

## **A Study on the Effectiveness of Classroom Disciplinary Measures in a Maltese Secondary School**

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**Abstract:** The study examines the different classroom disciplinary measures used at St Miguel secondary school, their effectiveness and why teachers resort to such measures. There is evidence in the literature that teachers resort to various disciplinary strategies, albeit not all effective, when trying to manage learners' behaviour. This study goes on to describe a small-scale research carried out with all the learners in Year 9 and Year 10 (i.e. 13- to 15-year-olds) and with all the teachers who teach one of four particular subjects in the afore mentioned years. The study compares the findings with similar international research conducted mostly with secondary school learners and teachers. The similarities and contrasts are highlighted in the research findings. The author contends that implementing effective disciplinary measures in the classroom would be beneficial for both teachers and learners, especially those who are often seen as the most troublesome.

**Keywords:** Discipline; behaviour; effective classroom strategies; relationships

### **Introduction**

Among the most serious problems present in schools, according to the community at large, lie the issues of classroom discipline and learner misbehaviour (Lowell & Gallup, 2002). Teachers remark that looking for the most effective strategies for producing learner behaviour modification is a modest cause of stress (Lewis, 2001), let alone maintaining classroom discipline (Otero-Lopez, 2009).

Classroom discipline and learner misbehaviour have been the focus of several studies (Lewis, 2001; Psunder, 2005; Romi et al., 2009). Lewis et al. (2005) suggest that teachers' disciplinary strategies are among the most potent school-related factors that influence learner behaviour. These strategies are essential in the teaching/learning process (Roache & Lewis, 2011) since they influence learner responsibility, learner misbehaviour, teacher stress and teacher/learner relationships.

Studies have time and again confirmed that differences in the effectiveness of classroom teachers affect learners' academic performances (Heck, 2009; Goldhaber, 2002; Sanders, 1998; Tymms, 1993). According to Marzano et al. (2003), effective teachers excel in three major roles namely teaching strategist, classroom curriculum designer and classroom manager. While all are indispensable, effective classroom management is the cornerstone that supports the other two. Wang et al.'s (1993) research study, which synthesised 11,000 research findings, confirms that teachers' classroom management is the most significant factor that influences learners' learning. The study concludes that effective classroom management augments learners' engagement in learning and lowers misbehaviour.

Effective classroom managers implement classroom rules and procedures (Emmer et al., 2003; Marzano et al., 2003) which guide learners throughout their scholastic year. Wragg & Wood (1984) note that the foundation of class rules and procedures are crucial during the first weeks of schooling and when not properly established, lesson time is wasted in maintaining order and control (Little, 2005).

Another important skill attributed to effective classroom managers is their ability to engage learners in well-planned, interesting and well-managed lessons and activities with clear programs of action for learners. Such activities encourage self-discipline and responsible behaviour, reduce low-level disruption and create a positive working atmosphere in the classroom (Doyle, 1984; Osfted, 2006; Kern & Clemens, 2007; Van Tartwijk et al., 2008; Osher et al., 2010).

Notwithstanding that the implementation of class rules and procedures and the delivery of interesting and engaging lessons give little space for low-level disruption, teachers sometimes resort to disciplinary measures to make learners aware of their irresponsible behaviour.

In a survey conducted with predominantly secondary school Australian learners, Lewis (2001) revealed that teachers possessed one of two disciplinary styles. The first disciplinary style was coercive in nature, dependent on aggressive teacher behaviour through the use of sarcasm, yelling and resorting to punishments. The second disciplinary style was

referent in nature and depended on the use of hinting, recognition, discussion, involvement and the application of appropriate consequences. After examining the impact of these styles, Lewis (2001) concluded that learners 'who receive more relationship based discipline are less disrupted when teachers deal with misbehaviour and generally act more responsibly in that teacher's class" (p.315).

Lewis et al.'s (2005) study, conducted in China, Israel and Australia, confirmed that one-to-one discussions with misbehaving learners, recognition of responsible behaviour, and hints that identify irresponsible behaviour without demanding improvement are productive strategies that reduce misbehaviour and increase learner responsibility. Lewis et al., (2005) confirmed that teacher aggression and punishment negatively affect learners' attitudes towards their school work and teacher.

In another study conducted with Australian learners coming from eight different secondary schools, Roache & Lewis (2011) reaffirmed that a combination of hinting, recognition and rewards, discussion and involvement "encourage greater levels of communal responsibility" (p.243). It also confirmed that learner misbehaviour is unjustifiably affected by teachers' aggressive attitudes and that teacher aggression undermines the teacher/learner relationship.

