Disruptive behaviour in the Foundation Phase of schooling

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Since the passage of legislation banning corporal punishment in South African schools, disruptive behaviour in schools has become an issue of national concern. Against this background a research project was undertaken in which the types and causes of disruptive behaviour occurring most frequently in the Foundation Phase of schooling were identified, with a view to providing strategies for teachers to manage behaviour of this kind. A qualitative research approach was applied. Data collection was done by conducting interviews comprising semistructured questions with Foundation Phase teachers. Strategies purposely devised to deal specifically with the identified types and causes of disruptive behaviour are explained.

Introduction

Disruptive behaviour continues to be the most consistently discussed problem in South African schools. Misbehaving learners and disciplinary problems are a disproportionate and intractable part of every teacher's experience of teaching. Teachers in South Africa are becoming increasingly distressed about disciplinary problems in schools, as corporal punishment has been outlawed by legislation, such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) and the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Some sectors of society have reacted positively, claiming that the said legislation affirms human dignity, but others have expressed concern, contending that there are no viable alternatives to corporal punishment. Naong (2007:283) maintains that abolition of corporal punishment in schools has left a gap which cannot be filled and that it has led to all kinds of disciplinary problems in schools.

In response to a public outcry, the government launched a national project on discipline in South African schools in 2000. Many of the recommendations emanating from the project were published in a booklet entitled *Alternatives to corporal punishment: the learning experience*, which was distributed to all schools in South Africa in 2001 by the National Department of Education. The booklet containing guidelines on alternatives to corporal punishment was disseminated in an effort to combat the escalating disciplinary problems in schools. In spite of this support from the National Department of Education, the following headline appeared in the media (Rademeyer, 2001:5): "Punishment guide not helping much with discipline — wonderful theories not always practical". Rademeyer's comments focused renewed attention on the jaundiced view of discipline that became evident

after corporal punishment was abolished. Teachers who used to rely on re-active measures such as corporal punishment to address disruptive behaviour now have to develop alternative proactive measures to preempt disruptive behaviour. This leads to the research question: What types and causes of disruptive behavior can be identified in the Foundation Phase of schooling with a view to providing strategies that teachers can employ to prevent such behaviour?

Project outline

In light of the above, a project was undertaken to achieve a threefold aim: firstly to identify the various types of disruptive behaviour that occur most often among Foundation Phase learners; secondly, to find out from teachers what the causes are of disruptive behaviour amongst Foundation Phase learners; and thirdly to suggest strategies that Foundation Phase teachers can direct towards managing disruptive behaviour.

The project focused on Foundation Phase learners, firstly because learners in this phase are in a developmental stage where they need to seriously master the laws of society and learn to abide by rules and behave in appropriate ways. Secondly, this developmental stage coincides with the beginning of formal schooling when the learning environment is structured according to the rules applicable to formal schooling. Thirdly, this stage is also the appropriate time to focus on managing disruptive behaviour as a means of assisting learners to cultivate a self-disciplined lifestyle.

Before unpacking the empirical section of the research in detail, a brief outline is given of the theoretical foundation on which the research was based, to which end the literature on disruptive behaviour is revisited.

Systems theory approach

This research is predicated on a general systems theory approach. A system is a group of interrelated, interdependent and interacting elements that form a coherent whole. General systems theory emphasises that a system can only be understood as an integrated whole and not as a set of discrete elements, since elements do not necessarily behave individually as they would in a specific context. Therefore the complex of relationships between elements in a system is key to understanding the system. Families, schools and society are regarded as social systems that interact with each other, are dependent on and influenced by each other (Laszlo, 1972:48). Plas (1986:16) elaborates by saying that "systems associate integrally with other systems. A pattern of mutual dependency exists".

Furthermore, context is a key concept within general systems theory. The focus is on the interactive processes of which the individual is a part (Gladwell, 1999 in Naong, 2007:289). Often the causes of disruptive behaviour are attributed entirely to the learner. However this kind of assessment, which presumes a linear relationship between cause and effect, is simplistic, unlike systems theory, which provides an alternative theoretical framework for

understanding and dealing with behaviour in a broader context (consisting of the individual, family, school and society) (Plas, 1986:57-59). Thus "when a learner presents with disruptive behaviour, the teacher has to view the behaviour within the context of the learner's life and come to an understanding of the forces that shape the life of the learner" (Naong, 2007:290). Note further that learners' lives play out in virtually endless permutations as they interact with and are shaped by forces within the individual (internal system) and outside of the individual (external systems).

