Applying Choice Theory in Fostering Discipline: Managing and Modifying Challenging Learners Behaviours in South African Schools

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Abstract

Discipline in school which is geared at ensuring the safety of educators and learners and to create an environment conducive to teaching and learning is hampered if the behaviour of learners in school disrupts the normal teaching and learning process. This seriously impacts on learners' access to educational opportunities. As such, it is imperative to consider strategies to foster school discipline. In order to test the possible success and suggest the application of Choice Theory in managing and modifying challenging learners' behaviours in schools, a study underpinned by a complete qualitative research paradigm was complemented with an empirical study to find out the challenges inherent in current disciplinary strategies in schools. This was compared to the demands of Choice Theory in managing discipline in order to suggest and highlight strategies on how teachers can stop the unwanted or disruptive students' behaviours (managing behaviour) and at the same time teach students how to control their own behaviour (modifying behaviour) without using punishments based on specific rules and unnecessary rewards. Through the use of document analysis, observations and field notes, and interviews as well as reflective journals, purposefully selected disciplinary committee members with at least five years teaching experience and learners that are victims of current applicable discipline strategies views and experiences on the possible use of Choice Theory in managing and modifying challenging learners' behaviours were captured. Data collected from two secondary schools which served as the cases of this study were analysed through open coding. The results revealed that the continuous rise of challenging learner behaviours and general discipline problems is as a result of lack of coherent disciplinary strategies in managing and modifying challenging learner behaviour in South African schools today. The findings further revealed that through careful planning, implementation strategies and in-service training, Choice Theory can be implemented in schools to manage and modify learner behaviours. This will contribute successfully in managing and modifying challenging learner behaviours, ensuring discipline in schools, and educating learners in the habit of accountability and responsibility for their actions without using punishment following specified rules or rewards; and by so doing, realizing one of the Critical and Developmental outcomes of education in South Africa.

Keywords: Choice Theory, Behaviour Management, Behaviour Modification, Challenging Learner behaviours and Schools in South Africa.

Introduction

It is evident from foregoing expositions that the South African government strives for a school environment that respects human right and fundamental freedoms. In terms of Section 8(1) of SASA (DoE, 1996:8), discipline must be maintained in school so that the culture of teaching and learning should run smoothly without any disruptive behaviour. The far reaching outcome of this clause on a national platform is the achievement of the critical and developmental outcomes of educating learners into being able to demonstrate an understanding of interrelationships, working with others as team members and for being responsible citizens of South Africa. It would seems that ever since the abolition of corporal punishment according to Section 17 of SASA, the achievements of these outcomes are gradually collapsing as discipline problems are on the rise in schools today. More cases of challenging learner behaviour are reported in schools. Trying to find out what is happening in the brains of learners with behaviour problems can be frustrating and exhausting.

Until recently, science could tell us a little about the causes of inappropriate behaviours and more or less ways to address them successfully. One of which is by using *Choice Theory* which involves bringing learners to an awareness of their responsibility to make their own decision about their behaviour. This style of discipline management strategy (Choice Theory) focuses not only on stopping an unwanted behaviour, but of modifying it without using punishments following specific rules or rewards of any sort.

Classroom management, a term used by teachers to describe the process of ensuring that classroom lessons run smoothly despite disruptive behaviour by students, also implies according to Barbetta, Patricia, Norona, Kathleen Leong, Bicard & David (2005), as the prevention of disruptive behaviour. Learner behaviour management, a broader concept to classroom management involves the management of learners' behaviour within the classroom and outside the classroom. This possibly is one of the most difficult aspects of teaching for many teachers in South Africa. The greatest challenge of an educator is to maintain order in the classroom so as to achieve academic objectives thus creating an optimal work environment (Shechtman & Leichtentritt, 2004:324). As such, discipline which ensures the safety of educators and learners and create an environment conducive to teaching and learning is of great importance in schools today and requires attention.

Background of the study

The responsibilities to create and maintain a safe, disciplined environment in South African schools are the responsibility of principals, educators, and management committees. With no explicit guidelines available to these parties on how to promote appropriate behaviour and develop self-discipline, and how to respond to inappropriate behaviour in order to correct and modify it (Joubert et al., 2004), educators today face many challenges. Not only must they present curriculum content in a meaningful way, but they are also expected to be drug, family and guidance counsellors, health care workers, as well as technology users and monitors. At the same time they must check for weapons, maintain a safe and positive classroom climate, and deal with disruptive behaviours (Sousa, 2009:1). Dealing with challenging learner behaviour is demanding a greater portion of teacher time as the number of students with consistent behavioural problems appears to be growing. However, the number of disciplinary actions taken by schools in response to less serious behavioural offenses has increased over time.

In maintaining discipline in schools that will serve a long term, educators have to device and implement disciplinary strategies that are non coercive, yet assertive and non-confrontational and which will strive to increase classroom time available for teaching and learning and at the same time respond to students behaviours in a manner that decrease disruption, improve classroom atmosphere and relieves educator stress and fatigue. In achieving this effectively such that discipline is managed alongside modifying students' behaviours, there is a dire need to understand learners' behaviour and reasons behind varying learner acts of misconduct. It is the conceded opinion of this study for educators to understand and apply *Choice Theory* in understanding learners' behaviours and actions so as to be able to design effective disciplinary strategies that will manage and modify students' behaviours in schools effectively.

Rationale of the paper

The paper was motivated by the general view of the researcher that discipline is gradually collapsing in South Africa schools while challenging learners' behaviour is on the rise. Learners seem to be uncontrollable thus, negatively affecting the quality of teaching and learning. This ultimately was the results of a critical analysis of the tenets of Choice Theory and the disciplinary strategies of schools linked in it the rise of challenging learner behaviour in schools. The analysis seems to reveals a contravention between existing disciplinary strategies used in schools and the guiding principles suggested by choice theory. Because of this contravention of ideologies, this study was moved by Naong's (2007: 297) suggestion that schools must rethink their discipline policies and seek new ways to address today's unprecedented learners' behaviour problems. A possible new way is looking at the use of Choice Theory in managing discipline in schools.