According to Lewis & Lovegrove's (1988) study, teachers rarely ignore misbehaviour and tend to deal with it themselves; usually explain to misbehaving learners how all the class is adversely affected by their misbehaviour; sometimes threaten learners of moving them within or outside the classroom or detention; rarely give arbitrary punishments; hardly ever involve learners in the set up of rules, even though they are clear; usually target only misbehaving learners; and rarely provide recognition for appropriate behaviour. Similarly, Lewis (2001) concluded that teachers seem to use hinting and punishment more often; sometimes recognize appropriate behaviour and hold discussions with learners; and rarely involve learners in decision making or use aggressive strategies. Nonetheless, at least sometimes teachers are seen to yell or keep classes in break because of some learners' misbehaviour.

Through an indicative survey Munn et al. (2004) found that teachers usually use the carrot and stick approach. Teachers use praise, humour and reasoning with learners counterbalanced with withdrawal of privileges, telling off and other sanctions. Other studies indicate that teachers rarely praise main stream learners (Beaman & Wheldall, 2000) and even less likely to praise learners who engage in challenging behaviour (Shores et al., 1993). Surprisingly, Riley et al.'s (2010) study, conducted with 233 Australian primary and secondary school teachers with the aim of eliciting reasons why teachers use aggressive

classroom disciplinary practices, indicated that “aggressive responding to student(s)' misbehaviour is common among many teachers” (p.962).

St Miguel School (pseudonym), a Maltese boys' secondary school, has been renowned for successfully preparing learners both academically and in character formation, while exerting positive discipline based on sound Christian values. Nonetheless, discipline is an issue of concern even at St Miguel School (SMS). Evidence of this are the animated discussions that take place when occasionally this issue is raised during department and staff meetings primarily due to the teachers' different philosophies related to classroom discipline (Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986). In an unpublished survey intended to measure the overall performance at SMS, several parents indicated outdated and ineffective disciplinary measures as elements they would change in the school. Also, the school's leadership team often ended up having to deal with learners who, according to certain teachers, demonstrate unacceptable behaviour. Naturally one then questions whether the disciplinary measures that teachers resort to in the classroom are effective and encourage learners to behave appropriately, indeed the research problem of this case study.

The research study examines the strategies used by SMS teachers to prevent student misbehaviour and the measures taken when misbehaviour occurs. The study also looks into how often and why SMS teachers resort to certain disciplinary measures and whether such measures are effective in creating a positive learning environment when considering today's social context.

## **Methodology**

The researcher examined teachers' disciplinary measures, their effectiveness and reasons for opting for such measures through a case study. This study adopted a pragmatic mixed method approach. Learners' views on classroom discipline were gathered through a five point Likert scale survey (Endnote). A semi-structured, face-to-face interview was conducted with a sample of teachers to elicit information on why they resort to certain classroom disciplinary measures. Non-participant, systematic and direct classroom observations were carried out with a small sample of teachers to comprehend what actually goes on in the classrooms and for verification purposes.

The surveyed sample consisted of nearly all Year 9 and Year 10 learners, similar to samples chosen in other international studies (Roache & Lewis, 2011; Lewis et al., 2005; Lewis, 2001). Through systematic sampling, different groups of learners within the same class were asked to answer the statements, with the teacher of a predetermined subject in mind. The predetermined subjects were English, Mathematics, Physics and foreign language. This process was repeated with all year 9 and 10 classes. The survey statements

were elicited from the reviewed literature on classroom discipline and similar to other international surveys (Lewis et al., 2005). The survey was piloted with a small sample of Year 11 learners and refined for accuracy and precision purposes.

The data from the learners' surveys were first analysed for internal consistency through Cronbach Alpha and related statistics. Since every statement yielded reliable results, all way over the required 0.7, the scores of every statement were then analysed through a non-parametric two-variable Chi-square test. Over 400 Chi-square tests were conducted to look for statements that had statistically significant results. All test results that had a critical Chi-square value for 5% significance more than 9.5 and an expected frequency more than 5 in about 80% of the results, as suggested by Cohen et al. (2007), were considered as significant. Following these tests, the percentage scores of statements with similar themes, for every year group and combined as a whole sample, were cross-tabulated (Cohen et al., 2007).

The purposive sample of interviewees, eighteen teachers in all, consisted of the Mathematics, English, Physics, and foreign language teachers that taught in Year 9 and Year 10 (i.e. 13-15 year-olds). This sample, the same teachers whom learners had to focus their responses on, was chosen specifically to minimise the probability of teacher identification since there were several teachers teaching the mentioned subjects in Years 9 and 10. Moreover, the sample was representative as these teachers taught in the other remaining years.