Yoon and Kuchinkie (2005:16) maintain that some interactions between systems are healthy and productive while others are not. Whatever the case, the interaction between systems is a given and the impact of these relationships can be understood by analysing and investigating the elements of each system to determine why systems and interactions may be unhealthy. Elements in particular systems, for example, would be learners' disruptive behaviour (element) in the system (school) and parents (element) in the system (society).

One of the dominant goals of a system, however, is that it is driven by a survival motive and a felt need for stability which ties in with the survival motive. A system is designed to seek self-maintenance. In this process of self-maintenance a system generates creative forces within itself that enable it to alter circumstances and in any case the system cannot remain healthy if it precludes the possibility of change (Cain, 1999:15).

In the system under discussion (the school), learners' disruptive behaviour is a threat which seriously challenges the health, and ultimately the prospects for survival, of the system. It is therefore important to examine the element 'disruptive behaviour' carefully with a view to devising strategies for the optimal survival of the system in the sense that it can function consistently to best advantage.

Defining the concept of disruptive behaviour
According to Gordon and Browne (2004:639) disruptive behaviour is merely inappropriate behaviour. According to Mabeba and Prinsloo (2000:24), disruptive behaviour is attributable to disciplinary problems in schools that affect the fundamental rights of the learner to feel safe and be treated with respect in the learning environment. For the purposes of this research, concepts such as misconduct and misbehaviour are treated under the rubric of disruptive behaviour.

Brief outline of identified types of disruptive behaviour
For Levin and Nolan (1996:23-24) disruptive behaviour implies learner behaviour that inhibits achievement of the teacher's purposes. Furthermore they classify disruptive behaviour into four basic categories:
• behaviour that interferes with the teaching and learning act (e.g. a learner who distracts other learners during lesson presentation, who refuses to follow directions, or displays aggressive behaviour);

- behaviour that interferes with the rights of other learners to learn (e.g. a learner who continually calls out while the teacher is explaining content);
- behaviour that is psychologically or physically unsafe (e.g. leaning on the back legs of a chair, unsafe use of tools or laboratory equipment, threats to other learners, and constant teasing and harassment of classmates);
- behaviour that causes the destruction of property (e.g. vandalism in the classroom).

Levin and Nolan (1996:161) note that common, day-to-day disruptive behaviours that pose a challenge to teachers are verbal interruptions (e.g. talking out of turn, name calling, humming, calling out), off-task behaviours (e.g. daydreaming, fidgeting, doodling, tardiness, inattention), physical movement that, whether intended or not, is bound to disrupt (e.g. wandering about, visiting other learners, passing notes, sitting on the desk, throwing objects around the classroom) and disrespect (verbal aggression, teasing, punching, neglecting academic work, refusing to follow directions, and assault). These common forms of disruptive behaviour exist to some extent in all classrooms. They are called surface behaviours because they are usually not the result of deep-seated personal problems, but normal developmental behaviour of children.

On the other hand, according to Rayment (2006:99) and De Wet (2003: 89), more serious disruptive behaviour, such as conflict degenerating into physical violence, is by far the most challenging misbehaviour to deal with. It is often a subset of revenge seeking and one in five boys will resort to violent physical conflict. Fighting is reputed among learners to be the best way of resolving their conflict situations. According to Rayment (2006:19), male learners regard peers who do not fight as weaklings.

Another example of serious disruptive behaviour that negatively affects both the emotional and physical experiences of learners in the school is bullying, defined for the South African context by Neser, Ovens, Van der Merwe, Morad and Ladikos (in Booyens, 2003:35), as intentional, hurtful words or acts or other behaviour repeatedly visited upon a child or children by another child or children. According to these authors, bullying exists in the classrooms and on the playgrounds of all schools around the world. As a teacher, Bott (2004:9) testifies that several learners reported that they were frequently called names such as stupid, dumb, skinny, fat or retarded by other learners in the classroom and on the playground, and that they felt ashamed and humiliated by the experience of being called those names. Smit (2003:30) reported that in her study most of the bullying took the form of general name-calling or the use of derogatory labels referring to colour and race.