Statement of the problem

According to section 17 of SASA (DoE, 1996a:5-6), corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool is outlawed. The outlawing of corporal punishment seems to have some negative consequences on school discipline. This is so because Section 8(1) of SASA (DoE, 1996:8) which instigate that discipline must be maintained in school so that the culture of teaching and learning should run smoothly without any disruptive behaviour must also be achieved.

In the abolition of what seems to be working for educators in the past to maintain discipline, and at the same time enforcing the responsibility to maintain discipline without an equivalent alternative is challenging and frustrating. That is why to improve the situation, sometimes, educators risk setting very rigid classroom rules instead of considering individual situation.

Masitsa (2007:3) puts it that:

> From the time learners realised that corporal punishment was abolished, their misbehaviour increased, and lately they appear to be out of control. Many schools especially in Mahikeng area (South Africa), learner's misbehaviour is so serious that numerous educators consider that the use of corporal punishment should be permitted in schools once more, since its abolition has left them with no effective methods of enforcing punishment.

Supporting this contention, (Osthuizen, 2007:1) also indicates that the abolition of corporal punishment left a definite vacuum in methods of dealing with learner misconduct. This is an indication over reliance on the use of punishment by specific rules.

Further emphasising the frustration and challenges for schools administrators and teachers to manage discipline in schools without corporal punishment, Van Tassel (2011:1) indicates that teachers do not know alternative discipline methods which allow for increased student autonomy. They also do not know what alternative methods of discipline have to offer to them as educators. Managing learner behaviour has become one of the most problematic and contested areas in schools since the banning of corporal punishment (Tiwane, 2010:1). Educators are discouraged and demoralized by the way learners behave as they are accountable for learners' academic performance and achievement.

Children are taught that coercion has no place in the civilized world. To be consistent, coercion should have no place in education. Students cannot be coerced to learn, nor can they be forced to behave in a certain manner. The choice of how to behave is just what Glasser (2009: 3) refers to as making better choices.

Review of related literature

One of the primary responsibilities of teachers is to help student learn (Barbette et al., 2005). It is difficult for learning to take place in chaotic environments. Thus, teachers are challenged daily with the responsibility to create and maintain a positive, productive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and managing the learning process. In attempting this challenge, teachers find themselves making common classroom behaviour management mistakes.

Behaviour management

Over the past two decades, behaviour management models and programs have emerged (Charles, 2002). Many of these models have been promoted vigorously and numbers have attracted large groups of devotees amongst teachers and school administrators. In Australia, models such as Choice Theory, Assertive Discipline, Responsible Thinking and the work of Bill Rogers have been widely adopted as an umbrella approach to discipline in many schools. Several of the models complement one another (Fields, 2011:5). Within the field of behaviour management, there is considerable disagreement about how best to gain and maintain student cooperation and engagement in academic tasks and activities, and what measures to apply when students exhibit inappropriate behaviour. There exist a significant divergence of opinion about how children learn behaviour and what should be the role and function of the teacher in the process of discipline.

School discipline

School discipline can be describe as all the strategies that can be used to coordinate, regulate and organise individuals and their activities in the school (Thornberg, 2008:37) and put in place the provision and procedures necessary to establish and maintain an environment in which teaching and learning can take place. This definition is comprehensive and a helpful starting point to understand school discipline in that it includes all activities used to maintain discipline – from cruel and coercive to the nurturing and liberating. From this definition, it is easy for researchers to categorise disciplinary strategies.

Educators operating from a traditional perspective may define school discipline as ranging from all activities that are implemented to control learner behaviour, to enforcing compliance and maintaining order, to a view of freedom where any external discipline or guidance is seen to restrict the learner's autonomy (Ferreira et al., 2009:163). However, some authors hold that the quality and complexity of human behaviour necessitates a more constructive approach to school discipline (Felderhof, 2002:71). This view holds that learners should increasingly accept responsibility for their own behaviour, and that good discipline should be based on human values rather than punitive rules. As such, this study is moved by the views of educators operating from a progressive perspective. According to the progressive perspective, school discipline should be seen as all activities that contribute to learners' intrinsic motivation, self management and decision-making skills.

Past disciplinary strategies

Teachers do not generally want to give control to their students. They perceive that the mark of a good teacher is a teacher who is in control of the class (Tassell, 2005:1). The amount of control that teachers have in the class is often seen by the administrators as a measurement of the quality of a teacher. Administrators are usually happy if a teacher never sends a student to the office and interpret this as proof that the teacher is in control and must be doing a good job.

Historically, teachers have always been trying to make sure that students behave in a manner in which they consider "discipline and view as the proper way a classroom should be. In order for teachers to attain this, they use punishment (coercion) and reward on their students to swear them to behave in a manner they saw as appropriate. That is, to respect and act according to specified rules and regulations guiding behaviours. It should be recognized that students present unique problems and challenges or misconduct. Therefore, there is hardly any "right" way to deal with discipline problems following specific rules. As such, there is a disagreement in the use of past disciplinary strategies to how discipline should be managed in schools today. There is a more effective way to manage student behaviour and deal effectively with discipline problems without necessarily using rewards of praises or punishment following specific rules. This is through the use of what is referred to as a *Choice Theory* (Glasser, 2009:2). Choice theory enforces assertive discipline which teaches students to accept the consequences of their actions. The basic premise of assertive discipline is the reinforcement of appropriate behaviour. Responsibility is exactly what assertive discipline is all about (Tassell, 2005:3). Practitioners of assertive discipline are taught that they must learn to be assertive in managing challenging learner behaviours. A system of rewards and punishments are devised by the teacher to let students know when they have acted correctly or incorrectly. Increasing unpleasant penalties are incurred by students who continue to make improper choices.