The interview questions were based on themes similar to the learners' survey for comparability purposes. This instrument was also used to triangulate data gathered from the other research instruments. The researcher tried to keep all interviews focused on the planned questions with the intention of obtaining descriptions of teachers' disciplinary measures and their effectiveness. In the study, all interviewed teachers were referred to by a specific code from T1 to T18.

Classroom observations were carried out with a group of eight teachers from the interviewed sample, two from every subject area. However, the choice of teachers depended on their availability and their willingness to participate. An easy-to-fill observation schedule was formulated and applied consistently to minimise variations. The items on the observational schedule, indicators related to disciplinary measures, were carefully selected to ensure the collection of the most relevant data.

The researcher recorded the frequency for every indicator in the observation schedule during classroom visits. The scores for every indicator were added to obtain an indication of the preferred disciplinary strategy. The results of

every schedule were collated in one final schedule and analysed in relation to the outcomes obtained from the teachers' interviews.

## **Research Findings**

The study explored whether and how teachers establish class rules; the hinting techniques teachers resort to more often in the classroom; whether teachers make use of different positive reinforcements; if and why teachers make use of one-to-one discussions; the consequences used more often in the classroom; whether teachers deliver interesting and engaging lessons; and if and why teachers resort to punishments and/or aggression. The results are discussed below.

### *Class rules*

The survey results indicate that 52% of the teachers establish class rules during the first week of school, more often with Year 9 students. Many teachers claimed that they establish rules related to misbehaviour. T1, T4, T5, T6, T12, and T16 explained that they stress on the notion of respect, both towards the teacher and towards others. Surprisingly, T4 and T17 emphasised that they want learners to see them as authoritarians. T4 tells her students, 'I am in charge here. I am the teacher. You have to do whatever I tell you to do in class because whatever I am going to say is for your own good.'

During the first week of school, some teachers establish rules related to homework and organisation of files. T14 stated 'Another rule is related to homework, I want the date, ... the page of book or hand-out and everything organised.' However, class rules are often established solely by the teacher and not formulated in conjunction with learners. T4, T5, T7, T9, T11, T14 and T16 admitted that they establish class rules themselves. Conversely T3, T5 and T13 do not raise class rules for discussion since, in their opinion, many of them are actually school rules. T1, T6 and T12 lead students to those class rules which they had in mind; T2 and T13 negotiate some of the class rules with students; and T12 tops up the few rules not suggested by students. Survey results indicate that 58% of teachers rarely remind students about the established class rules, and even less so with Year 10 learners.

### *Hinting*

According to the learners' survey, teachers often resort to two hinting techniques, namely the stop-and-wait and intentionally asking questions to distracted learners to involve them in the lesson. Surprisingly teachers use these two techniques more often with Year 9 learners. While T3, T6, T7, T8, T9, T11 and T16 claimed that they use questioning, confirming the survey results, only T1, T10 and T17 mentioned that they stop the lesson to wait for distracted students to refocus on the lesson.

Conversely, close proximity, giving students a stern look, variation of teachers' voice tonality and 'I' messages (messages that describe the teacher's feeling about irresponsible behaviour) are resorted to at least sometimes by about half of the teachers, less often with Year 9 learners. Notwithstanding that during classroom observations T1, T6, T11, T12 and T16 did not need to use close proximity as learners were attentive, they still went round the class to check learners' work. The statistical results indicate that teachers who resort to hinting use several hinting techniques simultaneously.

To draw distracted learners' attention, several teachers mentioned that they call out the learner's name and tell the learner to pay attention in front of the whole class. These are not hinting techniques. T4 pointed out:

I have to be very careful because sometimes I end up calling the same student's name more than once.... Students might end up calling him names.

According to the statistical tests, teachers who use close proximity; vary their voice tonality; and use 'I' messages, yell at learners when the latter misbehave.

#### *Positive reinforcement*

T7's comment, 'I even sometimes gave white sheets [commendation sheets] for such behaviour', confirms the survey results that learners are rarely rewarded for good behaviour. While T3, T4 and T7 intentionally reward learners to encourage others to repeat such behaviour, T5, T10 and T15 expect learners to behave well and believe that learners should not be rewarded or praised for doing so.