The next most frequent forms of bullying included physical blows administered to, or threats uttered against, chosen victims, and the spreading of malicious rumours. Other forms of bullying such as dispossessing fellow learners of their belongings were less frequent. Typically studies of the incidence of bullying have shown that more boys are involved in bullying than girls (Smit, 2003:28).

General causes of disruptive behaviour

The literature presents an array of factors that may cause or be conducive to disruptive behavior (Steward, 2004:317-335; Oosthuizen & Van Staden, 2007: 236; Naong, 2007:283-300; De Wet, 2003:164; Wolhuter & Steyn, 2003:521-538). An emerging tendency in research into this topic is the identification of risk factors that could be conducive to disruptive behaviour. These factors or variables can be inherent in the individual (internal system), but also in the broader social context or external systems in which the individual operates. The presence of such factors is associated with disruptive behaviour, thus the presence of the factor is associated with an increased risk of antisocial behaviour. Shaw and Tshiwula (in Maree, 2003:52) refer to youths at risk as children whose circumstances, lifestyle and/or behaviour put them at risk of offending in future. The more risk factors present in the different system contexts, the greater the chances of disruptive behaviour. For the purposes of the research under review, the risk factors, to which Foundation Phase learners are exposed, are discussed as factors emanating from internal and external systems.

Factors related to internal systems

Internal system factors, categorized as learner-related factors, include the following:

• *Developmental stage of the Foundation Phase learner*

When examining a learners' motives with a view to responding appropriately to their untoward behaviour, it can be helpful to look at some developmental issues that play a role in this regard (Miller, 1996:49). According to Erikson's stage theory, the Foundation Phase learner is typically in the fourth stage of development, for which the defining characteristic is stated as industry versus inferiority (6–12 years). The major theme for development in this stage is attaining mastery of life, primarily by conforming to the laws imposed by society (laws, rules, relationships) and by the physical characteristics of the world in which they have to live. Problems arise if the child feels inadequate and inferior to this adaptive task (Gordon & Browne, 2004:136-137). If learners have to struggle inwardly with a sense of guilt and feelings of unworthiness, inadequacy and inferiority, it is most likely that their behaviour will not conform to what is expected by society or required for purely practical reasons; in other words, their behaviour will tend to be maladaptive. Furthermore, Foundation Phase learners are still learning about their world by touching and doing. This explains why it is so difficult for them to sit still, which is regarded as a tendency to misbehave. Reviewing notes on children's developmental stages can help refresh teachers' memories and assist them in making age-appropriate rules.

• *Inexperience or ignorance*

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). It cannot be expected that young learners who come from divergent circumstances will automatically know and under-

stand what Payne (in Tilestone, 2004:55) calls the "hidden rules" of the class-room. These hidden rules are mostly based on middle-class ideals and values. It is important for teachers to teach learners that there is a set of behaviours and communication standards that work in situations where they come from and that there is another set of behaviours and speech patterns that will make them successful at school. When learners come from disadvantaged environments such as living in squatter camps, on the streets or 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 class-room. Making rules clear and explaining with the aid of concrete examples can help relieve their ignorance (Gootman, 1997:108).

• *Curiosity*

Normal curiosity may lead to misbehaviour. For example, a young learner who is asked to open a book at a certain page may be tempted to first flip through the book before doing so. This may happen more often if the learner comes from a poor socioeconomic background where books are normally not freely available. Rayment (2006:24) adds that experimentation out of curiosity is not only a natural part of growing up and of development, but is a powerful edu-cative medium, which can lead to disruptive behaviour.

