

**AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' SKILLS IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF  
LEARNERS WITH BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS**

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to explore teachers' abilities to identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems, to examine the strategies that they implement to address the challenges and their measure of success in addressing these. This study was qualitative in nature and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 volunteer teachers located in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth and an additional 50 teachers completed open ended questionnaires. The learning areas taught by the teachers varied. Descriptive and content analysis procedures were utilized to analyze the findings. The findings indicated that teachers lack the skills and knowledge to assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

The teachers tended to view their roles as imparting knowledge rather than tending to the mental health of learners so they did not adopt approaches to assist the learners with their behavioural and emotional challenges. This was in spite of the fact that the learners' psychological and physical well-being impacted their academic achievement.

**Key terms:** Behavioural problems, emotional problems, challenging behaviour, teachers' skills.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that:

### **AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' SKILLS IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF LEARNERS WITH BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS**

is my own work, that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this dissertation was not previously submitted by me for a degree at another university.

**SIGNED :** .....

**THIRZA DAMONS**

**DATE :** .....

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADD	:	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	:	Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder
BED	:	Behavioural and Emotional Disorders
BPT	:	Behaviour Parent Training
CAPS	:	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CASS	:	Continuous Assessment Standards
DoE	:	Department of Education
DSM-IV:		The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
FAMSA:		Family and Marriage Association of South Africa
FET	:	Further Education and Training
HOD	:	Head of Department
NCS	:	National Curriculum Statement
NGO	:	Non-governmental Organisation
NGOs	:	Non-Governmental Organizations
NICRO	:	South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Re-integration of Offenders
OBE	:	Outcomes-Based Education
SADTU	:	South African Democratic Teachers Union
TADA	:	Teenagers against Drug Abuse

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

There are a variety of descriptions from various sources of what the ideal teacher should know and what skills he or she should have. Teacher quality has been the focus of considerable debate worldwide since the middle of the twentieth century. The debate focuses on quality standards and on what teachers need to know to be able to do this.

Child (2004:414) evaluates the importance of teachers having a firm grip on both the academic and behavioural processes in a classroom which he contends should be the “bread and butter” of a teacher’s life. However teachers tend to focus on the academic abilities of learners at the expense of behavioural and emotional aspects. Furthermore, they may also not be knowledgeable about the signs that may indicate that a learner may be in need of emotional support. Because disorderly behaviour is so commonly and frequently misunderstood as disobedience or deliberate naughtiness, Donald (2002:358) reasons that it is important to understand that other cognitive difficulties interact and are intimately tied up with emotional and behavioural problems.

Mwamwenda (2004:8) is aggrieved by the fact that most South African Schools, especially previously disadvantaged ones, do not have adequate numbers of teachers who have studied educational psychology. The role of the teachers, however, is not to act as therapists, but rather to be sensitive to the signs that a learner may be in need of emotional support. In this regard it is important to examine the nature of the teacher’s level of knowledge and understanding of adolescent learners in terms of the identification, assistance and treatment including their training and preparation at educational institutions.

In recent years the South African government has sought to identify and explain teachers’ concerns relating to the intellectual, social, emotional and behavioural disturbances of young people in schools. If teachers are to play a meaningful role in addressing such problems they will have to be empowered with the necessary skills to identify the necessary signs that a learner may be in need of psychological support. Learners with emotional and behavioural

difficulties pose a major challenge to their teachers, many of whom may not be in a position to identify the warning signs or to implement intervention strategies to effect behaviour modification. Learners appear to be displaying behavioural and emotional problems at a younger age and many of them are increasingly being excluded from schools which have led to a national concern about the harmful impact of these learners on themselves, others and their teachers.

The new democratic South Africa was envisaged as a country of peace and prosperity, where all South Africans could enjoy a quality life. This however has not materialised in South Africa at present. Problems of violence among and affecting the youth of South Africa have become deep social concerns (Mckendrick & Hoffman, 1990:100). Becoming an educated South African does imply the acquisition of knowledge and skills required for adult life. This also implies becoming a human being, capable of much-needed understanding, love and compassion.

There are skills which all teachers require in listening to learners and encouraging them to talk about their hopes and concerns before making judgements about their behaviour. Greenhalgh (1994:27) asserts that these basic counselling skills are of particular significance for the creation of a supportive school atmosphere. He further goes on to suggest that initial teacher training establishments should introduce all their students to basic counselling skills and make them aware of the value thereof.

The implementation of school-wide early warning systems, to assist teachers in the identification of learners with emotional and behavioural problems are lacking in most South African schools. Efforts to implement curricular innovations such as programmes aimed at enhancing the social and academic skills of at-risk learners are minimal. Very little post-basic qualification training has been offered to teachers and educational psychologists are not available in the majority of schools. This poses questions such as who are at risk for engaging in such behaviours. What are the outward signs of less healthy growth? What conditions should be created to help students to be open to not just what they know but to what they feel? In the light of these questions it should be noted that according to Daniels and Edwards (2000:330) no suggestion is made that practising teachers should develop the level of skill and expertise possessed by trained family therapists. They suggest that it might be possible for

teachers to make profitable use of systemic insights, and particular intervention techniques which follow from these insights in their everyday interactions with students.

Donald (2002:168) states that the classroom becomes the microcosm or small scale reflection of society as a whole. Teachers need to be aware of how society's values and norms are reflected in the classroom. For learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties there are dangers in the over-emphasis on managing behaviour without attempts to understand the child's feelings. It needs to be widely recognised that inadequate support offered to disturbed or disruptive learners earlier on in their lives constitutes a major problem in society at large. Greenhalgh (1994:9) mentions that some of them may become the psychopaths, criminals, thugs and hooligans that lower the quality of life in many of our towns. Many mildly disturbed young people who are excluded from school could, with adequate support, be assisted to overcome their challenges to a certain extent. Instead they are left unattended to, and degenerate into the misfits in society at large.

Easton (2008:198) noted that interest and success academically does not occur until students have addressed some of their personal issues. Some may say that schools have no business teaching character, morals or values. Soler, Craft and Burgess (2001:123) suggest that anyone who has experienced the concentration action a teacher faces daily will ask: Why would a teacher further complicate life by trying to collect information on a very complex area of educational theory? Since teacher safety is high on national and international political agendas, there is extensive interference by politicians and policy makers.

According to the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the safety of teachers continues to be a serious concern in problem schools. In a most recent incident a teenager was stabbed by another learner at a school in Soweto. Frequent media reports highlighting attacks on teachers have also featured prominently recently. According to the South African Human Rights Commission (2001), 40% of children interviewed said that they had been victims of crime at school. More than a fifth of sexual assaults on South African children were found to have taken place in schools. Exposure to domestic violence, gangsterism and drugs has had a substantial impact on the number of learners showing behavioural problems in the school environment. Occasionally some tragedy, such as the shootings at a Columbine High School in Colorado in the United States of America, makes us question the structure of

our curriculum. According to Curriculum 2000, one of the aims is to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of learners at the school and of society.

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) currently used in South African schools may be fairly broad, but it is not balanced. A number of other countries have also taken stock of their curricular and aimed to implement necessary strategies to address behavioural problems in their schools. The governments of England and Wales for example have now begun to realize that the teaching of well-being should form an integral part of the National Curriculum. In this regard, Morris (2009:3) suggests that education needs to be more than just the accumulation of knowledge but; it should really be education in “how to be”.

The debate relating to the curriculum currently tends to focus on values first and structure and content later. The problems emerging regarding the disorderly behaviour of learners in schools, if not dealt with properly could lead to mayhem in schools. Learners with emotional and behavioural problems need to be identified early and provided with assistance to ensure a healthy and safe school environment for all involved. As this study set out to explore the teachers’ views regarding their skills and knowledge about learners with behavioural and emotional problems the view of the child/learner was not considered. Learners can also evaluate teachers, but that was not the focus for this study.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This study aimed to determine the nature of the teachers’ level of knowledge and understanding of adolescent learners in terms of the identification, assistance and treatment including their training and preparation in educational institutions. Despite the voluminous literature dating back many years on the causes, definition and treatment approaches for learners who have emotional and behavioural problems, very little has been written about how to identify these learners. Teachers need to be observant and alert to the signs of distress as changes in behaviour might be a cause for concern (Kyriacou, 2003:100). According to the Elton Report referred to by Kyriacou (2003), the government and educational institutes can reduce persistent serious misbehaviour by upgrading teacher skills. Freud (1935) noted that teachers should not only focus on the observable misbehaviour, but should also endeavour to establish the underlying causes of the ensued behavioural problem. **This study thus aimed**



**to establish the extent to which teachers are able to identify learners' with behavioural and emotional problems and their degree of readiness to offer the necessary guidance and support to learners that will lead to an improvement in their psychological well-being.**

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUB-QUESTIONS**

#### **1.3.1 Primary research question**

The primary research question to be addressed in this study can be formulated as follows:

- To what extent are teachers able to identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems and what is the level of support they are able to provide?

#### **1.3.2 Sub-questions**

- How can teachers be assisted in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems?
- What is the prevalence rate of emotional and behavioural problems that classroom teachers have to contend with?
- Who should be part of reshaping social norms, and restricting the safety issues in our educational systems?

### **1.4 THE AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study was to establish the extent to which teachers are able to identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems and to analyze the skills they have to address these problems.

### **1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study were to:

- Examine the extent to which teachers can identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems.
- Analyze the teachers' skills in addressing learners' behavioural and emotional problems.
- Examine the types of behavioural and emotional problems exhibited by learners.
- Examine the strategies adopted by teachers to address learners' behavioural and emotional problems and their suitability.
- Make recommendations for the kinds of intervention strategies that could be implemented to assist teachers to address related problems.

## **1.6 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

### **1.6.1 Learners**

In the context of this study, the term learners refers to adolescent learners between the ages of 13 and 17 years, who are attending the FET phase in a formal secondary school environment.

### **1.6.2 Teachers' skills**

Teachers' skills in this study will refer to abilities which enable teachers to be effective in identifying behavioural and emotional problems experienced by learners. This means possessing the knowledge about learners and having a plan to positively support, identify and recognize when a learner is in need of support. This in essence means that teachers are equipped to take decisions and act on them.

### **1.6.3 Behavioural problems**

In the context of this study the term behavioural problems refers to behaviour that takes the form of resistance, rebellion and retaliation which leads to problems with peers and people in authority like teachers and other school staff. According to Rogers (2003:92), these types of behaviour may be brought on by a lack of self-esteem and impulse control, which in turn may give rise to disruptions. These disruptions impact on other learners, and violate their rights. Their behavioural problems can take the form of doing whatever it takes to survive emotionally.

#### **1.6.4 Emotional problems**

Learners with emotional problems may be prone to emotional outbursts such as uncontrollable crying, tearfulness, overwhelming sadness and depression. As a result of such emotional problems, learners temporarily lose control of themselves and therefore they may withdraw, isolate themselves or even bunk classes.

### **1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW**

For the purpose of this literature study, sources consulted were journals, newspapers, books and internet sources. Issues identified were characteristics and behaviours associated with emotional disturbances and behaviour problems which may include aggressive or anti-social behaviour, inattentiveness, and intervention for at-risk learners. Timely identification of learners with behavioural and emotional disorders, as well as strategies implemented by teachers were some of the issues identified.

### **1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research was based on the phenomenological approach. The phenomenologist does not want to disturb the object of his study, because he is inspired by what he can see and he wants to describe and explain his observations. The qualitative method was chosen because the goal was to uncover and discover patterns of theories that help explain a phenomenon. The researcher used semi-structured interviews; interacted with the participants to examine ideas, thoughts and actions as heard or observed and the design of this research was flexible (Thomas, 2009:78). This method also served to provide the researcher with richer explanations and descriptions of the study. The researcher's goal in following this research method was to understand if teachers are skilled in identifying learners with emotional and behavioural problems from multiple perspectives, conducted in a natural setting being the different schools with a goal of building a complex and holistic picture.

#### **1.8.1 Population**

Two schools in Port Elizabeth's northern areas, in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa, were purposefully selected. These were schools that were identified as problematic by the Department of Education (DoE). Teachers from the senior phase Grades 10 to 12 across all learning areas were selected as participants for the purposes of this study. Teachers from the FET phase were selected as the study focused on the adolescent learner. The participants were classified as Grade 10 to 12 teachers but their specific areas of teaching were not identified.

### **1.8.2 Sampling**

Thomas (2009:104) refers to purposeful sampling as the pursuit of the kind of person in whom the researcher is interested. For this reason purposeful sampling was chosen because of the constraints that the researcher faced regarding time. The two schools were selected from the northern areas of Port Elizabeth.

In order to collect data from the participants, permission was sought from the District Director of the DoE. All data collected was treated as highly confidential and all participants remained completely anonymous. The sample was chosen purely on the basis of my judgement in terms of which areas were most problematic and which had the most incidents of disruption by learners with emotional and behavioural problems. The sample comprised all Grade 10 to 12 teachers across all learning areas.

## **1.9 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES**

Qualitative data, according to Struwig and Stead (2007:30), focuses primarily on the depth or richness of the data and therefore the qualitative researcher generally selects samples purposefully. The data was collected by means of interviews and questionnaires and the interviews were conducted with Grades 10 to 12 teachers to determine their knowledge on how skilled they are in identifying learners with emotional and behavioural problems. It was appropriate for this research in that the researcher obtained information on the skills of teachers in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems and their ability to assist these learners.

### **1.9.1 Interviews**

Struwig and Stead (2007) refers to the types of interviews that the research will be based on as semi-standardised interviews; this is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews. Predetermined questions were posed to each participant in a systematic and consistent manner. This enabled the researcher to obtain as much information as possible.

The researcher aimed to understand how skilled the teachers are in identifying learners with emotional and behavioural problems. The researcher used semi-structured interviews; interacted with the participants to examine ideas, thoughts and actions as heard or observed. The design of the research was flexible (Thomas, 2009:78). Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to provide richer explanations and descriptions of the research.

The researcher's goal in following this research methodology was to understand whether teachers were skilled in identifying learners with emotional and behavioural problems from multiple perspectives, conducted in a natural setting being the different schools with a goal of building a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon.

Interviews were conducted with all Grade 10, 11 and 12 teachers at two high schools in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth. Thomas (2009:160) refers to an interview as a discussion with someone in order to elicit information from them. The information may be facts, opinions, attitudes or any combination of these. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the interviewee. The face-to-face interview afforded the researcher an opportunity to gain an understanding of the interviewee as she was provided with in depth information during their personal contact. The researcher scheduled the visits with the school teachers. Efforts were also made to watch and listen for nuances in their behaviour which might provide the researcher with important clues relating to how they feel concerning their ability to identify learners with emotional and behavioural problems.

The researcher used an audio recorder to record the interviews which were later transcribed. This was necessary for the purposes of obtaining an accurate record of what was said. The researcher also briefly explained the method to the interviewee and what would be done with the data.

## **1.9.2 Questionnaires**

According to Thomas (2009:173), the defining characteristic of a questionnaire is that it is a written form of questioning comprising questions submitted to a number of persons in order to create a surveyor report. Questionnaires were used for the purposes of this study to collect the primary data, namely teachers' skills in identifying learners with emotional and behavioural problems. These questionnaires were distributed amongst teachers in Grades 10, 11 and 12 who were not interviewed.

### **1.10 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data analysis for a qualitative study is a complex and time-consuming process because the researcher is required to organize and read the data carefully to acquire a sense of what it contains and to identify categories or themes as well as to classify each piece of data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:161). The researcher implemented the data analysis immediately after the collection of the rich, thick data, and analyzed the data qualitatively according to themes.

### **1.11 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

Struwig and Stead (2007:145) refer to validity as the extent to which a research design is scientifically sound or appropriately conducted. Various methods were used for the purposes of data collection such as observation, interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Researcher effect which according to Struwig and Stead (2007:145), refers to the degree to which a researcher is biased in reporting and interpreting the findings, was used for the purposes of this study. The researcher explained the background, beliefs and views she holds that could influence the interpretations offered. A process known as member checking was implemented whereby the data was taken back to the participants for their comment on its accuracy. Making use of triangulation also contributed to the validity of the findings.

In qualitative research, reliability is seen as consistency. In qualitative research this can be addressed through observation, text analysis and interviews. Thomas (2009:105) mentions that reliability is the extent to which a research instrument such as a test will give the same result on different occasions.

### **1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

De Grunchy and Holness (2007:128) states that should the project involve working with humans, ethics approval should be obtained before the research begins. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's Ethics Committee to conduct the research. The researcher also obtained permission from the Eastern Cape DoE to conduct the research. Once approval was obtained from the DoE letters were written to the principals of the three schools to gain permission to enter the school for the purposes of conducting research. The teachers identified for this research were informed in writing about the purpose of this research and written consent was sought before research commenced. All schools and participants remained anonymous to protect the participants.

## **1.13 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

### **1.13.1 Limitations**

It should be noted that only two schools in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth were selected for this research due to time and transport constraints. Furthermore, only Grade 10 to 12 teachers constituted the group of teachers identified for the purposes of this research. Results may not be applicable to schools where there are counsellors. Further limitations related to the psychological theories. A Major limitation of the psychological theories of this study is that it is defined as habitual patterns of behaviour, and emotions. This leaves out personal choice, and the entire idea that people have something to say about their own lives, behaviours and personalities. Although theories in this study looked at internal and external factors, genetic history of the learners' was not considered.

### **1.13.2 Delimitations**

For the purposes of this study the schools selected were delimited to two schools in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth. Thus township, private and Model C schools were not part of this research study and were not included. The northern area schools were selected as learners in these schools are more prone to behavioural and emotional problems due to gangsterism and drug-related problems. The findings can thus not be generalized to all schools in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth.

#### **1.14 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study was significant in that it served to shed light on the extent to which teachers are able to identify learners with emotional and behavioural problems and to assist them with these problems. An understanding of the teachers' level of skills and their ability to assist such at risk learners will enable schools to identify their needs in terms of how to address such problems. If teachers do not have the ability to assist learners they will need to be trained or outside assistance will have to be sought. The findings of the study will enable the identified schools to establish what teachers' limitations are in terms of identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems and to implement strategies to address these shortcomings so that they are able to provide the necessary support to learners that will contribute to a more conducive environment for teaching and learning.

#### **1.15 SUMMARY**

The aim of the study was to explore high school teachers' opinions regarding their skills in working with learners with behavioural and emotional problems. It is important to understand the extent to which teachers can identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems if they intend to make an overall contribution to their holistic development; both academic and psychological.

This chapter provided an overview of the study by including the introduction and background to the study, the aims and objectives, statement of problem, research methodology and design, brief literature review, significance of the study and the limitations and delimitations. This overview aimed to place the study within a meaningful context and sketched the approach that would be adopted in terms of the reasons for undertaking the study, data collection strategies and analysis of the data with a view to acquiring a more in depth understanding of teachers' skills in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems and the measure of their support they are able to provide to these learners.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN IDENTIFYING LEARNERS WITH BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to firstly provide an outline of how behavioural and emotional problems manifest themselves within the context of a classroom and to analyze the teachers' skills and their level of competence in this regard. According to Car (2002:65), the humanistic approach focuses on the personal development as an individual and as a person. It is expected of the teacher to listen to the learners' views of reality, to respect the child as fellow traveller in life and not to manipulate him/her.

This literature review will also highlight the importance of teachers addressing the needs of learners with behavioural and emotional problems and also examine the teachers' effectiveness in identifying and dealing with these problems. The review would specifically address the adolescent learner with behavioural and emotional problems.

#### 2.2 THE ADOLESCENT WITH BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL DISORDERS

According to Blackwell's Nursing Dictionary (2005:205), the following definition is provided for emotional disorders:

“**Characteristic** of or caused by emotion. Bias tendency to allow one's attitude to affect logical judgement. **Illness** a mental disorder; **Instability** a condition characterized by hysterical behaviour; **Intelligence** a term describing the ability to perceive, assess, and positively influence your own and other people's emotions; **Liability** fluctuations in emotional expression that are beyond the person's control; may shift from crying to laughing, from anger to fear, and so on. **Labour** the stresses inherent in the conduct of work activities involving strong feelings, where effective performance may require individuals to express attitudes, that they do not feel and may consider false or personally distressing; **Reaction**

based on emotion rather than logic; **State** effect of emotions on normal mood, e.g., agitation-emotionality.”

For the teacher of the adolescent learner, the concern should be for the learner who demonstrates strong feelings of fear, anger and grief recognized by certain characteristics of behaviour. Lerner and Johns (2009:286-287) describe the adolescent period as a stage of turmoil and difficult adjustment. This period that is already confusing for the adolescent, can even be more of a crisis for the learner with Behavioural and Emotional Disorders (BED). The Oxford Dictionary (1994:265) explains disorders as “a state of confusion, irregularity or discomposure of the mind.” This definition indicates a disturbance in the mental function of the learner. Behavioural disorders can further be defined as: “Disorders that deviate noticeably from one’s normal behaviour and which is marked by abnormal conduct or mode of action” (Blackwell’s Nursing Dictionary, 2005:205). Teachers should be concerned with the manner in which behaviour manifests in their classes as they are tasked with the control of the learners’ behaviour.

Erikson’s (1968:92) psychosocial model of development, places the adolescent in a stage of resolving a conflict between his/her desire for freedom and independence and his/her desire for security and dependence. This period is also marked by:

- **Rapid Physical Changes**  
The adolescent must develop a new self-image and learn to cope with a different physical appearance, as well as new psychological and biological drives.
- **Developing Sexuality**  
The adolescent period is also one of developing sexuality- another change to which the adolescent must adjust.
- **Peer Pressure**  
Adolescents are greatly influenced by peer pressure and peer values. When the values of friends differ from those of parents, family confrontation and conflict may result.
- **Self-consciousness**  
Adolescents tend to be very conscious of themselves, of how they look, and how they compare with group norms. This self-consciousness can lead to feelings of inferiority and withdrawal.

For the adolescent with behavioural and emotional problems the individual may find it difficult to cope, in addition to the difficulties created by normal adolescent development (Lerner & Johns, 2009:287). For the teacher of the adolescent learner it might be difficult to determine whether behaviour stems from a learning disability or from normal adolescent development. These authors further maintain that in many cases, the challenges stem from both, thus complicating the learner's behavioural and emotional problems.

According to Gray (2002:4), in order to understand deviant behaviour one needs to examine the emotions associated with difficult behaviour. An analysis of the literature will focus on how learners' deviant behaviour can disrupt effective teaching and learning within classroom contexts. Some learners through their behaviour pose a risk not only to themselves, but also to other learners. This view is supported by Morgan (2007:3), who maintains that learners through their behaviour indicate that they may be in need of emotional support, which may be either negative or positive (Morris, 2009:74). Richard, as cited in Morris (2009:75), further states that emotions can either help or hinder us. He clarifies this as follows: "If an emotion strengthens our inner peace and seeks the good of others, it is positive, or constructive, if it shatters our serenity, deeply disturbs our mind, and is intended to harm others, it is negative or afflictive."