Choice Theory

Choice Theory, according to Glasser (2009:2) involves bringing learners to an awareness of their responsibility to make their own decision about their learning and behaviour in the classroom. This philosophy posits that students must have a choice, and that if they help choose their curriculum and decide on the rules in the classroom, they will then have ownership of their learning, have pride in their participation, will have higher self-esteem and will exhibit greater levels of self confidence and higher levels of cognition. This approach to classroom management creates a safe space to learn, as mainly it is their space, their classroom, they own it. When this sense of ownership is established, they will come to class willingly and with enthusiasm because they want to be challenged. A key component of choice theory is that the basic need of personal competence is an inner drive that is self-initiating and is unrelated to the need for extrinsic rewards of praise or grades. Glasser (2009:2a) suggests that when dealing with discipline problems, teachers should have two goals: first, to stop the unwanted or challenging behaviour; second and more importantly, to teach students how to control their own behaviour. There is a distinct difference between "Teaching Student Responsible Behaviour" and the behaviour improvement programs offered by other organisations (Glasser, 2009:3b).

Only by understanding what drives an action or behaviour can educators be able to deal or manage the behaviour effectively. In choice theory, people or learners behave base on what they want, compared to what they see and know. Choice Theory clarifies reasons for human behaviour and also seems to explain from a biblical perspective how and why people behave as they do.

Biblical perspective of Choice Theory

Linked to every choice is a natural consequence which produces responsibility and accountability. The book of Genesis in the Holy Bible (3, 4, 5:1-32) gives a glimpse of God's style of governance for humankind, which emphasizes the power of choice. God provide the option for humankind to choose to listen to Him or not. When Adam and Eve decided to disobey, they had to face the natural consequence of their choice. It was a tough situation for God who loves Adam and Eve and wanted only the best for them. But instead of immediately rescuing the pair, God allowed the natural consequence to occur. However, in His infinite love, He provided redemption through His son Jesus if they choose to accept it (Chris, 2007:35).

Challenging learner behaviour

An understanding of challenging learner behaviour can assist school personnel in coping with many problematic behaviour disorders. Recently, this invaluable knowledge base has been infused into educational practices and decision-making processes concerning at-risk students in only a limited fashion. The purpose of the inclusion of this literature in this study is to communicate and adapt this knowledge for effective use by educators who must cope with rising tide of discipline problems, challenging student behaviours and anti-social students populating today's school. Challenging learner behaviour might entail hostility and aggression towards others, willingness to commit rule infractions, defiance of adult authority, and violation of social norms and more. This behaviour pattern thus involves deviations from accepted rules and expected standards governing appropriate behaviour across a range of settings. The term antisocial tends to elicit impression of behaviour that is not only destructive but intractable, aversive, and difficult to tolerate (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004:4).

Policymakers and legislature view schools as the ultimate vehicle for accessing children who need services support and serve also as important settings for identifying learners and children who suffer from various forms of neglect and abuse at home. As families continue to abandon their parenting responsibilities on a broad scale, schools increasingly must assume the role of protector, socializing agent, and caregiver.

Behaviour Modification

Behaviour modification by skinner is one of moulding all children to conform by use of standard punishments and rewards. This places prediction as a core process. The techniques suggest that specific rewards and punishments will yield predictable results in the behaviour of children. As such, behaviourism suggests a system that will modify children behaviour to comply with prescribed norms. Miltenberger (2008:5) indicates that behaviour modification is the field in psychology concerned with analyzing and modifying human behaviour. Analyzing means identifying the functional relationship between environmental events and particular behaviour to understand the reasons for behaviour or determine why a person behaved as he or she did. Modifying means developing and implementing procedures to help change an unwanted behaviour. It involves altering environmental events so as to influence behaviour. Behaviour modification procedures are developed by professionals and used to change socially significant behaviours, with the goal of improving some aspect of a person's life.

There are eight major characteristics of behaviour modification which teachers can apply in classroom and schools in an attempt to change unwanted learner behaviour (Miltenberger, 2008:5). There should be focus on behaviour**.** Behaviour modification procedures are designed to change behaviour, not a personal characteristic or trait. Therefore, behaviour modification de-emphasizes labelling. The behaviour modification procedures should be based on behavioural principles. Behaviour modification is the application of basic principles originally derived from experimental research with laboratory animals. Behaviour modification procedures are based on research in applied behaviour analysis that has been conducted for more than 40 years. Emphasis should be on current environmental events. Human behaviour is controlled by events in the immediate environment, and the goal of behaviour modification is to identify those events. Once these controlling variables have been identified, they are altered to modify the behaviour. There should be a precise description of behaviour modification procedures. Treatments are implemented by people in everyday life**.** Behaviour modification procedures are developed by professionals or paraprofessionals trained in behaviour modification. However, behaviour modification procedures often are implemented by people such as teachers, parents, job supervisors, or others to help people change their behaviour.

One of the hallmarks of behaviour modification is its emphasis on measuring the behaviour before and after intervention to document the behaviour change resulting from the behaviour modification procedures. In addition, ongoing assessment of the behaviour is done well beyond the point of intervention to determine whether the behaviour change is maintained in the long run.

As stated earlier, behaviour modification places emphasis on recent environmental events as the cause of behaviour. However, knowledge of the past also provides useful information about environmental events related to the current behaviour. Although information on past events is useful, knowledge of current controlling variables is most relevant to developing effective behaviour modification interventions because those variables, unlike past events, can still be changed. Although some fields of Psychology might be interested in hypothesized underlying causes of behaviour, behaviour modification rejects hypothetical explanations of behaviour. Skinner (in Miltenberger, 2008:7) has called such explanations "explanatory fictions" because they can never be proved or disproved, and thus is unscientific. These supposed underlying causes can never be measured or manipulated to demonstrate a functional relationship to the behaviour they are intended to explain.

Research question

How can Choice Theory be applied in fostering discipline, managing and modifying challenging learner behaviours in South African schools?

In other words, how can discipline be managed in a non-coercive, assertive, yet non confrontational way to modify learners' behaviours and provide balance between actual teaching and learning time and solving disciplinary problems time?