• *Need for belonging*

Ladson-Billings (1994:20-21) contends that learners are not treated equally since white teachers are prejudiced against black learners as a result of stereotyped perceptions that they have internalised. He insists that these perceptions are derived from mainstream society's invalidation of African culture. In the report, *Racism, Racial Integration and Desegregation in South African Public Secondary Schools* (Vally & Dalamba, 1999:42-56), similar examples are given. The report includes details of incidents of racism and the prevalence of racism in schools. The challenge to the South African teacher is therefore to become knowledgeable about and sensitive to the needs of learners from a variety of cultures and family structures, and to accept all learners equally.

• *Need for recognition*

Many learners misbehave because they are starved for attention — ignoring such learners will not help; after all, negative attention is still better than none at all. A huge problem in desegregated schools is the disparity between the English proficiency of black learners and the proficiency required of them in order to master all the learning areas through the medium of English. When placed in classes where the ability to communicate fluently in idiomatic English is often assumed, these learners find themselves at risk of under-achievement. In this regard Lund (1996:69) warns that these learners are more likely to exhibit antisocial behaviour. Research further claims that poor parental discipline and 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 adoles-cence (Pienaar, 2003:6).

• *Need for power, control and anger release*

Some learners misbehave as a means of issuing a deliberate challenge to the teacher's authority. Ironically these are often children who either come from families where the children are powerless, or from families where the children are in control (in which case they may also feel powerless, for example, because they feel abandoned and overwhelmed) (Gootman, 1997:111). Furthermore, learners learn a lot by copying behaviour they observe around them. Watching television, as well as playing computer and videogames, influences young people to be heroes and stresses the need for power, control and aggressive behaviour. The media therefore inspire learners to emulate what they see. Observing entertainment-based power and control affects learners' day-to-day behaviour and temperament, and this influence is carried with them into schools (Rayment, 2006:18, 20). Some learners create disciplinary problems by indulging in violent behaviour because they are angry and resentful and are not mentally and emotionally equipped to handle their strong feelings or express their anger constructively. They lash out blindly without thinking. Furthermore, interpersonal situations in learners' homes, neighbourhoods, and the world at large contribute to an increased awareness of and exposure to aggression and violence (Gordon & Browne, 2004:613). Recent learner integration in classrooms aggravates the situation. For example, in a community where there has been a long history of racial intolerance, there could be a great deal of unresolved anger (Fourie, 2008:10). This is all the more reason for teachers to be well-acquainted with the culture of learners attending their classes and with any unresolved anger they may be harbouring.

Finally Rossouw (2003:427) holds that "children are not naturally inclined to be good and innocent", and that they have a "natural inclination to be disobedient".

Factors related to external systems

External system-related factors can be categorised as factors related to the family, school and society:

• *Factors related to the family*

The family is the most immediate and perhaps the most influential system affecting the individual (Walsh & Williams, 1997:xi). Lack of parental guidance and dysfunctional families are continually emphasised as risk factors. Rayment (2006:31-32) found that certain parents displayed violent and aggressive behaviour towards school staff and that their children also showed signs of violent, aggressive and antisocial behaviour. It was also found that 10% of respondents professed to often seeing their parents verbally or physically fighting. It stands to reason that if children are exposed to aggressive displays between the adult partners who are their role models at home, they will carry these experiences with them into the school. Wolhuter and Oosthuizen (2003: 454) mention that from a learner's perspective, lack of parent involvement is the biggest cause of disciplinary problems.

• *School-related factors*

Oosthuizen and Van Staden (2007:362), as well as De Wet (2003:92) 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 (lack of educational/didactic expertise), overcrowded schools; deficient organisational structure of the school, and rundown, ill-kept physical appearance of the school.

• *Factors emanating from society*

Moral degeneration of communities, racial conflict, poor housing and medical services, the availability and poor control of firearms, poor law enforcement and unemployment (De Wet, 2003:93) are some of the community-based risk factors that could heighten the possibility of learners' engaging in disruptive behaviour. Furthermore, McHenry (in Oosthuizen & Van Staden, 2007:363) takes 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.

In summary, to manage learners' disruptive behaviour, a teacher must first understand it in 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 playgrounds. The teacher must furthermore realise that "the more risk factors are present, the greater the chances of behavioural problems" (Maree, 2003:73). This allows teachers to be proactive in their management of the various types of disruptive behaviour.

