it sometimes work and sometimes don't work, because we as teachers are inconsistent.*

So the inconsistency was mentioned now.

*And also... you know... when sometimes it helps... when it helps. I think you must **affirm** that child and you must **make him feel important**, and affirm him in front of his peers. And, I think that will help, because 'my teacher is affirming me now, so next... I will continue... because...' And*



*then the teacher must also go on affirming and pointing out that he is now behaving.*

And sometimes it doesn't help? What do you think what goes wrong there? Why doesn't it help sometimes?

*I think because the child **didn't get any recognition**... you know...and also sometimes it doesn't help... the child is so full of anger and frustration because of his environment and... you know...and he is being labeled: en niemand hou van my nie, en niemand lyk my nie, so vir wat moet ek vir my gedra?*

*Another thing is also because of **the amount of children in your class**. The **child is not always acknowledged** for something good. The sore ones always... you will always say this one did something bad, but then this one on the other side did something good for the day but because your class is so clustered and full you never acknowledge that child... for the good thing the child did for the day.*

So you're saying that teachers... because of big classes teachers tend to focus on the wrong doings.

*Yes. Never acknowledging good things.*

**Concentrating** more on disciplining all the time, instead of giving recognition.

All right. What you are saying is if you then moan and discipline the bad behaviour, somehow you should also recognise and confirm the good behaviours, and because of the big classes you don't have time to do that.

Do you think positive... punitive ways and positive ways could maybe result in sometimes-it-work and sometimes-it-doesn't work? Or do you think that is totally unrelated?

*Say that again.*

Do you think that positive... punitive ways where you punish children and positive ones where you affirm children... Do you think that maybe have an influence on children sometimes where children... it helps when you intervene and sometimes it doesn't help? I'm actually quite aware how I am confusing you. Let me put it this way. Do you think when teachers report sometimes-it-help, that they may be responding in a positive way; and when they report it didn't... it doesn't help may be it is punitive and that's why it's not helping?

*I would say because a child doesn't want to be punished really... you know... and I feel that part of a child's development and growth is to acknowledge, to confirm, **to love, to care**. A child thrives... for me a child thrives on that and **he doesn't get it at home**, so let the teacher give it... you know... and go from there. I know it is difficult, but...*

Teachers also say that after 'I have intervened or after I have disciplined, or after I have stepped in (it doesn't matter which way) but after I have intervened, there is temporary change. It helps for a short while then the child reverts back to his old behaviour'. Why is that?

*I think there it comes back to **not being consistent**. Acknowledgement, not being consistent with our... the discipline, the side effects, and telling the child what is wrong... continually saying it.*

Is that why it is **temporary**?

*Yes!*

*Ja.*

*Because **children**... they **forget**. Continuous new things come along and you try to develop the child in many areas. But then you lack in certain areas... so it takes consistency where you keep on reminding the child.*

*I think where our mistake also... where we make the mistake. **We want to see immediate change**. You see, if we discipline the child now, we*



*want to see that he behaves now, and sometimes we need to have the goal for a long time. I'm thinking of one of the ways that I thought of disciplining... was hugging this child, and that completely breaks him down... he starts crying. Now I haven't done it for a while and he reverted back to his naughty ways. So you don't want to have the child cry all the time and feeling small and bad, but on the other hand you also need to discipline... whichever way.*

***The child wants to feel that he benefits throughout the disciplining process,*** and we become impatient and also sometimes the lack of knowledge from the teacher for alternative of discipline... sometimes you start off but the child leads to another... the child needs something different... a different style... a different approach and sometimes we don't have that... patience to implement those things. So the child feels that he is pulled along... you know. Actually the child needs to see that he benefits all the time. The focus must be entirely on the child.

*And also... when we look at our situation... our special situation where we are (I am in this area for 26 years) and I have discovered that **parents...** they **don't have time for their children**. Parents don't feel it is necessary **to hug that child, to love the child,** to speak nicely to the child. Dit is net 'n geskellery en 'n vloekery, en 'n gaan soontoe... because they are unemployed and because it is overcrowded. So now when they come to school, why not give it to the child? I know sometimes you really... I think it helps for me in many ways.*

Then, the final issue was why do teachers think children lack discipline. And various factors were mentioned but the one that was not quite clear... people just mentioned the media. The **media** had an influence. What kind of media do you think have an influence and how does it have an influence?



*I'm talking specifically now about **television**. Nowadays... I'm not even talking about blue movies that you have to bring into the house. I'm talking about what is shown right there. Our children come back to the class and they only talk about what they saw last night. And it's nothing foreign to them anymore because they can explain to you in the finest detail how that man and that woman slept together. And, sometimes it is very embarrassing for you as an adult, but for the children it's funny, it's exciting, it makes them popular and they know something that they know they shouldn't be knowing at that stage yet. And then also...*

Do you think certain... do you think some of the learners in the class... when these stories are shared... do you think that other **learners are traumatised** in the process?

*I think some of them might be, because I'm now specifically speaking about my class. I have a **child in my class who was raped**. She is like promiscuous at this... at the moment because it doesn't matter what... she's wearing short skirts. Men are very very appealing. So in that sense... yes... for me. I feel... yes... it is not a good thing.*

Thank you. Any other forms of media.