Purpose of the paper

In the light and nature of the above mentioned problem statement, the main purpose of this paper is to report on the research project that was conducted to explore how choice Theory can be used in solving disciplinary problems and in managing and modifying challenging learner behaviours in selected South African schools. In order to do this, this paper will also take a critical look at what are the perceived challenges inherent in current disciplinary strategies in schools compared to the demands of Choice Theory in managing discipline. This will be done in order to suggest and highlight strategies on how teachers can stop the disruptive students' behaviours (managing behaviour) and at the same time teach students how to control their own behaviour (modifying behaviour) without using punishments based on specific rules and unnecessary rewards.

Significance of the paper

This paper is of significance to researchers interested in the management of discipline and behaviour modification of learners in schools, Department of Education, teachers and learners.

To researchers with interest in managing discipline and learners' behaviour modification in schools, this paper will add more depth on existing body of knowledge on managing school discipline. Specifically, new grounds on the possibilities of managing discipline without using punishments based on specific rules and unnecessary rewards were developed. Moreover, for critics of Choice Theory on the grounds of its lack of practicality when it was first introduced in America, this paper provides valuable new information on the experimentation of the theory in South African schools and possible outcomes which support the stands of William Glasser.

To the Department of Education, this study provides a solution to its teacher's plight of lack of equivocal or better alternative disciplinary strategy for schools since the abolition of corporal punishment. The Critical Outcomes of education in South Africa of (DoE 2010:11), '….*showing critical responsibility towards the environment and the health of others,'* and the developmental outcome of '*drilling learners to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships between science and technology, society and the environment,*' not leaving aside the *pastoral role* as one of the seven roles of educator can easily be achieved with the application of Choice Theory in school as it promotes accountability and responsibility of learners and the pastoral characteristics of educators to stir learners towards it.

To educators, this paper provides an alternative strategy for managing classroom discipline which is less time consuming thus providing more time for teaching and learning instead of time wasting in enforcing punishment and resources wasted in using rewards to maintain discipline.

Knowledge of the use of Choice Theory which is non-coercive, yet assertive and non confrontational to manage discipline relieves educators of stress, fatigue and burnout normally caused by using the unsuccessful strategy of punishments to maintain discipline in schools.

To learners, this paper exposes learners to a strategy which does not only just strive to stop their misbehaviours, but also teaches them how to behave responsibly as future citizens of South Africa. Accountability and responsibility for ones behaviours is a dire need for future citizens of South Africa and the world. This becomes a part in the everyday life of learners.

Research design and methods

Methodology, a plan of action which informs and links the methods used to collect and analyse data to answer postulated research questions (Wilson & Fox, 2009: 58), was underpinned in this study from a complete qualitative research paradigm which is an inquiry process of understanding where a researcher develops a complex, holistic picture, analyses word, report detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, Ivankova & Plano Clark, 2010: 259).

Research design and methodology

The research project was based on a qualitative descriptive research design which moves from an underlying philosophical assumption to specifying the selection of participants, the data gathering techniques to be used and the data analysis strategy to be done (Maree, 2010: 70) to answer research questions from both literature review and an empirical investigation. A case study approach which is a form of qualitative descriptive research was deemed necessary. It is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon under study (Bombey in Maree, 2010:75). This means that the end product of the case study is a rich 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study. A 'thick' description refers to the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated within a context that is bounded by time and space (Creswell, 2007:57). Case study was a preferred strategy for this work as the study was not focus on the large number of participants but of the richness or quality of the information obtained from them.

Furthermore, the focus of attention in the research project was on the perceptions and experience of the participants who are responsible for managing discipline in schools and those who are being disciplined upon using specific rules. What the participants say they believe, the feelings they express, and the explanations they give were treated as significant realities. The perceptions of classroom teachers, school administrators, school disciplinary committee members and students were investigated paying attention to those who constitute the management and maintenance of discipline in schools (teachers and administrators) and those who are disciplined upon (students) on the use of current disciplinary strategies. Their success and constraints in the use of current school disciplinary strategies, opinions towards the possibilities of using Choice Theory in discipline with discipline issues, managing and modifying challenging learner behaviours in schools were captured.

Population of the study

The group of individuals who had one or more characteristics in common that was of interest to the researchers (Best & Kahn, 2003:12) was composed of learners, teachers, school administrators and disciplinary committees of selected secondary and high schools within the Ngaka Modiri Molema District of the North-West Province (South Africa). The learners' population of the study involved those who have been or are being disciplined upon and those who form part of school governance who are responsible for disciplining other students. The teachers, school administrators and disciplinary committees' population of the study constituted all those in authority in schools in charge of using a variety of disciplinary strategies on learners to manage discipline in schools. There are about 96 in total number of primary, middle and high schools within the area of study with about 40000 students and 4000 teachers/ school administrators.

Sample and sampling techniques

The element of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study was gained following the purposive sampling technique as proposed by (De Vos, 2005:146). The process used to select a portion of the population for a study (Maree, 2010:79). The reason for sampling was feasibility, i.e. time, money and effort were concentrated to produce better quality research and get more in-depth information. All empirical research involves sampling as one cannot study everyone, everywhere, doing everything (Punch, 2001:54).

A simple random sampling approach was used to select the schools to participate in the study and a purposive sampling approach to select the students, teachers, school administrators and disciplinary committee members from the randomly selected schools to participate in the study. The defining characteristics that made the participants holders of the data needed for the study was that they have been disciplined upon using one or more disciplinary strategies and/or they constitute part of the student government responsible for managing discipline in the school. Teachers, school administrators and disciplinary committee members were purposely selected based on their membership in the disciplinary committee of the participating schools and at least five years teaching experience which is necessary enough to have exposed them to variety of disciplinary challenges in which they had to use different disciplinary strategies to manage the challenging learners' behaviour. Sampling decisions were therefore made for the purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions (Maree, 2010:79). These criteria were determined prior to approaching them as participants.

