

## Behavioural Manifestation of Discipline: A Case Study in Secondary Schools in Heidelberg Gauteng Province

Joyce Phikisile Dhlamini

School for Educational Leadership and Development, North-West University, South Africa  
Joyce.Dhlamini@nwu.ac.za

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### Abstract

*Learner behaviour has become a major problem in most secondary schools in South Africa. A new political dispensation in South Africa in 1994 brought drastic changes and challenges to the education system. The abolition of corporal punishment in 1996 necessitated a shift towards alternative discipline methods. The establishment of the South African School's Act 84 of 1996 (SASA), Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, new policies in the Department of Education, all brought uncertainty to most schools. This study has anchored the intuitionism theory as a template to discuss acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours in SA schools. Discipline is problematic to parents, teachers and learners in secondary schools in East Rand District. This paper investigated the problems and challenges emerging from indiscipline of learners and recommends ways in which parents and schools could collaboratively manage indiscipline in schools. The study explored policies, codes of conduct, and other documents relevant to discipline of learners. A qualitative research design was employed and data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Three focus group interviews with 81 respondents were engaged in the data collection. Finally recommendations were handed to the participating schools.*

**Keywords:** Learner discipline, behaviour, Code of Conduct, (SASA), policy, involvement.

### 1. Introduction and Background

Evidence is emerging that there are differences in behaviour between today's youth and those of ten years ago. The reason might be the development and transformation in the political system of the country. The establishment of the South African School's Act no 84 of 1996 (SASA), which highlighted the rights and the responsibilities of learners in school, and the introduction of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, the introduction of the new Department of Education policy, all brought uncertainty to educators, parents and learners. This transformation required a gradual change in the Department of Education, especially in schools, to ensure the proper maintenance of discipline (RSA, 1996a; RSA 1996b). Ndebula (2003) asserts that learners were becoming apathetic, impatient, self-centred, overwhelming and harder to motivate, thus resulting in disciplinary problems at schools.

De Beer (2012) reported in a survey of more than 1000 grade 10 learners in a school in Johannesburg. The most traumatic event witnessed was violence, followed by robbery and mugging and witnessing a family member being injured and killed. The survey showed that 43% of boys and 23% of girls had been robbed or mugged. The abuse of alcohol and drugs by learners has negatively impacted on school discipline. In May 2013, a fourteen year old school boy brutally killed four members of his family (Daily Sun news-paper, 28 May 2013). It is thus important to take note of conclusive findings of studies, particularly in South Africa, which have made it clear that violence in schools has an undesirable impact on discipline. Rosen (2005) defines discipline as training that develops self-control, character, orderliness or efficiency, strict control to enforce obedience, treatment that controls or punishes and a system of rules. It is interesting to note that the definitions of the term suggest that discipline can have quite different implications for schools. The component of the definition that relates to teaching seems much more positive than the components that include the negative expressions such as punishment and strict control.

In qualitative research enquiry based on the discipline of learners in Heidelberg secondary schools in the East Rand, Gauteng province, a problem stood out after focus groups interviews were conducted. The misconception of SASA (1996b) and other school policies by learners in many schools focusing on their rights whilst neglecting their responsibilities has contributed to the school indiscipline. Negligence and non-involvement from the side of the parents in as far as the school work and active participation in school programmes was concerned had a negative impact. Fragile family structure was discovered to have a negative impact in maintaining discipline. Certainly social habits such as courtesy, punctuality, proper language, and cleanliness should be learned and emphasised in the home and are not the

primary responsibility of the school (Rosen 2005). The fact of the matter is, however, that a great number of learners come to school without the so called social graces.

Educators lack motivation. There is a *laissez-faire* situation that prevails in schools due to lack of efficiency of the School Management Team (SMT). Teachers forget performing their contractual obligations of ensuring effective teaching and learning. The school is the most likely institution to fill the gap of appropriate training in social skills. The school disciplinarian has the responsibility of leadership in ensuring that all members of the school staff play a role in the reinforcement of appropriate disciplinary and behavioural habits (Reeve 2009). Poor academic performance in these secondary schools reflects a lack of discipline. Although there might be several contributory factors towards this, the high involvement of the Teachers' unions, who ultimately control the functioning of the schools, has a negative impact on positive discipline (Jankowski 2002).