*Also the **books**. The Cosmopolitan and the Hustler and those things... **very explicit**... and I mean... all the breast... everything is just so explicit. And they get all excited, because I mean...*

How does that, the excitement and being sexualized at a very young age... how does that influence the behaviour? The inappropriate behaviour.

*They bring it to class.*

*They go on and **expose themselves**. Some of them expose themselves in the class. Some of them... they **touch the others**. The girls touch the boys, or the boys touch the girls. Mostly boys touching the girls, but it*



*happens. And we are talking about grade fives. So its not as if it doesn't touch them... it doesn't affect them? It does!*

We've looked at television and books and we only concentrated on the sexuality issue. Are there any other issues that also affect the children?

*I think the **excessive watching of videos**. I asked my class the other day 'how many of you don't have a video machine'. I mean... I know for sure half of them...(it wasn't my class; it was Mrs. P's class) they didn't pay school fees. They all have video machines with about one exception to that... to the whole class. Which means it comes down to the point that it is something that they thrive on weekends. It is a mechanism where parents know where the child is. The child is in the house. He doesn't need to go out at night so they get him a video. The child is **exposed to violence all the time**. Watching **action movies** and he come here... I think it affect the child's behaviour. When he sees fighting in the streets, it **becomes like normal**... gang fights... Something switches off within the child about what is right and wrong. The child is programmed to this type of behaviour. They watch three to four movies a night on the weekend and it is nothing new.*

You're saying that sometimes they get programmed into not knowing what is right and wrong. Would you say then... that they're confronted with, serves as a model for resolving conflict?

*Yes, it can be.*

Juffrou wou iets gesê het.

*Ek wou net gesê het van die videos en die violence.*

O.K.

*Gister was daar 'n **movie op T.V**. Die **next dag in die klas** het die kinders ook so...*

Ek sien. So hulle bring tog die goed wat hulle by die huis sien... bring hulle na die skool toe.

*Ja, o ja.*

*Just one more thing. Again with this sex thing. I feel that our children at school are being exposed at too early an age to sex, because the nurses that come here... they show the children what a penis looks like, and they show them how to put on condoms. I feel that they should rather teach the child at this age to abstain and... that is not a part of the body that should get exposed at this tender age. High school is fine; because they are... you know... starting to develop in that direction. But here at primary school... grade one, two and three and four... No, no.*

*And they must also go on preaching abstinence right up to matric. That is what must happen.*

*Abstain... you know... until you are married, then you are allowed to do things like that. Without a wedding ring, tough... you don't... you just don't.*

Anything else perhaps people... that you feel I need to know that wasn't mentioned yet pertaining... about the questionnaire that you filled in as well as the process now? Anything else?

If not, I want to thank you. Thanks very much for your time and you will get a copy of the final project once it's completed. Thanks very much.



## APPENDIX 8

### Transcription of Focus Group Interview

#### School B

Good morning ladies. Thank you for availing yourself. This is a focus group session, and the only reason why I am here to clarify some of the uncertainties that came through on the questionnaires. I'm going to ask you four broad questions and then as you explain and things are unclear, I am going to ask to just zoom in. One of the questions on the questionnaire was: **Factors for children's inappropriate behaviour** and teachers mentioned **environment**. Now I didn't quite understand what they meant with environment. Can any of you explain to me, when teachers fill in environment... what exactly they mean? Afrikaans of Engels mense...dit maak nie saak nie.

***Broken homes.** They don't even see their mommy or their daddy. They live with their grandparents. They miss their parents. Some of them only see them maybe holidays or weekends. And the granny can't always fill that gap. And some of the **grannies can't even read or write**, so they can't help them with their schoolwork... so it is all frustration.*

How does frustration then cause the misbehaviour within the classroom?

*It is inevitable that they're never going to do the things they're supposed to do.*

You say... not doing things they supposed to do?

*Yes, whether it is homework or finding out or doing things they're supposed to bring back to classroom. I mean... there is no help there.*

O.K. Anything else people?

*Just... what the lady said. Grandmother is busy sometimes. She cannot look after all of them and that is where they escape. They go and play with the wrong friends. So they are easily influenced and with that...*



You were going to say?

*What is the norm for Bonteheuwel? The children's behaviour... I take the example from the people next door to me. The only language those children hear, is **swearing**. So it's the norm for them to then come to school and use the same language in the classroom. It is also just like... they get sworn at all the time and chased away all the time, because the less of them there is in the house the better it is going to be for grandma... and then grandma can go and sleep. So now when they get to school, that is the same thing they see here again. They must be **disruptive** because that is how they live. They will steal and take whatever they can because that's how they survive at home. So the environment really... they are only displaying what is normal for them.*

So they showing you in class what is actually happening within the environment?

*That's right.*

Broken homes and grannies looking after the children, and granny not wanting the children to look after... How does this contribute to lack of attention?