Since purposive sampling may be seriously flawed as it may result in data not being saturated, counter reaction were set in motion in which the purposive sample size for the study were determined on the basis of theoretical saturation (a point in the data collection process when new data no longer brings additional insights to the research (Maree, 2010:79).

Using a simple random sampling approach, a total number of two schools, (one middle and one high school) in the Ngaka Modiri Molema district was selected. All the schools were public schools. Public schools best suited the study because of easy accessibility or ease of permission to conduct research in such schools, and because of the universality of their discipline management policy nationwide.

Middle and high schools were chosen for the study as it offers an avenue of the student participants to the research who are matured enough to be able to understand the core concept (Choice Theory) of the study and make reliable inputs. Moreover, the concept Choice Theory is a new theory in the educational management field (especially for managing discipline) in South Africa which most of the students might be hearing for the first time. As such, there was need to try it out with matured minds that can easily come to grasps with the demands of the concept.

Using the purposive sampling approach, five students and five other participants from the same school who were labelled "**disciplinarians"** (teachers with either five years teaching experience or members of the disciplinary committee or responsible for school administration) were chosen from each school to participate in the study. This made up a total of ten participants from each school and a grand total of twenty participants from the two schools which constituted the cases for the research project.

Data collection methods

Halloway (1997:45) after a concrete evaluation of how data is generated in a qualitative study indicated that qualitative researchers should reject the term "collection of data". They should instead use "generating" data. This term is considered more appropriate in qualitative approaches because researchers do not merely collect and describe data in a natural and detached manner, but are involved in a more creative way. Qualitative researchers operate under the assumption that reality is not easily divided into discrete measurable varieties (White, 2002:82). The different techniques the researchers used to gather information in this research writing (White, 2002:82) adheres to the three possible approaches to generate data suggested by Wilson & Fox, (2009:76) in qualitative study. Firstly, one can observe students and teachers as they work, secondly, one could ask about what is going on (interview), and thirdly, one could read or look for traces of other evidence to verify whatever they are investigating (document analysis). Data was collected from teachers, school administrators, students and disciplinary committees of selected secondary and high schools in the Ngaka Modiri Molema district of the North-West Province (South Africa). Data was collected by means of interviews, document analysis and observations which are the best qualitative strategies to collect in-depth information from a case study. The researchers personally visited the selected small group of participants (individuals in schools) as required by a case study approach to qualitative research and collect data. This means that the variables under investigation were studied where they naturally occur, not in research controlled environment under research controlled conditions.

Document analysis

Written data sources to this study included publish and unpublished documents, DoE reports, memoranda, agendas, administrative documents, and newspaper articles. Document analysis to this study involved both primary and secondary sources of data (Maree, 2010:82). All types of written communications that shed light on the strategies for managing discipline and the use of Choice Theory in dealing with discipline problems in school were reviewed. Documents of current disciplinary policies of schools and minutes of disciplinary committee meetings were analysed. The existing disciplinary measures of schools were cross-examined with the demands of Choice Theory on managing learner discipline and modifying learners challenging behaviours to find out where they agree and disagree. An analysis of disciplinary committee meeting minutes enriched the study with records of student who have been disciplined upon using current disciplinary management strategies of schools. The cases of students who have been disciplined upon were of value to the study to re-examine the current behaviours to find out if the implemented strategies were effective. Care was taken to evaluate the authenticity and accuracy of the information before using them. The researchers also checked on the publication date to make sure the phenomena were most resent.

Observation and field notes

Observation was done in order to obtain data that could not be gained through interview. Observers as a participant models which describe a researcher getting into a situation but focuses mainly on his or her role as an observer in the situation (Maree, 2010:83) was used in this study. The researchers only looked for patterns of behaviour amongst the participants in the schools to understand their assumptions, values, beliefs and experience, and make sense of the social dynamics. Observation was made on practical classroom scenarios on the direct consequences of the use of existing disciplinary strategies on students to examine the behavioural changes of the use of such strategies on the learners.

Throughout the observation, the advice of Best and Kahn (2003:300) were heeded to. Observations were carefully planned, systematic, and perspective. The observers knew exactly what they were looking for and what was relevant in the situation, the observers were objective. To avoid bias, the observers eliminated their influence on what they see and report, they separated the facts from the interpretation of the participants, and the observations were checked and verified by repetition. It was collected in such a way that they are valid and reliable.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted to find out from participants those things that were not directly observed like feelings, thoughts and intentions. Interviews to this study generated participants' meaningful insights and in-depth opinions on the importance and challenges of the use of current disciplinary strategies in managing discipline and motivating learners in schools. Through interviews, the study was able to obtain participants honest opinions as to the use of choice theory in managing discipline in schools instead of existing contrasting strategies. In all, ten participants were interviewed from each school; five learners and five discipliners. Participants were asked open-ended questions with the objective of not putting ideas in their minds, but to access the perspective of the participant being interviewed.   Individual in-depth interview were conducted on the five 'discipliners' of each school; making ten individual in-depth interviews in the entire study. The in-depth individual interview used in this study is sometimes called the "informal conversation" or unstructured interview (Punch, 2009:147).

Focus group interviewing represents an open purposive conversation where the researcher asks questions on a specific topic and then guides the discussion by means of questioning. Focus group interviews were conduced with students in participating schools. The researcher conducted two focus group interviews, one in each school; each focus group was made up of five participants (all students who have been disciplined upon or members of the school student government) who have mutual interest and personal experience on the study. Both verbal and non-verbal responses of participants were recorded.

Data analysis process

After data collection from the field through interviews, document analysis, observation and field notes had been reviewed; there was need for it to be analyzed. This involved breaking up data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships (Mouton, 2005:108). The aim of analysis was to understand the various constituting elements of the data.

Since qualitative research requires logical reasoning, it was thought considerable to use inductive reasoning in organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns and the categories (White, 2002:82). Leedy & Ormrod (2001: 150) suggestions were adhered to in this process. After identifying a theme in data using an inductive process, the researchers moved to a more deductive mode to verify it with additional data. Data to this study was analysed through open coding.