Thomas (2004:32) describes BED as disorders characterized by consistently aggressive, impulsive or withdrawn behaviour. Children classified as having BED show signs of impairment to their social, academic and vocational skills. According to Roffey (2011:270), there are some suggestive findings which indicate that there is a biological basis for certain types of behavioural problems such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and mood disorders. She relates this to the fact that most behavioural difficulties have a known medical cause.

Most definitions of behavioural and emotional difficulties, such as that by Chazan, Laing and Davies (1994), tend to focus on three major aspects which are the following:

- When the child's behaviour is a danger to himself, other people or property.
- When the child's behaviour interferes with efficient education of other children or with their own educational progress.

- When the child has difficulty with social relationships or interferes with the relationship of other children.

The literature review relates to learners with behavioural and emotional problems which will constitute the crux of the discussion. Although many types of deviant behaviour may come to mind including hitting others and calling names in childhood and perhaps cheating or stealing in adolescence within developmental psychology, aggression is specifically defined as any behaviour that causes intentional harm, pain, or injury to another. Aggression is further classified into: Instrumental aggression, in which a learner will attack another person who is in the way of a desired object or space and hostile aggression such as hitting, punching, and attacking (Keenan, 2009:31).

Learner aggression has become a major concern not only for the DoE, but also for one of the teacher unions, the SADTU. The union reported on an 11-year-old learner from Heathfield in Cape Town who on 1 June 2012 stabbed a teacher with a pen, leaving behind a wound on her arm that required stitches. In Pietermaritzburg a 19-year-old Grade 12 learner hit a teacher with a desk plank due to an argument relating to his cell-phone that the teacher confiscated. Schools should design policies to equip teachers with some practical competencies that would enable them to respond to current social and educational problems with particular emphasis on the issues of violence and drug abuse (Leickness, 2005:61).

### **2.2.1 Learners with emotional problems**

Emotional disorders, according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004:101) is “a disability whereby a learner of typical intelligence has difficulty, over time and to a marked degree building satisfactory interpersonal relationships, responds inappropriately behaviourally or emotionally under normal circumstances, demonstrates a pervasive mood of unhappiness or has a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears.”

Smith (2007:240) makes the important point here that disorders can be divided into externalizing and internalizing behaviours. Some emotional or behavioural disorders which manifest themselves outwardly constitute acting-out style that could be described as aggressive, impulsive, coercive and non-compliant. Other disorders are more accurately described as “inward” internalizing behaviours which are typical of an inhibited style that

could be described as withdrawn, lonely, depressed, and anxious. Teachers may be less likely to notice these behaviours, because they are less likely to interfere with teaching and learning (Smith, 2007:238). Davis *et al.* (2000:57) links up with this in stating that many mental health disorders, especially anxiety and depression, are difficult to recognize in adolescent learners because of the internalising nature of the disorders. Campbell (2004:4) avers that research has shown that adolescent learners experiencing anxiety disorders have lower academic achievement. Depression also affects learners in similar ways. Learners with depression exhibit impaired interpersonal relationships and academic problems. An initial episode of depression is often a forerunner to future depressive episodes and impairment in adult life is also the single most prominent risk factor for adolescent suicide. Adolescence with more emotional and behavioural problems has reported substantially more suicidal ideation and behaviour (Sawyer, Arney & Baghurst, 2000) as well as smoking and drug and alcohol abuse. These problems often manifest in the classroom. There is a need for the identification of these learners, by teachers or other special education support staff in secondary schools who are also able to assist with the identification process. For this reason the role of staff is invaluable in identifying learners in need of intervention programmes. Therefore it would be beneficial if teachers can assist in identifying learners with emotional disorders in secondary schools and subsequently refer them for intervention programmes (Patton, Glover & Bond, 2000).

#### 2.2.1.1 Classification of emotional disorders

As with behavioural disturbances children with emotional disturbances demonstrate behaviour that is outside the norm. A learner will indicate how he/she feels through his/her behaviour. Dowling (2010:126) states that learners will show the effects of their feelings, those who are needy, even given the support of a loving family, may show helpless and dependant behaviour.

Eisenberg (2000:305) describes guilt, shame and embarrassment as the self-conscious moral emotions. The term self-conscious refers to the fact that the experience of these emotions depends on a child being able to understand and evaluate him or herself. Embarrassment is thought to be least negative and serious involving less anger at oneself. Guilt and shame on the other hand play much more significant roles. Guilt is often defined as regret about

wrongdoing and serves to make the offending person take responsibility for his/her actions and either make amends for the wrongdoing or punish the self (Ferguson & Stegge, 1998).

The Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association (1994), further classifies emotional problems as:

- Conduct disorder: Learners may seek attention, are disruptive and act out.
- Socialized aggression: Students join a subculture group of peers who are openly disrespectful to their peers and teachers.
- Attention problems: These students may have attention deficit disorders, are easily distractible and have poor concentration. They may have the tendency to be impulsive and may not think about the consequences of their actions.
- Anxiety/Withdrawal: These students are self-conscious and unsure of themselves. They typically have low self-esteem and withdraw from immediate activities.

With regard to these emotional problems teachers should determine what is actually going on as they may gain the impression of emotions that do not really match what is happening. It is imperative that teachers adopt a pro-active, context driven approach in identifying emotional disorders.

#### 2.2.1.2 General causes of emotional behaviour

According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study (2011), teachers are more likely to identify the externalizing characteristics such as aggression and impulsivity than the internalizing characteristics of anxiety and depression. These students are more likely to miss more school, obtain lower grade point averages and fail more classes (Smith, 2011). This may lead to the under-identification of serious emotional problems. There is a need for teachers to become aware of what the signs of both internal as well as external emotional disturbances are. These are identified by Smith (2011:93) as the following:

- Biological Factors  
There is growing evidence that behaviour and emotional health appears to be influenced by genetic or neurological factors or a combination of both.

- **Environmental Factors**  
The family or home, school, and society environments have a major influence on the behaviour of individuals.
- **Family**  
The relationship children have with their parents, particularly during the early years, is critical to the way they learn to act. Interactions between parents and their children influence the child's opinions, and emotions.
- **School**  
School is where children spend the largest portion of their time outside the home. Teachers' expectations and actions greatly affect a learner's life and behaviour.
- **Society**  
Societal problems can impact on a student's emotional and behavioural status. An impoverished environment, including poor nutrition, a disrupted family, and a sense of frustration and hopelessness may lead to aggressive, acting-out behaviours.

Roffey (2004: 96) maintains that psychological survival is a motivation for many types of behaviours, and underpins emotions that are associated with fear and defence. Teachers, in attempting to assist and understand these learners, may experience that learners who have had difficult experiences may construe the world as a hostile place and see demands, expectations and social interactions as potentially threatening. Teachers, by making an effort to understand what a learner's behaviour means for them, provides greater opportunities for schools to work together to change it.

## **2.2.2 Learners with behavioural problems**

Learners who may not be fluent in spoken language may through their actions convey messages about how they feel (Dowling, 2010:127). What is needed from the teacher is patience and understanding to realize that all is not well in the learner's life and this is being communicated through his/her behaviour.

### **2.2.2.1 Internalizing and externalizing behaviours**

A report on violence in South African schools (2008) highlights a distinction between internalizing and externalizing behaviours. Internalizing behaviours reflect withdrawal,

inhibition, anxiety, and/or depression. Internalizing behaviour has been found in some cases of youth violence although in some youth, depression is associated with substance abuse. Learners with internalising behaviours rarely act out; and are often overlooked by teachers.

#### 2.2.2.2 General causes of disruptive behaviour

Some learners misbehave as a way of issuing a deliberate challenge to the teacher's authority. These children either come from families where the children are powerless or from families where the children are in control, in which case the families may also feel powerless. Some learners make mistakes and misbehave simply because they do not understand the rules of the classroom or even the dominant culture in the school (Gootman, 1997:107-108). When learners come from disadvantaged environments such as living in squatter camps, on the street or even in abusive family scenarios, where language is coarse and loud and where stealing is a way of surviving, they need to be taught what is expected of them in the classroom.

Since many learners misbehave because they do not receive adequate attention at home, ignoring such learners will not help. Riffel (2011:122) states that for some children it does not matter whether they receive positive or negative attention, they are just happy to receive eye contact and verbal recourse from the teacher in the classroom.

Research further claims that poor parental discipline and a lack of parental warmth, sensitivity and attention due to factors such as divorce or job commitments have been responsible for the occurrence of persistent misbehaviour during middle childhood and adolescence (Pienaar, 2003:6). Furthermore dysfunctional families are also continually emphasised as affecting the individual. Rayment (2006:31-32) found that children of certain parents who displayed violent and aggressive behaviour towards school staff showed signs of violent, aggressive and antisocial behaviour as well. It stands to reason that if children are exposed to aggressive displays of violence between parents they will carry these experiences with them into the school.

Wolhuter and Oosthuizen (2003:454) as cited by Pienaar mentions that from a learner's perspective, a lack of parental involvement is the biggest cause of disciplinary problems. Oosthuizen and Van Staden (2007:362) list numerous school-related factors which may



heighten learners' propensity to engage in disruptive behaviour such as: a negative school climate, inadequacy of teachers as role models, teachers' professional incompetence, overcrowded schools, and run down, ill-kept physical appearance of the school. Societal influences such as poor housing and unemployment, are some of the community-based risk factors that could heighten the possibility of learners engaging in disruptive behaviour (De Wet, 2003:93).

According to Marias and Meyer (2010), teachers need to understand disruptive behaviour in its context. This understanding requires solid background knowledge of child development, the reasons why learners behave and misbehave, and which types of disruptive behaviour occur most frequently in the classroom and on the playground. The teacher must furthermore realize that the more risk factors that are present, the greater the chances of behavioural problems. This is supported by Riffel (2011:124), who states that teachers need to play "detectives" to identify the underlying reasons why the misbehaviour is manifesting in the classroom. She demonstrates this by providing an example of a learner who blurts out and calls the teacher foul names every day in a Maths class and who has to report to the principal's office daily. By examining the underlying reasons for this learner's behaviour there are at least two questions that come to mind: *Is he doing this to escape Math class or is it too difficult or too boring?* Spohrer (2008:27) states that behaviour is communication, not necessarily a direct hit at the teacher; it could be that the teacher is just in the firing line at the time. If we believe that behaviour is communication, and therefore has some kind of meaning we can set to work to try to learn the language of the child and understand what it is he/she is saying.

According to Burke (2010:7), this is important especially in the context of high poverty in schools. Rather than waiting and hoping that relationships magically develop in the classroom, teachers should build relationships deliberately and work to get to know learners. Bondy and Ross (2008) as cited by Burke (2010) suggest this could be done with a smile, a hand on the shoulder, the use of a student's name, or a question that shows you remember something the learner has mentioned; these small gestures do much to develop relationships. Rogers (2006:165) explains that there are many aspects of a learner's life, temperament, home and background that teachers have little control over. Teachers should, however, not keep complaining about these factors, but rather support the learners in their ongoing welfare of learning while they are at school. He suggests that teachers avoid blaming home

environments for the child's disruptive behaviour at school, as this has become too easy to excuse the learner's behaviour because "he comes from a difficult home". While significant disruptive patterns of behaviour clearly make a contribution from family dynamics, structural poverty and abuse, a learner's disruptive behaviour is also learned in context.

Teachers are not just creating educated learners; they are helping to create citizens of a democracy. This means nurturing in children the habits of mind to participate actively in our daily democracy, live and act for the common good; and create a better, more humane, just, and equal society and world (Wolk, 2002:2).

### **2.3 EMPOWERING TEACHERS TO UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS AND LEARNER BEHAVIOUR**

Although teaching, according to Roffey (2011:3), is a potentially meaningful, rewarding and stimulating profession, teachers in the context of their profession are required to deal with a wide range of human emotions, which includes being able to meet the needs of learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is important to note that for teaching to be effective the needs highlighted above need to be addressed as such difficulties may impede successful teaching. Yet there are many teachers who may not have the prerequisite skills to cope with learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Some of the irritations that could affect teaching and learning include learners calling out, lying, stealing and bullying (Rogers, 1995:214). He further states that teachers may commonly ask themselves questions such as: *What can we do when learners? And what should we do when learners? Or even how shall we do it?* Behavioural and emotional difficulties interfere with academic learning. When learners are challenged by these difficulties it is difficult for them to focus on academic tasks (Lerner & Johns, 2009:189).

Rogers (1995:215) asserts that teachers may be left at a loss as to what to do to attend to deviant behaviour, especially if they lack the requisite skills to address these challenges. Thomas (2004:82) highlights this by quoting from a teacher from Chicago affected by children in her classroom with extreme behavioural and emotional difficulties arising from the effects of drug abuse:

*“I wish we knew more about how to teach them. They would probably be okay. But we don’t understand enough. It is a waste of time trying to figure out what’s wrong with a student and trying to provide them with the correct kinds of services if we don’t know what we are looking for.”*

This quotation serves to highlight the dilemma that many teachers have to contend with in the classroom context. It is with this background in mind that the study aimed to explore to what extent this may also be the case for teachers in the South African context. Understanding problem behaviour helps educators achieve academic tasks. Robert and Powell (2010:173) explain that teachers must have an understanding of the function of the learners’ behaviour in order to respond in a way that helps him/her learn to behave appropriately. They further state that very few teachers understand the connection between teaching effectiveness and student behaviour. The literature asserts that it is imperative that teachers be trained to interpret behaviour, so that they can provide a supportive environment for learners which will enable them to feel safe and to express their feelings freely. Therefore the involvement of teachers in the identification process is one way of ensuring ownership and collaboration in providing selected solutions (Campbell, 2004:6).

## **2.4 CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS**

Teacher workload has increased since the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) and Continuous Assessment (CASS). Consequently they tend to focus on completing the syllabus and do not have adequate time to assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems as pointed out by Chrisholm (2005:42) in their report focussing on the educator workload in South Africa. Rogers (2003:113) maintains that in some schools, there are students who calculatingly, purposefully, set out to hassle and even harass a teacher. He further explains that teachers face a range of repeated attention and power confronting behaviour through to verbal abuse. Teachers however, are expected to deliver and manage such behaviour. These demands on teachers, according to Gray (2002:17), are bizarre expectations. Blum (2001: 20) explains that in meeting these demands placed on teachers, they may feel inadequate knowing that they are judged by their ability to quell the learners and they may find it a constant and exhausting battle. They may feel they are failing. In a South African context not all schools have systems in place to assist teachers to control learner behaviour which could lead to teacher frustration and depression.

Blum (2001:20) further states that teachers must meet the needs of learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties and they must recognize emotions and the causes of difficult behaviour. Potter (2003:58) noted that in recent years teachers have experienced ever-increasing pressure to deliver against new targets and tests and that they have become increasingly vulnerable to abusive, even violent behaviour by learners. Teachers face major stress with the day-to-day demands of teaching, disruption of classes, learners coming to class intoxicated and violent learner behaviour. Many teachers understand, however, that children come from dysfunctional families, and they bring these difficulties to school. This results in more pressure on the teacher. He further states that many teachers are concerned that they are unable to do their basic jobs, because they spend so much time dealing with issues that could be dealt with by people especially employed for the task such as social workers and counsellors. However, it has been reported that they often do not refer these learners for assistance. Campbell (2004) states that families, schools and the juvenile justice system are failing the at-risk learners, thereby making them vulnerable to the prison.

According to Rogers (2007:224), teachers often have to deal with aggressive behaviour and fighting these behaviours as highlighted by many other authors are amongst the most difficult to address, especially at adolescent level. When addressing aggressive behaviour it is important to discuss teacher safety. Teachers should be made aware of the legal implications of any sort of restraint of students. Physical intervention in a fight is always risky and teachers may need to be skilled in management that is both realistically practical and as effective as one can be in a particular context.

#### **2.4.1 Teachers' skills**

When a child enters a socially demanding context like a school, a prime motivation for behaviour will be social belonging whatever his emotional pathology (Rogers, 1994:61). He further states that a learner would want to belong, either by finding constructive ways or seeking counter-productive ways to gain social credibility. There is a belief that teachers have to be trained experts to deal with issues like these. Support for this view comes from Hanko (2002), as cited in Gray (2002:280), who says that one often hears comments by teachers: *"We are not trained that way, we are not psychiatrists, social workers, educational psychologists"*. This, according to Gray (2002:280), demonstrates an underestimation of their importance as "significant" others in their learners' lives. There is the belief that teachers

have to be trained experts to deal with issues like these, but teachers can be trained in therapeutic teaching skills and learn through learning focused professional development how to recognize and assist learners in need of support.

Beerens (2000:69) is interested in establishing whether our current systems of learning for teachers' professional growth include these elements. If this training is indeed lacking, teachers may start blaming themselves or doubt their own competence. Gray (2002:28) argues that this might not be the case for all teachers and that responsive professionals accept that they should attempt to understand learners with emotional and behavioural problems. He further posits that it is a known fact that teachers need to work with multiple concepts and are not required to be psychologists or psychotherapists but argues that they can however be trained. At this stage, we should reflect on the actual practices.

School counsellors are often members of staff in schools in Australia and the United States but this is not a common practice in the United Kingdom (Roffey, 2011:73). In South Africa this is mainly found in private schools and lacking in most government schools (DoE, 2012). Adelman and Taylor (2010:33) refer to an incident in Virginia where a group called for the removal of counsellors from their schools. The group raised the following concerns in this regard namely: school counsellors introduce matters to their children that are inappropriate, such as child abuse, death, and opposite sex relationships. The group further argued that schools should not be centres for mental health and should focus solely on academics. Teachers and counsellors stressed the need for support services in schools by noting the many challenges learners are confronted with and which must be addressed in order to succeed. According to Long (2000:270), about one to four children in classes portray deviant behaviour. Yet teachers report that they feel poorly equipped to deal with misbehaviour, often pointing to their lack of experience and preparation. Successful teacher intervention in emotional and behavioural difficulties is crucial, as teachers are the only professionals who interact with children over a period of time. Edelman (2008:177) states that public schools are hard pressed to acquire the staff or resources to recognize these problems and provide counselling and therapeutic assistance for their learners. It is much more likely that learner behaviour will be perceived as insubordinate, disruptive or unruly.

#### **2.4.2 Teachers' misinterpretation of learners with behavioural and emotional difficulties**

Teachers, in recognizing and working with learners with emotional problems should realize that all learners, not only those with behavioural and emotional difficulties have basic emotional needs. These needs, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970:101) are to belong, to be safe, to be valued, and to be in control. These hierarchy of needs help us to understand how our inner emotional world drives our behaviour. According to the behaviourist model we learn how to behave by repeating what we find rewarding and avoiding what is painful. Despite being a dominant model in most schools it could have negative implications especially for those learners with behavioural and emotional problems, since punishment is associated more with retribution and "justice" than learning (Roffey, 2011:71).

A lack of skill in identifying these needs could result in teachers labelling students instead of addressing their needs. Roffey (2011:37) suggests that teachers think about what the behaviour means for the learner, rather than what it means for the teacher as all action has a meaning for the person engaging in it. She further warns that teachers should be careful not to jump to conclusions about the meaning of learner behaviour. It is important to note that there is often a tendency to categorise all learners who may be difficult into overarching categories of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. This categorization is problematic since we may respond to the label rather than to the whole child. This however cannot be positive for those students with challenging behaviour. Robert and Powell (2010:171) believe that most teachers motivate students who require few interventions to achieve academically. Potter (2003:59) links up with this idea stating it is less easy to treat less able children with respect, particularly when they lack the social skills to explain their difficulties and seek help for their problems. For teachers the starting point however, which has been proven in schools that have been able to tackle the issue of behaviour, must be to recognize a problem where it exists. Carl (2002:65) draws on the humanistic approach which is a reaction to behaviourism which focuses on personal development as an individual and as a person. It is expected of the teacher to listen to the learner's views of reality, to respect the child and not to manipulate him/her. Lerner and Johns (2009:196) explain that behaviour is communication and the teacher's job is to ascertain what the learner is telling him/her. By

recognizing the function of the learners' behaviour, the teacher can either change the antecedents or the consequences in order to meet the need of that learner.

### **2.4.3 Challenging behaviour and situations teachers may encounter in the classroom**

The DoE recognizes the reality, responsibility and influence of the education system within the community at large and seems to accept the important role it has to play (Osborne, 2004). There are signs that schools have become increasingly concerned about learner behaviour and that modern life exerts greater pressure on children. Porter (2000:298) distinguishes between behaviour that violates someone's rights and less serious behaviour that teachers should be aware of. Inconsiderate behaviour requires a response that protects the rights of learners to learn, and supports the rights of teachers to teach and offers the learner involved a chance to learn how to make a more considerate choice in future. According to Gray (2002:131), challenging behaviour and situations that teachers may encounter in dealing with learners with behavioural and emotional difficulties are:

- **Confrontation.** A confrontation is generally a battle of wills. This can be between the teacher and a learner or a learner and another learner. This interaction is normally argumentative. Many teachers may respond to this with aggression as they want to show that they are in control and have the power.
- **Rudeness.** Usually body language and facial expressions that can be interpreted very negatively. Often a bored look, the slouch, the arrogant sneer and the use of abusive language.
- **Defiance.** When a student actively resists a request or an instruction. Normally comes with the message "just try and make me".
- **Bullying behaviour.** This behaviour includes persistent teasing and name calling to intimidation, exclusion, vicious verbal attacks and actual physical harm.
- **Swaggering, swearing, outrageous behaviour.** These behaviours are often part of an attitude within an adolescent peer group. The intention with this behaviour is normally to shock or to confront.

Rogers (2006:15) explains that sometimes learners challenge others, particularly the teacher, through expressions of inappropriate power – a kind of game where the learner, in effect, says, "*I can do or say basically what I like and how I like and you can't stop me...; I'm the*

*boss here...*". 1 – 5 % of learners display frequent, and often intense, patterns of disruptive behaviour. These learners may present behavioural and emotional difficulties. It is with this background in mind that the study proposes to examine the extent to which teachers are able to identify and cope with such deviant behaviour in their classes.