Our empirical study, done against this theoretical background, focused on the identification of types of disruptive behaviour that occur most often in the Foundation Phase of South African schools with a view to recommending strategies devised to manage the identified types of disruptive behaviour.

Research design
Research approach

A qualitative research approach was considered suitable because it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers are motivated by an in-depth inquiry to study a phenomenon in its natural setting, to make sense of, as well as to interpret, the phenomenon in terms of meanings and understandings constructed by people (Denzin, 2005:3). Therefore, the real-life experiences of teachers regarding disruptive behaviour in the Foundation Phase and the nuances of their understanding and experiences of disruptive behaviour and its causes needed to be captured.

Research method, data collection and sample

A questionnaire with two semistructured questions and one open-ended question was used to obtain the data. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire in written format using a narrative method. Each respondent

was asked to identify three examples of disruptive behaviour that occurred most often in the Foundation Phase. The second question dealt with possible causes for the disruptive behaviour and the open-ended question provided for reflected general comments. The same questions were asked to all respondents in the same sequence.

Purposeful sampling was used to select 90 Foundation Phase teachers, of both genders aged 28 to 64 and representing different cultural groups across South Africa. Respondents had to have at least five years' experience of teaching practice. A selection of rural and urban schools ensured rich and poor resources in the sample. The interviews were conducted at the schools where the respondents taught, and the time frame for conducting the interviews was seven months (February to August).

Trustworthiness
Trustworthiness was established by using various strategies as safeguards against bias in the findings. The two researchers involved were disciplined in their subjectivity as they consciously tried to refrain from being biased by continuous self-monitoring throughout the research process. Furthermore, two other peer reviewers were used to verify the interpretation of the data.

Ethical measures
Ethical measures adopted by us included gaining informed consent from the school principals and the respondents. Each interview began with a statement of the purpose of the interview, a promise of confidentiality and an assurance that there were no right or wrong answers.

Data analysis and interpretation
The data are discussed in the following sequence: (1) The perceptions of teachers regarding the nature of disruptive behaviour in the Foundation Phase, and (2) the perceptions of teachers regarding the causes of disruptive behaviour. The data with regard to identifying examples of disruptive behaviour were categorized and then consolidated into seven themes. These themes were structured according to the reasons why the learners committed the disruptive behaviour.

Data analysis and interpretation are approached in three stages. In stage 1 data on and causes of disruptive behaviour are divided into categories (keywords). In stage 2 these categories are consolidated into themes, and in stage 3 the data are interpreted.

Results
As indicated above, the seven themes were identified from the data collected on disruptive behaviour: disrupting of classroom activities, fighting, disrespect towards teachers, bullying, stealing, using bad language, and vandalism. The themes were isolated during stages 1 and 2 of the data analysis.

Disrupting classroom activities
All the teachers in Grades 1 to 3 (thus all the respondents in the sample) ex-

perienced learner behaviour that disrupted classroom activities and deemed it the biggest challenge to disruptive behaviour management. According to the teachers, learners talk while learning content is being explained or when they have to complete a task. Even after being warned, learners keep on talking, laughing and making a noise. Learners play with stationery, throw objects around, disobey the teacher, are inattentive, and make a noise. Some learners walk or run around aimlessly in the classroom. Learners also shout at other learners. Some teachers claim that learners are simply undisciplined. They have a "don't-care" attitude because they are not reprimanded at home, and therefore they think they can be unruly at school too.

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

Fighting
According to the respondents, fighting in the classroom and on the play-grounds, apart from verbal aggression, mostly manifests as pushing, slapping, kicking, and aggressive play-fight, all of which are part of everyday school events.

Possible reasons for fighting are exposure to violence at home and an abusive background. Racial intolerance and racial discrimination appear to be a major reason for fighting. According to one respondent,

> "*learners from the same race gang up. They let the other learners know that only learners from the same race are allowed to join the gang and those learners from other cultural groups are not welcome and should stay away*"

Furthermore, respondents are convinced that public media, such as television programmes and television and computer games, are to blame. Learners are exposed to violence, jealousy, abusive situations, and bad manners on a daily basis. They are egocentric and completely lacking in anger management skills, therefore easily provoked and inclined to protect their rights violently. Many teachers agree that discipline is neglected at home and that the school is given the responsibility of disciplining children. One respondent commented as follows: "*sometimes learners are just mean and cruel and take pleasure in hurting one another*".