Ethical considerations

The researchers have a moral and professional obligation to be ethical and objective, even when research subjects are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics (Neuman, 2003:116-118). Adhering to this, the researchers ensured that those being interviewed are absolutely clear about their rights to an explanation of aims, procedures purposes, the consequences of the research, publication possibilities and the right to refuse to take part or withdraw at any stage. The participants were made confident to make the decision of acting voluntarily and making their decisions on the fullest possible information (Briggs & Coleman, 2007:245).

The researchers protected participants from harm and violation of privacy, whilst at the same time maintaining the integrity of the research and its ethical standards. Participants were informed that they might withdraw their participation at any time without my penalty to them.

Gaining access

The researchers applied for and were issued a letter of permission by the Department of Education, to gain access to selected schools. With the letter, the researchers approached participants' of participating schools. The school heads of participating schools signed a consent form agreeing to help organize interview sessions with the participants.

Credibility and trustworthiness

When qualitative researchers speak of research "validity and reliability" they are usually referring to research that is credible and trustworthy. This study adhered to Maree (2010:80) suggestion by engaging multiple methods of data collection such as observations, interviews and document analysis which led to trustworthiness. In addition, involving several investigators and peer researchers to assist with the interpretation of the data also enhance trustworthiness.

Validity

For the study to accurately represent the social phenomena to which it refers, the researcher took the findings back to the subjects being studied to verify. This is called respondent validation. The findings of the study were taken back to the participants of the participating schools for them to verify if what was captured was actually what they said. Maree (2010:86) refers to members checking as situation where the researcher verify his/her understanding of what has been observed with those observed. All of the respondents will have to confirm whether the data was captured accurately. The findings were also be validated by reviewing many literature sources on the subject.

Reliability

To test the extent to which the study measured whatever it was measuring consistently (Best & Kahn, 2003:285); categories of the frequently occurring data were identified and checked. Since the main issue of reliability is dependability (Neuman, 2003:184), data was established by capturing all interviews on a tape recorder and transcribed in writing. During the transcription exercise, only parts of the respondent's story that were not commensurate with the research topic and had no significance to the research were eliminated. Attempts were made to reproduce the interview scripts as accurately as possible. The interviews were unbiased and care was taken not to ask leading questions or to be over-impressionistic in observations.

Delimitation and limitations of the study

Delimitation

The study was delimited to only schools in the Mahikeng AO of the North-West Province South Africa. Focus was on disciplinary strategies in managing school discipline and modifying challenging learners' behaviour, the perceptions of learners and discipliners on the use of Choice Theory as alternative strategy for managing learners' misbehaviour in schools.

Limitations

The study had the following limitations:

Because of time constrains, just three qualitatively orientated types of data collection instruments were used, and not extensively as demanded, but accurately, i.e. interviews (focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews), observation, and document analysis.

Due to financial constrains, the study was restricted to only two schools in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District. The researchers lack finances to move to many schools within the Mahikeng AO and organize interviews and conduct investigative observation. This results in problems of generalising of the findings.

Language a difficulty was also another setback in communication to this study as most of the holders of information (participants) wanted to use Tswana to respond to questions during interview, whereas the researchers were only fluent in English. The study was only conducted in Ngaka Modiri Molema District in the Mahikeng AO of the North West Province; possibly different findings may exist on provincial level if the study is extended to other districts and AO in the province.

Due to the capricious nature of the participants, they might decide to answer the questions partially or fake their information.

Findings and discussions

The following emerged as major findings:

Choice Theory is desired
The overwhelming majority of disciplinarians and learners in the study registered strong support for the use of Choice Theory in enforcing discipline in South African schools. This stand was defended by the fact that for a number of years now behaviour management theories and practices are gradually moving away from a teacher-directed-controlling orientation to discipline. It is no coincidence that this movement has paralleled the paradigm shift from instrumentalist to constructivist views about how children learn and the belief that students can be self-regulatory and can be given much greater responsibility for their own learning and behaviour (Fields, 2011:8). As school curricular change to reflect the view that students need to have greater control over their learning experiences and that learning is facilitated when students are given the opportunity to reflect on and construct their own understanding, so to behaviour management approaches have moved away from the stance that children need to be managed because they are capable of controlling their own behaviour.

Compliance to section 17 of SASA
Choice Theory conforms to section 17 of SASA which outlawed corporal punishment in South African schools. The principles of managing discipline and modifying challenging learners behaviour in South African schools by using choice theory does not entails any form of punishment through the use of physical force with the intention of causing a learner pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the learner's behaviour. As such, it is ideal in South African schools as it provide answers to the main arguments against corporal punishment in South Africa. Corporal punishment is seen to not demonstrate a desired behaviour; it merely tries to extinguish a negative behaviour. Thus learners are not provided with real examples of alternatives to challenging behaviours. Choice theory strives both to extinguish the negative behaviour and at the same time teach learners how to behave acceptably. Analysis of disciplinary policies, code of conducts and records of disciplinary sanctions of schools complimented with data of individual in-depth interviews with disciplinary committee members reveals that disciplinary strategies used in schools comply with section 17 of SASA. Identified disciplinary strategies included the use of detention, kneeling, sitting on the floor, which are all not corporal punishment strategies.

Assists in the systemic interventions to eliminate corporal punishment
Hough et al. (2009:94) argues that for change in the use of corporal punishment to occur, interventions should be aimed at four levels: the individuals (learner and educator), classroom, school and district. Interventions should also build links and empower connection between and within these levels.