T1, T8 and T13 reinforce positive behaviour through praise rather than rewards. While many teachers mentioned that they do praise learners for good behaviour the survey results show otherwise. Nonetheless, as a positive reinforcer, praise is resorted to more often than reward. Many teachers praise learners because they want others to model or repeat good behaviour. T6 praises learners to draw them towards him and T16 does likewise to show that she appreciates their efforts.

However, not all teachers praise learners in the same manner. T1, T2, T6, T11, and T18 prefer to praise learners discretely on a one-to-one basis and for various reasons; T7, T8, T9 and T16 praise learners both discretely and in front of the whole class, usually depending on the situation and the learner; and T3, T13 and T17 praise learners only in front of the whole class. The statistical tests confirm that the teachers who praise learners for good behaviour discuss issues with misbehaving learners; let them talk about their side of the story; allow learners to come up with solutions; and check on learners' behavioural progress.

On the other hand, many teachers even without being specifically asked to, mentioned that they praise or reward students' academic attainment. T15 mentioned that he praises students who manage to answer correctly thought provoking questions. T10, who like T15 is against praising good behaviour, rewards students for academic achievement.

#### *Discussion as a disciplinary measure*

Teachers discuss issues with misbehaving learners for various reasons namely so that learners feel there is a personal relationship with the teacher (T12); might convince themselves that the teacher is not picking on them (T3); are made aware they were being inconsiderate and disrespectful (T1, T13); and are made aware of their misbehaviour (T1, T3, T5, T7, T11; T13). Teachers also use discussions to find out why learners misbehave. Remarkably, once they get to know the learner's problem, T2 and T10 try to guide learners on how to improve their behaviour.

T2, T4, T6, T9 and T12 argued that one-to-one discussions are more effective than those held in front of the whole class as without audiences learners seem to mellow down. Similarly, the survey results show that the majority of teachers, at least sometimes, do help learners realise the effects of their misbehaviour on the class. Also, teachers seem more willing to hear year 10 learners' side of the story, rather than Year 9's. Another interesting finding is that teachers who use discussion as a disciplinary measure also resort to various hinting techniques.

Another similarity that emerges from the interviews and survey is that the majority of teachers do not allow learners to come up with solutions on how to improve their behaviour and that teachers propose solutions themselves. Notwithstanding that T9 is compassionate with learners who have problems at home, she still argued, 'the student has to come to terms with my rules.' T1, T2, T5, T7, T12, and T18 ask learners to come up with solutions. T1, T5, T7 and T12 also mentioned that when students do not propose feasible solutions, they supply some themselves. Surprisingly, while most teachers either impose or ask learners to propose solutions to improve their behaviour, the majority of teachers, according to the survey results, rarely monitor learners' behavioural progress. Year 10 learners' behavioural progress is monitored even less.

Not all teachers feel that discussions are always useful and effective. Reasons such as: at first learners work hard to implement the proposed solution, but after some time fall back to the usual behaviour (T7); discussions are effective as long as learners understand why their behaviour is bothering others (T5); discussions are not plausible solutions to counter the misbehaviour of learners who have certain physiological conditions (T9 and T17); and



discussions do not work with those learners who have a pile-up of academic and emotional problems which effect their behaviour (T12) suggest that discussions are not infallible solutions to problematic behaviour. Nonetheless T12, like many of his colleagues, agrees that discussions are useful since 'teaching is a matter of relationships. If you don't relate you can't teach.'

#### *Logical consequences*

The survey results show that few teachers regularly give logical consequences; and almost half of the teachers rarely give logical consequences to Year 10 learners. These results might suggest that teachers either refrain from giving consequences or the consequences that they give are illogical. The teachers' responses confirm both interpretations. T5, T8, T14, T15 and T18 remarked that they rarely give consequences.

Conversely T10 either phones home or issues misbehaviour notes. As a consequence to misbehaviour T6, T7, T13 and T17 usually give extra work related to the topic being carried out in class while T3, T11 and T16, rather illogically, make learners copy extracts from the book related to the lesson. T16 sometimes sends learners out of class (time-out) or changes their seating place while T1 usually asks the learner to reflect on his behaviour and then write a short essay on why his behaviour was inadequate. Other teachers referred to classical logical consequences including closing the classroom window when learners are constantly looking out of the window (T2).

However, when teachers were asked how they tackled situations where learners repeatedly disturb the lesson, other consequences emerged. T9 argued that she informs the parents. T3, T10 and T11 refer the learners to the school administration. T3 and T4 sometimes warn or threaten learners with repercussions. T4 and T6 sometimes give timeouts while T2 and T5 change the student's place.