*Some of the children don't even have places to sleep. They do not have a bed. I know of children who sleeping under a table, in a bath... now you tell me how that child is going to pay attention the next day. The child never even had a decent meal. There is no way that child wants to listen to my nonsense. That child is finding a place... and a lot of children will fall asleep in the class at their desks. Never mind what is happening.*

Looking for teachers' attention: how does the lack of attention at home contribute to children seeking teachers' attention?

*Die kind wat **by die huis nie aandag kry nie**... dit is dieselfde kind wat vir jou in die klaskamer die probleem gaan skep, waar hy dan jou aandag graag wil hê deur verskillende dinge te doen. Of dit nou is dat hy iemand*



*se brood gaan neem, of hy nou iemand... daai spesifieke kind is miskien nie eers honger nie, maar daai kind gaan nou die kind se brood neem, want dit was die eerste ding wat hy raakgesien het vanoggend... Oor hy vir **juffrou** heel moontlik kan sê dat: 'nie dat ek honger is nie, maar ek gaan nou jou aandag kry'. Hy gaan nou vir my iets sê en so... dit is sy manier of haar manier om vir jou dan te sê dat ek wil **aandag** hê want ek kry dit nie by die huis nie.*

En of dit nou negatiewe aandag is of positiewe aandag... ek soek vir aandag.

*Presies...*

*Een seun... Ek was besig hier onder en toe kom ek daarbo, en toe is hy besig om die kind te wurg. Die kind sit doodstil en sy werk doen. Ek het dit gesien. Niemand het dit vir my gesê nie. En dis die tipe kind wat... sy ma is weer getroud. Sy ma het probleme met hom. Hy slaap uit. Sy ma sê hy is laat saans uit by die games-house. **Sy kan niks met hom doen nie.** Sy het nog 'n dogter, maar sy het 'n kind van die ander man, en sy pa is in die gevangenis... you see. En die ma het vir my gesê sy gaan hom uit die skool uithaal en hom op 'n ander plek sit... laat hy by sy ouma kan gaan bly... sy pa se ma. Maar wat hy in die klas doen, meneer... jy kan nie byhou nie. **Hy soek net aandag** en hy vat ander kinders se goed. Hy loop rond. Die een ouma het al vir my gebel en gesê: 'don't let my child sit next to... this child; because he hits her... he does anything just to get my attention. But I caught him choking the poor who was trying to do his work... you see.*

*Now the other thing is the tolerance level of children is very low. That is also attention seeking... you know. And the other thing is... many **children are spoilt**, because if they say they want it, their parents will go and buy it... it doesn't matter how expensive it is. So that is also attention*

*seeking. They want to try their tantrums at home... they want to try it here. That is attention seeking.*

All right...

*Ek wil net sê... op daai punt... dis ook nie net altyd die kinders wat probleme het by die huis... wat nie aandag kry nie. Jy kry daai kind wat geweldig aandag kry by die huis, en tog is hy 'n probleem in die klas... en dis daardie ouers wat eintlik kom... na jou toe en vir jou sê: **juffrou... ek weet nie wat om te doen met die kind meer nie.** Hy of sy wil nie luister nie'. Nou as die ouers dit vir jou sê, dan wat... ons probeer so baie by die skool... wat moet ek... wat behoort ek dan te doen? So dis nie altyd net die kind wat swaarkry... want baie van daardie kinders... veral waar dit swaar gaan... het ek nogal nie baie probleme mee nie. Dis daai kind wat eintlik opgevoed is by die huis. Hy kom met maniere skool toe. Hy is meer gedissiplineerd as die kinders wat alles kry by die huis. En dis ook somtyds eintlik meer 'n groter probleem met daai kind as daardie kind wat in die bad slaap of onder die tafel ... of so.*

*And the other thing is also that **they are not taught at home** how to behave... how to be disciplined... so it is difficult when they come to school. The norms and the value systems are different. What you teach them here, they can't apply at home because it is a total different environment.*

We're talking about not being taught at home. Do you think the parents have the skills to teach the children?

*I don't think so... I don't think so.*

*Ek sê altyd onse kinders het nie **konsentrasievermoë** nie en dit is nogal vir my rêrig 'n probleem. Hulle kan nie langer as 5 minute sit en luister na 'n mens... en 5 minute is baie min. As hulle in graad 2 kom... graad 3...*



*moet hulle nou al vir 10 minute na jou kan luister of 15 minute. Maar 15 minute... as jy langer as daai 5 minute aangaan, dan mors jy jou tyd. En ek dink dit maak vir ons ook gefrustreerd waar jy dan begin skree... 'wat het ek dan nou gedoen? ... met wie het ek gepraat?' Ons het nou pouse gepraat... en verduidelik, jy vra vrae, jy probeer om op hulle vlak te kom waar jy in hulle taal praat... om oor te dra nou. Maar aan die einde van daai 5 minute of daai 10 minute dan kyk hulle vir jou... en jy probeer nou vrae vra om te kyk of hulle geluister het... konsentrasie.*

Maar wat dink juffrou veroorsaak daai gebrek aan konsentrasie?