The achievement of all these are encompassed in the use of choice theory which recommends a pastoral care model of managing and modifying challenging learner behaviours consisting of positive reinforcement, support and counselling aimed at increasing desired behaviour, over the disciplinary model of practice which consist of task such as writing lines, detention and exclusion which are more traditional techniques to discipline. Choice Theory at classroom level further considers a broad concept of classroom management in which activities that provide structure and order in the classroom like use of registers, checking of homework, planning are all brought under one category. Since Choice Theory complement behaviour modification which is an extensive contributing function of parents, in managing challenging learner behaviours in schools, the links between educators and caregivers which is a vital component of a systemic approach to discipline is maintained.

Why Choice Theory? Weaknesses of current disciplinary strategies
Overdependence on punishment and rewards in schools

Literature study revealed and is confirmed by interview response that acts of misconducts and discipline amongst educators and learners in schools is due to educators dependence on external control psychology in which teachers try to control learners using punishments based on specific rules or rewards (Chris, 2007:35). Instead of using punishments based on specific rules and rewards to manage discipline in schools, this paper suggests that it should rather be understood that individual's behaviours, whether disciplined or undisciplined, is caused not by outside stimulus that can be seen, punished or rewarded, but by what a person wants most at a given time. All behaviour is intended to satisfy one of the following five basic internal needs:

- Need to survive;
- Need to belong and be loved by others;
- Need to have power and importance;
- Need to have freedom and independence; and
- Need to have fun.

In the course of satisfying these internal needs, learners are usually victimised in a dilemma of expressing behaviours of misconduct and indiscipline in schools. Educators reacting to learners misconducts end up using one or more of the seven deadly habits of criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, bribing or rewarding to control or rather use one or more of the caring habits of supporting, listening, accepting, respecting, trusting, and negotiating differences.

In trying to manage and modify challenging learner behaviour in schools, educators should do away with praises and punishments with specific rules. Praise and rewards as a strategy to manage discipline in schools kills the intrinsic motivation and the desire of students to learn desired classroom behaviours (Kohn in Glasser, 2001). The key to good behaviour is an inner drive that is self-initiating and is unrelated to the need for extrinsic rewards of praise. Rewards destroy students' inherent intrinsic motivation by reducing the exchange of the reward to a demoralizing, manipulative dysfunctional exchange that reduces students' interest in learning good behaviours.
Rather than using rewards and punishments to manage discipline in schools, educators should try to understand the internal need(s) intended to satisfy that is responsible for the challenging behaviour of the learners and try to act upon using the caring habits and not the deadly habits. For this to be achieved, the relationship of trust between educators and learners is necessary, especially over the long term (Chris, 2007:36). Educators have to replace the deadly habits with the caring habits. It is reminded that using punishment and rewards to manage classroom discipline and promote good learner behaviour is not as important as the process of letting the learners explore the ideas and understanding of the concept of good behaviour or being discipline in school.

Analysis of schools policies on discipline and discipline sanctions records reveal that discipline is managed in South African schools using specific rules. In the disciplinary sanctions record, it is evident that specific punishments are ascribed to display of specific challenging behaviours irrespective of the diversity of the inner drive to the behaviour. The commonly used punishment is 'detention' which is used on most learners with challenging behaviours. Every learner is diverse and unique in terms of what drives their actions. Therefore, there is hardly any right way to deal with discipline in schools using specific rules to specific behaviours. What drives behaviour is internal and diverse and should be handled not by how it looks. When educators are attempting to change learners misbehaviour, they often describe it by only how it looks (e.g., calling out, hitting, getting out of seat) which is not appropriate.

Defining misbehaviour by how it looks only provides us with an incomplete picture of the behaviour; it tells us little about why it occurred and doesn't help much in our behaviour-change efforts (Lewis, 2005).

Learners involvement in decision-making about managing their behaviour

Classroom meetings are effective vehicles for addressing matters of class rules, behaviours and consequences (Fields, 2011:10). From observation made on classrooms of participating schools and from review of disciplinary policies of schools relating to making classroom rules, it is evident that learners of South African schools are given the opportunity to take the responsibility in making decisions about their behaviour in the classroom and not in schools' disciplinary policies. Findings from focus group interviews with learners' representatives in schools policies committee reveal that they are represented physically and not resourcefully in designing school disciplinary policies concerning them except in running errands for the committee. In the classroom, the learners together with their educators participate in making classroom rules and they are accountable to it though some learners are not fully respecting them at all times. This is further confirmed by records of disciplinary sanctions of participating schools which reveal that most of the challenging behaviours cases experienced in schools are contravention of general school disciplinary policies and not those in the classroom. This is an indication that it is important for learners to be given the responsibility to make their own decision about their own meaningful behaviours in the classroom and schools. It teaches them accountability and responsibility of their behaviours.

Misconception and application of the concept 'punishment'

The concept punishment which is viewed in Choice Theory as the consequence to the display of problem behaviour or a response to an assertive behaviour is wrongly perceived and applied in the management and modification of challenging learner behaviours in school. A critical review of disciplinary policies and past disciplinary sanctions on analyses performed on disciplinary record of the schools which constituted the case studies, and from the transcribed data from individual in-depth interviews with disciplinary committee members; there is a clear revelation that the concept punishment is wrongly applied in schools.

Punishment is perceived and applied in schools as something meted out of students who have committed a crime or other inappropriate behaviour. In this context, punishment involves not only the hope that the behaviour will cease, but also elements of retribution or retaliation; part of the intent is to hurt the students who has displayed a challenging behaviour. Seen as something that the wrongdoer deserves, punishment has moral or ethical connotations. But Choice Theory is counselling this perception of punishment in schools, though it may be viewed as the preferred by a wide society. Choice Theory suggests an expression of the concept punishment as a behavioural principle which views's a learner engaged in a behaviour in which there is an immediate consequence that makes it less likely for the person to repeat that behaviour in similar situations in future. Perception of the concept punishment should carry a clause that ensures that the challenging behaviour is less likely to occur in the future. This contention is supported by Miltenberger (2008:120), who after demonstrating many examples of punishment splits the definition of punishment into three parts thus:

- A particular behaviour occurs.
- A consequence immediately follows the behaviour.

As a result, the behaviour is less likely to occur again in the future (the behaviour is weakened).