## **2. Problem Statement**

A Medical Research Council survey of 2010 indicated that at least 9% of learners in that survey carried weapons such as guns, knives, pangas or sticks to school. About 15% of learners had been threatened or injured at school, of which 19% had been injured in fights and 40% reported to have been bullied (Rottcher 2006). There is an apparent link between a drop in the academic performance of learners in some secondary schools in Heidelberg and the salient observations made in the Medical Research Survey of 2010. Learners no longer respect their teachers. Are the parents working in collaboration with teachers in helping with the behaviour of their children?

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

Intuitionism theory has been engaged in this research. The intuitionism theory avers that there is a fundamental principle of right and wrong, and that there is authoritative virtue of self-evident truths. In school discipline, one can therefore speak of an act of wrong and right behaviour of learners based on the tenets of intuitionism. In this research it was decided to follow a combined approach that embraces tenets of intuitionism, a judicial conception of the principles of good or acceptable conduct and of contractarianism. Teachers and learners all have an intuitive understanding of what good or acceptable behaviour entails. Educators and learners work within a legal framework, (school policy) and educators, learners and parents are parties to a social contract. Based on the above, teachers, learners and parents have some understanding of what is morally good conduct (Smit 2004).

Every person is entitled to the fundamental human rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Everyone is also bound by them (Malherbe 2004). On the other hand, the SASA (RSA 1996b) outlines the learners' rights and responsibilities. Consequently as learners have rights, they are also bound to abide by their responsibilities. The implication for education is that teachers, learners and parents are entitled to the protection of and advantages offered by these rights. (Smit 2004). On the other hand, these rights are not meant to be separated from responsibilities because that results in behavioural problems of learners in secondary schools where this research was conducted. Learners lacked good moral behaviour and could not differentiate between what is good and what is bad.

Operational Education Management (OEM) in the Western Cape Education Department (2013) suggested that discipline is necessary for the functioning of a school. Indiscipline not only disrupts teaching and learning but can also endanger other learners and educators. School discipline has certain objectives. Amongst them it is to ensure safety of staff and learners (Gaustand 1998). Pretorius (2007) says that such safety might probably be lacking in many schools as there is evidence of violence in many schools. Ledwaba (2011:4) says that learners are killing each other at schools: they even kill educators. There is no more respect for each other. It is not any longer creating an environment conducive to learning and teaching in schools.

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) is accountable to the community, through the Minister for Education and Children's Services for managing learner behaviour in schools. They are also responsible for creating safe, orderly, productive and successful learning communities (DoE 2007). Potgieter (2005) asserts that good school discipline is an important feature of effective schools. Learners learn best in an orderly and safe environment. Discipline is therefore one of the most important management functions in a school that requires the principal, the teachers and parents to maintain order and proper discipline that allows for effective teaching and learning.

Section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that everyone has a right to basic education in the official language of his/her choice in public institutions (RSA 1996a). It is important for schools and educators to realise that they are entitled to limit the learner's right to education, should the conduct of the learner infringe upon the right to education of other learners. For such behaviour, the correct disciplinary measures have to be taken to discipline

such a learner.

This article focuses on problems of discipline that are faced by secondary schools in the East Rand, Gauteng, in South Africa. It endeavours to put forward recommendations in order to assist those secondary schools to maintain discipline. It is important that the schools compile a discipline policy that outlines the required behaviour in the school in line with the South African schools Act of 1996. In South Africa, directors, district directors, principals and school based staff, including teachers, are accountable to the Chief Executive, Department for Education and Children's Services, for implementing the School Discipline Policy (DECS 2007) The research conducted by the Department of Education indicates the importance of school's discipline policy that should be fairly and consistently applied by all educators in handling disruptive behaviour.