Schools have become increasingly concerned about learners' behaviour and modern life exerts greater pressure on them, as a result more learners are becoming aggressive and show signs of disturbed behaviour. Roffey (2011:270) demonstrates this by referring to April 16, 2007, when Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people at Virginia Tech before committing suicide. It was reported that this might have been influenced by the fact that several learners across the United States committed violent offenses or threatened to do so in their schools. According to the United States National Centre for Education Statistics (1994), school violence by learners with behavioural and emotional problems is a serious concern. Issues raised were that learners come to school with weapons e.g. guns, knives, etc. and there were physical attacks on teachers and other members of staff. Furthermore exposure to domestic violence, gangsterism and drugs had a substantial impact on learner performance.

According to Long, as cited in Gray (2002:103), if teachers have skills to understand problem behaviour they will be better equipped to generate creative interventions in schools. An informed interpretation of problem behaviour will better support children and equip teachers to generate creative interventions in schools as well. Following union and media reports, schools subject to vandalism and learner violence towards their teachers is on the increase. The *Kuier Magazine* (9 Mei 2012) reported on a teacher who was brutally attacked by a student in her class with a hammer. According to the report the learner plotted and planned the murder of his teacher in his school diary. The teacher being a newly qualified teacher may not have been able to recognize that the learner was in distress as he was from a single parent household. Then again, Roffey (2004:96) states that teachers can discover meaning of behaviour by looking at patterns of behaviour. This can be done by talking to children about the pictures they draw, sometimes just by asking indirect and open questions and listening – for example "*you seem a bit bored lately, what's up?*" This will enable teachers to find qualities they can work with.

Blum (2001:15) states that there is a real need for all teachers to receive proper training in how to be effective managers of behaviour. This requires carefully constructed training



throughout their teaching careers. Without this training a teacher might miss warning signals from a learner in distress. Tuaber (2007:351) highlights that there are early warning signs that may be indicators that a learner could exhibit aggressive behaviour towards himself or to others. Roffey (2011:37), however, cautions that teachers should not jump to conclusions, as early warning signs may only be indicators, but if a teacher had been trained to recognize the early warning signs potentially violent situations could be averted. Teachers have become increasingly vulnerable to abusive, even violent behaviour by young people. Potter (2003:45) attributes this to the mental health of young people. According to him, one in five young people suffers mental health problems and an equivalent number of young people demonstrate disturbed behaviour arising from emotional disorders. Wolfgang (2009:303) concurs with this view, in stating that revengeful, assaultive and violent students are simply “reflex” beings; their negative behaviour is automatically triggered by external stimuli or situations and by internal fears. This trend of learner behaviour sets new difficult challenges for teachers. If teachers hope to understand why learners exhibit aggressive behaviour, it is important for them to be exposed to the necessary skills in identifying and assisting such learners.

## **2.5 OUT OF SCHOOL FACTORS THAT MAY CONTRIBUTE TO BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS**

Powell (2010:171) mentions a list of out of school factors that may also contribute to behavioural problems:

- Pervasive poverty, which means a state of being poor, lacking the means of providing material needs or comfort.
- Substance abuse, also known as drug abuse, refers to the persistent and excessive use of an organic or inorganic substance which practice is inconsistent and irreconcilable with accepted prescribed medical use.
- Child abuse, which is behaviour whereby adults physically, sexually or emotionally torment or harm children in their care.
- Effects of divorce and single parent homes.
- Teenage pregnancy; where an adolescent deals with the consequences of early motherhood.
- School drop-out (truancy) refers to being absent without permission.

- Delinquency rates, how frequent adolescents break the law.

These have become significant predictors of school behavioural problems. Society looks to schools to resolve these social concerns (Roffey, 2011: 81).

### 2.5.1 Teachers' conceptions of behaviour

Behavioural and emotional challenges occur in learners in all populations and are found in diverse economic, racial, cultural, and language groups. Often the social, emotional, and behavioural challenges are interdependent; they overlap with each other e.g. a learner who is depressed may engage in withdrawal behaviour, which leads to poor peer relationships and isolation (Lerner & Johns, 2009:186).

According to Powell and Powell (2010:173), teachers must have an understanding of the function of the learner behaviour. These authors draw on the works of Freud's (1935:177) psycho-educational approach. This approach lends itself to the belief that a teacher's responsibility is to assist children to deal with the thoughts and feelings that motivate the disruptive behaviour.

Understanding what behaviour means can potentially lower the rate of incidents by learners with BED. South Africa is not the only country where incidents of learners with BED are on the increase. According to Wolfgang (2009:301), in the United States, teachers are being trained in how to deal with a potential violent students or situations and how to use methods to keep them safe. Newspapers and news stations often report on incidents involving violence in schools, from fights between students to attacks on teachers, shootings, and harmful gang activities. It would be easy to try and understand or interpret behaviour by seeking to understand why children behave as they do. Long, as cited in Gray (2002:102), states that the challenge should be for us to develop a model that relates specific behaviour patterns to specific needs. He refers to a **Model of linear causality** that is to say that when X happens, it is because of Y. It is however important to stress that such a model cannot be a quick-fix. Schools must be creative and design models that suit their needs and address their issues concerning learners with BED.

## **2.6 PREVENTION AND EARLY IDENTIFICATION PROGRAMMES**

Adolescent mental health issues are an important public health problem (Sawyer *et al.*, 2000). These problems are often manifested in classrooms. What is significant, however, is that many authors believe that mental health problems in learners are still significantly underestimated. Furthermore, it seems as if mental health problems and disorders appear to be affecting learners at younger ages than previously.

According to Campbell (2004:65-77), mental health problems not only have significant implications for school communities, but also for society in general. Prevention and early intervention of BED during the critical adolescent period has been called the “window of opportunity” (Martin & Cohen, 2000:157). Schools should be the place for early identification and prevention. Two examples of successful prevention and early intervention programmes in Australian Secondary Schools are the Gatehouse Project and Mind Matters. The Gatehouse Project (Paton *et al.*, 2003) addresses the social context of high schools in order to change students’ sense of school connectedness and therefore promote the behavioural and emotional development of learners. These strategies used are multi-level including curriculum based materials for all. Mind Matter as mentioned by Campbell (2004) is another promotion programme aimed at promoting the mental health and wellbeing of all learners in school. However these programmes also emphasize the need for specific interventions to address the needs of learners with behavioural and emotional difficulties who require support from the school.

### **2.6.1 Behavioural and emotional disorders and learning**

In reference to learners with behavioural and emotional disorders, teachers may be confronted with learners who set up barriers between themselves and their learning environment through inappropriate, aggressive, or withdrawn behaviour, which could impede normal personal and social development, and make it difficult for them to learn (Thacker, Strudwick & Babbedge, 2002:10).

According to Kazdin and Weisz (1998:140), an effective diagnosis relies on multi-informants and uses multi-methods that means learners are identified in multiple settings such as classroom and playground by multiple informants such as teachers, peers and self-report.

This would assist teachers to accurately identify at risk learners for future school failure based on academic, behavioural and emotional needs. Many learners presenting behaviour difficulties are struggling with learning (Roffey, 2004:97). This is why they lack skills in paying attention to teacher input and have a fragmented concentration on set tasks. Roffey (2004:97) explains that the reason for this maybe that they have unmet emotional needs or are experiencing great distress which impinges on their ability to learn. This may cause them to not pay attention in class and have a fragmented concentration on set tasks. These learners are often the “class clowns” who by persistently disrupting classes, choose to behave in ways which maintain their self-esteem rather than accept the position of a slow learner.

Learning disabilities according to Goldstein and Brooks (2007:64) play a powerful role in affecting children’s behaviour and academic achievement. The result of this may be school failure and serious maladjustment in adult life. Notwithstanding this, cognitive theorists believe that children displaying behavioural and emotional difficulties need to be taught new skills. By changing a learner’s beliefs, teaching the learner to think or perceive differently, one can change a child’s behaviour (Olson & Cooper, 2004:8). It reaffirms the important point made by Morgan (2007:4) when referring to the Steer report (2005). The report is a government report on behaviour in schools. It highlights the connection between behaviour and learning, and emphasizes the need to actively encourage the type of behaviour that is conducive to learning. Teachers should be clear on the connection between learning difficulties and behaviour disorders. Burke (2010) maintains that parents and learners have every right to expect that teachers in whom they place the education of their children, know as much as possible about how the brain operates as it pertains to learning. Teachers need to be current and knowledgeable on matters concerning learners’ behavioural and emotional needs. Martella and Nelson (2003:2) states that teachers should focus on treating behavioural problems as they do academic ones. Lerner and Johns (2009:201) explain that teachers should help learners accomplish successful experiences which will help them build feelings of self-worth, self-confidence, and self-respect. This feeling of success and self-worth will enable them to better cope with challenges.

## **2.6.2 Punishment as a measure of discipline**

Goldstein and Brooks (2007:240) reports that some teachers who have a lack of skill in understanding learners with behavioural and emotional problems may use inappropriate

physical methods of punishment to embarrass learners into submission. Punishment is an act that suppresses undesirable behaviour, but may not necessarily distinguish it. According to these authors punishment does not provide an appropriate model of acceptable behaviour and for many teachers it is accompanied by emotional outbursts. Teachers and schools when using punishment should implement it to make a positive difference. When used inappropriately, it can be abusive, and can lead to withdrawal, anxiety, anger, frustration, and further misbehaviour.

## **2.7 TEACHERS' PRE-SERVICE AND IN SERVICE TRAINING**

According to Riffel (2011:56), teachers spend years at the pre-service level learning to write lesson plans, but very little time is spent during the pre-service years to learn how to identify and write behavioural lesson plans that are proactive. Alexander and Potter (2005:38) argue that we need to return to the human scale of schooling. Knowledge is not merely intellectual information but also an experience of relationships, with oneself, the natural world and other human beings. With this holistic view teachers should ensure that learners are viewed as human beings with emotions and behaviour that at times need to be observed and assessed to ensure the holistic development of the child. These authors further state that teachers, learners and parents should work together as partners in an interconnected way. Such relationships should go beyond academic pursuit; it should include practical as well as mental, spiritual and emotional engagement. Teachers should explore the causes of negative behaviour in school and then plan interventions that consider those causes (Lerner & Johns, 2009:186).

Leicknessc (2005:61) suggests that schools adopt a policy to train teachers with some practical competencies that would enable them to respond to current social and educational problems with particular emphasis on the issues of violence and drug abuse. They further more suggest a working partnership with professional services to deal with such issues. In terms of teacher training, Spohrer,(2008:31) maintains that teachers can be trained to use the principles of neuro-linguistic programming which is a technique that does not look for deep meaning as to why a person behaves the way they do, but does enable enhanced communication, while Martella and Nelson (2003) mentions that pre-service teachers should be trained how to undergo detailed planning for instruction, which focuses on the laying out

of instructional goals and the methods of instruction to be adopted.. A frequently missed area of teacher training, however, is behaviour identification and management.

Chaplain (2003:164) draws the comparison that unlike other learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties suffer from a lack of normative data. Measuring reading or maths competence is far easier than trying to measure the degree to which someone's behaviour deviates from the norm. According to Ash (2008:177), teachers' lack of appropriate training may result in them expelling learners from school hoping that they would find assistance outside the school. On the other hand, Wolk (2002:63) argues that helping these learners is much more complex than it sounds, because as learners with chronic behaviour problems often have other problems such as low self-esteem, difficult home conditions, or problems with friends or peers, that contribute to the problems in the first place. According to Thorson (2003:94), teachers have to examine learners through different lenses. They should work at understanding the learners' perceptions and know when and how to deal with them.

Rogers (2006:195) describes a culture amongst teachers where teachers are afraid to admit to each other that they experience challenges in class with the management of learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Some teachers may say "*I don't have a problem...*" because they are anxious that if they acknowledge their lack of management and discipline related skills they would be regarded as being "weak" teachers. Such teachers often mask their deficiencies by asserting that they do not have any problems whatsoever. According to Rogers (2002), this kind of unprofessional culture tends to breed a degrading survivalism rather than professional empowerment.

## **2.8 THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL**

According to Martella and Nelson (2003:78), schools, like families, have patterns of behaviours, relationships thinking, beliefs and traditions that make up the school culture. Schools can however sometimes be oblivious to the behavioural and emotional needs of their learners as highlighted by Adelman and Taylor (2010:30). The latter researchers are of the view that a growing number of learners are suffering because their behavioural and emotional developmental needs are not being met by the school. They are interested in establishing why schools do not do a better job in addressing learners' problems. They relate this to the fact that little or none of a teacher's in service training focuses on improving classroom and school

wide approaches for dealing effectively with mild to moderate behaviour, learning and emotional problems.

Some schools are moving more aggressively to change learners' understanding of themselves and the world. One school implemented a K-12 social-emotional learning curriculum designed by parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. They reported reduced feelings of fear, fewer incidents of gun and knife carrying, and improved attitudes towards the school and community among the learners (Thorson, 2003:11). Schools are becoming the point of entry into the juvenile justice system as learners are increasingly arrested on school grounds for subjectively and loosely defined behaviours such as disorderly conduct and malicious mischief (Ash, 2008:177).

It is important to note that while learners with BED have a right to education in mainstream schools, Rogers (2007:192) maintains that that right has to be balanced against the right of their peers to learn without persistent interruptions and displays of unsafe and aggressive behaviour. There needs to be a clear understanding of the infringement on, or damage to, another's right. In considering this it is also important to consider the welfare of teachers working with such learners.

The SADTU in 2009 called on the DoE to consider danger-pay for teachers teaching at high risk schools. Chaplain (2003:162) explains that learners who act on their difficulties, aggression or violence can be frightening to schools and which makes it difficult to build positive teacher-learner relationships. Schools might find that many learners with behavioural difficulties are unpredictable, and there are various reasons for this. One is that they may lack social competence. This may make it difficult for schools and teachers to interpret and thus make the situation at school stressful for teachers. These learners often use inappropriate strategies to cope, including angry outbursts, sulking or destructive behaviour violence towards teachers or other learners, thus making the school a rather unsatisfactory learning environment.

According to Rogers (2007:224), teachers should not be left to their own discretion in dealing with learner behaviour, but it should be a whole school discussion, policy and practice.

Many learners are alienated, not because they commit crimes in schools, but because they have a mental or behavioural disorder. These learners due to exclusion or expulsion from schools turn to crime (Ash, 2008:177). The United States DoE (2011) found that some 30 to 50% of youth in correctional facilities are individuals with disabilities. In this group, learning disabilities and emotional or behavioural disorders are about equally represented (45 & 42%, respectively). This however, is not the case for all learners with disorders. Smith (2007:238) found evidence to suggest that although some children who are delinquent have BED, many do not. However, it is very important to understand that many of these learners are at great risk for being involved with the criminal justice system. Some authors argue that schools should monitor and screen at risk learners in order to intervene quickly (Adelman & Taylor, 2010:38).

## **2.9 WARNING SIGNS FOR TEACHERS**

Warning signs are not to be ignored. Prevention and early intervention of outbursts during the critical adolescent period has been called the “window of opportunity” (Martin & Cohen, 2000). According to Martella and Nelson (2003:75), warning signs are the behaviours that indicate that a learner is in distress. He suggests that teachers look out for the following key personality characteristics:

- **Leakage:** A learner will reveal clues, (e.g. spoken, stories, diary entries, essays, poems, letters, songs, drawings, or videos to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes) or intentions that signal an incident or targeted violence.
- **Low tolerance for frustration:** Learners might be easily bruised, insulted, angered, and hurt by real or perceived injustices done to them by others.
- **Poor Coping Skills:** Learner shows immature or disproportionate responses to frustration, criticism, disappointment, failure, rejections, or humiliation.
- **Lack of Resiliency:** When a set-back occurs the learner may have little capacity to bounce back (even when some time has elapsed).
- **Failed Love Relationship:** Learners might feel rejected or humiliated after the end of a love relationship; this learner might be withdrawn and unable to accept or come to terms with the rejections or humiliation.



- Injustice Collector: Learner will not be able to forgive or forget real or perceived injustices or the persons they feel are responsible. They might keep a hit list of these individuals.
- Signs of Depression: Such as lethargy, physical fatigue, a dark outlook on life, a sense of malaise and a loss of interest in activities that they once enjoyed. Talk of suicide and worthlessness. Other signs may include outburst of anger, a generalized and excessive hatred towards everyone.
- Alienation Learners: Learner being estranged from others. This involves feelings of isolation, sadness, and loneliness, not belonging, and not fitting in.
- Change of Behaviour: A decline in academic performance, sudden disregard for school rules, etc.

As can be seen from the above signs, learners will often through their behaviour indicate that they are out of control and in need of assistance. Goldstein and Brooks (2007:129) explain that although teachers are in an ideal position to spot these warning signs and identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems, it is unfortunate that they miss many.

### **2.9.1 Identifying internalizing problems**

An interesting finding by Campbell (2004) was that internalizing problems of anxiety and depression are both under-identified and under referred to by teachers. According to Goldstein and Brooks (200:129), there are a number of reasons why these adverse feelings are not easy to observe that makes it difficult for classroom teachers to accurately identify learners struggling with internal problems. They explain that teachers are not in a position to observe symptoms affecting inner-thoughts. The behaviour of most worried or helpless learners do not all call attention to themselves because these learners do not act up in class nor are the majority of them likely to share their fears, worries, helplessness, sadness, or at the extreme suicidal thoughts. Patton and Glover (2000) mention that, even though teachers are not very accurate in identifying specific internal concerns, they are none the less crucial to the success of interventions in schools.

## 2.9.2 Defining, observing and recording behaviour

In recognizing and observing learners, Porter (2000:39) outlines target behaviours that are a high priority namely those that violate someone's rights, rather than acts that are merely inconvenient to others. The behaviour that is of concern should be defined precisely that is in terms of what actually happens.

He further explains that teachers when observing and recording should focus on:

- The frequency of the behaviour, which is the number of times it occurs.
- The rate, that is, the number of times the behaviour occurs within a specified time period.
- The duration and the intensity of the behaviour.

Roffey (2004:120) suggests the ABC model in attempting to make sense of behaviour. This model looks at what the circumstances are when the learner is behaving well and what happens afterwards to reinforce this. This model identifies not only the problem behaviour (B) but also the antecedents (A) consequences (C), to see what might be reinforcing the unwanted behaviour.

Porter (2000 39) states that when teachers are observing and recording behaviour with the intention to intervene the aim should be to define the behaviour in behavioural terms rather than diagnostic ones. If a learner hits another learner in a class situation define the behaviour in terms of what actually happens instead of labelling the learner as aggressive.

Many predictions and explanations draw on information such as social class; context, dress, sex and ethnicity which can affect the interpretation put on behaviour and subsequent beliefs about future outcomes. Teachers must therefore take care not to overreact and misinterpret normal developmental behaviour as predictive of a future outburst or catastrophe. On the other hand, Campbell (2004:4) states that teachers can be assisted by special educational support staff in secondary schools who are also able to assist with the identification process. These could be guidance counsellors, learning support teachers, behavioural assistance teachers, and health nurses who are still in positions to where they are privy to information about learners' problems. Lerner and Johns (2009:203) maintains that sometimes school

personnel do a thorough job of assessing these learners, but then create a “one size fits all” behavioural intervention plan. They further argue that this behavioural intervention plan should be based on the individual needs of the learner. Learners may feel threatened, or even demoralised, by the demands placed on them by the school.

Goldstein and Brooks (2007:381) explain that there are several barriers that teachers may encounter to effectively identify and intervene as teachers are not trained in mental health, nor should they be experts in that area. The authors suggest a collaborative dialogue and active assessment opportunities to screen or identify learners at risk for behavioural and emotional problems.

Adelman and Taylor (2010:69) maintain that all learners have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and to achieve productive and healthy lives. Schools should adopt a comprehensive approach and emphasize the need to develop systematic interventions that can enhance the role they play in promoting healthy and emotional development. What will emerge are health promotion and problem prevention, as well as special assistance for those with chronic and severe problems.

## **2.10 SUMMARY**

From the literature study it is evident that teachers should be supported and receive training in dealing with learners with BED. This is crucial in securing a safe and healthy school environment for all involved. Schools also have a duty towards these learners to assist them when in distress. Learners are human beings with emotions and some learners, due to factors outside of school may look towards the school for assistance. Learners with behavioural and emotional problems may not fit into the system; they may have experienced loss, abuse or other disadvantages. Teachers can play a significant role by spotting warning signs and seeking assistance from the school or outside support services. There is a meaning to everyone’s behaviour and teachers need to explore what these behaviours might mean.

The school should be the place where learners can think and feel positive about themselves; developing and nurturing mental health during adolescence is important and this can best be achieved by identifying learners with possible behavioural and emotional problems early.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an outline of the research methodology used. The geographical area where the study was conducted, the design, population, and sample are described. The instrument used to collect the data, including methods implemented to maintain validity and reliability are described. A qualitative research design was selected to describe and analyze the participants' knowledge on signs learners with BED might display. Within the framework of a qualitative research design a case study was conducted with the purpose of gaining insight into the teachers' perceptions of how knowledgeable they think they are in identifying learners with BED. This strategy was aimed at guiding the study in an exploratory manner and enabling the researcher to gain insight into the knowledge of teachers who deal with learners with BED in their classrooms. This research design also allowed the researcher to provide a rich detailed description of teachers within their day-to-day setting in order to produce insider perspective.

#### **3.2 METHOD OF RESEARCH**

The qualitative approach which is inductive in nature was used to guide the researcher to extract all the required information from the interviewees. Creswell (2002:54) defines qualitative research as an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. To learn about this phenomenon the inquirer asks participants broad general questions and collects the detailed views of the participants in the form of impressions, words and sentences. This approach is useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. In this study the researcher systematically collected and analyzed empirical data and carefully examined the patterns in them to understand and explain the teachers' effectiveness in identifying and dealing with learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

A qualitative approach was further adopted to enable the researcher to gain a better understanding of the views and opinions of the teachers who are required to manage learners

with behavioural and emotional problems. The researcher aimed to describe and explain her observation and based the study on the phenomenological method, as the phenomenologist does not want to disturb the object of his study, because he is inspired by what he can see and he wants to describe and explain his observation. The researcher made use of questionnaires and interviews which formed the bases for the data collection.

The qualitative design was chosen to meet the objectives of the study, namely:

- To examine the extent to which teachers can identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems.
- To analyze the teachers' skills in addressing learners with behavioural and emotional problems.
- To examine the types of behaviour and emotional problems exhibited by learners.
- To examine the strategies adopted by teachers to address learners' behavioural and emotional problems and their suitability.
- To make recommendations for the kind of intervention strategies that could be implemented.

Drew (2008:21) explains that qualitative research tends not to tamper with natural settings where the data was collected. The teachers from the FET phase were selected because they work with adolescent learners and they could provide the researcher with the relevant data. The collection of data involved words that described the topic under investigation in the natural setting, which in the case of this study was the high school. This method allowed the researcher to describe what was being studied.