Disrespect towards teachers
Another challenging type of disruptive behaviour was categorised as disrespect towards teachers (e.g. giving rude answers when spoken to, repeatedly ignoring teacher's instructions/requests, being generally unco-operative and flouting classroom rules). One teacher said that a learner who refused to clean up told her: "*Dirty papers will make me sick*". One of the respondents commented that learners "*... are not disciplined at home. They get away with being disrespectful at home and they just have no regard for authority*". Another claimed that learners are "*immune towards authority*".

Possible reasons for disrespect, according to the respondents, can definitely be traced back to the home environment: lack of ethical role models, lack of respect for parents, and lack of discipline at home being the main reasons for disrespect towards teachers.

Bullying

According to the respondents, bullying is a serious problem, especially on the playground, where it takes the form of name calling, teasing, taunting, mocking, as well as intimidating other learners. Persistent physical or psychological harassment occurs daily. Physical abuse includes kicking, biting, hitting, punching and deliberate pushing and shoving; emotional abuse includes the above as well as malicious gossip and ganging up to deliberately ostracise victims. A respondent declared that "... *gangs/cliques are formed with conversations, such as don't play with ... don't speak to ... he is not our friend*".

Respondents stated that in some instances bullies are themselves bullied by siblings at home (it is a well known pattern of the abused becoming the abuser). Other causative factors named were the influence of television, growing up in an aggressive society ("mean streets"); emotional problems like an inadequate sense of self-worth; jealousy (related to poor self-image); peer pressure, egocentrism, insecurity, and single parenthood. One respondent remarked "... *bullying allows them* (learners) *to experience a sense of control and authority*". Another respondent observed that "... *older learners bully the younger learners to get their tuck shop money*" and "... *older children who play in the area of the smaller children like to abuse the younger children*". Another respondent confirmed this remark and added that older learners believe they are naturally superior to, and can control, younger learners.

Stealing

Theft, a common practice in schools, is a daily aggravation to teachers. Respondents testified that learners steal each other's lunch boxes, tuck-shop money, stationery, clothes, cellular phones and toys.

Comments on causes for stealing emphasise the testing of barriers, poverty, poor socio-economic backgrounds, emulation of peers, malnutrition, personal problems, hunger, jealousy, and unprincipled parents. One respondent remarked that "... *some children don't think that it is wrong due to improper examples from parents and older siblings*". Another respondent said: "*Cases can seldom be proven and parents side with their children*". Learners' bags are often searched and a few respondents stated that the police are contacted in serious cases.

Using bad language

Rude signs and suggestions, swearing and derogatory remarks, and abusive, discriminatory or offensive language are daily occurrences.

The respondents stated that learners in the Foundation Phase use offensive language to express their feelings, anger and grudges. According to some respondents, bad language is copied from parents/guardians and peers as

well as from television, where swearing is not unusual. Respondents also emphasised bad language as index of the deterioration of values in homes. One respondent believed that "... *learners are used to using bad language because it is heard in conversations of peers and adults*". Another respondent added "*learners are exposed to bad language at home and in society at large to the point where it becomes a norm. It becomes part of their life world*".

Vandalism
The respondents also identified vandalism as a serious form of disruptive behaviour. According to them breaking windows, blocking toilets with toilet paper, scratching teachers' cars, puncturing teachers' car tyres, and damaging plants and trees are examples of vandalism in Grades 1 to 3.

Learners are not disciplined at home. Parents do not instil social values, such as respect for persons and property. Learners are therefore challenging authority both at home and at school. Respondents also believed that learners' disruptive behaviour amounted to retaliation for punishment by teachers. Learners are not punished at home and therefore find it unacceptable to defer to authority of schools. Most respondents feel that vandalism at schools is mainly attributable to the antisocial content of televised, cinematic and music productions aimed at a youthful audience.

In the light of the above the data are interpreted as follows.