Incomplete disciplinary sanctions

Document analysis undertaken on the disciplinary records and observation of the classroom behaviour of student victims disciplined upon using current disciplinary strategies, reveals that the current disciplinary sanctions are incomplete. These disciplinary sanctions are what are referred to as punishment or consequence. Punishments are executed in schools without follow-up strategies to enforce modification of learners' behaviour or the less likelihood for the behaviour to occur again in the future. The strengths of the existing disciplinary policies and records of past sanctions of schools are just to ensure that the challenging behaviour stops in an occasion. Nothing is done to modify the behaviour. No tools are established to check if the behaviour has ceased to occur only temporarily or to find out if the behaviour has instead changed environment and not stoped. This was evident in the findings from analysis of disciplinary records for names of student victims in the use of current disciplinary strategies. It revealed that the same names of learners keep appearing. This is an indication that follow-ups are not made to shape their behaviour though they are being punished. This was further confirmed from the data collected from individual in-depth interview conducted to students who are victims of challenging behaviour.

They reveal that they receive little or no behaviour modification follow-ups.

Choice Theory suggests that the consequences of a challenging behaviour should be aligned with a behaviour modification therapy to ensure that the behaviour ceases to exist. Focus should not only be to stop the behaviour, but also to find out if it is short-lived and suggest follow-ups to extinct the behaviour.

School counsellors overloaded to ineffectiveness

School counsellors are considered in South African schools as responsible in undertaking behaviour modification schemes to learners. Although only one of the schools which participated in the study had a schools guidance counsellor, which is an indication of lack of guidance counsellors in schools who are responsible for behaviour modification schemes, the guidance counsellors are ineffective because they are over-worked by too many appointments from learners which could be sorted by teachers in class. Moreover, the students' participants to the study reveal that they have never had access to visit the school counsellor. Moreover, they don't feel opening up to counsellors as they see them as strangers. Therefore, teachers whom they are used to in their everyday classes should be able to set behaviour modification schemes to complement their discipline strategies.

Moreover, if managing challenging behaviour is to be handled alongside behaviour modification, then the responsibility should not be left to school counsellors and discipliners alone, but also parents have to be involved. Follow-ups of most behaviour modification strategies have to also be applied at home. Behaviour modification procedures often are implemented by people such as teachers, parents, job supervisors, or others to help people change their behaviour. People who implement behaviour modification procedures should do so only after sufficient training. Precise descriptions of procedures and professional supervision make it more likely that parents and teachers will implement procedures correctly (Miltenberger, 2008:5).

Lack of focus on challenging behaviour

The management of challenging learners behaviours in schools lack focus on the target behaviour. It is sometimes geared towards changing personal trait. With the defence of one of the behaviour modification characteristics (Miltenberger, 2008:5), behaviour modification procedures are designed to change behaviour, not a personal characteristic or trait. Therefore, behaviour modification de-emphasizes labelling. For example, behaviour modification is not used to change autism (a label); rather it is used to change problem behaviours exhibited by children with autism. Behaviour excesses and deficits are targets for change with behavioural modification procedures. In behaviour modification, the behaviour to be modified is called the *target behaviour*. A behavioural excess is an undesirable target behaviour the person wants to decrease in frequency, duration, or intensity. Smoking is an example of behavioural excess. A behavioural deficit is a desirable target behaviour the person wants to increase in frequency, duration, or intensity. Exercise and studying are possible examples of behavioural deficits.

Recommendations

Educators are adviced to be conversant and apply reality therapy in managing and modifying challenging learner behaviour in schools. Educators need to develop series of steps to help learners understand the choices they are making. By doing this, educators should first try to help students identify their inappropriate behaviour and then help them identify the consequences of that behaviour. Learners need to be taught how to control their behaviour. Most learners do not believe that they have a choice. It is the responsibility of teachers to teach students to choose how to act. Teachers are supposed to help students make good choices by making clear the connection between student behaviour and its consequences. Though reality therapy takes considerable training and classroom time to implement, all studies of reality therapy that assessed effects on learners variables show that it is effective (Tassell, 2005:6).

There should be frequent opportunities for students to engage in higher order thinking and critical analysis in behaviour management and modification. For this to take place, teachers need to formulate expectations for student behaviours and clearly communicate it to students. In doing this, teachers together with students should identify consequences for misbehaviour and apply these consequences consistently when necessary. As such, encouragement of students and not praise, is the best tool that teachers have to influence students.

Conclusion

Not all teachers are convinced that embracing teacher leadership management strategies to the exclusion of other strategies and approaches is a realistic, wise or safe option to enforcing discipline in South African schools. Some teachers appear to be unable, reluctant or unwilling to change from the traditional disciplinary strategies. As such, the existing disciplinary strategies applied in schools adhere minimally to the demands of Choice Theory in managing and modifying learners behaviours in schools though applied in respect of section 17 of SASA (DoE, 1996), that is, without the use of corporal punishment which is outlawed in South African schools.

At the same time, existing disciplinary strategies in schools are geared towards stoping unwanted challenging behaviours and learners misconduct but little or nothing is done to modify challenging learners behaviours in schools. As such, the realisation of Section 8(1) of SASA (DoE, 1996:8) which instigates that discipline must be maintained in schools so that the culture of teaching and learning should run smoothly without any disruptive behaviour is hampered. That is why discipline problems are on the rise in schools today. However, the challenges in the use of current disciplinary strategies to manage and modify learners' behaviours in schools in South Africa is not an end to itself. Through careful planning and both general and in-service training, learners and discipliners can be equipped with necessary skills on the use of Choice Theory in managing and modifying challenging learners behaviour in schools. Some of the teachers are already practicing some of the principles of Choice Theory in schools but they need training on how to apply it efficiently. Learners and discipliners see the possible success in the use of Choice Theory in South African schools and declare interest in learning and applying it while at the same time suggesting possible spheres in managing discipline in schools today that require the use of Choice Theory.

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