Social and physical environments play an integral part in providing guidance to behavioural patterns of learners in schools. Behaviour can be affected by socio-economic status, poverty situation and violence within the community, family composition, health status, and guidance and counselling. Greenberg, Weissberg, Utne O'Brien Zins, Fredericks & Resnik (2003) agree that a sense of belonging and connectedness has been identified as contributing to improved academic achievement. An unsafe environment at school is an indicator of disciplinary problems that schools are now facing. Some schools are faced with serious learner misconduct and educators have to deal with disruptive behaviour of learners Potgieter, Visser, van Der Bank, Mothatha & Squelch (2001) assert that good school discipline is an important feature of effective teaching and learning. Learners learn best in an orderly and safe environment. Discipline is therefore one of the most important management functions in a school that requires the principals and educators to maintain order and proper discipline at school for effective teaching and learning.

### 3.1 *The nature of discipline in schools*

According to Potgieter (2005) discipline implies control without which there would be anarchy and chaos and learning would not take place effectively. Therefore, the school has the responsibility of controlling its learners to ensure effective teaching and learning. With the help of the South African Schools Act of 1996, schools have to compile rules and regulations for the learners to be adopted by the School Governing Body as the Code of Conduct for the school. Schools should make discipline a priority, because no matter how effective the teacher or the teaching strategy is, without discipline, no effective learning will take place at that school (Department of Education 2000).

It has remained a challenge to many countries on how to provide the right kind and method of discipline in schools that will create a climate that is conducive for effective teaching and learning in schools. It might not be sufficient to look at the problem from the educator's angle, or looking at it from the learner's point of view only. Parents also play an integral part in maintaining discipline in schools. Subsequently, a collaborative effort of all stakeholders in education should be considered. Jankowski (2002) explains that before the implementation of any new curriculum, discipline in schools took some form of correction or punishment in response to errant behaviour. Learners sat in neat rows in their classrooms, while their educators stood in front of them, teaching. Learners were expected to respect their teachers and any form of disruptions were dealt with severely through corporal punishment.

Opposed to the above cited setting, the New Curriculum Statement (NCS) requires teachers to arrange the classroom setting in a manner which is conducive for learning. If the lesson requires group work, learners should sit in groups to allow participation in discussions. This arrangement varies according to the requirements of the lesson. According to the Department of Education (2001) transformation of the country and the new era in political development indicate that there is a need to change the perceptions of discipline in schools.

### 3.2 *Models of discipline*

Discipline refers to behaviour directed from within and not to compliance with demands made by others. Discipline does not require punishment as it is a behaviour that does not need to be motivated by fear and all the regimentation associated with most school procedures (Holdstock 2000). Educators who ensure good discipline at school are those who are guided by an explicit approach to teaching and who use specific strategies that fit the approach. They are the guiding model, which includes **(TIRO) Trust, Intention, Respect and Optimism** (Purkey and Straham 1999). This model is viewed as necessary for maintaining discipline because it brings cohesion between teachers and learners. Teachers who apply such a guiding education model demonstrate their trust in learners, by consistently providing opportunities for them to make decisions and create guideline for monitoring their own behaviour.

**TIRO** can assist to brighten the teachers' darkest moments of handling ill-disciplined learners, and make it all worthwhile. Ideally, the teacher experiences minimum disciplinary problems in the school, because they work together in

trust and respect with the learners (Purkey and Straham 1999:9). With reference to this model, consistency in purpose and direction is important even when it is difficult to do so and to treat learners as they could be, not just as they are.

**Respect** is another strategy which is manifested by the educator in everything she/he does, including respect for oneself and others, personally and professionally. Educators need to constantly encourage learners to view themselves as **valuable, able, and responsible** members of the community. Consequently, learners discover the importance of behaving well at school (Holdstock 2000).

#### 4. Research Method

A qualitative research design was used to collect data for this study. This study used interview schedules with open ended questions that allow probing to enable respondents to be more relaxed in answering questions on the discipline of learners in their schools (Leedy & Ormrod 2010; De Vos 2011). Qualitative data was collected from three secondary schools in Heidelberg, East Rand.