#### *Effective teaching and learning*

The statistical tests show that teachers who manage to engage learners or conduct interesting lessons use all disciplinary methods, including punishment and aggression, to maintain classroom discipline. The survey results indicate that there is approximately the same amount of teachers who often or rarely engage learners or deliver interesting lessons. Fewer still, occasionally manage to engage learners in the lesson.

As expected all teachers claimed that they do their best to stimulate learners' interest in learning while most teachers try to develop lessons that are relevant to learners. T9 tries to get to know her learners well enough and centres her lessons round their passions and likings while T8 gives examples from their surroundings.

Most teachers use questioning and class discussions to engage learners in the lesson, albeit for different reasons. Classroom observations confirm that most teachers involve learners by questioning individual learners while T1 and T11 addressed several questions to the whole class to get learners into a reflective mode. Nonetheless, while most observed learners were engaged, in T3's and T11's classes there were few learners who wondered off and whose attention was not drawn.

Teachers use several resources to stimulate learning such as the students' book (T1, T14); hand-outs and pictures (T2, T4, T10, T11, T13, T14); the CD player (T1, T10, T11, T13, T14); and video animated clips (T1, T2, T3, T6, T7, T12, T13, T17). Learners in T1's and T12's classrooms were particularly focused when they were shown short video clips.

### *Punishment*

There are conflicting views among SMS teachers on the necessity and effectiveness of punishments. T3, while claiming against banning punishments is unsure of their effectiveness, maintaining that the learners 'who go afterschool detention in Year 9 are the same students who go to afterschool in Year 11'.

The teachers who are convinced that punishments are necessary maintain 'if you don't punish, they [the students] don't respect you' (T11); because before misbehaving, learners need 'to think about the consequence that would follow' (T16); without punishments, 'even the quiet ones start imitating the naughty ones' (T10); and they serve as deterrents (T17). T10 and T16 agree with punishments as long as they are just and bring along a positive change in the learners' attitudes respectively.

Other teachers maintain that punishments are sometimes necessary with learners with whom negotiations and logical consequences do not work (T12); and after trying out all the other methods of classroom discipline (T5, T7). Nonetheless, T5 claimed that punishments do not have a long term effect.

Conversely teachers who disagree with the use of punishments maintain that rather than resorting to punishments, teachers ought to build a positive rapport with learners (T13); reason things out with learners (T15); understand that learners sometimes are fidgety because they would have been sitting down for hours in class (T2); constantly remind learners to act appropriately, as they easily forget (T14); and resort to consequences which are not imposed by the teacher (T1). Remarkably, T18 feels that punishments are unacceptable as 'when you give a punishment you would have just got rid of the person' and the teacher would shut down any form of open communication.

The survey results indicate that 62% of teachers, at least sometimes, punish learners for misbehaviour, even though less often with Year 10 learners. According to the statistical tests, teachers who give punishments increase the punishment when either learners complain about them or do not carry out the punishment or misbehave again.

T5, T7 and T9 affirmed that they give some sort of punishment when the learner's misbehaviour reaches a particular limit. T17 mentioned that sometimes he gives up on learners who constantly misbehave because he cannot afford to keep the rest of the class waiting. T3, T10, T11 and T16 sometimes refer misbehaved students to an assistant head while T3, on rare occasions, even phoned home to inform the parents.

### *Aggression*

The survey results indicate that most teachers rarely purposely embarrass misbehaving learners; rarely punish the whole class when only some learners misbehave; and rarely pass sarcastic comments towards misbehaving learners. However, some teachers, at least sometimes, do yell angrily when learners misbehave. The statistical tests show that teachers who give punishments are also aggressive with learners; those who yell or raise their voice at learners give group punishments and embarrass learners in class. The few teachers who give class punishments do so more often with year 9 students. Interviewed teachers confirmed that they do occasionally raise their voice at misbehaving learners. T2 and T4 raise their voice towards the whole class and at the beginning of the lesson to set them into working mode. Sometimes teachers yell to get the learners' attention (T3, T5, T11, T17); when they run out of patience (T1, T5, T7, T9, T12); to instil fear in learners (T17); to get noticed and as learners 'listen to you more' (T11).

While, according to T11, yelling is more effective when done occasionally, T9 stressed that learners listen more 'when I say nothing and point at the student.' Similarly, T12 remarked that rather than raising his voice, a clear sign of poor class control, he lowers his voice. Nonetheless T12 admitted that sometimes he does raise his voice.