### **3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

This section will focus on the selection of the population and sample. Qualitative research focuses primarily on the depth or richness of the data and therefore qualitative researchers generally select samples purposefully rather than randomly (Struwig & Stead, 2007:121).

#### **3.3.1 The population**

Silkind (1977) as cited in Punch (2009:162) defines a population as a group of potential participants to whom you want to generalize the results of a study. In this study, two

secondary schools in the northern areas in Port Elizabeth were selected because the aim was to study teachers' knowledge in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems in the FET phase from Grades 10 to 12. The two secondary schools were selected because they had similar school profiles, were located in the same suburbs which minimized the differences across schools. They also had similarities regarding geographical location, resources and socio-economic status. A population is explained by Drew (2008:83) as all constituents of any clearly described group of people, events, or objects who are the focus of an investigation. The two secondary schools are referred to as Schools X and Y. School X is located to the north of Port Elizabeth and consists of a predominantly low income population with high numbers of unemployment. School Y was also purposively selected on the basis of its location, and potential to provide rich data needed for the study. The surrounding area is a lower socio-economic area characterized by high crime, unemployment poverty and poor socio-economic conditions. The identification of the population was done in accordance with the qualitative research design as such a design is not restricted to the selection of respondents but also involves the setting, incidents, events, and activities to be included for data collection (Niewenhuis, 2007:79).

### **3.3.2 The sample**

According to Thomas (2009:105), a sample is defined as a specimen; a small portion to show the quality of the whole. This process is used to select a portion of the population for a study.

The sample in the research study is teachers in the FET-phase from the northern areas of Port Elizabeth. For the purpose of this study the sample comprised 25 teachers from each school with a combined total of 50 teachers. The sample did not take gender, race, age or years of teaching experience into account as all the teachers at the schools irrespective of these factors worked with the adolescent learners. The aim was to determine the teachers' level of knowledge in terms of how skilled they are in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

This fairly extreme sample assisted the researcher significantly in determining the extent to which teachers are knowledgeable in identifying warning signs. The teachers' opinions in terms of how competent they feel in this regard were also examined. The teachers in the FET phase work with adolescent learners who are being prepared for their final matric examination

and who have a relatively limited time at school before completing their schooling. This sample was selected in such a way that the individuals chosen were representative of the larger group from which they were selected. The researcher selected this group thereby aiming to elicit information about the population. With this the researcher aimed to produce results that are equally if not more accurate than trying to reach every person in the whole population (Neuman, 2003:195).

The primary purpose of sampling is to collect specific cases, events, or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding. The researcher aligned this study with purposeful sampling. According to Creswell (2002:193), purposeful sampling selects people or sites who can best help us understand the phenomena. In this study the selection of participants was therefore intentional and purposeful to best understand the central phenomenon under study, which was to examine the extent to which secondary school teachers were equipped to cope with the wide range of emotional and behavioural challenges that they are presented with in the classroom situation.

As pointed out by Cohen *et al.* (2000:103), purposeful sampling enables the researcher to handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality. In this way a sample can be built up that is satisfactory to their specific needs. The two schools were selected because they both are in impoverished disadvantaged communities where social problems are rife. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:400) assert that purposeful sampling requires that information be obtained about variations among the subunits before the sample is chosen. The samples were chosen on the basis that they were likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher was investigating.

The researcher selected the sample in such a manner that the individuals chosen were representative of the larger group from which they were selected. This group was selected to elicit information about the population. With this in mind the researcher aimed to produce results that are equally if not more accurate than trying to reach every single person in the whole population (Neuman, 2003:195). Such a sample thus ensured a representative body of data on the views of a significant number of participants.

### **3.4 A CASE STUDY DESIGN**

The case study research applied in this research is embedded in the qualitative method. Cohen (2000:181) regards case study design as a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle; it is the study of an instance in action. The knowledge of teachers in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems will be described in the analysis of findings through the research tools. One of the strengths of case studies is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that contexts are unique and dynamic. Hence case studies as cited by Adelman (1980) in Cohen *et al.* (2000:181) investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance.

One of the advantages of using a case study method is that it enables the use of multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:398) state that qualitative research uses a case study design meaning that the data analysis focuses on one phenomenon, which the researcher selects to understand in depth regardless of the number of sites or participants for the study. A qualitative research design requires a plan for choosing sites and participants and for beginning data collection. They continue to say that to plan a case study design involves not only selecting the general research questions, but also involves incorporating design components which add to the potential contributions and significance of the study.

In this study, two secondary schools X & Y in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth, representing the two cases for in depth investigation, were selected for their unusually high number of incidents by learners with behavioural and emotional problems. With the selection of the case study the researcher aimed to explore significant features of the case and to construct a worthwhile argument or story, on the basis of the rich thick data provided by the participants.

### **3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

The instruments used for the purpose of this study were questionnaires and interviews. A two-step methodology was used by first constructing a questionnaire involving all teachers in grade 10-12 and then followed by interviews.



### 3.5.1 Questionnaires

Thomas (2009:173) defines the characteristics of a questionnaire as a written form of questioning with either open or closed ended questions or a combination of both. For the purpose of this study the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit rich data typical of a qualitative study. Questionnaires consisting of 13 open-ended questions (see Appendix E), focusing on teachers' skills in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems, were administered among selected teachers.

A questionnaire was selected as one of the data collection instruments for this study since:

- It ensured a high response rate as the questions were distributed amongst teachers to complete and were collected personally by the researcher.
- It required less time and energy to administer.
- It offered the possibility of anonymity because the respondents' were not required to provide their names.
- Most of the questions on the questionnaire were open-ended questions which afforded respondents the opportunity to provide as much detail as possible on their skills in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

The questions focused on teachers' understanding of learners with behavioural and emotional problems and their ability to identify learners exhibiting these problems. Open-ended questions were designed to encourage as comprehensive a response as possible using the respondents' own knowledge and feelings. This ensured that the respondents used detail in their responses. The flexibility of this approach also allowed for the discovery or elaboration of information that was important to the respondents. Teachers from the two schools responded to the open-ended questions. The result of this was that teachers were not limited and could give an account in their own words. Since the questions were objective they afforded the respondents an opportunity to formulate responses that were pertinent to them. Such questions furthermore allowed the respondents to answer and to provide extra information. The teachers participating in the interview study did not take part in the questionnaire study; this was deliberately set out in order to avoid the teachers having time to re-think questions and as some questions in the questionnaire were repeated in the interview this also ensured that the same teachers did not answer a question twice.

### 3.5.2 Interviews

An interview, according to Thomas (2009:160), is a discussion with someone in which the interviewer tries to elicit information on a given topic from him/her. This face-to-face interaction served to provide the researcher with a great deal of data. Menter *et al.* (2011:126) state that a research interview is a dialogue aimed at eliciting information on a certain topic of interest or a research inquiry. The semi-structured interviews were conducted at the schools, where the respondents taught.

The respondents for the interviews were all teachers from the FET-phase (Grades 10-12) across all learning areas. The researcher asked questions to and recorded answers from only one participant in the study at a time. According to Creswell (2002:206), one-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably. The interviews were held to verify the data from the questionnaires. Subsequently each interview transcript was read and analyzed for major constructs and common themes. The purpose of the use of the two instruments was to ensure reliability of the findings.

On the basis that the study called for specific information from specific informants who are knowledgeable about the process under consideration, Creswell (2002:199) makes the point that in qualitative research, interviews are typically unstructured or, less frequently, semi-structured. The advantages of this type of interview are that they permit participants to describe detailed personal accounts of experiences. The interviewer also has better control over the type of information received, since specific questions can be posed to elicit the information. Punch (2009:144) posits that the interview is the most prominent data collection tool in qualitative research as it is a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality which assist in ensuring that the data is valid and reliable. For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews were used. The advantage of the semi-structured interview is that respondents are allowed to discuss issues beyond the confines of the questions. This technique enables the researcher to obtain multiple responses to set questions thus allowing for detailed responses (Struwig & Stead, 2007:98).

Five teachers from each of the two high schools were selected to be interviewed. These ten interviews were conducted with selected participants. The interviewees were chosen for their relevance to respond to the conceptual questions rather than their representativeness. The selection was, however, completely voluntary. The researcher used semi-structured open-ended interviews, where the interviewer engaged the respondents in a relatively informal conversation focusing on events, opinions and insights relating to their ability to identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems. The individuals selected were interviewed separately, to protect their identity and also to afford them the opportunity to express their views adequately. Individual interviews also ensured that more detailed information could be obtained from each respondent. During the interview process the researcher assured the respondents that they could refer to any other concerns relating to the topic.

### **3.6 RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

Drew (2008:46) refers to the data collection phase as the actual execution of the investigation. This may include the process of administering a questionnaire, conducting an interview, or presenting a test to a participant and recording the responses. This is the point at which the study was implemented.

The research process commenced with the researcher requesting permission from the District Director to conduct research at the selected schools (**see Appendix A**). After permission was granted, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in the (**see Appendix C**). Thereafter permission was sought from the selected schools relating to their willingness to participate in the study (**see Appendix D**). Once permission was granted, the researcher paid each school a courtesy visit to establish contact with the principal and staff. Thereafter questionnaires were administered among the staff members who were willing to do so, but who still would be able to provide rich, thick data (**see Appendix E**). Arrangements were made with principals for the collection of the questionnaires. Thereafter appointments were made with the identified members of staff for conducting interviews. After the accumulated data was collected, it was processed and analyzed qualitatively.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants as well as the schools in which they work. Therefore, the schools where the researcher conducted the research are

referred to as School X and Y. The two schools selected are situated in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth characterized by poverty and socio-economic problems.

A questionnaire with 13 open-ended questions was delivered to each of the schools; the questionnaire was based on the qualitative design frame. A questionnaire (see **Appendix E**) was administered by the researcher to collect the data from a purposive sample of 50 respondents. Respondents were asked to answer the questions as comprehensively as possible.

The interviews (see **Appendix G & H**) were scheduled not to interfere with the academic tasks of the teachers. A time frame of 35 minutes was allocated for each interview. The respondents' permission was requested to use a voice recorder during the interviews. All the teachers granted their permission and the research could continue. The researcher therefore, aimed to capture the real-life experiences of teachers in a school setting and to understand to what extent they are knowledgeable in identifying learners with BED. Each interview began with a statement of the purpose of the interview and a promise of confidentiality.

Trustworthiness was established by using various strategies as safeguards against bias in findings. Member checking was used to verify the interpretation of the data. This was done by taking the data back to the respondents to check the validity of the findings. Ethical measures included gaining informed consent from the school principals and the respondents. The data was analyzed and consolidated into themes. These themes were coded according to skills, knowledge and opinions of teachers regarding types of disruptive behaviours, structures they employ in dealing with these learners, what resources are available to assist them as well as the learners with behavioural and emotional problems. When all the data was consolidated into themes it was analyzed and interpreted.

### **3.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis is described by Bogdan (2003:147) as the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview scripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that one accumulates to enable one to establish findings. The data was collected from each of the two schools, in the northern areas by means of questionnaires and interviews. Data analysis consisted of text analysis, where the researcher described the information using words. Themes were

developed and preliminary codes developed as logical extensions from the interview questions.

The semi-structured interviews conducted with selected teachers, each took 35 minutes and were recorded on tape and transcribed directly after the interviews were conducted. This data collection process is described by O'Donogue and Punch (2009:174) as a three current flow activity namely data reduction, data display and conclusion. These authors define the coding process as attaching meaningful labels to data chunks. For the purpose of this study themes that emerged from the data were analyzed into preliminary codes. Data was analyzed and interpreted to produce the results and the findings. O'Donogue and Punch (2009:174) define codes as tags, names or labels, and coding is therefore the process of putting tags, names or labels against pieces of the data. The pieces may be individual words or small or large chunks of the data. Thus labels are therefore assigned to attach meaning to the pieces of data. O'Donogue and Punch (2009:175) further states that coding is the starting activity in qualitative analysis, and the foundation for what comes later.

According to Struwig and Stead (2007:170), data interpretation focuses on holistic understanding, and is not merely the reporting of data but should provide a coherent interpretation of the findings. In this study the results were interpreted within the research framework of a qualitative study. This method of data analysis was used, because it enabled the researcher to base the findings on existing theory and research and it is therefore inductive.

### **3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

#### **3.8.1 Validating the data**

In validating the data in a qualitative study, Drew (2008:70) states that this involves recording data in narrative descriptions, not numbers. Researchers use qualitative methods to observe and describe conditions rather than controlling them. Interview transcripts and written notes were analyzed systematically through repeated re-reading of them. This made it possible to gain an understanding of each interviewee's viewpoint and perspective. The questions were formulated in simple language for clarity and ease of understanding.

According to Struwig and Stead (2007:136), validity refers to the extent to which a research design is scientifically sound or appropriately conducted. They further contend that there are various ways of confirming or validating data. Various methods were used to confirm or to validate the data such as conducting interviews, and administering questionnaires.

To ensure validity the researcher explained the background and the view she holds that could influence the interpretations offered. Further use of triangulation contributed to the validity of the findings. Cohen *et al.* (2000:112) states that triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspects of human behaviour. Neuman (2000:124) makes the analogy that surveyors and sailors measure distances between objects by making observations from multiple positions. By observing something from different angles or viewpoints they get fixed on its true location. Applied to social research it is better to examine something from several angles rather than to look at it in from only one perspective. Thus the researcher used different methods; questionnaires, and interviews to check on the accuracy and to ensure validity and reliability.

### **3.8.2 Reliability**

Neuman (2000:171) states that reliability means dependability or consistency. Qualitative researchers use a variety of techniques to record their data consistently. In this study interviews and questionnaires were used as techniques to gather the data. Reliability was also ensured by minimising sources of measurement error like data collector bias which, refer to the degree to which the researcher is biased in reporting and interpreting the findings. To ensure that data was dependable, the researcher employed member checking by returning the data to the respondents for verification of its accuracy.

Bloor (1978) as cited in Cohen *et al.* (2000:120) suggests the following three means by which respondent validation can be addressed:

- Researchers attempt to predict what the respondents' classifications of situations will be.
- Researchers prepare hypothetical cases and then predict respondent's likely responses to them.

- Researchers return their research reports to the respondents and record their reactions to that report.

For the purpose of this study the researcher returned the findings to the respondents and recorded their reactions to that report, by means of member checking. Privacy and confidentiality were further established by ensuring that the physical and psychological environment where data was collected was made as comfortable as possible. At both schools the researcher was given a quiet room to conduct the research in private without any disturbances.

### **3.9 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

#### **3.9.1 Limitations**

The limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the application or interpretation of the results of a study. They are the constraints on generalizability of findings that are the results of the ways in which you choose to design the study (USC Libraries Mobile, 2012).

Two high schools in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth were selected for the purpose of this research. The reason only two schools were chosen was to comply with the time constraints regarding the research. Only Grade 10 to 12 teachers were chosen which confined the research to a relatively small geographical area. Results may not be applicable to schools where there are counsellors or educational psychologists such as private or former Model C schools. Teachers from the disadvantaged township schools were excluded from the study.

#### **3.9.2 Delimitations**

This study is delimited to two secondary schools located in the northern areas of Port Elizabeth as it is a small-scale study. A more in depth study involving a wider selection of schools goes beyond the scope of this study.

### **3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

To render the study ethical the rights to self-determination, anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were observed. Written permission to conduct the research study was obtained from the DoE as well as the Ethics Committee of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (see **Appendix B and C**).

Permission and consent were also obtained from the school principals as well as the teachers who participated in the study (see **Appendix D**). The informants were informed of their right to voluntarily consent or decline to participate, and to withdraw participation at any time. Respondents were also informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures that would be used to collect the data, and assured that there were no potential risks involved.

In this study, confidentiality was maintained by keeping the collected data confidential and not revealing the respondents' identities during the reporting of findings.

### **3.11 SUMMARY**

This chapter provided an outline of the research methodology, including the population, sample, data collection instruments as well as strategies used to ensure ethical standards regarding reliability and validity of the study. The qualitative design was explained in detail and motivation for its selection was provided. The various data collection instruments such as questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were described.

The qualitative method was used in this case study to collect data. Case studies can establish cause and effect; one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognising that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects. Furthermore context is unique and dynamic; hence case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:181).



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research followed a qualitative approach during the data collection process. The aim of the study was to analyze teachers' skills in the identification of learners with behavioural and emotional problems. The case study approach was implemented to gain a rich detailed understanding of the cases selected by examining the ways in which behavioural and emotional challenges manifest themselves in the classroom and the teachers' skills in identifying and resolving such challenges. Each of the schools will be discussed separately according to emerging themes and trends. The main challenges will be discussed and analyzed in terms of teachers' abilities to identify and assist learners with behavioural and emotional challenges. Findings will further be analyzed according to themes as explained in Chapter Three. These findings emerged from the interviews conducted with teachers at the school.

Two secondary schools were selected for the research. The schools are referred to as School X and Y for the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality and are discussed separately in detail below.

The background from the two schools would flow into the analysis of the findings. The findings were interpreted and discussed. Data were collected and analysed before interpretation. This systematic method of finding answers is important as it allows the information to be broken into clear steps that led to interpretations. This also defined the plan indicating direction and put the two schools within a clear context.

#### **4.2 CASE STUDY 1: SCHOOL X**

##### **4.2.1 Background history of School X**

School X is a secondary school situated in a lower socio-economic area in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. The neighbourhood is notorious for gang fights and violence. Despite this the school serves as a beacon of hope for the community.

The school is a government funded school and operates exclusively on the low school fees and limited funds it receives from the DoE. It is headed by an acting principal who has been waiting for the past three years for a permanent appointment, but to no avail. This, according to him, is not an ideal situation as the teachers and learners often undermine his authority.

Learners at the school are regarded as disadvantaged because of their poor socio-economic conditions, the numerous obstacles they face such as poverty, unemployed parents, gangsterism and drug infested neighbourhoods. The effects of gangsterism can also be seen in their manner of dress and their use of language.

The principal and staff informed me that the school was one of the top schools in the Eastern Cape a few years ago. They ascribe the decline in the results to the low motivation of teachers, and learners who had become very difficult to manage and to teach. In the last matric exam the school had a pass rate of just over 60% which was low in comparison to previous years.

The school only offers rugby for boys and netball for girls as extra-mural activities. Many teachers regard the exclusion of physical education from the syllabus, due to budget constraints, as a shortcoming in the learning programme. They are of the opinion that the inclusion of physical education could contribute significantly to their learners' physical, mental and emotional well-being.

They have increasingly become aware that many learners are faced with emotional challenges which they are not equipped to manage. The school however managed to obtain the services of a student social worker to assist the learners for a few months.

#### **4.2.2 How behaviour manifests itself in the classroom and teachers' abilities to cope with these**

THE DSM-IV-TR Diagnostic Structured Manual of Disorders (2000:93) considers an essential feature of conduct disorder as a repetitive and persistent pattern of behaviour in

which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate social norms or rules are violated. The behaviour pattern is usually present in a variety of settings such as home, school, or the community. Adolescents with this disorder often initiate aggressive behaviour and react aggressively towards others. They may display bullying, threatening, or intimidating behaviour.

Teachers in South Africa are becoming increasingly distressed about disruptive behaviour. Conduct disorder is a complex group of behavioural and emotional problems in adolescents. According to Prever (2006:51), learners with these disorders may have difficulty following rules and behaving in the socially acceptable ways normally expected of them. Often their problems are perceived by parents, schools and peers as wilfully bad or delinquent behaviour and treated as such.

For Levin and Nolan (1996), as cited by Marais and Meyer (2010), learner behaviour that inhibits achievement of the teacher's purposes is:

- Behaviour that interferes with the teaching and learning act.
- Behaviour that interferes with the rights of other learners to learn.
- Behaviour that causes the destruction of property.

Prever (2006:51) states that the causes of conduct disorder appear to be related to learners susceptible to genetic factors and a range of influences such as inconsistent behavioural expectations at home.

At School X all the respondents (i.e. the teachers) experienced learner behaviour that disrupted classroom activities and deemed it a major challenge to classroom control and learning. Some of the challenging behaviours that teachers are concerned about include *inter alia* the following:

#### 4.2.2.1 Attention seeking behaviour

According to the respondents, attention seekers are learners who speak out of turn, walk up and down while the lesson is in progress, and disrupt other learners while they are working.

Learners also shout at other learners from across the classroom. This is very frustrating to teachers as it even makes it difficult for them to hear themselves talking.

Learners who also fool around, joking at the silliest things and are generally not serious and respectful in the classrooms are described by one respondent as *“the class clowns always wanting the focus of attention to be on them”* and would even go as far as arguing or being openly deviant to the point where such a learner would engage in a verbal confrontation with the teacher to challenge his/her authority. One respondent stressed that such verbal interruptions e.g. talking out of turn, name calling, calling out occurs almost in all classrooms. Marias and Meyer (2010) refers to such behaviour as surface behaviour because they are usually not the result of deep-seated problems, but normal developmental behaviour of children.

According to one respondent:

*“Attention seekers normally break the rules to be thrown out of class. They will push boundaries. When attention seekers disrupt lessons emotions runs high. I force them to pay attention by screaming at them; sometimes it is an impossible task. If they continue to refuse to comply, I send them out of my class. I don’t really know other methods of dealing with these learners or how to assist them.”*

#### 4.2.2.2 Wandering around school grounds and bunking classes

Respondents indicated that learners who are instructed to leave the classroom normally wonder around the school grounds until the end of a lesson. Most respondents shared the belief that if learners are asked to leave the classroom it becomes easier for the rest of the class to focus and the teacher can then attempt to complete the lesson. The negative impact of putting a learner out of a class is that they sometimes run around the school grounds making a noise and even swearing at the teacher from outside. This conveys the message that they donot care or are openly disrespectful to the teacher and his/her authority. Some respondents claim that learners are simply ill-disciplined, and rude. One respondent said: *“They have a disrespectful attitude because they are not taught at home to respect others and they are also not disciplined at home. When they are at school they think that they can be unruly anddisrespectful towards the teachers.”* Another respondent stated: *“I am not a trained*

*expert on behaviour and I lack the knowledge on whether the learners want to be outside to because they find the work difficult or boring.”*

Behaviour that disrupts classroom activities is attributed to a lack of discipline and rules at home, a lack of respect for authority and rules, overcrowded classrooms, as well as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and or Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which is significantly prevalent among learners.