*Daar is **nie tyd by die huis vir kommunikasie** tussen ouer en kind nie. Televisie speel eintlik ook 'n baie belangrike rol daar. Kinders sit heeldag voor die televisie as hulle nie buite speel nie. Jy sien eintlik rêrig meer kinders speel buite nie. As hy by die huis gekom het tussen twee tot vyf... of wat ever... dan is die soaps na daai... dan is dit to sesuur toe. So dis voor die kassie heeltyd.*

Kan ek vir juffrou challenge?

O.K.

As hy dan heeldag televisie kyk en hy moet konsentreer om daai soapie te volg, dan moet hy mos kan konsentreer.

*Hy... hy is... dis luister, en sien, en kyk. So dit is selective concentration... yes... Hy kan daai storie vir jou oorvertel ook... daai televisie program of programme wat hy gekyk het kan hy vir jou lekker oorvertel more. Dit is al wat hulle kan doen, maar as dit by werk kom, waar die kind nou moet luister en dink eintlik... denkvermoë is bietjie underdeveloped.*

*And also... I think... **if things are happening at home they sit and think about it.** They're not here... yes... (comments about sex follow about a child who told the other children about a sex story).*

*Dit heg aan by wat Mrs. A gesê het.*

***That was on her mind... what she saw the morning... Yes.***

*En wat die goed aanwakker, is jy nie altyd bewus van nie. Want het ek miskien die word seks gebruik, dan kan jy nog sê... maar heel moontlik het dit iets by die kind aangewakker, maar... ons het miskien wiskunde gedoen voor die en daar was nie van: 'daar was soveel mense by die sekspartytjie dat dit nou die kind in daai rigting in kan stuur... so 'n mens weet nie of hulle wil nie... of 'n mens... **'ek het vanoggend heel moontlik daai prentjie** en nou kom ek in die klaskamer en ek kan dit nie uit my gedagtes uitkry nie, en nou dink ek daaraan en vertel die ander kinders wat het gebeur',*

Dink juffrou daai goed wat gebeur... wat nie eintlik in die kind se ondervindingsveld nog is nie... dink juffrou die kind is getraumatiseer daardeur?

*Heel moontlik ja... ja... ja... want wat... "Ek het al gehoor of ek het miskien by die televisie gesien ook... en nou sien ek die werklike ding hier voor my. So wat gaan nou hier om my aan? Is dit 'n gewoonte? Gaan dit nou elke keer gebeur?' Want volgens hierdie kind was die man besig om haar ma te skud... but... maar sy het ook geweet dat... maar dit was nie 'n geskuddery nie... dit was seks wat hulle gehad het. So... 'but he was shaking my mommy'... understand? So... what the child at that moment or... what the child is thinking, you can't really say. En ek glo dit is **traumaties vir die kind.** Dit moet wees.*



Onderwysers het verskillende intervensie strategieë genoem en... some of them were shouting and scolding at children; code of conduct... I let the children rewrite the code of conduct; sending the child to detention came up strongly... 24% of teachers, and extra work. So I'm going to be looking at these four things individually.

**Shouting** at children: How do you think this helps?

*It doesn't help at all. It just really doesn't help at all, because that child shuts down immediately and the child is wondering: 'is a smack going to follow? Is she going to kick me?' Because what normally happens at home when my mommy **shouts**, she follows it up with a smack. So that child will shut down immediately and just stay in a panic state. But what it does do... is... gives me a chance to air my vocal cords really so that it swells. And then there are some other children that will sit down and be quiet quickly. It might not even work for that same one, but the child will just stand there and shivering in his boots... like which... is a very bad idea (ons wil dit nie graag doen nie, dit kom net uit...), but we are going to do it anyway. Because it brings the rest of them to order. It is not particularly aimed at that one child.*

Juffrou sê... juffrou wil dit nie graag doen nie, maar dit kom. Wanneer dit kom... voel u dit help... of vir u of die kind?

***Dit help vir my op daardie oomblik en vir die kind ook... al is dit net vir 'n paar minute... vir 15 minute en die kind werk... jy kan of aangaan met jou werk, of die kind kan aangaan met die werk.***

Goed. Detensie: sending the child to detention... what does the teacher aim to achieve by sending the child to detention?

***Detensie*** vir my was maar altyd net 'n... omdat dit gedoen moet word. Omdat dit by die skool besluit was, maar daai kind kom... hulle sê nou wel die kind moet iets saambring om te kom doen daar, maar as jy die kind



*alleen vir daai tyd in die klas gaan hê met... onder toesig van 'n onderwyser of onderwyseres dan dink ek daai kind gaan voel daai dag dat: 'ek word nou rêrig gestraf vir dit wat ek gedoen het, want nou kan ek nie met my maats huistoe gaan nie. Ek verloor uit op my speelyd... op my televisie tyd... of wat ook al ek na skool doen... word ek nou weerhou om te doen'. Maar terwyl die kind in daai klas sit met nog ander kinders en die onderwyser sit daar voor en sy is besig om haar boeke te merk, of wat ook al... glo ek nie **dit dien rêrig 'n doel nie**. Maar as jy die kind eenkant neem en hy sit alleen daar met die onderwyser, dan voel daai kind... of die juffrou nou haar boeke gaan merk... maar daai kind voel nou ek is alleen hier. 'Ek kan nou gespeel het. Ek kan nou op die sokkerveld besig gewees... maar kyk wat moet ek nou doen. Ek gaan miskien volgende keer twee keer dink voor ek dit weer gaan doen', maar saamgegooi in 'n klas... dit werk nie.*

*Dit het **wel vir my gehelp**, maar dan moet dit nie na skool wees nie. Ek het hulle gedurende pouses ingehou vir 'n week. 'Jy gaan nie speel pouses nie. Jy werk in die klas in'. Daarna het hulle hul huiswerk gedoen. Vir my het dit definitief gehelp.*

So... wil juffrou sê nadat hulle gestraf was, het daai kinders nie weer...