Interpretation and discussion of the data
It became clear from the findings that disruptive behaviour in the Foundation Phase poses a major challenge for educators and threatens the existence and survival of the system. An important discovery made during the research and which related to all types of disruptive behaviour was a lack of parental care and adult role models in society. Guidance regarding disruptive behaviour is deeply embedded within the values and beliefs of the family. It is primarily in the family where learners learn to act morally. It seems as if ethical principles and convictions are neglected at home. Parents may have fallen between two stools: in the sense that they have not internalised the conceptual framework and mindset of people living in a typical western industrialised nation-state, nor are they 'traditional' — they are neither one nor the other. In many instances they are merely 'detribalised'. They have to forge a new identity in a bewildering, head spinning modern world rushing headlong into the unknown. If parents avoid their responsibilities towards the moral upbringing of their children, disruptive behaviour in homes and in schools will be inevitable. These statements confirm the findings of Rayment (2006:18) as well as those of Wolhuter and Oosthuizen (2003:437-456).

Other manifestations of disruptive behaviour are disrespect towards teachers, and using bad language. These findings are consistent with results obtained by Levin and Nolan (1996:161). The findings have also proved that serious disruptive behaviour, such as fighting (consistent with the findings of Rayment, 2006:99), bullying (consistent with the findings of Bott (2004:1-5) and Neser *et al.* (in Booyens, 2003:35), vandalism (breaking of windows,

scratching of cars), and stealing lunch boxes, toys and cellular phones, etc. also manifest among learners in the Foundation Phase. These examples of disruptive behaviour are part of an "ordinary" school day and teachers have to deal with this kind of serious disruptive behaviour all the time. Rayment (2006:18) adds that the reason for the serious disruptive behaviour in class-rooms and on the playgrounds could be the need for power, control or release of anger (internal system), as well as television progammes and computer/video games for aggressive and violent behaviour (external system).

A learner's disruptive behaviour is a call for help and at the same time is a serious challenge to the survival of the school (as a system). Families, schools and society are not simply a collection of people but consist of people plus their relationships. Thus social systems that are dependent on each other are influenced by each other, and have a responsibility to assist other systems to keep healthy. Because the learner is inherently dependent on other systems for his or her own health and survival, other systems like the family and society need to exercise and promote positive behaviour in the learner. It is futile, however, if one system, (e.g. the parents) models good behaviour but learners are exposed to immoral and corrupt behaviour of political leaders who are suspended from office or not, because of dishonesty, teachers who come to school unprepared or drunk, and media portrayal of excessive vio-lence and aggressive behaviour in children's programmes. Each system there-fore needs to maintain its own health and must be able to change in order to positively shape a learner's life.

Once common causes of disruptive behaviour and the system(s) in which they originate are understood, it becomes easier to deal with the learner and to take action to prevent similar misbehaviour in future. Systems rely on other systems for sustenance, maintenance and growth. Therefore educators need concrete strategies to manage the identified causes of disruptive beha-viour. Such management is central to effective teaching and learning in the school system. All educators know it is impossible to teach misbehaving learners. Furthermore, a learner's dignity, self-respect and self-esteem cannot develop in an environment where discipline is not maintained.

Strategies for managing disruptive behaviour
Parental involvement
Respondents' testimony points to a lack of parental care, lack of parental involvement, and lack of role models as a significant cause of disruptive be-haviour. Parents should be examples of pure values and convictions. Learners pattern their responses after adult behaviour and parents, teachers and care-givers should ask themselves the following questions from time to time: "Are my values worth following and do I transmit ethical principles to children? Are children important to me and am I making time for them in my life? Am I a responsible role model for children in my care?" Schools need to participate in educating parents/caregivers by communicating ethical values regularly to parents/caregivers because the message learners receive about what is good, right and proper conduct should be consistent between schools and home to ensure the same level of respect for authority, persons and property.