#### 4.2.2.3 Disrespectfulness towards teachers

Another challenging type of behaviour was categorised as disrespectfulness towards teachers e.g. not answering when being asked a question by a teacher, or giving sarcastic or rude answers when spoken to repeatedly thereby ignoring teachers' instructions or requests. One teacher said that she told a learner to get his life in order after he failed her test. He responded “...and you need to get a life.” One of the respondents commented that learners lack discipline at home and they just have no regard for authority. They don't respect their parents at home because the parents are not role models, which they can look up to or aspire to be like. These learners just donot care and teachers need assistance in dealing with them.

This disrespectful behaviour towards teachers leads to teacher frustration and despondency towards their work. This behaviour, according to Colwin (2010:64), can set the stage for authoritarian behaviour in learners, adult life leading to crime, dysfunctional relationships, and conflict in the workplace.

#### 4.2.2.4 More serious disruptive behaviour

##### 4.2.2.4.1 *Fighting*

According to respondents, learners who engage in fights are angry and lack the verbal skills to express themselves. Further possible reasons are exposure to violence at home and abusive backgrounds. According to the respondents, fighting has become part of the everyday events at their school. Fights are often gang related and sometimes a fight that starts in the classroom is continued on the sport fields. Types of fighting are kicking, punching and slapping.

These respondents ascribed the behaviour to violence at home as well as in society. One respondent at this school remarked that: *“Learners see violence on television and movies they living in a society that has no regard for human life.”*

A female teacher who only started teaching about three years ago relates her experience of a learner being aggressive towards her as follows:

*“One day I was busy teaching when a learner who always disrupts my class asked in the middle of the lesson to leave the classroom because he was bored. I told him that he was not going to leave the classroom. He got up and shoved and pushed me to the side, I lost my balance and fell over and knocked my head against the cupboard.”* Another teacher expressed a fear of the learners and she indicated that teachers need to be trained in self-defence to protect themselves against these learners.

**At this school a male teacher who was viciously attacked in his classroom relates his story as follows:**

*“It was in the last period I went to my classroom and when I entered I saw three boys sitting at the back of my class who did not belong there. I asked them to leave because I wanted to start teaching. They refused and a verbal argument started. I walked towards them to show them that I was serious and it is then that they got up and attacked me. I fought back which was difficult because the one had a knife to my throat. A girl in the classroom started screaming ‘you going to kill him’ that is when they punched me in the face and ran away.”*

Sometimes fighting is directed at teachers which make them fearful of attending school. Unfortunately violent attacks on teachers are on the increase in South Africa. One respondent replied: *“Our learners are angry. This aggression stems mainly from drug abuse and alcohol abuse. Learners who are involved in fights are in most cases the ones that are on drugs. It is difficult to work with such learners, so teachers ignore them, out of fear of being attacked. I was never given training on how to protect myself against aggressive and violent learners. Teachers are becoming easy targets.”*

#### 4.2.2.4.2 Bullying

According to the respondents bullying is a serious problem. The type of bullying that they are mainly concerned about is emotional abuse which occurs predominantly via the electronic media such as cell phones. They describe this as threats via text messages or phone calls which one respondent distinguished as more prevalent among girls than boys. She explained that boys are normally bullies on the sport fields and in the classroom. According to her they are mainly involved in physical abuse such as kicking, biting, hitting, and deliberate pushing and shoving.

One respondent indicated that learners who bully others are the result of being bullied at home. It is the case of the bullied becoming the bully. One respondent remarked that the older boys normally bullied the younger learners. They want to show that they are powerful and in control. They also want to be feared. Most respondents remarked that victims of bullies will not inform a teacher that they are being bullied, but their parents. Consequently it is normally the parent who comes to the school to report the case. One respondent remarked that bullies normally suffer from low self-esteem and conform to peer pressure. Respondents indicated that their college and university training did not prepare them adequately to cope with deviant behaviour such as bullying in the school or classroom.

#### 4.2.2.4.3 *Acting out behaviour*

Respondents list swearing, use of foul language, derogatory remarks and screaming uncontrollably, openly defying and challenging the teachers to fight, as acting out behaviour.

One respondent says that using vulgar language has become part of the learners' vocabulary. Learners do not even realize that their manner of speaking is abnormal. Another respondent at the same school remarked that learners are allowed to speak to their parents in a derogatory manner without fear of being reprimanded. She ascribed this to the loss of values and religion, amongst others. In many of the learners' homes learners are exposed to bad language at home and in society to the point where it becomes a norm. She further states that as teachers "*our knowledge on behaviour is limited to the subject content. We could do with some practical training to equip us to be more confident to deal with these learners. Many of us are unable to cope with learners who act out in our classrooms.*" Another respondent stated: "*Sometimes I'm not sure if the behaviour should be ignored or if I should act on it.*"

Another respondent remarked that many learners are angry which stems from problems at home. The learners feel neglected and are disappointed with their parents who indulge in

alcohol and drug abuse or who are involved in extra- marital affairs. Another respondent remarked that domestic problems spill over into the school. According to her: *“They come to school and they act out, as a means of relieving their frustrations.”*

#### 4.2.2.4.4 Vandalism

According to the respondents at this school vandalism is a serious problem. Learners break windows, doors and cupboards open. They destroy chalk boards and write obscene language on walls. One respondent replied that his car was badly scratched and he had to pay to have it repaired even though it occurred in the school’s parking bay.

A number of teachers indicated that learners engaging in vandalism are objecting to the school’s authority. Since they are not punished at home they therefore find it unacceptable to adhere to the school’s rules. Another respondent remarked that they have no respect for property and they do not think about the consequences of their actions. Teachers’ frustrations with vandals are summoned up in the following respondent’s reply: *“We don’t know what to do anymore, pipes were stolen and classrooms were broken into. I lost my record file and stationary. The vandals were caught but one got released because he was younger than 18. He is now victimizing and terrorizing teachers.”*

### **4.2.3 Learners’ emotional problems and teachers’ abilities to identify and address these**

#### 4.2.3.1 Anxious learners

Learners may be anxious for a number of reasons. Respondents described reasons such as:

- Not coping intellectually with the degree of difficulty of the work at school.
- Being worried about problems at home.

One respondent replied that learners are anxious mainly because of worries over food, money and being abused at home. Another remarked that many learners at his school are anxious about being attacked by gangs in the school. One respondent expressed the view that teachers are often too busy to notice signs that a learner might be anxious or depressed. A respondent



remarked that: *“I often see learners who are anxious or depressed. It is difficult to reach out to these learners. They need specialist help, we are not psychologist or social workers we are teachers. Our school need a permanently employed school counsellor or social worker to assist these learners.”*

#### 4.2.3.2 Depression and suicidal thoughts

Respondents replied that more and more learners are showing signs of depression. They identified these signs as:

- Learners who show no interest in school work or friends.
- Lack of motivation.
- Negative self-concept.
- Learners who talk about life that is not worth living.

One respondent said that learners who are depressed absent themselves frequently from school. They subsequently miss out on a lot of work and find it difficult to catch up. The result is that most of these learners drop out of school.

#### 4.2.3.3 Overwhelmed feelings of tearfulness/sadness

Another problem raised by a respondent was girls who cry when confronted by teachers. She replied that when girls cry in class they believe it will solve the issue when their behaviour is the problem not the emotional outburst. Another respondent remarked that girls cry when they are not coping with problems in their lives that usually involve boys. Respondents indicated that girls crying are an indication of their emotional instability and that some girls start relying on pain tablets to suppress their emotions.

A respondent remarked that when a learner starts crying about a minor issue that happened in class he then knows that the learner is dealing with bigger issues which she is not coping with. The response from the teacher was: *“Unfortunately I am not capable to assist such learners.”*

#### 4.2.3.4 Low self-esteem

A respondent at School Y replied that a reason for learners' low self-esteem might be because they are bullied at school. Learners also are very shy in class and don't interact easily with other learners or the teachers. Another respondent replied that self-esteem problems are very common among learners at his school. He relates this to parents not believing in their children or instilling confidence in them. Some respondents also related that learners suffer from inferiority complexes because they are not coping with the work load at school. Some of these learners have also been in the same grade for more than two years and are repeating the grade for a third time. One of the teachers stated that most of the teachers simply do not have the time to work and help such learners individually and consequently they are simply left behind to fail.

#### **4.2.4 Teachers' knowledge of signs that a learner might demonstrate that he/she is in need of emotional support**

##### **4.2.4.1 Need for belonging**

Respondents contend that learners behave disorderly because they have a need to belong. This need to belong is often not met at home and learners with weak family ties simply join gangs to find a sense of belonging. One of the respondents expressed his viewpoint as follows: *"Adolescent learners have a strong need to belong, but unfortunately some of these learners seek out gangs to satisfy that need."*

Respondents replied that learners who seek power often come from families where the child is powerless. These learners feel overwhelmed or abandoned. A respondent indicated that learners are influenced by movies where they see aggression and fighting for power. The media therefore also tends to contribute towards aggression amongst learners to a certain extent. Another respondent replied that situations in the learners' homes and in their neighbourhoods contribute to an increase in aggression and violent behaviour among learners. Respondents indicated that these learners show signs of extreme aggression and defiance. One respondent stated this as follows: *"Sometimes I have fights in my class, out of fear of being attacked or hurt I don't intervene, I merely put them out of the class."*

According to some of the respondents, some learners create disciplinary problems by indulging in violent behaviour because they are angry, restless and are not mentally and emotionally equipped to manage their strong feelings or express their anger constructively.

#### 4.2.4.2 External factors relating to family, school and society

Estimations from twin and adoption studies show that conduct disorders are influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. The risk for conduct disorders are increased in children with a biological or adoptive parent with Anti-Social Personality Disorder. Learners with parents who are alcohol dependant, have mood disorders, schizophrenia or have a history of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or Conduct Disorder are more at risk (DSM-IV-TR, 2000:97).

Respondents replied that a lack of parental guidance and dysfunctional families are factors that contribute to behavioural problems amongst learners. One respondent stated that most of our learners *“come from single parent households”*. According to him the parent is young and unable to set good examples for the child. The majority of respondents stated that families who abuse drugs are a major concern for schools, because children see aggression and fighting amongst parents and they lack role models at home. One of the respondents indicated his viewpoint as follows: *“These kids carry that experience with them into school. They are demotivated and find it difficult to concentrate in class.”*

Oosthuizen and Van Staden (2007:362) and De Wet (2003:92) list factors that may heighten learners' propensity to engage in disruptive behaviour such as: a negative school climate, teachers' unprofessional behaviour, overcrowded classrooms; deficient organizational structure of the school, and rundown, ill-kept physical school structure.

One respondent at School X replied that learners ruin the school with graffiti and they also don't throw papers in bins. This gives the school a bad appearance as if there are no rules at the school and *“as if chaos rules”*. Respondents also highlighted overcrowded classrooms as a major contribution to learners' disorderly behaviour. Some classrooms have up to 45 learners which makes it difficult for teachers to teach and easy for learners to misbehave.

Respondents mentioned a list of societal influences impacting on learner behaviour such as: learners who belong to gangs, poverty and unemployment, poor housing facilities, and violence. Oosthuizen and Van Staden (2007: 363) share the view that prevalent examples of violence propagated in the media and witnessed or experienced as victims in society have a predisposing influence that could heighten learners' propensity to engage in disruptive behaviour.

One respondent replied that most learners in the school come from the local community where violence and crime is the norm. The learners are exposed to drugs and alcohol abuse. One teacher provided an example where a learner was caught selling drugs during the break and was expelled from school. This is a concern as teachers are ill-equipped to recognize all the signs that a learner is intoxicated in the classroom. If the learner does not speak or just sits quietly this learner often goes unnoticed.

#### **4.2.5 Factors that hinder teachers from identifying learners with behavioural and emotional challenges**

##### **4.2.5.1 Lack of knowledge and skills**

The majority of teachers indicated that their university/college training was not adequate to prepare them to assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems. One respondent replied that as teachers *"we are only experts in our learning areas, so we don't have the skills to deal with social and emotional issues"*. The DoE is responsible and should get involved. Another respondent replied that a lack of necessary training to equip teachers to deal with behavioural and emotional problems exist during teachers' initial training. Respondents' responses indicated that they are not adequately trained but it is expected of them to deal with learners with BED. A respondent stated that the university design for learning is a wonderful initiative on paper, but difficult to put into practice especially when resources are not available. Another respondent at the same school stated that the psychology model only prepared her to a certain extent and *"due to this I find it extremely difficult to understand or to know how to assist learners who demonstrate strong feelings of fear, anger and or being emotional disturbed"*. A respondent who is close to retirement indicated that *"If I was younger with less experience it would have been tough to handle learners with BED but*

*because of my experience I have an understanding of learner behaviour although it is very limited”.*

Many respondents related their lack of skill and knowledge to inadequate training at teacher training institutions. The majority interviewed indicated that they have never gone to workshops on how to identify or assist these learners. This is lacking and respondents believe that if they could better understand what behaviour means and which learner behaviour should be considered as problematic behaviour, they would feel more confident in class. Another respondent suggested a review of the teacher training program. Teachers and mental health professionals undergo completely different training and their roles are defined differently (Weare, 2003:5). This is highlighted in the difference between these two spheres of activity, in which teachers are viewed as being concerned with developing a learner’s intellectual, logical, technical and sometimes creative powers, but rarely their emotional capacity. She continues by stating that those in education have tended to view what happens in the “*black box*” of mental health as at best mysterious and medical and at worst rather frightening and off putting. Respondents asserted that schools are there to teach and to facilitate learning. They view their job as “*a passing of knowledge and skills*”. However teachers should regard education as more than the passing on of knowledge since the failure to address psychological issues in school will affect learners’ capacity to learn effectively (Weare, 2003:5). One respondent stated the following: “*I was given the necessary theory which always proves helpful, however we were not given sufficient practical experience. We work with adolescent learners many of which faces problems that they don’t know how to handle. Teachers should be equipped to assist these learners so that they don’t become the criminals and drop-outs of society*”.

#### 4.2.5.2 Overcrowded classrooms

Respondents explained the reason for overcrowded classrooms as the influx of learners from the township schools into the former ex-House of Representatives (Coloured School). After the 1994 election learners from township schools flooded the northern area schools. Respondents’ expressed their frustration at having to manage classrooms of up to 45 learners per class. This makes it difficult to focus on individual learners who may need support. A respondent at the school stated: “*Our school is under staffed and teachers are overloaded, we don’t have time to deal with learner issues, specialist should be brought in, but our school*

*lacks funds to appoint such people. If our school could afford to employ a counsellor it would help to support our learners with these problems. Another respondent at the school replied that 54 learners are way too many. If classrooms were not so overcrowded problems could easily be identified”.*

Another respondent voiced her frustration at having to deal with the huge numbers: *“I have 45 learners per class; how do I distinguish between different behaviours, or who needs help if I’m battling. Just to keep order, the ones who act out I just chase out of my class so that I can continue teaching.”*

The introduction of OBE and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) has increased teacher workload immensely. As one educator pointed out: *“One has to complete the syllabus. It is very difficult to provide the necessary help to learner needs. There is simply not enough time to walk alongside someone who needs my help.”*

#### **4.2.6 Teachers’ responses on the effectiveness of the methods used to cope with learners with behavioural and emotional problems**

##### **4.2.6.1 Detention/suspension or expulsion**

Most respondents indicated that learners who misbehave or disobey classroom rules have to report for detention. One respondent highlighted the detention practices as follows: *“At our school detention is on a Friday afternoon and learners stay behind after school for two hours”.* The respondent indicated that detention at their school was not as she put it *“a well-functioning process, as learners who are on detention often don’t arrive. They simply ignore the detention slips and don’t care if they are sent to the principals’ office”.* Respondents mentioned that the phasing out of corporal punishment in 1994 has contributed to an increase in disciplinary problems. In the case of learners who are involved in fighting or who are rude to a teacher those learners are suspended from school for two weeks. One respondent indicated that it often helps if the learner is removed from the classroom for a period of time. Teachers indicated that due to the lack of knowledge they are not equipped to employ more fruitful methods to assist these learners. As one respondent stated *“We use these methods because it is easy and it is what schools have been doing for many years”.* He indicated that these methods were not always effective and expressed the hope that his school would employ better methods to assist these learners in order for them to remain longer in school.

#### **4.2.7 Resources required by teachers to assist them in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional disorders**

Respondents listed the principal and the head of department as the primary members of staff who try to assist them at present. However they are not always able to provide assistance due to their other administrative responsibilities. The school also has the services of a student social worker who will be assisting them for a few months and a few staff members who are able to provide assistance at times. The respondents indicated that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as NICRO, TADA and other social welfare organizations provided assistance at times, but they were not always available.

One respondent indicated that they do not actually have any relevant resources on hand to assist them with the behavioural and emotional challenges that they are confronted with on a daily basis. He articulated his viewpoint as follows: *“The best schools can afford psychologists. Our school needs it more but we can’t afford the service and the DoE is not willing to help.”*

Respondents at this school indicated that full time educational psychologist or counsellors should be available. One respondent replied that learners find it easier to talk to as he put it *“a neutral person. Teachers also don’t always have the time to deal with learners issues. We are busy and also don’t know how to handle or help learners with behavioural and emotional problems.”* Another respondent replied that to have a full time counsellor would be very helpful, also having peer educator groups where learners are assisted by their peers to help solve emotional issues. Where serious cases are identified, educators are required to intervene or sometimes refer these learners to specialists in the field. One respondent stated that the lack of resources such as school and educational psychologists contribute to an increase in incidents of learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

Further resources were listed as a lack of training and workshops by mental health professionals. Respondents also stated that without in-service training many teachers feel ill prepared to assist these learners.

### **4.3 BACKGROUND HISTORY ON SCHOOL Y**

#### **4.3.1 School Y**

School Y is situated in Port Elizabeth's northern areas in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. This school is also situated in a lower socio-economic neighbourhood. The physical appearance of the school indicates that it is being targeted by thugs, gangsters and vandals on a regular basis. The building itself is old and graffiti can be seen on many of the walls. There are only a few classrooms with windows and there are many holes in the fencing. There is a security guard at the school gate who controls the cars that enter and leave the premises. The school has a permanently appointed principal and deputy principal who manage the school.

The school is regarded as an under-performing school based on the extremely low Grade 12 results. The total enrolment of learners is more than what the capacity of the school building can manage. The principal voiced his frustration at being under staffed and many temporary teachers feel demotivated because they have not been paid in months. He regards the lack of funding as a major stumbling block to the success of the school as a whole. The DoE pays the salary of permanent teachers, but nothing extra is being paid. The learners have to pay school fees for the school to function effectively, but many do not even pay and the school cannot compel them to do so. Consequently the school struggles to function as the telephones and photocopy machines do not work as there is no electricity.

The learners have learning problems and the literacy and numeracy levels are low. Many learners have parents who are illiterate, unemployed and addicted to drugs. Teachers are concerned about the high number of learners who come to school hungry and who in addition have to contend with numerous other socio-economic problems such as drug abuse, violence, sexually irresponsible behaviour leading to pregnancy and truancy. The teachers are particularly perturbed by the violent and aggressive behaviour of the learners towards them. The lack of discipline at the school is regarded as a serious problem facing the school as a whole.

The school has enlisted the assistance of an external NGO to assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Organizations come into the school from time to time to discuss



issues relating to life-skills. There are no counselling or psychological services available to assist learners who may be in need of such professional support services.

#### **4.3.2 Teachers' skills in identifying and assisting learners with behavioural challenges**

A learner's disruptive behaviour is a call for help and at the same time it is a serious challenge to the survival of the school. Families, schools and society are thus dependent on and influenced by each other, and have a responsibility to assist each other. It is difficult if learners are in families where positive behaviour is not exercised or promoted.

If the school as a system promotes good behaviour and the society promotes corrupt behaviour there is inevitably bound to be problems in the school as a whole (Prever, 2005:50). Respondents remarked that it is impossible to teach learners who misbehave in class. A number of them also complained about not having concrete strategies to deal with and to help these learners. Prever (2005:51) states that often the problems of learners with behavioural and emotional problems are perceived by parents, school and society as wilfully bad or delinquent behaviour and treated as such.

According to many of the respondents adolescent learners copy behaviour they see at home. Learners that come from disadvantaged backgrounds, where language is coarse and violence has become a means of communication, find it difficult to obey school rules. Their need for belonging, recognition, power and control leads them to being disruptive at school. These learners also find themselves at risk of underachievement. Teachers indicated that they try to deal with such learners by ignoring them or putting them out of class or reporting them to the school discipline committee.

Respondents also remarked that this is due to them not having the knowledge, time or resources to assist the learners. One respondent stated that *"some teachers at my school scream and shout at learners all day, they do not realize that their behaviour contribute to the disruption in their classes. We need better tools or ways to address the needs of learners with behavioural disorders"*.

#### 4.3.2.1 Home environment

All the respondents agreed that the home environment plays a significant role in building the morale and shaping the behaviour of an adolescent. One of the interviewee's remarked that a lack of parental interest and involvement is a major concern. Another interviewee expressed his viewpoint as follows: *"Many of our learners have parents that don't even know in which grade their child is. There is just no involvement. This could be due to the fact that the parents are alcoholics or using drugs."*

Respondents interviewed also referred to the following as key factors impacting on the behaviour and emotional state of the learners:

- Parents that are young, they are immature and set no example to the child.
- Alcoholism and drug abuse in the home.
- Violent display of temper and aggression by parents.
- Single parent family, especially the absence of the father.
- Poverty and unemployed parents.
- Parents who are illiterate and do not show any signs of interest in the learners school progress.

According to a number of the respondents collaboration with parents is difficult as many of them do not turn up when required to do so. Petersen (2011:112) states that it is important for teachers to make a concerted effort to try to get to know their learners and families outside the school. Many underperforming schools blame their lack of success on their learners' parents. But according to Taylor and Ryan (2005:169), some schools don't try hard enough to win over the parents. Most respondents expressed the wish for parents to become more involved in the school's activities.

#### 4.3.2.2 Specialist services

In terms of specialist services one of the respondents articulated his viewpoint as follows: *"In terms of learners with behavioural and emotional problems these learners would benefit greatly by professional services such as social workers or educational psychologist. We are unable to help learners who might have a serious disorder or who poses a challenges to*

*himself and to other learners.*” Another respondent relates a case at the school where a disturbed learner attacked two other learners with a knife during school hours. Teachers at the school never even noticed that the learner was disturbed, because he was always very quiet and did not have a lot of friends. This respondent felt that the teachers of this learner should have been of more to help him. This learner was arrested and sent to juvenile prison.

Another respondent remarked that *“our school needs security to help with discipline and who could confiscate weapons. Also a full time school counsellor or educational psychologist to help learners to deal with the many problems they are faced with. We are teachers; we don’t get paid to be psychologists.”* Petersen (2011:231) maintains that even if schools do not have formal partnerships with outside welfare organizations, teachers can be proactive in creating an on-going list of community resources.