*Hulle Huiswerk was gereeld gedoen... veral die wie se huiswerk nie gedoen was nie... en vir pouses baklei.*

Ekstra werk... ek sien onderwyser het ook genoem hulle gee die kind ekstra werk. Wat dink u hoe kan ekstra werk die kind help... veral na juffrou se opmerking nou... waar juffrou sê 'die kind doen nie sy werk nie'. Hoe gaan ekstra werk dan nou vir die kind help?

*I've got a problem with **extra work**. In that... the child will just eventually dislike that subject... which ever it is. If you making a child write out or doing an essay or... you just cause that child to hate that ... and why is he*



*doing it? Is he doing it because he wants to... no it's forced upon him, and anything that you force upon anybody? I mean... force me to do something and I'll show you. **You just develop hate.***

Enige iemand met enige ander insig oor ekstra werk? Goed dan gaan ons na die volgende ene. Some teachers said they let the child rewrite the **code of conduct...** and I was wondering how does this help?

*Om die kind goed oor te laat skryf... dit werk nie, want die kind gaan net skryf omdat hy dit moet skryf. **Ek weet nie of dit werklik help nie.** As ek dink toe ek op skool was.... moes ek skryf: 'Ek moet myself gedra...' ...'n ... jy moes dit 100 keer oorskryf, en jy het dit net geskryf omdat jy dit moes skrywe, en nie eers met gevoel nie. Jy het geskryf: Ek....ek....ek.... moet... moet... moet... en dit het nie gehelp nie. Ek dink nie dit sal nou help nie.*

*I **tried it last term...** I don't really hit my children. They didn't like it, but there was absolute silence because they wanted to get done. But they would rather prefer getting a hiding, than writing out.*

So for you it was a way of not giving in to what they would prefer... a hiding. So I'd rather let you then rewrite it. So it was also a form of punishment.

*Yes... **for me it worked** because they simply hated it.*

It seems as if all these strategies are **punitive strategies**: shouting at the child... code of conduct... detention... extra work. You want to get at the child... you want to punish the child and what is interesting is that we are complaining about behaviour... and if teachers complain about behaviour... somehow you have this picture in your mind that they would like to eliminate that behaviour... and maybe get the child to do something else. But by punishing the child... this lady said... you not going to get the child what you want him to do... so somehow it seems



as if we are perpetuating or we are still involved in punitive ways even though we know it is not helping us.

*But we are just trying. We are... we really don't know what to do. You can't hit them... I mean... corporal punishment is out. So what else can we do... what else can we do? Those are the things that we are trying and even more... by sending them out of the classroom... I mean... that is wrong, but just to get rid of them. They don't want to listen. **You send them to the office**... the principal is just talking to them... send them back... they come back to the classroom laugh-laugh. Why do I send my child to the office? I can't help them... I try it... try doing this, doing that... then send the child to the office and he comes back and **nothing happens**. So what else do I do? I am going to **shout** at him now. I am going to chase him out of my classroom. I'm going to send him to **detention**. I don't know.*

On that point... I'd like to now come back to the effect then... so because we don't know what to do anymore, we then engage in these kinds of strategies... punitive ones. What is the effect? Do we find that children... that there is **definite** behavioural **changes** and the child is now a star pupil in my class or do we find that there is absolutely **no improvement**. What did you find?

*Look... some children... **1,2 or 3**... they change... but the rest... **no permanent change**. And the other thing with the little ones is that you sometimes give them a star... then you will have the whole class for the day... I mean... they all want a star... doing what they must do... whatever. The star helps a lot.*

*I mean... sometimes you forget about stars and you forget about the smiley faces and... but that is what they like.*

Would you say when you reward them with the stars and the smiley faces that the **change is permanent**?



No. I didn't keep on with it... you know... for a month or two months to see if it is a permanent change. But for that **2 or 3 days** or even a week... there was a definite **change** in your class. In the whole classroom situation.

So what you have just described to me is that maybe **inconsistency** contributes to maybe not permanent change.

Yes. The reward system... **you've got to keep at it** all the time. it is not a permanent change. You reward the child today, so today there is good behaviour. Tomorrow... good behaviour. You have to keep on. If you drop it, why don't you see the same results? There is no reward... we already know there is no reward today... so... but if you introduce the reward just 5 minutes later, everybody again.

You can't just work for rewards all the time also... you see... So... I mean... We can try for say Friday... you can get the reward or whatever... a star. I didn't do it that way yet, but maybe... I don't know whether I will have the same results.