##### 4.1 Population and sample

The population included all three (N=3) secondary schools in Heidelberg, in Gauteng province South Africa. The findings are therefore valid to these secondary schools in the East Rand. The population for this article comprises (N=103) educators, (N=3400) learners and thirty six (N=36) School Governing Body members from three secondary schools. Therefore, a sample for this article was constituted as follows:

*Biographical data of learners*

Variables	School A	School B	School C
Gender	Males 9	Males 9	Males 9
	Females 9	Females 9	Females 9
Age	9 = 15 -16 years	9 = 15 - 16 years	9 = 15 - 16 years
	9 = 17 - 18 years	9 = 17 - 17 years	9 = 17 - 18 years
Grade	10 = 09	10 = 09	10 = 09
	11 = 09	11 = 09	11 = 09
	12 = 09	12 =09	12 09

There were three principals (N=03), one from each secondary school, nine (N=9) experienced educators, three (N=3) from each secondary school making a total of (N=12). There were fifty-four learners (N=54), eighteen (N=18) from each secondary school including members of the Representative Council of Learners (RCLs). Fifteen (N=15) parents, SGBs five from each secondary school. The sample gave a total of 81 respondents. There were two focus groups of learners per school that were conducted. Each group had nine respondents. Three focus groups of educators, one in a school comprising the principal and five educators. Lastly, three focus groups of parents, with five parents in a group. All interviews were conducted in each of the secondary school.

##### 4.2 Interviews

Interview schedule was used to guide the interviewer on questions that were relevant to the research on discipline of learners in the secondary schools. Such a schedule was used to ensure that all relevant topics covered during interviews (De Vos 2011). The interview allowed the researcher to examine fundamental questions about the way discipline was maintained in the three secondary schools. Interviews for educators and the principal were conducted in the principals' office, during the scheduled time in all three schools. Particular attention was paid to data bearing on the question of the discipline of learners in secondary schools in Heidelberg, Gauteng province, South Africa.

##### 4.3 Focus group interviews

Focus group interview was used to collect data from all respondents. There were nine focus groups, three from each school that were conducted. These focus groups were conducted in the respondents' school including the parents. Semi-structured method was employed. During each process, the interview guide was used to develop the discussion among the respondents. This method of interviewing accommodated a minimum number of respondents (Creswell 2012).

A brief set of field notes during the session as validation of the taped comments was made. Respondents were informed about the recording device during the interview session. Key sites were also recorded during these sessions (White 2005). The same questions were asked in all three schools. Additional probing questions were phrased carefully so as not to be leading, thereby invalidating data, and were based on remarks made by the respondents. To ensure maximum participation, respondents were allowed to discuss issues in question with each other. Holloway and Wheeler (2000) point out that, focus groups are characterised by the interaction between participants from which the researcher discovers how they feel about a specific issue

## 5. Findings and Discussions

Verbatim transcription of views and information gleaned from documents, books and articles about discipline of learners in schools were used to analyse data for this article.

### 5.1 *The general behaviour of learners.*

- Educators observed problems of recurring late coming of learners to school which affected teaching time .The timetable was not fully adhered to.
- The political status of South Africa led to a radical transformation within the department of Education and this paradigm shift had an impact on the control system of learners in schools. This led to the establishment of the SASA Act of 1996 which was not comprehensively understood by learners, teachers as well as parents.
- Learners were bunking lessons, and were staying outside their classes, making a lot of disruptive noise that would disturb other classes during their learning.
- The social background of learners, moral values and norms of the community of Heidelberg does not motivate, support, and promote good behaviour of learners.
- Substance abuse by learners had a major influence on the discipline challenges of learners in the classroom; some of them stayed outside their classrooms and refused to do their work
- Neatness of the school and cleanliness of their classrooms were a big problem as other classrooms were dirty.