Consultations from time to time with a nurse or physician can be of great help. Parents should also inform the school if the child is taking a particular medicine so that the teachers are able to monitor the learners’ behaviour

### **4.3.3 Teachers’ skills in identifying and assisting learners with emotional challenges**

#### **4.3.3.1 Emotional issues**

One respondent commented on learners’ emotional issues as follows: *“A lot of learners battle with emotional issues that they can’t talk to teachers about. A lot of learners are also sexually active, some of our learners have had abortions and some are already parents. This emotional disorder prevents them from focusing in the classroom”*. One respondent stated that *“This year we have had up to 15 learners from Grade 10 to 12 who are pregnant. Some learners don’t even report the pregnancy to the school and often teachers are too busy to even notice that a learner is pregnant.”* Colwin (2010:64) states that it is important for teachers to recognize the specific onset signs. He suggests that teachers identify signs of agitation and emotional outbursts in order to defuse the emotions or to reduce it. It can be difficult to evaluate and recognize signs of emotional distress. The reason provided by the DSM-IV-TR (2000:96) is that these individuals may learn to suppress emotions. These learners self-esteem may be low, despite a projected image of “toughness”. For other individuals, measured self-esteem may be overly inflated; frustration, tolerance, irritability, temper

outburst, and recklessness are frequent associated features. Respondents stated that they need to be trained to identify the signs indicating that the learner is in emotional distress so that they are able to assist such a learner.

#### 4.3.3.2 Impact of peer pressure on emotions

Peer pressure was also mentioned by many of the interviewee's as a factor influencing learner emotions. As one respondent interviewed remarked: *"Many learners especially the younger ones are influenced by peers and they end up doing what the others are doing just to fit in and to belong"*. One respondent replied that *"It is very difficult and confusing to me. I see learners in my class being influenced by peers into not answering questions or doing homework. I feel lost because teenagers value the opinion of their friends more than that of the teacher"*.

#### 4.3.3.3 Impact of drugs and substance abuse on emotions

The use of drugs is also a big concern according to the majority of teachers interviewed. One interviewee remarked as follows: *"I am very concerned with learners who are using 'tik', because they normally sleeps in class and is aggressive when approached. I fear these learners because many of my colleagues have been pushed around or smacked in the face by tik users"*. Another respondent interviewed at the same school commented that there are learners who sell drugs during break: *"We are aware but it is very difficult to catch these learners out"*. A lot of teachers have remarked that learners returning to class after break were often very "hyped-up" and out of control. One respondent remarked that teachers often don't know how to deal with cigarette smoking on playgrounds and toilets let alone with drugs in school.

Substance abuse is a serious concern for many interviewed and respondents remarked that it is on the increase. This view is shared by Lumby, Middlewood and Kaabwe (2003:6) in stating that many feel threatened physically by learners, who are violent and believe they are unable to deal with problems beyond their control, such as drugs and alcohol abuse

#### 4.3.3.4 Depression

Depression involves changes in affect, ranging from positive to negative. Learners who are depressed have also been highlighted by interviewees as a major concern. One interviewee mentioned being approached by a learner who wanted to commit suicide: *“I spoke to the learner and tried to motivate and encourage her, she told me that she was ‘okay’ but committed suicide a few days later. None of the teachers at my school noticed or picked up on signs that this learner was in need of support.”* According to Prever (2006:65), the suicide rates among young people continue to rise. This can be prevented by effective prevention, early recognition and treatments and the secondary school can play a role in all three areas. Respondents indicated that if they have the knowledge they could intervene and maybe prevent a suicide from happening.

Most interviewed discussed the following as issues contributing to depression among learners:

- Death of a parent.
- Socio-economic factors such as parents who are unemployed, poverty, hunger.
- Sexually abused learners.
- Learners who are not coping with academic work in class.
- Relationship issues.

Respondents indicated that they need to be skilled in what the signs are indicating that a learner might be depressed or suicidal.

#### 4.3.3.5 Physically ill and hungry learners

Another issue raised by interviewees is learners who are hungry and those who are physically ill. One interviewee remarked that teachers cannot provide medical intervention because we have limited control over learners’ physiologies. There should be communication between the school, parent and physician in the case of a serious condition, but communication is lacking. One respondent remarked that it is difficult to spot learners who are hungry or ill. *“I had a learner in my class for two years who always complained of headaches; because I am not knowledgeable I assumed that the learner was faking and lazy. One morning, the school*

*was informed that the learner died of an untreated brain tumour. This was very sad to me.”*

These are behaviours that do not necessarily interfere with teaching but which teachers should notice and be concerned about.

#### 4.3.3.6 Truancy

Some respondents indicated that there are learners who truant and who display conduct disorders such as lying, stealing, and running away from school. One interviewee remarked that learners who truant cause great frustration due to the fact that they miss out on school, their work is normally of a poor standard and they behave carelessly and exhibit deviant behaviour. This makes it difficult for the teachers when tests or exams are written and these learners are absent.

There is a serious concern among teachers interviewed about truancy. Teachers remarked that the learners who truant are:

- The ones whose parents show little interest in their school work.
- Some learners who find it difficult to abide by the school rules.
- Learners who can't cope academically. They find the work difficult and are not coping in class.
- Learners who are unmotivated and feel that there is no sense in school if they don't have a future. They subsequently have a negative attitude towards school.
- Learners who fear school and dislike certain teachers.

One respondent stated that he had a learner in his class this year who was caught stealing calculators from other learners' bags. The learner received punishment in the form of a week's detention. *“This learner now comes to school one week per month; we are unable to determine what the causes are of his truancy. I wish there was some way of helping this learner.”*

#### 4.3.3.7 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Teachers remarked that learners with ADHD are restless and they cannot focus on lessons. Since teachers cannot help these learners they drop out of school or are expelled. These

learners are often aggressive and rebellious. According to Prever (2006:48), ADHD is characterized by persistent difficulties in paying attention and impulse control, and hyperactivity. It affects 3.5% of the school population; it is one of the most common of the childhood behaviour disorders. It can have a profound effect on the child's family, the school and the wider society. It is linked to school failure, exclusion and poor vocational outlook.

One teacher interviewed remarked that she suspected that a learner had ADHD. When she called the parents in to discuss the idea of having the learner tested, the parents became extremely aggressive. This learner later dropped out of school. Teachers complain about learners who are incapable of sitting still in class and also display inattentiveness. One interviewee remarked that: *“As teachers we are not equipped to deal or help these learners we often just send them out of our classrooms. It is expected of us to accommodate diverse learners but we are not skilled to assist learners with special needs.”*

#### **4.4 ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS EMERGING FROM THE CASE STUDIES**

##### **4.4.1 Teachers' skills in identifying and assisting learners with behavioural challenges**

Many respondents stated that they find it difficult to manage and to react skilfully to habitually disruptive learners. They feel unsure of their ability to manage these learners and many may overreact thereby changing minor disturbances into major ones. A good percentage interviewed at both schools indicated that they get so angry at these learners that they end up screaming and shouting at them. This is disturbing to them as well as the rest of the learners in the classrooms. Teachers acknowledge that they lack adequate training in prevention and intervention tools they require to address recurrent behaviour problems.

Respondents agreed that they cannot identify interfering behaviours and they cannot help learners to overcome them. They need guidance on how to analyze the kinds of behaviour that places learners at risk. The respondents expressed the need for the DoE to provide in service workshops to make teachers aware of the techniques of child management and for dealing with problem behaviour. Cooperation between parents and school personnel was viewed as lacking. Smaller class sizes and changes in the curriculum were also suggested.

Respondents indicated that their knowledge was not sufficient and the majority desired training. This training could be provided by local health professionals with the collaboration of parents and NGOs. The DoE should also play a more active role in assisting teachers.

According to the respondents disruptive behaviour is one of the main challenges confronted by teachers in the classroom activities. Some learners will disrupt the class with the main aim to be thrown out of the class. Some teachers claimed that they waste up to 20 minutes of lesson time just to get the learners to settle down before they can start the lesson. Learners keep on talking, refuse to settle down, make a lot of noise, laugh and disobey the teachers. According to Prever (2006:51), conduct disorders is a complex group of behavioural and emotional problems found among children and adolescents. Learners with these disorders may have difficulty following rules and behaving in the socially acceptable ways normally expected of them.

Teachers attributed this to overcrowded classrooms which make it difficult for the teacher to keep control. Learners having no respect for teachers and who don't fear being disciplined by the school like being send for detention or being send out of class. According to Colwin (2010:6), extinction refers to the process of systematically removing events that reinforce behaviour. He illustrates this by means of an apt example: *“A learner may act out in class as to be sent home however if it was set up that on the next occasion when the learner acted out in class he/she is sent to an alternative classroom this might give thought to different behaviour.”*

#### **4.4.2 Teachers' skills in identifying and assisting learners with emotional challenges**

Despite the increasing number of learners with emotional disabilities attending general schools, teachers find themselves with limited information on how best to accommodate these learners. Respondents all agreed that more and more learners are showing signs of being emotionally disturbed, prone to stress, suffering from low self-esteem, and being withdrawn, anxious, tearful or depressed to the point where they are suicidal. In this regard, as postulated by Morris (2009:79), teachers should be aware that during the secondary school years learners will become aware of complex emotional cycles where one emotional state proceeds from another.



Respondents replied that many signs go unnoticed possibly because of inadequate knowledge that teachers had acquired at university or training colleges. A lot of the respondents agreed that it is difficult to help learners or to identify them as these learners sometimes just withdraw. Respondents from School Y found that learners with emotional challenges often find it very difficult to speak to teachers. At School X the male teachers interviewed stated that learners would rather approach a female teacher instead of a male teacher. These learners are unwilling to participate in classroom activities, have few friends and girls often demonstrate their emotional distress by crying. As a result they underperform academically in school. Respondents from School X expressed their concern with the number of girls using pain medication at the school to block out emotions. This is of major concern to teachers who also indicated that some of these girls often have emotional outbursts like crying when they did not do their homework. This is not really an issue for teachers at School Y who indicated that they were more concerned about the impact of drugs on learners' emotional well-being. These learners are often very aggressive and violent towards them. The increase in the number of learners addicted to the drug 'tik' is also of concern to many teachers.

#### **4.4.3 The extent to which teachers are able to identify warning signs**

*An interviewee from School Y replied that "A lot of our learners have learning barriers, their literacy levels are low. They don't have books at home to read also parents don't offer support or encourage them to read. These learners feel despondent because they are not coping with the school work. They cause problems to the teachers in the class and would rather loiter around outside of the classroom."*

*Another interviewee remarked that "A lack of motivation on the side of parents may also cause the decline on the learners' performance."*

According to DSM-IV-TR (2000:96), the academic achievement of learners with BED particularly in reading and other verbal skills, is often below the level expected on the basis of age and intelligence.

Teachers interviewed stated that they are concerned with learners exhibiting especially challenging behaviour. According to a number of them learners are exhibiting BED that are far more intensive than in previous years. Concerns escalated due to the number of violent

incidents that are on the increase. One respondent stated that: *“It is taken as a given that we can control learners, the DoE should rather infer as to whether teachers are coping while trying to tackle these challenge”*.

#### **4.4.4 Training at university and college**

Most teachers interviewed indicated that their college/university programme provided poor preparation for working with learners with BED. One respondent interviewed stated that: *“We clearly need an increase in well-trained teachers to work with these learners in need. But teachers have not received adequate training and lack the resources to obtain these skills”*.

Teachers stated that they lack the knowledge, skill, experience and confidence to effectively intervene. One respondent indicated that many teachers at his school fear the learners and are therefore not able to effectively work with these learners. Respondents are aware of a substantial number of learners with significant mental health issues in their schools. One respondent remarked that: *“We are expected to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse learner population, but we were never trained to handle this diversity”*.

Respondents listed a number of signs they regard as warning signs that a learner may be struggling with an emotional disorder. Although they indicated that they do not have the expertise or feel the responsibility to diagnose emotional problems among learners, some respondents mentioned that they are aware of some of these signs, but are not always knowledgeable on what this behaviour signifies:

- Lack of energy
- Unexplained anger
- Withdrawal from class activities
- Drop in marks
- Absenteeism

Respondents indicated that although they may notice these warning signs they often do not know how to approach the learner or what to do in the situation. One respondent stated that: *“If I suspect a learner has a problem I am often not sure if I should ask questions, or should I*

*just wait for the learner to tell me what is happening.*” Another respondent stated that learners are often reluctant to discuss emotional concerns with teachers. According to him: *“We see learners who are extremely distracted or confuse, or who shows no emotion while a teacher is talking to them.”* Teachers showed a limited knowledge of warning signs of emotional disorders and expressed the view that they needed insight to guide them to engage with these learners. Unfortunately some teachers interviewed admitted to using inappropriate measures like ignoring the challenges presented by these learners.

#### **4.4.5 Readiness to offer support guidance**

Respondents stated that disruptive behaviour by learners with BED takes much teacher time and even more time when teachers do not have the knowledge base, practised skills to support or guide these learners. According to the respondents from both Government schools, learners with BED are educated in the general education system under the responsibility of the teacher. One respondent voiced her frustration with this by responding as follows: *“We struggle with these learners and we generally feel frustrated”*. Teachers repeatedly remove learners who are disruptive from the classroom as a disciplinary measure. Many stated that this measure is used because they do not know what else to do. Another respondent stated that she ignored learners who disrupt the class because they are lazy or merely looking for attention. Respondents further listed the following methods used to manage learners with BED:

- Talking to the learner outside the classroom.
- Send learners for detention.
- Giving learners extra work.
- Stopping classwork until the deviant behaviour ends.
- Trying to ignore the learners.

These methods are normally followed in cases where a learner exhibits behaviours that are interfering with his/her learning or the learning of others.

It is evident from the findings that learners with behavioural and emotional problems pose a challenge to teachers. Different views and opinions were raised regarding the concept of emotional and behavioural problems. Respondents also raised their concerns regarding the

lack of parental involvement and adult role models in society. Respondents at both schools agreed that behaviour of learners is in some instances based on the example set for them by parents. Further respondents indicated that South African schools are facing a very serious problem of adolescent drug and alcohol abuse. Respondents from School Y showed extreme concern for learners using the drug 'tik' while at School X respondents were more concerned about drugs being sold during breaks and being used during school hours.

Furthermore respondents are convinced that disrespectfulness towards teachers like ignoring them when they speak to learners, swearing and giving rude answers could be due to a lack in discipline at home. Learners have lost respect for parents and when they are at school they want to show that same disrespectfulness towards the teachers. Respondents reported that using offensive language is a daily occurrence. They expressed the view that it is not their job to teach learners discipline as this should be taught at home. This is a major concern for them as they do not know how to address such behavioural challenges.

The respondents indicated their concern regarding more serious disruptive behaviour such as fighting, acting out behaviour, vandals, and bullying. According to the respondents fighting occurs because learners are angry; they are therefore violent and aggressive. Respondents indicated that they do not know how to manage these learners as they fear being attacked if they reprimand them. This is a problem for teachers because they fear that the learners might direct that anger towards them. They have no inclination of knowing when a learner might be triggered into a violent rage. Acting out behaviour like throwing objects at each other, anger outburst towards the teachers is behaviour that teachers are expected to deal with. Respondents also reported that vandals breaking windows, stealing of pipes, scratching of cars also contribute to the frustration among teachers. Bullying behaviour is seen by teachers as taking on different forms like teasing, taunting, hitting and kicking. Respondents reported that it is difficult to deal with bullies, as those who are being bullied seldom report this to the school. As this has become more serious and more severe over the years teachers felt that they need some guidance in how to deal with bullies and how to identify the victims of bullies and to support them.

## **4.5.6 Teachers' opinions on factors impacting on and contributing to behavioural and emotional disorders**

### **4.5.6.1 Factors relating to the family**

According to the respondents, most learners are from dysfunctional families, in which there is no parental guidance. These learners create problems in school as they have not been taught how to respect authority or how to obey rules. Teachers mentioned a lack of interest and involvement from parents as a major contributing factor to disciplinary problems. They reported on parents who do not respond to requests to attend school meetings or meetings to discuss their child's conduct. Furthermore respondents reported on parents who become aggressive towards school staff. Respondents also related aggressive and violent behaviour among learners from homes where the parents are aggressive, fight at home and expose their children to such violent behaviour. Respondents also mentioned large families and living in poor housing conditions as influencing learners' behaviour. Some parents also do not regard school as important and do not check if their child is attending school daily.

Another growing concern amongst respondents are parents who are young and illiterate and who do not show any interest in the child's scholastic matters such as checking on school work and visiting the school during parent-teacher meetings. This lack of interest, encouragement and motivation filters through to the learners and affects their attitude towards the school.

Factors under the family were highlighted as a lack of parental interest in school issues, rejection of the child, alcoholism and drug abuse at home, violent display of temper from the parents, parental absence, young and illiterate parents, dysfunctional families and unemployment. Cox-Peterson (2007:192) is of the opinion that if a parent does not get involved in his child's education, teachers should telephone them and make a concerted effort to get them involved. This is important if they hope to make a meaningful contribution to the academic success of their learners. The National Association of School Psychologists (2007) published a mission statement related to home school collaboration and establishing partnerships with parents to enhance educational outcomes. The association claims that multiple benefits exist when educators engage in collaborative partnerships with parents such as higher achievement, increased completion of homework and attendance of learners.

#### 4.5.6.2 Societal factors

Respondents at School Y related violence in the community and the overall degeneration of communities as some of the community based influences of learner behaviour. They also highlighted the influence of drugs and alcohol on behaviour. This was an equally similar concern for teachers at School X. These are predisposing influences that heighten learners' disruptive behaviour and contributes to their emotional problems. Senge (2000:118) is of the opinion that schools can help build a learning community for learners by giving them responsibilities and realising that learners who are struggling with some of these psychological issues, are not going to do their work just because they are supposed to do their work. They need to feel good about what they have to offer.

#### 4.5.6.3 School related factors

Respondents stressed the impact of overcrowded classrooms on behaviour. Some learners also feel that they cannot identify with the values and standards by which a school encourages and rewards learners and therefore regard themselves as failures and non-achievers. Some learners fear school as they are not coping with the academic content, and the teachers due to the large classrooms do not have time to spend with individual learners. These learners often find it difficult to engage with the curriculum in a purposeful manner. These unmotivated learners display anti-social behaviour and often cause disruptions in the classroom as well as on the playground. Such learners are often chronic liars who are involved in theft.

South African schools are facing a very serious problem of adolescent drug and alcohol abuse. It is estimated that 5,8% of the South African population over the age of 15 are alcohol dependant and that there is progressive increase in the general level of drug and especially alcohol intake among young adults. In three major studies undertaken on youth in South Africa alcohol abuse is the most prevalent. In as far as drug abuse is concerned, dagga (marijuana) has been found to be the most common type and highly accessible drug used by adolescents (DoE, 2000:2). Teachers reported that learners involved in drug abuse are a serious concern as they are not equipped to assist or to assist or manage such recalcitrant learners. Teachers however agreed that the school has a role to play in this regard.

Teachers also raised concerns about the physical appearance of the school. They raised concerns that learners have little respect for the school building and property. They break furniture and litter papers. Taylor and Ryan (2006:169) highlight the importance of a school that is well kept. This they regard as providing an excellent indication of the quality of the institution. They suggest that litter in the playground and in the corridors combined with graffiti are indicative of a poor school. A school can put up signs to encourage learners to place their litter in bins and not drop it on the floor, banning of chewing gum and eating in the corridors and especially in the classroom ensure that high standards extend to all aspects of school life.

#### **4.5.7 Factors that hinder teachers from assisting learners with behavioural and emotional disorders**

##### **4.5.7.1 Overcrowded classrooms**

Respondents related certain factors which hinder them from being able to identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Factors such as overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of furniture, amongst others were regarded as problematic. This problem is so common at both Schools X and Y which limits contact with learners and hinders them from really focusing on which learners need assistance. The responses from the respondents indicated that there is a lack of support from the DoE. Respondents further mentioned that resources are scarce and they do not even have adequate furniture in their classes.

It is evident that overcrowded classrooms are a real issue. The general perception is that teaching in overcrowded classrooms limits learning and makes it impossible for teachers to focus on those learners who are in dire need of emotional support. Respondents indicated that they are keen to assist learners, but lack knowledge as to how to do it. If they can receive the necessary support from the Department then they will be in a better position to contribute and create a positive learning environment.

##### **4.5.7.2 Workload**

Respondents also mentioned the workload as a factor that hinders them from identifying or assisting learners with behavioural and emotional problems. It is apparent that respondents

feel overwhelmed with teaching for most days without a free period. Respondents referred to some time-consuming tasks such as attending CASS workshops, marking scripts, attending meetings, setting and typing class notes and test which hinder them from assisting learners with their behavioural and emotional challenges. The central concern of most respondents is the lack of support from the DoE and many suggested that support teams be appointed to lessen teachers' workloads. Such support teams could include assistants to mark or set class tests that could free teachers thereby enabling them to tend to the emotional needs of their learners.

#### **4.5.8 Strategies teachers apply when dealing with learners with behavioural and emotional problems**

##### **4.5.8.1 Putting learners out of class**

Putting learners out of class is a method employed by teachers from both Schools X and Y. From the findings it is clear that teachers do this because they have no knowledge of other ways of dealing with learners with BED. During the interviews all of the teachers agreed that putting learners out of class is not the most efficient or successful manner to address behavioural challenges in the classroom. They resort to this method to keep control and to ensure that the rest of the class can work undisturbed so that they can teach without disruption.

##### **4.5.8.2 Detention**

Respondents all mentioned that detention is one way of dealing with learners with behavioural issues or conduct disorders. They, however, agreed that detention is ineffective and serves no real purpose, as many learners need professional assistance in dealing with problems. Learners who disrupt classes, bully and who do not attend classes are usually sent to detention. Detention is regarded as a method that should be reviewed, and respondents suggested trying to establish the real reason for this behaviour. Respondents felt that they have no other means besides expulsion for more serious issues to manage learners with conduct problems.



#### 4.5.8.3 Expulsion/Suspension

Expulsion is only applied in severe cases such as learners who fight, attack teachers, sell drugs, are suspected of being under the influence of drugs or coming drunk to school. At Schools X and Y respondents agreed that there is a process to follow before a learner could be expelled or suspended.

The governing body would form part of the decision to suspend or expel a learner. This is often the case for serious misconduct. They may however only resort to this method when the learner has had a reasonable opportunity to make representations to it in relation to such a suspension. A learner is expelled from school for 14 days; during that time the school, DoE and the governing body can decide if the offense warrants expulsion. Respondents regarded expulsion as a necessary means of ensuring discipline in schools, but agree that it should only be used as a last resort. Respondents also believed that fewer learners would be expelled or suspended if schools had counsellors or educational psychologists to assist these learners with BED.