Why do you think after we have scolded, after we have caned, after we have sent them to detention, after we have done everything possible... that there is no change. What do you think causes that '**no change**'?

It is a negative situation. We show the children all the negatives. If we show the children the positive, we will get a positive reaction. But sometimes it just takes **too much effort**. It is quicker to shout and to say 'listen here... everybody listen quickly. Here is this beautiful book and if all behave yourselves... the one who behaves himself the best for this month then earns this book'.

So you saying punitive intervention is not going to bring **permanent change**. But if you do... if you have some positive interventions... the child will behave positively.

*Positively for a **short while**... still not permanent.*

*Die **kinders weet** dat **ons hulle niks** kan **maak nie**. Dit is ook 'n groot probleem, want jy kry die kleinspan wat sê: 'As juffrou my net gaan slaan, dan gaan ek my ma haal'. Want die ouers sê vir daai kind 'laat jou juffrou net aan jou slaan... dan gaan sy sien wat ek vir haar gaan maak'. En jy kry dit... toe die kind nou vir my gesê het... hy gaan sy ma... sy ouma haal om vir my te kom slaan... toe sê ek: 'jy kan jou ouma gaan haal want ek is nie bang vir haar nie... en jy kan jou ma en jou auntie gaan haal'... Hy het nou die vloekwoord gebruik, en ek het vir die kind net so gesê soos wat hy vir my gesê het, en ek wag nou nog vir die ma en die ouma en so aan. Maar dit is soos hy nou vir my probeer sê het: 'ek kan maak soos ek wil en juffrou kan vir my niks maak nie, want my ma gaan na juffrou toe kom en sy gaan vir juffrou slaan'. Dit is een van die maniere wat ek nie die kind kan dissiplineer nie.*

Vind julle die kinders ken hulle regte?

***Miskien nie hulle regte nie**, maar hulle weet 'juffrou kan nie aan my raak nie. Ek kan dit maak en ek kan dat maak... en my ma gaan sê en hulle kan polisie toe gaan'.*

*Dit is **al reg** wat hulle ken. They know their right, but they don't accept responsibility.*

*You know... because of unemployment... everybody is poor and they always looking for money. And they think that: 'if we get a claim against this teacher at the school, we are going to get some money...' Oh yes!*



So there are also ulterior motives... Yes... Exploiting it? Yes.

*I'm going to be very honest. I also blame the department for this problem that we have. O.K. With the **big classes**... you can't really control the children... and also where their **rights** are concerned... which put us in a situation where the parents really don't have **no respect** for teachers nowadays... (Oh yes...), and that is what it boils down to... So parents they really feel: 'teachers can't hit you'... so that type of thing and the child comes with an attitude... they have attitudes. I... blame them... they don't have a vision. Whatever they have been trying to do with this rationalization and things like that... they didn't see what's going to happen. If they are going to tell me they work with strategies, then I'd like to see it.*

Do you think the situation would be different... had your classes been **smaller**?

*Definitely! Definitely... **you can give individual attention**... you can immediately pick up where there is a problem, because you know exactly who the child is. Definitely.*

*As ek dink toe ek 'n kind was né... toe ek op skool was...en jy durf iets kom sê by die huis... (jy kan nie... you can't)... dan het jou ma vir jou 'n pakslae gegee en jy... jou... het skool toe geneem... en vir jou voor die meneer of die juffrou of die prinsipaal self weer 'n pakslae gegee en dan weet jy voor die vader dat jy nie verkeerd was nie... maar dit het nie van my 'n slegter persoon gemaak nie, maar dit het vir my geleer om my onderwysers te respekteer, my mede leerlinge wat saam met my in die klas was... vir hulle te respekteer en die skoolreëls, en wat ook al daarmee gepaard gaan te respekteer. Maar nou... soos die juffrou tereggesê het... is dat **die ouer sê nou vir die kind**: 'maar hulle mag nie dit aan jou doen nie... en hulle mag nie dit aan jou doen nie... en daarom kry jy die tipe kind wat rondbeweeg en probleme veroorsaak en gedragsprobleme vertoon. En jy... jou hande as onderwyser is*



vasgemaak want jy kan rêrig niks doen nie. As jy gaan probeer... iets omdat jy... en ek glo in die meerderheid van die onderwysers se harte doen hulle die ding omdat hulle **die kind wil help en red**, en nie omdat hulle wil... die kind **wil skaad vir die res van die kind se lewe nie**... ek sê die meerderheid. Daar is gevalle wat jy kry waar mense dinge doen om ander redes. Maar die meerderheid van ons doen 'n ding omdat ons daai spesifieke kind wil help en wil sien vorentoe gaan in die lewe.

*I also think it is a form of escape. They **don't like to take the responsibility** at home. Come the second week of the school holidays: 'O ek wens die skool kan net aangaan'. They **don't have time to look after** their own children.*

Parents... so... that brings us to the next point... because teachers said that... when they were asked factors why learners lack discipline... a lot of them stated '**parents don't really care**'. So that latches on to that one.

*Yes... and holidays is a burden ...absolute burden.*

So what you then implying... teachers... not teachers... **Parents don't take responsibility** for their children?