Conversely, T15 raises his voice to put up a show. He emphasised, 'Most of the time, I end up laughing. The student gets the message that what he has done is not right but, as always, there are no hard feelings.' Other teachers disagree with yelling for different reasons. T16 feels she cannot yell at learners since she tries to treat them like mature persons. Similarly, T14 feels it is rude to raise one's voice at someone. T6 stressed that 'yelling implies violence. When you raise your voice you will be closing the door for discussion.'

Most teachers confirmed the survey results declaring that they are against whole class punishment. Teachers disagree with class punishments because they are unfair on the ones who do not misbehave. Conversely T9 stopped giving class punishments as learners who saw themselves innocent rebelled even more. T1 and T5 said that they do give class punishments when they realise that learners are covering up for each other.

## **Discussion**

### *Class rules*

Class rules, especially when established during the first week of school (Wragg & Wood, 1984), guide learners throughout the scholastic year and lead to less class disruption (Marzano et al., 2003). Although the majority of SMS teachers mentioned that they formulate class rules, a considerable percentage does not. This might result in lesson-time being wasted in establishing order (Little, 2005). When establishing class rules, SMS teachers mainly focus on learner behaviour and on homework procedures, two areas among those mentioned by Marzano et al. (2003). Some SMS teachers even emphasise the notion of respect both towards the teacher and towards their class mates, thus helping learners learn how to behave in a classroom community.

The fact that teachers establish class rules; resort to punishment; and give class punishments more often to Year 9 learners while they are more willing to hear Year-10 learners' side of the story and monitor them less often might indicate that teachers view Year 9 learners as less mature than Year 10 learners. Notwithstanding this notion of maturity, teachers might consider formulating class rules with their learners rather than establishing them on their own as this ensures greater learner commitment and reduces the likelihood of learner misbehaviour (Kern & Clemens, 2007). Imposing the rule that learners have to do as they are told, as mentioned by two teachers, is rather aggressive in nature and does not help build a positive teacher\learner relationship (Roache & Lewis, 2011).

### *Hinting*

Hinting is an effective disciplinary measure as it censors misbehaviour without abuse of power and allows learners to save face (Roache and Lewis). The findings indicate that very often teachers use the stop-and-wait technique and intentionally ask questions to draw learners' attention. Others use a variety of hinting techniques simultaneously. The calling out of the misbehaving learner in front of the whole class, a common practice at SMS, might embarrass learners. Conversely SMS teachers might use close proximity; 'I' messages; maintain brief eye contact with off-task learners; and other hinting techniques more often as these techniques get learners very

quickly back on task (Boynton & Boynton, 2005) and help them meet adult expectations in an adult manner (Roache & Lewis, 2011).

#### *Positive Reinforcement*

While studies have shown that recognition for good behaviour helps learners become more engaged in learning activities (Allman, 2006), and less likely to act irresponsibly (Roache & Lewis, 2011), SMS teachers rarely reward learners for appropriate behaviour. The few teachers who resort to positive reinforcement do so to strengthen learners' original behaviour, as suggested by McLeod et al. (2003). Others do not since they believe that it is the learner's duty to act responsibly.

The findings suggest that there are more teachers who praise rather than reward learners for good behaviour. This in itself is commendable since positive feedback, encouragement, and praise that emphasise effort teach learners self-control and self-discipline (McLead et al., 2003) and are very effective in promoting desirable behaviour (Kern & Clemens, 2007). Similar to other studies (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008); Crawford & Beaman, 2006), the findings indicate that many teachers reward or praise learners for academic achievement. However, misbehaving learners might feel outcasts to systems that reward academic achievement and might even try to undermine it (Lewis, 2009). The findings also indicate that teachers who praise learners for good behaviour help them find solutions to their problems, confirming Lasett & Smith's (1992) belief that encouragement develops learners' self-esteem and self-control.

#### *Discussion as a disciplinary measure*

Many SMS teachers, at least sometimes, resort to discussion to make learners aware of their misbehaviour and to find out why they are misbehaving. While some of the reasons given by teachers for resorting to discussion are plausible (Lewis, 2009), unfortunately the findings also indicate that most teachers rarely allow learners to come up with solutions on how to improve their behaviour and rarely monitor learners' progress. The success of discussion lies in the negotiation process, including the empowerment of learners to take ownership of their solutions, which increases learners' sense of belonging and competency and in turn, reduces misbehaviour (Anderman, 2002).

As discussed earlier, many SMS teachers, at least sometimes, allow learners to talk about their side of the story. While this happens more often with Year 10 learners, probably because they are more mature, these same teachers discuss behavioural issues; check on the learner's progress, and use one-to-one discussions, procedures also suggested by McLeod et al. (2003). The findings also suggest that teachers who resort to discussion use various hinting techniques. Teachers are encouraged to resort to these measures as both censor misbehaviour on an individual basis without embarrassing the learner.