The majority of the respondents indicated that they have received superficial training and indicated that their preparation was inadequate. A few teachers however indicated that they believe that they have been prepared at colleges/university to deal with learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Respondents suggested workshops and in service training as measures that could be implemented to equip them in this regard. From the findings most respondents believed that action is needed urgently to equip them, as more and more learners are showing signs of disturbed behaviour and being emotionally unstable. Respondents indicated that they are in favour of in-service training by an expert in the field of psychology.

At School X, teachers have also indicated that some teachers have taken the initiative to improve their skills by enrolling at a university to be trained in life skills and special needs education. Respondents also indicated that a school psychologist is the most proficient person to deal with BED amongst learners. This is because of the knowledge he/she has in terms of counselling and therapeutic strategies, which can benefit the learner with BED.

#### **4.5.9 Resources lacking/needed**

The study revealed that the teachers are of the opinion that guidance and counselling should be introduced in schools. Respondents indicated that the lack of resources such as counsellors and educational psychologists, contribute to an increase in incidents by learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Respondents indicated that resources are required to meet the needs of learners with academic, behavioural and emotional challenges. At School X, a student social worker is assisting the school on a temporary basis. Respondents at this school indicated that she has been of assistance to some of the learners. However they expressed the view that the school needed the services of a qualified, full time social worker, counsellor or educational psychologist. At School Y no specialist services are available and respondents expressed similar views.

#### **4.6 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the findings were presented, analyzed and discussed. Themes were employed to substantiate and contextualize the findings. Respondents feel deskilled and out of their depth and equally frustrated by what they perceive to be too few routes for referral and access to professional advice. All teachers are expected to manage learners with diverse learning needs in their classrooms and to provide them access to the general curriculum. In the light of the many attacks on teachers and the numerous shootings of principals and teachers in South African schools the question of whether teachers are well-equipped to tackle this challenge is critical. Teachers indicated that they needed additional skills. According to the No-Child-Left-Behind Act (year), every child deserves a highly qualified teacher. No-Child-Left-Behind defines a highly qualified teacher as someone with extensive knowledge in his/her discipline. He/she must hold a bachelor's degree, and demonstrate competence in his/her learning area. The law does not define the skills, competencies, and dispositions necessary to teach effectively. These qualities are critical to learners with disabilities and others whose learning presents challenges. The time has come for school professionals and teachers to be skilled and knowledgeable to meet the needs of all learners in diverse classrooms.

Schools have a responsibility to support young people through this minefield as part of a wider commitment to the social education and emotional development of their learners. Some learners will develop mental health problems that if left untreated could develop into longer

lasting mental illnesses. The earlier a mental health problem is identified, the better the chance that the learner can be supported and if necessary, referred for treatment.

Teachers may feel unsupportive or undervalued by learners, principals and parents. Many feel threatened physically by learners who are violent and believe that they are unable to deal with problems beyond their control, such as drugs and alcohol abuse. Clearly respondents expressed the opinion that disruptive behaviour in schools and in classrooms needs to be addressed.

The respondents upheld the view that secondary schools require full-time counsellors or social workers to be based in schools. There is a need for better, more consistent, faster and earlier identification of learners with behavioural and emotional problems. If teachers could be equipped with the basic knowledge concerning identification and diagnosis they would be in a better position to intervene.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to draw conclusions based on the findings that emerged from the study as a whole. The aim of the study was to analyze teachers' skills and their interpretation of learners with BED. In this chapter recommendations are made and intervention strategies proposed. Suggestions are also made for further research.

Teachers have a crucial role to play in terms of identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Learners' psychological and physical well-being is amongst the most important factors impacting academic achievement. Teachers, of course, are not trained to be experts in psychological issues and their interventions, but they can be expert observers. Furthermore teachers spend a substantial amount of time with learners and thus their observation of learners and judgements on the characteristics of their emotional and cognitive behaviours would provide vital insights for preparing prevention and intervention programmes for a healthy school environment. The primary focus of schools is to grant academic achievement and not to provide mental health services. Horowitz and Garber (2006) argue that the healthy development of adolescent learners may be disrupted at any point in their lives.

Teachers should not adopt the view that they do not have the resources or skills to assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Teachers often blame learners' behaviour on their poor housing backgrounds. Thacker *et al.* (2002:11) argues, however that there may be a correlation but statistically there are always cases of learners with poor home backgrounds who do not develop BED. Teachers should be careful to attribute this factor to any particular case. Many teachers are also of the opinion that parents are to be blamed for their children's misbehaviour in schools. Teachers should not allow such preconceptions to detract them from assisting and being a positive influence on these learners (Thacker *et al.*, 2002:12). There is a limit to what teachers can do about poor housing, but they can influence and assist learners with BED. Moreover, teachers' participation and support are crucial to the healthy development of learners and to ensure that the psychological disposition of the

learners can have a vital impact on their development by affecting their quality of life now and in the future.

The motivation for this study arises from the fact that although there is a substantial amount of literature on how learners with behavioural and emotional problems can be assisted, there is scant research examining teachers' perspectives on learners with behavioural and emotional problems, and whether teachers are indeed skilled and knowledgeable in identifying these learners. This is an issue of which we have to be mindful considering that there are a very limited number of school counsellors in our schools in South Africa, and most schools do not have any. What kind of observations do teachers have regarding their learners psychological difficulties? What do teachers do to intervene, and how effective is this intervention?

Teacher professional responsibility requires that they teach in an all-inclusive classroom. They need to go beyond preconceived roles therefore it is important that teachers identify tools and strategies that will be beneficial to them (Lovey, 1992:3). It is fruitless to depend on the DoE to step in and assist. Teachers need to become pro-active and step up to this challenge. This chapter will thus focus on proposing recommendations to address some of the challenges experienced by teachers as highlighted in Chapter Four.

## **5.2 INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS TO MANAGE LEARNERS WITH BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS**

According to Porter (2006:35), humanists aim to create a school community in which learners feel cared for and are encouraged to care about each other. He further states that a core component of a caring community is for teachers to relate to learners with acceptance, respect, empathy, humanity and as a real person, rather than hiding behind a role of professionalism.

Teachers at both schools mentioned their frustration with learners who are confrontational and angry. Learners' safety at school is often compromised by the aggression of their peers. Dix (2009:74) suggests that when teachers deal with confrontation they should not try to solve the confrontation immediately, but rather walk away and take time to get advice on how to solve the situation. Teachers also need to keep their own emotions in check to protect themselves

and their learners. A good idea is to offer assistance rather than criticism or instructing a learner to leave the class.

Allowing learner aggression to go unchecked would be unfair to those around them. Teachers can use cognitive strategies to teach aggressive learners emotional self-control to manage their own emotional reactions, so they can behave pro-socially with peers without using coercive means that invite further rejection.

Many behavioural problems can be prevented or corrected using effective behaviour management strategies. Teachers can employ techniques for managing the aggressive behaviour of learners. Prevention strategies could focus on inhibiting such behaviour before they occur. One way could be to create a structured environment that is based on set rules and routines, and well-established schedules and arrangements. Teachers should also develop an individual behaviour plan for learners who present more serious behaviour problems, and maintain written records of specific events to assist in tracking behaviour. This could assist in the case where individual learners continue to act out in spite of prevention measures. In this case it becomes necessary to use intervention strategies to try and reshape a learner's behaviour. This could include teaching learners anger management training strategies which could include relaxation skills, breathing and physical exercises that could help reduce both stress and the physical symptoms of anger. Learners should be taught to view situations as problems to be solved and not battles to be won.

Educational psychologists identify anger amongst learners as a growing concern for schools. Learners who are overly angry and aggressive may be enrolled for intensive anger management coaching and counselling programmes which could have a marked effect on learner behaviour (Dix, 2009:77). This course could be useful instead of suspending or expelling a learner due to a violent incident. However, for anger management training to succeed certain conditions and key principles need to be in place and everyone should have a clear rationale for the intervention.

Teachers at both schools mentioned incidents where fights broke out and teachers were attacked. Dix (2009:77) suggests that with some extreme volatile learners "hands off" is a useful strategy. "Hands-off" means no touch or anger or without permission. This has two benefits since it firstly enables the teacher to give a clear command when he/she sees physical

confrontation occurring and it further deters those who poke others in fun and provoke a violent reaction.

Teachers at Schools X and Y also mentioned bullying as a major concern. Bullying refers to repeated aggressive behaviour (physical, verbal or psychological) meant to hurt another person. Creating an environment where all learners feel safe is extremely important to learning. Schools should ensure that learners never feel that they are being bullied by other learners and teachers should be trained in the signs indicating that a learner is being bullied or that a learner is a bully. This is important in preventing incidence of violence or attacks by bullies. The shooting of a learner who was regarded as a bully by a learner who was being bullied in South Africa in November 2012 (The Herald, 22 November 2012), is an indication of the extent of the problem of bullies. Teachers should be trained in psychological intervention programmes which place prevention at the forefront. This means that teachers should always be on the lookout for potential problem cases since identifying these can assist in preventing problems from escalating further.

It should be noted that during the analysis, some teachers were observed to report some learners' misbehaviour such as talking during the course of a lesson and walking up and down in class as psychological difficulties. This observation indicates that teachers should be trained in what constitutes psychological problems as opposed to "normal" classroom misbehaviour. In order to assist teachers to identify psychological difficulties written advice in the form of tip sheets could be developed, in addition to formal training. The usefulness of the test sheet was tested by Little (2005) who reported that teachers make extensive use of tip sheets to resolve classroom behaviour problems. Similar tip sheets on learner possible developmental and psychological problems can be constructed for teachers as well. The tip-sheet has proven to be of great help to teachers as it consists of ideas for teachers on how to handle and assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

### **5.2.1 Skills to manage confrontation**

Teachers' responses to the procedure for managing learners who are disruptive and confrontational as highlighted in Chapter Four are unlikely to be appropriate. Putting learners out of class is a response used by teachers to protect them. However for teachers working with learners in an educational setting this response is unlikely to be effective. Teachers need

to adopt skills to deal efficiently with learners challenging authority. It should be important for teachers to be knowledgeable in learners' challenging behaviour. Inappropriate verbal language or non-communication can convey the message to the other learners in the class that the teacher is not in control and being confronted by a learner who wants to escape from the classroom could lead to the use of threats and a louder than normal voice.

### **5.2.2 Strategies to pre-empt misbehaviour**

Skilful teaching can do much to minimise learner misbehaviour occurring in the first place. It could be useful to redirect incidents that were developing before they need to be regarded as misbehaviour.

Kyriacou (1991:89) highlights a useful strategy that teachers could use to pre-empt misbehaviour. He suggests that teachers periodically look around the classroom and consider whether any learner appears to be having difficulties and, if so, go over and investigate in a supportive manner. Circulating the room and sometimes asking learners about their progress uncovers problems which they would otherwise not have drawn to your attention. While a firm expression of disapproval is effective, expressing intense anger, shouting at learners and appearing to have lost your temper will tend to undermine the classroom climate.

### **5.2.3 Intervention strategies helpful for teachers to implement and address related problems**

It seems that at both secondary schools teachers utilize similar intervention strategies. Some strategies mentioned were amongst others ignoring the learners, putting them out of class, shouting at them, detention and in severe cases of misbehaviour expulsion and suspension. The use of negative intervention strategies such as these listed were viewed by those teachers interviewed as not being very effective. This suggests that more positive intervention strategies are required to address challenges experienced by teachers.

Teachers' insights and participation play vital roles in the development of the psychological and counselling and guidance services. Nevertheless, as Little (2005) suggested, the strategies need to be flexible as one strategy may not address all the problems. Chosen



strategies should match with the needs of both the teacher and learner with BED. Teachers can practice these skills and be guided by those that work in their particular settings.

### **5.3 STRATEGIES TEACHERS COULD IMPLEMENT TO ADDRESS EMOTIONAL DISORDERS**

It often falls on teachers to provide emotional support to learners with emotional disorders. Porter (2006:220) states that learners with emotional disorders are overly vigilant as they try to read the intentions of a person and scan their environment for indications of danger and they will need the support of teachers. He further states that teachers should enhance the self-esteem of learners with emotional difficulties. When these learners appear to be enjoying an activity, teachers' should highlight this so that they can get in touch with life's positive possibilities.

In both Schools X and Y teachers indicated that they found it difficult to identify learners with internalizing problems. The staff at the two schools in this study seemed to be quite aware that these problems do exist and were somewhat accurate in identifying individual learners with early signs of an internalising disorder. Teachers indicated internalizing emotional problems such as depression, suicidal tendencies and thoughts, tearfulness, overwhelmed feelings of sadness as some of the emotional problems the learners are facing. According to Davis *et al.* (2000:70) most mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, substance abuse and psychosis have their peak period of onset during adolescence. Teachers indicated that learners with emotional disorders not only have lower academic achievement but they also have a high absenteeism rate. Teachers can make use of child skills training which aims to teach children social, emotional and cognitive competence.

Teachers spend a lot of time with learners and should be active in mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention (McBride, Midford, & James, 1995). The strategies teachers can use are multi-level including curriculum based materials. Teachers can also initiate support from mental health societies to train them in ways to promote mental health programmes at school. Such programmes should target intervention strategies to address the needs of learners who require additional support. This includes the reorganization of grades or classes to group together high risk or disruptive learners for periods of the school day,

while teaching them alternative curriculum material and using cognitive behavioural techniques.

Further ways to identify at risk learners could be effective screening procedures. Teachers can identify learners in multiple settings such as classroom and playground. When teachers identify a learner with an emotional disorder such a learner could be referred to social workers or psychologists outside of the school. However teachers mentioned that they often do not refer these learners for assistance. Internalizing problems of anxiety and depression, however, are both under-identified and under-referred by teachers. According to Percy, Clopton and Pope (1993), an interesting finding was that teachers' referral increase as the severity of the learners' externalizing problems increased, but decreased as the internalizing problems of learners became more severe.

Even though teachers at both schools indicated that they are not very accurate in identifying specific mental health concerns, they are none the less, crucial to the success of interventions in schools. Teachers' involvement in the identification process is one way to ensure ownership and collaboration in providing selected programmes in schools. This process is very important in the prevention of future school tragedies like learner suicides, or learner attacks on teachers and other learners, as well as the prevention of school shootings.

It is important for teachers to be knowledgeable on the signs indicating that a learner might be in need of emotional support in order to intervene. Without early intervention and appropriate treatment emotional disorders can lead to serious consequences that lingers into adolescence and adulthood. According to the Nemours Foundation (2002), suicide is a leading cause of death for adolescents, the third leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Close to 95% of those who commit suicide have a mental disorder. Teachers should know what their school's policy is for providing psychological and emergency services.

Schools should make provision to equip teachers with the information pertaining to warning signs. This could be supplied to teachers in the form of a manual or guide as teachers in this study indicated that the thought patterns of learners with severe emotional disorders can be difficult to follow. Some learners may have poor interpersonal skills and may express no emotion while talking to teachers.

If a learner with an emotional disability becomes disruptive or threatening a teacher should know what the procedures are at school for dealing with such a learner. They need to understand how to inform the threatening learner that his/her behaviour is not appropriate and know how to document the interaction with the learner. However a learner displaying an emotional disorder should not be suspended or expelled based on unsubstantiated evidence about dangerous behaviour. Such a learner should be offered the appropriate help, in the form of counselling.

#### **5.4 PREPARATION TOWARDS BETTER SKILLED TEACHERS**

What teachers are expected to know and do has increased, bearing in mind that teachers need subject matter knowledge and an understanding of psychological factors. Meeting these demands may be very stressful for many teachers. Many of the teachers interviewed in this study received training at a time when teaching did not routinely require many of the skills in educational psychology that are needed to function effectively in restructured schools presently.

Teachers in this study indicated a lack of time as one of many major challenges confronting them. They need time to understand new concepts, such as CAPS, CASS, learn new skills to develop new attitudes, discuss, reflect, try new approaches and integrate them into practice. Unfortunately teachers have become part of inflexible and counterproductive school schedules. A way of combatting this problem would be to teach teachers time management skills.

Teachers need to set aside time for learning (e.g. workshops and courses) and time to experience and digest new ideas and ways of working in order to require specialized knowledge and skills relevant to the needs of learners with behavioural and emotional problems. This could include training, practice, and feedback opportunities for teachers to interact with peers. School schedules should include time to consult or observe colleagues or engage in professional activities such as learning and practicing new skills.

Researchers such as Larke of Texas and A&M University (2010:1) and Norvella Carter of Illinois (2010:1) summarized strategies proven effective when implemented by trained teachers in School Violence Preparing In-Service Teachers.

They note that teachers should be trained in the following skills:

- Improving the school climate through after-school activities. This could be in the form of art/dance classes, or yoga and meditation classes to help with stress relief.
- Conflict mediation. Teachers should know how to handle a confrontational situation.
- Recognizing the impact of social influences such as poverty and racism on student behaviour.
- Promoting empathy among learners for the concerns of others. Be knowledgeable on ways to teach respect for others.
- Helping learners control impulses to react violently when challenged. Improving learners' verbal skills so that they are able to talk instead of fight to solve a problem.
- Communicating with parents to get them to reinforce lessons from the classroom.
- By working with parents, teachers can work with parents to teach the same values at home that are being taught at school.
- Building self-esteem in learners through praise and recognition. Acknowledge when learners do well and reward them for good behaviour.
- Using and teaching learners to use resources in the community to address their needs.

In the current education system it is crucial for teachers to update their skills and knowledge. Time should be set aside for training that provides skills that might help to cope with learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Any form of training where teachers can meet other teachers is likely to help build important networks, which will be useful.

#### **5.4.1 Teacher training at universities**

Teacher training needs to be re-examined. All teacher training programmes should include some studies on the science of human behaviour and/ or a qualification in special needs education in youth care. Over and above this teachers need some intensive on the job training on the subject of psychological intervention strategies, to empower teachers to tackle problems presented by learners. Teachers at both Schools X and Y indicated they are not

trained to be psychologists. However teachers can be trained in strategies rather than being dependant on an outside expert clinical psychologist to provide them with solutions.

The findings indicated that teachers should be trained in identifying learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Teachers should see themselves as an important part of the team of mental health workers. The aim of the training should not be for teachers to be equipped to conduct psychological interventions as professionals, but to provide guidance and support. The assumption therefore is that teachers at Schools X and Y are not adequately trained to face the challenges presented by learners with BED. If teachers are to be effective in their teaching of learners with BED, they need to be adequately trained. This implies that rigorous in-service- training courses need to be organized by the DoE so that they can work as a team with professional mental health workers (e.g. psychologist, social workers and therapist) in dealing with BED learners.

The DoE should provide financial sponsorship (e.g. bursaries) for teachers to enrol for courses on special needs education or science of human behaviour (e.g. psychology). Further the DoE, through its skills development unit should plan training workshops specifically on psychological intervention strategies for teachers. The Department could focus on out-sourcing this function to outside service providers if it does not have the capacity within itself.

#### **5.4.2 Improving teacher effectiveness**

To improve teacher effectiveness to deal with learners with behavioural and emotional problems we need to consider all aspects of the profession – from pre service and in service training to recruitment and retention of highly skilled teachers. Stronge (2007:103 ) suggests that many behaviours and characteristics found in effective teachers can be cultivated among novices through awareness brought about by observing other teachers, receiving peer feedback, cultivating collegial relationships, and participating in live long learning experiences.

According to Sandison (1994:143), a teacher is a worker who has human beings on the receiving end of his/her communication channel. If a teacher does not understand human behaviour and learning and does not know how aspects of human behaviour express

themselves in teaching situations then the teacher will not know how best to engage. It is the job of teacher-training to provide sufficient educational psychology to conduct this task.

Given the current state of South African society and the schooling system, education has an important role to play in achieving transformation, reconstruction and development (Coutts, 1996:44). The teacher education curriculum needs to empower the teacher for the tasks and situations that are likely to be encountered during their careers. This should include assistance in dealing with specialist teaching situations; they must be empowered in the following areas as part of their pre-service education: This should be specialized education directed towards addressing special academic and learning problems, physical health problems, emotional concerns and particular social needs; community education directed towards the needs of those parents whose formal schooling has been disrupted or prematurely terminated for a variety of reasons; education towards community well-being and development, including the teacher's role as a community leader, resource person and development agent. The aim should also be towards equipping teachers as counsellors, communicators, advisors and consultants.

An example of how this could be accomplished is presented in respect of guidance and counselling which should be a compulsory core component of the curriculum, so that every teacher is able to cope with learners who may approach them for assistance with an emotional issue maybe in respect to suicide, abuse, depression or bullying. This is important as one of the respondents interviewed indicated that she was approached by a learner who wanted to commit suicide, but she was not sure how to assist the learner.

Teachers should also be afforded the opportunity to participate in special education programmes with a view to facilitating intra-school networking. Where schools are situated in close proximity to each other, inter-school peer networking and the sharing of resources would facilitate teacher development. Ideally such peer learning should be developed and supported by itinerant specialists and by in-service courses for the teachers in the participating schools. Those schools with specialised units should be used for in-service training that could be done through teacher exchange schemes.

## **5.5 THE SUPPORT OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Relationships with social welfare agencies should be improved and teachers should know what organizations are available to assist them. Teachers indicated a need for support staff that will be able to assist with the identification process. Guidance counsellors, support teachers, behavioural assistance teachers and health nurses are all able to be of assistance to class teachers. These support staff are invaluable for suggesting some learners for intervention programs. Many mental health disorders, especially anxiety and depression are difficult for teachers to recognize in adolescents because of the internalising nature of the disorders. Therefore it would seem appropriate that a model for identification of learners with BED incorporating teacher referral and support staff referral could be most beneficial in identifying adolescents for a range of intervention in secondary schools.

The support of professional services is crucial for preparing teachers by giving legitimacy to the new field of skills needed. In addition to pre-service education, the provision of in service training for teachers will increase the likelihood that they will employ their newly acquired skills in working with learners with BED.

Schools can contact professionals in the community as many have a history of offering their services on a pro-bono basis, and psychologists and social workers may volunteer their time to offer workshops to teachers. During these workshops teachers must brainstorm and discuss current issues teachers face with regard to problem behaviour and effective intervention strategies. Contributors to such workshops and programs could be university faculty members from the Department of Psychology.