*No... no.*

Why is it so?

*Children...when I tell my children you go and behave yourself... and enjoy the holidays... go through all the rules... be careful and all that... then they tell me: 'but Miss, the holiday is not nice... it is boring'... you know. They tell me straight: '**Miss it is boring**'... even the weekend... when it is a long weekend... I say: 'have a nice weekend' ... 'same to you miss, but miss... we don't like long weekends'. Then I say: 'it is your own home... with your mother and your father there, and your granny... but they tell you it's boring at home.*



*Die feit dat ek met **10... 12 rapporte** gesit het... wat deur die vakansie by die skool agter gebly het... wat sê dit vir jou?... (Ja...)... en daar was nie eers 'n storie van eers die skoolgeld betaal en dan kry jy die rapport nie. Die mense het hulle rapporte gekry, maar tog het daar rapporte by die skool geslaap. Stel daai ouer rêrig belang? Graad 1 ... die kind het nou rêrig formele skool begin... waar... wat sê dit vir jou? Dit sê vir my verskriklik baie.*

*In grade 1 ... when a parent comes to see you and say: **'I don't know what to do with this child.** He don't want to come to school. You must please talk to him... (grade 1...) ... the child is seven years old... who is going to be talking to the child when the child is 10, 11 ... 12? A lot of the parents' reasons also... they have a lot on their plate... if you're **unemployed**... you wondering where that piece of bread is going to come from... what hope have you decently got to sit down with the child and decently explain to him that: 'this is how you have to behave boy'... when the child's stomach is empty and you know... isn't that the same way that parents rather chase the child out or swear at the child, because the parent is feeling too guilty knowing that that child is hungry. That child is looking at you for food.*

The parents also don't have the time to be bothered with trivial things like behaviour when 'I am to think about a roof over our heads...'

*...Or to find a picture of a horse... **good grief**... 'Do I now care about a horse when I don't have a piece of bread'. Looking at it that way... and also most **parents work**. Parents take any jobs these days. They work **night shift**. More and more women are starting to work night shift now. So **see to yourself**. Just like... get on and get what you can, because I'll bring home a piece of bread at the end of the week.*



*It is survival...*

Can you tell me more about survival?

*Everybody just want to survive and then... like... **working nightshift** and things like that... **at the expense of their children** and things like that. But they have to see that the children are fed... So they don't really have much **time to sit with the child** and spend quality time. There isn't that... also they don't even know there is such a thing. And I was listening one Sunday on the radio... that you get married... but... many have children... **parents are not taught how to rear that child**. It just automatically... And I think that is also the problem with the parents. They were not taught. It is a cycle that we all go through, but you **don't have the skills**. She is doing it her way and I am doing it my way, and we both think we are doing it right. I may be giving my child everything and... but that lady feels that I'm spoiling the child. But I can afford it, and things like that... Or I want to give the child the best because I didn't have what my child has. So we going all out now to give it to my child. Thinking it is the right way... ya.*

*Do you know how many children come to school for a **piece of bread**? ... talking about survival. What about on a Monday when the bread sometimes doesn't pitch? ... They actually wasted their time coming to school. Talking about lack of attention ... you concentrate... when you waiting on that bread to come down from the kitchen? So...*

*At 09-15 they ask me: 'teacher can I go and fetch the bread'. Then I have forgotten.*

*Last week we didn't have bread... the bread wasn't delivered and one girley came to me and she said: 'Miss my mommy asked if you could buy bread today, because I went to bed... we all went to bed without food'. So*



*I told all... them... **I know the family... I know their circumstances...** you better go... so that they can have bread tonight... the child can't go to bed without... the second night, you know. And, so... it is like that you see.*

O.K. ladies. I'm going to put my foot in here. I'm going to challenge you. When I listen to the reasons that you give me... and when I listen to the strategies and also the outcome, and the wonderful discussion that you people had... It seems as if you are fully aware of the atrocities outside. You are aware of the factors causing it. You're aware of how our punitive interventions aren't helping. And somehow this gives me... or I'm thinking that here I have a bunch of... a wonderful group of teachers who understand, YET... when I look at how you perpetuate the punitive strategies... **I'm wondering whether you really do understand the children?** How do you answer that?

*Make no mistake ... **we understand the children.** And a lot of things we're said... on the other hand there are a lot of things we're tried. We're tried reward systems... we still do it... like **when we have time.** We have taken children outside the class... and **stood and spoken to them nicely...** You haven't heard about the things of how we go out of our way to rectify that situation. Its just being honest... **shouting now and then,** but **you know when a child is really hurting.** You walk that extra mile because you really know inside what it feels like being that child. **You know each child and what the problem is. There is very little you can really do that is going to count and make it better.** So... **sometimes you also want to put your blinkers on and hide because you yourself can't really face that hurt.***

*We spoke to the (school) **psychologist** also about it... and what can we do. **We are asking for help.** And I mean... this is now for a long time that we are asking... **what else can we do besides what we are busy***



**doing right now?** *And there are children who... who will come to you, who trust you... who will talk to you... you know... you know the children.*