### 5.2 *The school rules, policies and code of conduct*

- Non-implementation of the school code of conduct in some schools was a problem. In one school, the school code of conduct does not exist, although according to SASA it is compulsory for each school to draft its own school policy from the guidelines provided by DoE. Its absence raised problems for the learners to know their rights and responsibilities as well as school rules.
- Absence of alternative measures regarding corporal punishment which teachers could use as a source of discipline for learners when need arises.
- Difficulty and negligence of teachers to implement suggestions for disciplinary procedures as stipulated in circular 74 of 2007 and notice 2591 of 2001.
- Learners who do not wear their school uniform were giving teachers problems because they could not distinguish between learners and gangsters that unlawfully enter school premises. The area had a problem of gangsterism.

### 5.3 *Factors that influence discipline and rights of learners*

- Poverty has stricken many families in Heidelberg, Gauteng, especially in the township. A majority of learners go to school on empty stomachs and they experience difficulty in concentrating in class, and they play truancy.
- There are families that are headed by young learners as their parents are deceased. These learners were tired at school because of the parental responsibilities that they performed every day.
- Teachers were faced with disrespectful learners who would not listen to them and sometimes refused to do their school and home work. The lack of moral development of learners from home had an impact in discipline.
- There was evidence of a laissez-faire atmosphere in some schools; some learners do what they want, and there was no action taken against them. Some teachers do not cooperate with the principal, the SMT, and the



SGB an indication of the lack of teamwork in the schools.

- High rate of pregnancy in the schools was a problem because some teachers and other learners could not cope with pregnant girls. These girls were frequently absent from school and did not want to cooperate with others.

#### 5.4 *The effects of discipline in these schools*

- Some teachers come to school without any lesson prepared, and secondary school learners would observe that and complain. Some teachers arrived late in class and some completely missed lessons. They also failed to react to ill-disciplined learners or condoned miscreant behaviour.
- Some schools were not properly and safely secured. There was no proper fencing and in some instances the school fence had holes where gangsters and hooligans would come through and disturb the school at any time.
- Gangsterism was a big issue in two schools. Some learners are involved in gangs in the township, and they brought their gang issues into the schools which resulted in 'clashes amongst the learners and subsequent disruption in the school. This observation was supported by the Medical Research Council survey which indicated that at least 9% of learners in that survey carried weapons such as guns, knives, pangas or sticks to school. Other related incidents related to threats, physical injuries and bullying. Violence has taken a scene in one of the schools and has resulted in learners fighting each other. Burglary and stealing of valuable school properties and facilities was rife in the three secondary schools at Heidelberg. This caused a draw back for the schools in trying to provide Learning, Teaching, and Support Materials for effective teaching and learning.

#### 5.5 *Leadership (SGB) and management (SMT) influence on discipline*

- Poor communication channels between learners and teachers and amongst teachers themselves. Some learners wanted the morning assembly to be reinstated at school on daily bases. They said it was one of the effective forums where they could communicate messages, events, and other school news.
- Misinterpretation and misunderstanding of rights and responsibilities of learners by them and no one was assisting with that.
- Lack of authority from the principal and teachers in guiding the learners. Learners were saying that the principal must be firm in taking decisions. SGB does not play any role in availing and assisting in the maintenance of order in the school. Some teachers were showing no interest in their responsibilities and the education of the African child.

### 6. Recommendations

Recommendations that could assist teachers, learners, SMT and parents and all other stakeholders is to have an intuitive understanding and the insight of what is good or acceptable behaviour and the way of good conduct. They should try to condemn the bad or unacceptable behaviour for effective discipline at their school. This is an effort that could be achieved through collaboration of the SMTs, educators, learners and the parents. The following recommendations are made to all the stakeholders in this research:

#### 6.1 *Recommendations to principals*

Principals should ensure that the School Code of Conduct is drawn up by all the interested parties in the school, and to make sure that it is respected in the school in order to maintain order and good behaviour of learners. They should administer and organise teaching and learning activities at the school in accordance with the mission statement of the school which was developed by the SGB and all stakeholders (RSA 1996 b; RSA 1998). Principals should be aware of all the activities that are happening at the school in all times. They should form network of communication with the community and the parents of learners for the benefit of the school. It should be their priority to consider that discipline in the school comes first, and make use of the counselling services for the learners with severe behavioural problems.