Although many teachers view discussions as an effective disciplinary measure, some have reservations especially with learners who have physiological, emotional or academic problems. Nonetheless, due to the positive effects discussions have on the learner/teacher relationship (Roache & Lewis, 2011) and learner responsibility (Romi et al., 2009), such teachers might reconsider before giving up on such a beneficial measure.

#### *Logical Consequences*

The findings indicate that when learners repeatedly misbehave in class some teachers resort to some form of consequence, albeit not all being logical consequences. While teachers did mention that they give text book style logical consequences, these do not reflect the manner of how many teachers apply consequences. Issuing of misbehaviour forms; notifying parents of misbehaving learners; referring misbehaved learners to the school administration; giving extra work related to the topic being done in class; copying part of the topic being done in class; and threatening learners with repercussions, all mentioned by SMS teachers, seem illogical consequences as they are not related to the cause (Nelson et al., 2000) and probably do not replace inappropriate behaviours with acceptable ones (Lewis, 2009).

Conversely, few teachers give logical consequences such as having learners change their places or making learners reflect on their misbehaviour and then write an essay on their reflection, as mentioned by Shindler (2010). SMS teachers might consider giving such logical consequences more often since these enhance learners' responsibility and only slightly negatively affect their pile of goodwill (Lewis, 2009).

#### *Effective teaching and learning*

Teachers who manage to engage learners in well-managed classroom activities have fewer behavioural problems as such activities encourage greater learner responsibility and self-discipline (Osher et al., 2010). Undoubtedly, all SMS teachers try their best to engage learners in interesting lessons. To achieve this goal teachers try to deliver lessons that are relevant to learners; use various resources; use different questioning techniques; use class discussions; and actively involve learners in the lesson, a point highlighted in Doyle's (1984) study. Despite these approaches, there are still too many learners who maintain that lessons are rarely interesting and engaging. Teachers at SMS might need to focus on improving their teaching methods as these lead to less learner disruption (Ofsted, 2006:2).

However, surprisingly, teachers who engage learners and present interesting lessons resort to all disciplinary measures, including punishment and aggression, to maintain order in the classroom. While it is understandable that teachers might get frustrated when strategies like hinting, discussion,

praise and the preparation of interesting lessons do not leave the desired behaviour modification, nonetheless punishment or aggression might lead to more learner misbehaviour (Psunder, 2005).

### *Punishments*

The fact that punishment is a controversial issue among SMS teachers is understandable since on one hand punishment does not lead to behaviour modification (Shindler, 2010) while on the other hand it is common practice world-wide (Psunder, 2005; Lewis, 2001). Actually the findings suggest that few teachers seem convinced about the necessity of punishments and resort to it frequently. The findings also indicate that these teachers apply harsher punishments when learners continue to misbehave confirming that punishments are very unlikely to reduce learner misbehaviour (Barker et al., 2009; Lewis, 2001). Similar to Lewis et al.'s (2005) findings, some of these teachers refer misbehaved learners to school administrators, rather than resorting to discussions which increase teachers' referent power (Tauber, 1999).

Notwithstanding the belief that punishments do not have long-term beneficial effects (Barker et al., 2009) some teachers opt for this measure occasionally as a last resort and with particular individuals. Many of these teachers, after punishing learners, resort to discussions. This is probably due to their conviction that discussions are more effective. Conversely the teachers who refrain from giving punishments reckon that one can resort to more effective measures such as effective communication; reason things out with learners; and constantly remind learners to behave appropriately, since through punishment learners become lesson engaged (Beaman, 2006).

### *Aggression*

Similar to Lewis' (2001) conclusions, SMS teachers rarely respond aggressively when learners misbehave, notwithstanding that, at least sometimes, some teachers yell angrily when learners misbehave. However, a worrying finding is that teachers who resort to punishment and yell in class use other aggressive measures to maintain order in the classroom. Although teachers yell out of frustration and exhaustion (Psunder, 2005) rather than to instil fear in students, such measures might lead to more learner distraction and resentment towards the teacher (Lewis & Lovegrove, 1987).

Most SMS teachers mentioned that they do not resort to group punishments as they feel these are unfair on innocent learners. Nonetheless the findings indicate that this disciplinary measure is still used, especially with Year 9s, and may result in learners less willing to conform to the expected behaviour (Roache and Lewis, 2011).