*You know a bit too much sometimes.*

*You really do. You did psychology... we didn't do that. We are just trying to help as best we can as teachers, and... but we go beyond that. **You call in the parents and then they just don't know what to do.** They can't even help you. You tell them to take the child for help and they don't even go. **Ons gee ook somtyds geld vir die ouers** om die kind net êrens by 'n kliniek of 'n dokter te kry in Athlone of... kliniek... of waar ever... net dat die kind kan hulp kry. Somtyds...doen ek 'n bietjie baie... doen ek ook dinge wat ek nie eers moes doen nie... **dan bel ek heentoe en daantoe...** wat nie eers op my... ek behoort dit nie te doen nie, maar ek wil hê daai kind moet nou gehelp word. **Ek kan nie wag nie...** wag tot more toe nie. Ek kan nie wag vir juffrou S of mevrou H nie, maar dit is dingetjies wat ons doen.*

*You find some parents will take advantage of you. (Ja...) For example, the child is ill and I take the child home. The mom will write a letter saying: 'if she isn't well again, just bring her home again'. They expect you to do it. (Yes... yes...)*

*En ek voel somtyds net dat van die ouers begin advantage te vat van jou. Die ander ding wat ek ook altyd sê ... die kinders... jy help hulle. Jy gee vir hulle elke dag daai stukkie brood. Jy gee vir hulle 'n potlood. Jy gee vir hulle 'n uitveër. Jy gee vir hulle dit en hulle groei so op... om the loaf. En hulle probeer nie eers self om 'n magazine êrens te kry vir more nie, 'want ek weet ek gaan more dit kry... daar gaan iets vir my wees'. Dit is die ander ding wat ook gebeur. Jy probeer so hard om hulle te help, maar hulle begin... om te loaf.*



*And even if you take the example of the bread hey... then some children who bring bread... they bring bread from home and then there are those who never bring. And then you just ask tomorrow you know... 'I think your mother is lazy. She can get up. If that one's mother can get up and make bread...' She knows he's getting a slice of bread... that's why... tomorrow they bring bread.*

*Daar is so baie dinge wat kan uitkom. Ons kan praat en praat en aangaan en so aan... en 'die een vat advantage'... die ander een weet jy rêrig het 'n probleem. Ons vat byvoorbeeld as jy civvies dra... op 'n Vrydag het ons... daai kind het nooit geld nie, maar Vrydags is hy uitgetof... maar ons sien daai kind... daar is nie skoolgeld nie... daar is nooit geld vir dit of geld vir dat nie. Maar kyk na die klere dan begin jy weer anders dink. Ons kan mos sien wanneer klere gekry is, maar dit is nuwe klere. Ek mean... dit is klein dingetjies, maar is al daardie dinge wat ons sien en weet maar ons is eintlik magteloos.*

*Maar dan is daar ouers ook... **moeders ook wat raadop is met hulle kinders...** Byvoorbeeld 'n seun in my klas het iets gedoen. Hy het 'n kind betas... daar en... by die huis. Daar is nou 'n saak teen hom. En die moeder het vir my gesê: 'Miss, **I don't know what to do.** I am going to send him away to Elsie's River so that he can live with his father's... his grandmother and his uncles, because they are all in the police force. But his father is now in jail. Now the mother has a problem because she has another man and they have a child already. Now... last... on Friday he didn't come to school. He bunked. We spoke to him... Mr. V spoke to him... the principal spoke to him... asked him where he was on Friday... there was another one and they walked to Vanguard Drive and sat on the bridge there. The whole day... it is dangerous there. This morning the principal spoke to him and he was performing again in class. You see...*

So... **that child is definitely a problem**... you know. So... now... maar die ma is raadop en die kind werk ook nie in die klas nie. Donderdag vra 'n juffrou vir hom... ek was besig hier onder... gaan sy in my klas in en die ander het geskryf, maar hy het gesit en kou. Sy vra vir hom: 'kou jy?' en hy sê vir haar nee, maar toe ek inkom... toe sit hy. Toe sê die kind vir my: 'Miss, the teacher asked him whether he was chewing and he said no, but see there... he is chewing'. So, I sent him next door to tell the teacher that he was chewing in the class. And **ever since that child came to the school... three years ago... he's been a problem** and now he is with me. Maar **die ma haarself weet nie wat om te doen met haar kind nie**.

So it seems also as if teachers' jobs are becoming more difficult, because **parents are abdicating their responsibilities**.

*Definitely.*

Ladies... thank you very much. Once this project had been completed you will get a copy of the project. Thank you very much.



## APPENDIX 9

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Western Cape Education Department

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7460

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL: TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNERS' BEHAVIOUR IN THE CLASSROOM**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, teachers and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, teachers, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. All research should be conducted after school as educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The investigation is to be conducted during September 2001.
6. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school, please contact F Wessels at the contact numbers above
7. No research will be allowed during the fourth school term.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal of the school where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the following primary schools: Arcadia and E.A Janari.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Research  
Western Cape Education Department  
Private Bag 9114  
CAPE TOWN  
8000

We wish you success in your research.  
Kind regards.

*F. Wessels*

PP ACTING HEAD: EDUCATION

DATE: 04/09/2001