Disrupting classroom activities, disrespect for teachers and using bad language

It is imperative that teachers adopt a *proactive, context driven* approach to managing disruptive behaviour in an effort to positively redirect learners' behaviour. The point of departure should always be the *enhancement of developmentally appropriate guidance and curriculum material*. According to Gordon and Browne (2004:275, 283), it is important to identify typical behaviour of a specific age group as a benchmark against which to measure and understand learners' behaviour. Behaviour can then be seen as *predictable* and can be countered accordingly. Guidance, based on a *developmental approach*, assists educators to know that first and second graders already have the ability to consider others' points of view, so they would choose problem solving methods that motivate their learners to think of how their behaviour affects others. Enthusiasm for the curriculum and thorough preparation would help to avoid the situation where learners subconsciously *switch off*. Educators should bear in mind that children in the Foundation Phase still love games, and if learning is made interesting by developing joyful, interactive learning resources, the learners will be more attentive in class (Rayment, 2006:51-52). Neutralising attention-seeking behaviour, perhaps by a simple change of tone of voice or statements and extended commands to the whole class can be effective. According to Rayment (2006:84), the key here is to play on the learner's instinctive desire to take part in classroom events. All teachers need to *model correct behaviour*. If teachers yell at learners, while exhorting them not to yell, learners are taught that "undesirable" behaviour is appropriate when you are an adult or if you have the power in your hands (Gootman, 1997:25-26).

Fighting, bullying, and vandalism

The importance of rules can never be overemphasised. Having class rules enables learners to understand what kind of behaviour is expected from them. Distributing these rules and guidelines in print reinforces this understanding (Rayment, 2006:84). Rules can be displayed as written notices on walls, floors, and along pathways and passages throughout the school premises, including toilets, and can even be hung from classroom ceilings. These rules should be read aloud by all the learners on a daily basis. Once rules are set, educators should enforce them rigorously. Rules should be few in number, easily understood, justifiable and enforceable. Sproson (1995:sp) refers to these as *high level rules* (no learner participation in setting policies) and *low level rules* (negotiation with all stakeholders, even learners) and suggests that both high and low level rules should be taught to learners in preprimary and primary schools.

When dealing with fighting, the first thing to assess is the implication of injuries. The teacher is responsible for protecting the safety of learners. The best way to manage fighting is to remove the victim. The other learner then has no one to fight with. It is also important to prevent the bystanders from becoming part of the situation (Rayment, 2006:101). The problem of fighting can also be addressed by drawing the attention of learners to the conse-

quences of fighting by means of anti-fighting posters, class discussions and group projects. These should be integrated into lesson plans, lesson activities and plays. Parent involvement in this regard is crucial.

One of the strategies to manage bullying, according to Bott (2004:8), is the joint setting of classroom rules by learners and teachers regarding relationships. Even young children in the Foundation Phase are able to describe how they should treat each other. Teachers should also organise group discussions in their classrooms where issues such as name-calling and words that cut others down are discussed. Bott (2004:9) also suggests that learners should list words that hurt them, such as *stupid*, *dumb*, *skinny*, *fat* or *retarded*. These words are name-calling and the rule should be that name-calling is forbidden. Reading a story to the learners about bullying is also an excellent strategy to help them understand the nature of bullying and how to report it to an adult and even help one another to stand up to a bully. Bott (2004:11) proposes the *name it*, *claim it*, *stop it* strategy. *Name it*: the teacher repeats what the bully said to the victim; *claim it*: the teacher explains the disruptive behaviour and reprimands the bully; *stop it*: the teacher firmly dictates that such language needs to stop.

Furthermore, all stakeholders in education should be involved in managing disruptive behaviour: policy makers at national, provincial and local level, school principals, teachers, personnel providing specialist support systems, parents and society at large. There should be collaborative goal setting for developing skills and abilities to be used for teacher training programmes, and barriers between role players should be eliminated. New knowledge gained by continuously evaluating disruptive behaviour should be introduced to manage strategies communicated to student teachers in the formal training process so that they will be able to manage discipline in the Foundation Phase schools once they enter the teaching profession.

Conclusion

The key to addressing disruptive behaviour lies within a systems theory approach which involves a shift of focus from objects to relationships and from individuals to communities. The learner should always be viewed as part of a system, comprising a group of interrelated and dynamically interactive elements. The complete picture of the system resembles a tapestry woven from many factors (e.g. the school, learner, family and society) acting on a virtually unlimited diversity of learners. Individual behaviour should therefore always be assessed within the context in which it occurred.

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