The principal together with the SMT could apply Data Management System (DMS). This would appear quite a straight forward step. Essentially fields need to be developed for the data entry, such as student information, infraction,

referring teacher and action taken. These data are entered into a spread-sheet and reports can be gleaned in many ways. Greenberg et al (2003) pointed out that many schools are not sufficiently coordinated to attend to the factors that maximise the measurable programme outcomes. Carnine (2002) concluded that until education becomes the kind of profession that reveres evidence, we should not be surprised to find its experts dispensing unproven methods, endlessly flitting from one fad to another. In developing a data management system for a proactive school-wide discipline plan, the following components are crucial (De Klerk & Rens 2003).

- Defining the role of SMTs. The leadership team should determine a kind of data management system to be used in an individual school. Options include self-generated programme. Designate someone the responsibility to enter data on the regular basis. Data entry should be monitored.
- Purposes of an effective DMS. The key to an effective proactive school-wide discipline plan is the systematic use of data. Tracking the progress whether is the plan working. The plan would be considered working if there is reduction in the school's office referrals. Data received should serve to monitor disciplinary actions to ensure equity and could be used to develop a School Improvement Plan (SIP). This is the most concern of the Department of Education (DoE) through district offices to assist school in the development of the SIP.
- Guidelines in developing DMS. The system needs to be set up so the entry person can input the information with relative ease. The data entry must be up to date so that current reports can be readily accessible. The school must develop a confidentiality protocol and ensures that it is followed. It should be easy to generate reports from the data.

## 6.2 Recommendations to the teachers

Commitment, involvement and dedication of teachers towards their daily and contractual responsibilities are essential elements to receive the top priority from the teachers. Time management should start with the teachers first so that learners would realise the importance of managing time. Teachers should refrain from sending learners to shops and or outside school premises during school hours (RSA 1996b).

Preparedness and willingness of teachers to guide and teach learners at all times at school should be a prerogative effort. Formation of teamwork amongst teachers, SMTs, RCLs and SGBs is necessary for the promotion of effective teaching and learning (Potgieter 2005). Teachers should inculcate a good and acceptable behaviour in learners and combat all what is known as undesirable behaviour of learners. If learners are found using bad language, dishonest, rudeness, provocative behaviour, using insults language, disrespecting teachers, carrying weapons and similar misconduct. Such learners should be made aware of the seriousness of the conduct. Teachers must communicate favourable expectations to the learners. The more positive the learners' perception of the teachers' feelings towards him/her, the better the classroom behaviour and discipline will be (Lewis 2001; Jankowski 2002)

## 6.3 Recommendations for learners

Learners should respect other fellow learners and their teachers. Those who have huge responsibilities of heading the family should ask for assistance from neighbours and from social services and must also report their situation at school.. It is heavy for a child to take the responsibility of parenthood and heading the family. All learners should take the responsibility of being a learner and know that "bad and unacceptable" behaviour is not allowed at school. Example of bad and acceptable behaviour is rudeness, absenteeism, disruptive behaviour untidiness, disrespect of everyone is not acceptable. Each child has a right and a responsibility to perform (RSA 1996a; RSA 1996b).

Learners should be prepared to learn and arrive on time for school to begin with the activities including effective teaching and learning. Those learners who use drugs, alcohol and other substance abuse should refrain from them instead ask for assistance from the school to stop taking them. The SMT should request for assistance from the social services to provide them with programmes for learner support.

## 7. Conclusion

This article has investigated the disciplinary problems that are facing teachers in three secondary schools in Heidelberg. It has discovered that discipline of learners in schools should receive first priority in each school. If the school is unable to maintain discipline among its learners, that might result in ineffective teaching and learning. Educational authorities, District officials, and parents are not supporting teachers and learners in areas pertaining to discipline, although in most cases they have an intuitive understanding and an insight into "what good and acceptable" conduct of behaviour entails.

This effort would bring a collaborative effort of 'all the parties who are interested in education. Therefore, they should do their best to assist and root out what is known as "bad and unacceptable" behaviour of learners in schools.

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