Schools especially ones in disadvantaged communities require at least one psychologist or social worker to be employed on a full-time basis. Teachers in this study motivated their reason for this as learner problems have become complex. It would be a good idea for schools in these areas to visit other schools e.g. private schools to examine how they manage and intervene in issues regarding learners with BED. Schools could further examine mentoring programmes which typically involves a non-professional drawn from the community spending time with an at-risk learner in a non-judgemental supportive capacity whilst also acting as a role model. Teachers in this study mentioned that learners lack role models in their lives.

## 5.6 THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS

Teachers at both schools mentioned a lack of parental involvement as most families are living in poverty and face problems such as unemployment and drug abuse. This is likely to be beyond the scope of school personnel, but it might be possible for teachers to refer the parents to agencies that can offer both practical and counselling assistance. Porter (2006:220) suggests that schools support the parents of aggressive learners as troubled and isolated children often have troubled and isolated families. Their child's aggressive behaviour often exacerbates their isolation, with not only the child being shunned by peers, but the parents also being excluded from interaction with, and support from other parents. Where possible teachers could play a vital role in possibly recommending social agencies, such as the Family and Marriage Association of South Africa (FAMSA), that could help them to improve their interpersonal relationships. These agencies can teach parents Behaviour Parent Training (BPT) which enables them to be consistent in reinforcing helpful behaviour and punishing or ignoring hostile or uncooperative behaviour. Schools could also be pro-active in initializing community upliftment programs aimed at addressing social issues like unemployment, child rearing, drug and alcohol abuse.

Teachers must also learn new ways of involving parents. By merely stating that the parents do not care and are therefore not interested in being part of the school is not acceptable. Research indicates that the starting point of placing children on the road to excellence is parental involvement in their children's education (United States DoE, 1996). Teachers can draw them in by offering the following services to parents:

- Run literacy/knitting/gardening/computer training/classes for parents. Schools could also consult parents in decision making for example policy on classroom control.
- Community based parent education and support systems enhance parents' knowledge of ways that they can support the development of their children. Through a focus on family management, problem solving skills, and referrals to other needed services, families whose children are at risk can help those youth avoid future problems with delinquency.



Many parents may resist the idea of others telling them how to raise their children. Community-based newspapers, newsletters, public events, or schools can disseminate information to educate parents about how services could be helpful to them. Training for parents could include ways to discipline their children which stresses communication between parents and children and shows parents how to teach and model respectful behaviour towards their children.

Getting parents involved was an aspect of concern for many teachers, as well as handling being confronted by parents. In this study, methods employed were ineffective which included sending out letters, requesting them to attend meetings or sending a message with a particular child requesting the parent to attend.

Packard and Race (2000:163) acknowledge this concern of teachers by stating that in this regard liaising with parents can be a difficult process as parents may seek advice from teachers.

## **5.7 TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council has funded a project known as the Professional and Teacher Development Task Force, whose task it is to develop strategies to ensure that school professionals and teachers will be skilled and knowledgeable to meet the educational needs of all learners in diverse classrooms. This task force comprises teachers, university educational consultants, family members, persons with disabilities and advocates.

South African schools and teachers could benefit greatly from such task forces. This is necessary for the effective preparation and training of school personnel in order to enable them to successfully meet the needs of every learner with behavioural and emotional problems in the school community. These competencies should be viewed as value added to the knowledge, skills and traditional teacher preparation programs.

All educational environments should reflect sound professional and ethical practices. Teachers cannot ignore problem behaviour they do not understand any longer. They have a professional responsibility towards these learners to ensure not only the learners' well-being but also that they as well as other school staff and learners are safe. Often in South African

schools where violence occurs or where a learner was shot in class or school it is reported that the teachers knew that the particular learner was troubled, but nothing was done to inform parents or to help the learner.

Teachers working with learners with diverse educational needs must be especially mindful of issues of confidentiality and discussion of learners' needs and disability diagnosis. Teachers should regularly reflect on their own feelings and biases concerning learners with BED. They need to go beyond pre-conceived roles and maintain openness and innovative thinking. They should have knowledge of available resources for their own support as well as for the learners and their families, within their school cluster and the community and demonstrate an eagerness to utilize them. They must encourage meaningful family participation in every aspect of educational planning for learners with BED.

It seems that at both secondary schools teachers utilize similar intervention strategies. Some strategies mentioned were; ignoring the learners; putting them out of class; shouting at them, detention and in severe cases of misbehaviour expulsion and suspension. According to Flynn, Fulton and Kennedy (2003:61), it is important that teachers are aware of what is going on for themselves emotionally, when in conflict with troublesome learners. A teacher's own emotional state can often have a considerable impact on how he/she is going to manage a situation e.g. if a teacher is feeling hurt, it is likely that he/she will react angrily and shout and scream at learners. To teach well, it may be that he/she needs to learn to deal with his own anger. There are many self-development and personal growth courses available to teachers. The use of negative intervention such as these listed were viewed by those teachers interviewed as not very effective. This suggests that less negative and more positive intervention strategies are required.

## **5.8 FURTHER RESEARCH**

Future studies comparing the perceptions of teachers with school counsellors and parents should be interesting and useful to bring all the parties to work together with a goal to create better school environments in which the healthy growth of the learners in every aspect is facilitated. Further studies could also investigate the establishment of school based support teams in the secondary schools.

## 5.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter some practical competencies that would enable teachers to identify and respond to learners with behavioural and emotional problems were addressed. If teachers hope to understand why learners exhibit aggressive behaviour it is important for them to be exposed to the necessary skills in identifying and assisting such learners. Another issue to be examined is whether training at universities/colleges can be improved or changed. As this small scale study indicated teachers need to know how to identify these learners.

The secondary school teachers in this study revealed that they were not equipped to deal with the challenges of working with learners with BED. These teachers working in lower socio-economic schools face numerous challenges on a daily basis as they lack the skills, knowledge and attitudes to support these learners. Teaching is not only about knowledge and skills, but also about attitude and personality. This implies that teachers do not just teach what they know and what they are skilled to do, but they also teach who they are.

This study indicated that teachers have to know their learners and their problems. They teach learners who they do not understand and in some instances even fear. Yet teachers and their judgements are the most important source of referral for the counselling and guidance services at school as well as outsourced psychological help. Furthermore, teachers' intervention choices may hinder or alleviate the effective treatment of psychological difficulties of learners (Ainscow, 2005). The intervention strategies suggested here are important as they would enable teachers to be in a better position to assist learners with BED. These intervention strategies could also assist where schools do not have counsellors or educational psychologists. Most Government schools do not have the funds to employ counsellors and in this regard the intervention strategies could be of great help to teachers.

Their support, non-judgemental attitudes, tolerance, appropriate referral and collaboration with counsellors and parents may prevent learners from developing more serious difficulties. The perception of the teachers about their learners' psychological difficulties was revealed in the manner in which they manage these learners. As argued earlier, teachers' insights and participation play vital roles in the development and implementation of successful prevention and treatment programmes for learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

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## APPENDIX A

### LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION FROM DISTRICT DIRECTOR



• PO Box 77000 • Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University  
• Port Elizabeth • 6031 • South Africa • [www.nmmu.ac.za](http://www.nmmu.ac.za)

22 May 2012

Dr Ntsiko  
District Director  
Ethel Valentine  
Sutton Road, North End  
Fax: (041) 451 0193  
For attention: Dr Ntsiko

#### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

Dear Dr. Ntsiko

My name is Thirza Damons], and I am a [post graduate](#) student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth. The research I wish to conduct for my [Master's dissertation](#) involves [an analysis of the identification of teachers' skills in the identification of learners with behavioural and emotional problems..](#) This project will be conducted under the supervision of [Dr. L. Athiemoolam \(NMMU, South Africa\)](#).

I am hereby seeking your consent to approach three schools in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth to provide participants for this project.

I have provided you with a copy of my [dissertation](#) proposal which includes copies of the measure and consent and assent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter which I received from the NMMU Research Ethics Committee (Human).

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Department of Education with a bound copy of the full research report. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0837922115 or email, [twdamons@gmail.com](mailto:twdamons@gmail.com) Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Thirza Damons 208107303  
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

## APPENDIX B

### PERMISSION LETTER FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR



Province of the  
**EASTERN CAPE**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Ethel Valentine Building\* Sutton Road \* Sidwell \* Private Bag X3915 \* North End \* Port Elizabeth \* 6056 \*  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA \* Tel: 041 4034400 \* Fax: 041 4510193 \*  
Website: [ecprov.gov.za](http://ecprov.gov.za) \* Email: [nyathi.ntsiko@edu.ecprov.gov.za](mailto:nyathi.ntsiko@edu.ecprov.gov.za)

Ms T. Damons  
Researcher  
c/o Dr L. Athiemoolam  
Senior Lecturer  
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University  
E-mail: [Logamurthie.Athiemoolam@nmmu.ac.za](mailto:Logamurthie.Athiemoolam@nmmu.ac.za) // [thirzadamons@gmail.com](mailto:thirzadamons@gmail.com)

Dear Ms Damons

#### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN DEPARTMENTAL SCHOOLS: PORT ELIZABETH

I refer to your e-mailed communication dated 04 May 2012 (received 18 May 2012) and telefax dated 17 July 2012 respectively.

Permission is hereby granted for you to conduct your research on the following conditions:

1. Your research must be conducted on a voluntary basis.
2. All ethical issues relating to research must be honoured.
3. Your research is subject to the internal rules of the school, including its curricular programme and its code of conduct and must not interfere in the day-to-day routine of the school.

Kindly present a copy of this letter to the principal as proof of permission.

I wish you good luck in your research.

Yours faithfully

**DR NYATHI NTSIKO**  
**DISTRICT DIRECTOR: PORT ELIZABETH**  
/ab

17 July 2012





## APPENDIX C

### LETTER FROM NMMU ETHICS COMMITTEE



**Nelson Mandela  
Metropolitan  
University**

*for tomorrow*

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

Tel . +27 (0)41 504 2125

Fax. +27 (0)41 504 9383

3 September 2012  
Ms T Damons / Dr L Athiemoolam  
Education Faculty  
NMMU

Dear Ms Damons / Dr Athiemoolam

#### **AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' SKILLS IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF LEARNERS WITH BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS**

Your above-entitled application for ethics approval was approved by the Faculty Research, Technology and Innovation Committee of Education (ERTIC) meeting on 16 August 2012.

We take pleasure in informing you that the application was approved by the Committee.

The ethics clearance reference number is **H12-EDU-CPD-024**.

We wish you well with the project. Please inform your co-investigators of the outcome, and convey our best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Elliott-Gentry'.

**Ms J Elliott-Gentry  
Secretary: ERTIC**

# APPENDIX D

## LETTER TO PRINCIPALS



• PO Box 77000 • Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University  
• Port Elizabeth • 6031 • South Africa • [www.nmmu.ac.za](http://www.nmmu.ac.za)

### Topic: An analysis of teachers' skills in the identification of learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

#### School Principal Consent Form

I give consent for you to approach teachers to participate in the *Analysis of teachers' skills in the identification of learners with behavioural and emotional problems.*

I have read the Project Information Statement explaining the purpose of the research project and understand that:

- The role of the school is voluntary
- I may decide to withdraw the school's participation at any time without penalty
- *Grade 10, 11 teachers* will be invited to participate and that permission will be sought from them. All information obtained will be treated in strictest confidence.
- The learners' names will not be used and individual learners will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
- The school will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
- Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- A report of the findings will be made available to the school.
- I may seek further information on the project from *Thirza Damons* on 0837922115.
- The participants will be interviewed and a tape recorder will be used.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please return to: *Thirza Damons*  
0837922115. I will collect completed forms from your school.

**APPENDIX E**  
**TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE**

High school questionnaire on teacher's skills in the identification of learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Please answer all questions as comprehensively as possible.

1. What are some of the behavioural problems that you encounter in your school?

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2. To what extent have you been able to address behavioural problems in your class? Provide examples (if appropriate).

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3. What aspect of learner behaviour is the most frustrating to you? To what extent have you been able to address such problems? Provide examples (where appropriate).

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4. What are some of the emotional problems that you encounter?

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5. To what extent have you been able to assist learners with their emotional problems?  
Give examples if relevant.

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6. How would you respond to signs that a learner might display that he/she is in need of emotional support?

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7. If you believed you needed support in dealing with learners with behavioural and emotional problems how would you initiate such support?

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8. In what ways are you skilled (if at all) to identify and assist learners with behavioural and emotional disorders?

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9. If you are not skilled what could the reason for this be?

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10. Do you think that you were adequately prepared to assist learners with their behavioural and emotional problems during your teacher/university training? Motivate your response.

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11. What resources are available at your school to assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems?

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12. What resources do you think your school needs to assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems?

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13. Any other suggestions beyond those you already noted about how schools can assist learners' with behavioural and emotional disorders.

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Thank you for taking the time to assist with this study. The purpose of this questionnaire is to investigate the skills, knowledge and opinions of teachers regarding learners with behavioural and emotional problems.

**Thirza Damons**  
**M.ed (Research)**  
**NMMU 208107303**

For any queries regarding the questionnaire contact me on 0837922115 or  
[twdamons@gmail.com](mailto:twdamons@gmail.com)

# **APPENDIX F**

## **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

### **SCHEDULE**

#### **Semi-Structured Interview Schedule**

The Researcher will introduce herself and, explain how the interview will proceed.

The participant will be allowed to introduce him/her self.

- What skills do teachers require to identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems?
- What are some of the behavioural problems you encounter?
- What signs do you think a learner might display that he/she is emotionally disturbed?
- Do you have the skills to assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems?
- Are you concerned about learners misbehavior, if yes, why?
- Have you ever been approached by a learner with BED and were you able to assist the learner?
- Do you know of resources available to you to assist learners with BED?
- Where you adequately trained at University/College to assist learners with BED?
- Have you ever attended a workshop or in-service training program organized by the Department of Education on how to identify and assist learners with behavioural and emotional problems?
- Are there policies or guidelines in place at your school to assist you in dealing with Learners with BED?
- If you are not skilled to identify learners with behavioural and emotional problems, how do you think this could be rectified?

## APPENDIX G

### INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT: TEACHER FROM SCHOOL X

#### APPENDIX : G

#### TRANSCRIPT 1- SCHOOL X

**I: What aspect of learner behaviour is the most frustrating to you?**

P: Learners who disrespect my authority and who can't settle down. They would either walk up and down in the classroom or talk while I'm trying to teach. Some days it takes me up to half a lesson just to deal with a disorderly learner. The rest of the learners then also suffer.

**I: How have you been able if at all to manage these learners?**

P: I first try and talk to them to get them to settle down. If they still continue I send them out of my class until the end of the period. I'm not saying teachers are not concerned about learners, but it is emotionally too taxing to deal with learners who are disorderly. We have a syllabus to complete and are under stress to get through the work. I don't have time to deal with disorderly learners.

**I: Have you ever been concerned about a learner showing worrying behaviour?**

P: Yes, I have been concerned about many learners. A lot of the learners at our school are using drugs. Some even come to school drugged. For a teacher it is very difficult to work with these learners. I am not sure how to approach them because they can be aggressive if approached wrong. For my safety I ignore them and continue with my work.

**I: Besides the drugs what are some of the issues learners at your school have to cope with?**

P: Some of these learners has parents who are very young. They don't know how to be parents to these kids. These children have no role models to look up to or to aspire to be like.

There are also a lot of gangs in the area, these gangs sometimes brings fights into the school.

**I: What would you say are some of the characteristics or needs of the learners that should be noted?**

P: I would say fear. A lot of learners are fearful of the gangs in school or being bullied. A lot of learners has very low self-esteem.

**I: Are there any intervention from the school to protect these learners from gangs.**

It is very difficult because the gangs operate during break when teachers are not around. The only time teachers become aware of activities is when there is a fight on the playground between gangs. A day ago the police was called in to break up a gang fight. These learners poses a serious threat to the safety of other learners as well as teachers.

**I: What measures are in place to handle gang activities.**



P: The school normally call in the parents. Depending of the severity of the fights the learners will be suspended or expelled. It is very difficult for the school because we don't always have the support from parents. In some instances parents even blame the school and get angry at the teachers. They have the opinion that it is the school's responsibility to handle their kids and to discipline them. We don't have the energy or the time for that.

I Do you think expulsion or suspension is an effective measure for dealing with learners?

Our school only suspend a learner in severe cases. Where a learner may be attacked another learner. If a learner had been caught selling or using drugs in school. A learner will be expelled for reasons such as attacking a teacher, vandalising school property, or stealing school property.

This matter is not effective because in many instances these learners come back to school and continue with the same behaviour. The two weeks off school also causes them to lose out on classwork. When they come back they are so far behind with the work they simply give up or become either truant or simply drop out of school.

**I What are some of the emotional issues learners at your school are dealing with?**

P: I often notice learners who look very pre-occupied and worried. I think they are mainly worried about issues at home. These issues could be abuse, violence or poverty, I am not really sure. These learners don't really talk. If they do discuss an issue it will be with a female teacher. But we are often too busy to notice these learners. It is only once a learner starts crying about a minor issue that a teacher might notice that something is wrong with the learner.

**I Does your school have any support systems in place to assist a learner that might be in need of emotional support?**

P We have a social worker student who has been helping for the past three months. But the school needs a counsellor or educational psychologist to assist these learners. We are not psychologists, we are here to teach. We also don't know how to deal with these learners. Many of our learners face major issues which we are not equipped to deal with. A lot of learners are showing signs that they are depressed. This is a bit frustrating to me as I don't always know how to help these learners.

**I: Do you think your university training was adequate to prepare you to deal with learners with behavioural and emotional problems?**

P: At university the focus is more on subject content. We are not trained to deal with learners with behavioural and emotional problems. The university design for learning is a wonderful initiative on paper, but difficult to put into practice especially when resources are not available. It is expected of us to deal with these learners but nobody asks if we are skilled to handle them. We can't teach and be social workers at the same time. We teach overcrowded

classrooms which makes it difficult to notice if a learner is in need of support or to understand why a learner is acting out.

**I: If you are not skilled, what do you think should happen to equip you with the necessary skills.**

The Department of education runs a lot of workshops aimed at the learners, assessment and changes to the curriculum. Teachers need workshops aimed at improving teaching skills, where they can be trained to deal with learners with behavioural and emotional problems. Some of these learners are violent and you don't know when they going to vent their anger towards you. Last week a learner smacked a teacher in the face. How can you teach learners who don't have any respect for you. This disrespect towards teachers leads to teacher frustration and stress.

We need to know how to defend ourselves against learners. What type of behaviour is dangerous and what type of behaviour can be ignored.

**I: Does your school have a system in place to assist not only teachers but also learners with behavioural and emotional problems?**

We have a discipline committee made up of mainly the senior staff members of the school. If a teacher has a problem with a learner the learner is sent to this committee. It is not always possible for the committee to handle all the cases because they also have classes to teach and we have a lot of learners with problems at our school. That committee and the social worker student is the only resources available to teachers at the school. We need professional help like a full time educational psychologist. We also need a model on how to identify symptoms that a learner might be a danger to himself or to others. Our system stipulate the discipline procedures to follow but does not really provide substantial help to teachers.

## APPENDIX- H

### INTERVIEW 2- SCHOOL Y

**I: Do you ever feel overwhelmed with learners who disrupt or misbehave in your class?**

P: It is very frustrating to deal with learners who are arrogant, rude and who disrespect my authority in my class. Sometimes I go home with a headache after a day of screaming at learners to sit still be quite and do their work. Yes it is very overwhelming to teach and scream at learners.

**I: What are some of the behaviour learners' display that frustrates you most?**

P: Learners who don't have to verbal skills to express themselves then they swear at other learners, or they believe they can solve problems by being violent. Then you also get the learners who refuse to speak. They suffer from low self-esteem and refuse to participate in classroom activity. Then you find that a lot of girls believe that crying will solve the issue when their behaviour is the problem not the emotional outburst.

**I: How have you been able to assist such learners?**

P: I talk them down so that they can calm down. I advocate an open door policy and I always tell my learners that they can come talk to me if they have a problem. I find that learners in the higher grades don't easily talk about their problems. I think they believe that they can handle their problems on their own.

**I: Do you think you are skilled to assist a learner who may be battling with an emotional problem?**

I can talk to a learner but I don't have any counselling skills to get a learner to open up to me. I have advised a learner who was pregnant to keep the baby after I heard from her friends that she wanted to go for an abortion. It is not always easy because I teach for the full duration of the day without any admin period. As teachers we sometimes feel demotivated because you see learners who really are battling emotionally but we are not sure what to do to help them. I started a pray group for learners to assist them with prayer.

**I : How do you handle learners who display behavioural problems in your class?**

P: I try and talk to them. If they continue disrupting like walking up and down or picking fights with other learners I send them out of the class until the end of the period. I do this because the other learners' in the class also has a right to learn without disruption. I know that some of them roam around the school building and sometimes they run home.

**I: Did your college or university training prepare you to handle learners with behavioural and emotional problems?**

P:: At the time I got my training learners did not have such a lot of problems as today. Times have changed. Also there was not a lot of focus on learners with behavioural and emotional problems. With regards to behavioural problems the emphasis was more on discipline than remedy the root of the problem. Psychology was not one of my modules.

**I: What emotional problems of learners are of concern to you?**

P: A lot of learners are depressed. I am concerned about a learner in my grade 11 class who has lost her mother and who seems to be very sad as if she does not care about things happening around her. We also have some learners' who have a lot of mood swings, I suspect that they are using drugs.

**I: To what extent have you been able to assist these learners?**

I once had a learner who confided in me that she wanted to commit suicide because of a boyfriend who broke up with her and because of problems at home. I was not sure how to handle this situation or whether I was giving her the right advice. By talking to her I tried to encourage her to see meaning in life. I send her to the office as I was unsure if my advice was sufficient. The school arranged for her to go see a psychologist outside school.

**P: How could teachers' be equipped to handle learners with behavioural and emotional problems?**

We need in service training, this should be on going not only a once off occurrence. The Department of Education offer limited opportunities for training. We sometimes have people from NGO's to come talk to learners about drugs, violence and crime. If we are better skilled it would be easier to understand which learners should be referred for counselling outside of school and who should be helped by the school.

**I: What resources do you think should be available?**

P: A full time school counsellor would be very helpful. The Department must appoint specialist at schools. The teachers are not coping with learner issues and teaching. We just don't have the training to deal with learners with serious emotional issues. In any case we should not have to deal with learner issues. Our school is under staffed and teachers are overloaded, we don't have the time to deal with learner issues. Specialist should be brought in, but our school lacks funds to appoint such people. The best schools can afford educational psychologist, our school need it more but we cannot afford the service and the Department is not willing to help. The Department of education should also appoint discipline officers at school. To help teachers with discipline. At the moment we try and solve problems ourselves. With severe cases we will call life line, the police, or in the case of substance abuse we will