## Conclusion

This study attempts to give a clearer picture on how classroom discipline is maintained at SMS. The results indicate that hinting techniques, discussion and effective teaching strategies are among the commendable disciplinary measures used by SMS teachers to promote learning and learner responsibility. Other disciplinary measures, such as involving learners in the formulation of class rules; recognising learners' appropriate behaviour; and monitoring learners' behavioural progress, which reduce the likelihood of learner misbehaviour, are among those seldom used in the classroom. Finally the results reveal that teachers rarely respond aggressively when learners misbehave, albeit the fact that the use of punishment is not uncommon.

Conclusions from the study recommend the need to involve learners in the establishment of class rules early in the scholastic year as these ensure greater student commitment and ownership towards these rules. Teachers can consider the more frequent use of various hinting techniques to censor misbehaviour and to embark on a system that recognises appropriate student and class behaviour as this creates a positive atmosphere of respect and trust where students are less likely to act irresponsibly. Teachers are encouraged to make use of one-to-one discussions, allow students to come up with a behaviour modification plan, and when possible, monitor students' progress. It is highly suggested that teachers apply pre-established and reasonable logical consequences rather than resorting to punishments and illogical consequences which might breed resentment. Finally, teachers should focus their efforts on engaging students in well-managed, interesting and stimulating classroom activities rather than wasting time trying to implement measures that stop misbehaviour.

## Note

### Students' Likert scale survey

Several students, including yourself, have been selected to participate in this survey which is meant to bring out the effectiveness of the disciplinary measures used by teachers in your school. You are encouraged to give honest answers as in doing so you will be helping the school in evaluating its current disciplinary methods. All participating students will remain anonymous throughout the survey.

All statements indicate an action taken by the teacher to maintain classroom discipline. The teacher referred to in the following statements is your Foreign Language teacher. To answer the following statements encircle the numbers next to every statement according to the code below:

1 = always; 2 = very often; 3 = sometimes; 4 = rarely; 5 = never

For statements 10 and 11, 1 means **yes** and 5 means **no**.

1. The teacher punishes students who misbehave (e.g. extra work, copies, issues a pink form, keeps student in

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---



- break or after school).
- |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
2. When a misbehaving student argues about the teacher's punishment, the teacher increases the punishment.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  3. When a misbehaving student does not carry out the teacher's punishment, the teacher increases the punishment.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  4. The teacher increases the punishment when a misbehaving student stops misbehaving and then starts again shortly after.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  5. The teacher applies **logical** consequences (punishments) whenever a student misbehaves (e.g. when a student scribbles on his table, the teacher tells the student to clean it up during break)
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  6. The teacher rewards individual students who behave well.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  7. The teacher rewards the whole class when students behave well.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  8. The teacher praises individual students who behave well.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  9. The teacher praises the whole class for behaving well.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  10. At the beginning of the year the teacher makes the class rules for good behaviour.
 

1				5
---	--	--	--	---
  11. At the beginning of the year the teacher **and students** formulate the class rules for good behaviour.
 

1				5
---	--	--	--	---
  12. The teacher and the rest of the class decide what should happen with students who misbehave.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  13. The teacher makes students leave the classroom until they decide to behave appropriately.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  14. The teacher makes misbehaved students know that the rest of the class expects them to behave better.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  15. The teacher allows students to talk about their side of the story so that they can be clearly understood.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
  16. Through discussion the teacher explains and helps students understand why their behaviour is causing problems to other students.
 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

- 
17. The teacher allows students to come up with solutions of how to behave in the future. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
18. Following these one-to-one discussions, the teacher checks on students' behavioural progress. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
19. The teacher manages to engage (really interested) students in the lesson. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
20. You feel that the teacher's lessons are interesting. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
21. To draw the attention of a distracted student the teacher walks about in the classroom and then stands close to the distracted student without interrupting the flow of the lesson. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
22. The teacher stops the lesson and waits for misbehaved students to pay attention and then continues with the lesson. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
23. The teacher looks at misbehaved or off-task students in the eye without interrupting the flow of the lesson. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
24. The teacher intentionally asks questions to distracted students to involve them in the lesson. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
25. The teacher varies the tone of his/her voice to help distracted students refocus on the lesson. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
26. The teacher reminds misbehaved students about class rules. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
27. The teacher explains how he/she is feeling when students start to misbehave. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
28. The teacher yells angrily when students misbehave. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
29. The teacher purposely embarrasses those students who misbehave. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
30. The teacher punishes the whole class when some students misbehave. 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
31. The teacher passes sarcastic comments or ridicules students who misbehave. 

1	2	3	4	5
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