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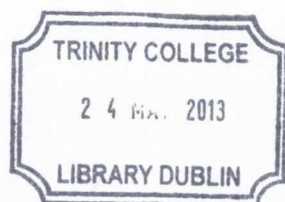


Disciplinary practices and their effects on students attending secondary public schools in Cyprus.

*Christina Aristidou*

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of PhD,  
Trinity College Dublin

September, 2012



Thesis 9870

**Declaration:**

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## **Summary of the Study:**

A growing body of literature indicates that the traditional disciplinary practices, such as suspension and expulsion, which are being widely used by the majority of schools around the world, are not only ineffective in fulfilling their primary goals, which is to target and deter a student's disruptive behaviour, but they can actually reinforce such behaviour and/or cause students more problems than the ones they are already dealing with. These practices are considered by established literature as a quick and superficial way to handle student indiscipline, which is instead, a complex problem requiring more in-depth examination and more time to resolve. The current study examines the effectiveness of two of the most prominent disciplinary practices used in secondary public schools in Cyprus today, namely in-school suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct, and the effects that these practices may have on students. It further looks at the factors that may be influencing the quality implementation of these practices. To achieve the aforementioned goals and provide this research with triangulated, comprehensive, and valid results, this study employed a mixed methods research design by combining quantitative (n=576 student-questionnaires) and qualitative (n=40 educator-interviews) research. The vast majority of the student and educator participants of this study found both in-school suspension and the practice of downgrading a student's conduct as ineffective tools in either dealing with or resolving a student's disruptive behaviour. On the contrary, these practices were held responsible for increasing a student's problematic behaviour, affecting the disciplined student's relations with his/her teachers and vice-principals, evoking feelings of annoyance/irritation, anger, aggression and retaliation and impacting a student's academic achievement. Educators on their behalf, further highlighted the linkage that exists between a number of school related factors, student indiscipline and the malfunctioning of the public school's disciplinary practices and, while they emphasized the need to involve all educational stakeholders to combat student indiscipline, they were quite clear in their suggestions that unless the school related

factors that lead to indiscipline and render the disciplinary practices currently used ineffective are acknowledged and dealt with, student indiscipline will continue to rise.



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction to the thesis

#### **Introduction:**

After completing my Master in Educational Administration at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE) in 2003, I returned to my home country of Cyprus, where the Ministry of Education and Culture offered me a position to teach as a secondary school teacher. With a background in Greek Literature and Classical Studies, I was assigned as a Greek Literature teacher serving students of ages 15-18. With all the knowledge acquired on school related and administrative matters as well as on educational policy at OISE, and with the intention of pursuing a PhD in Education, I was very eager to observe and explore the educational realities in Cyprus. Although my teaching experience lasted two years, the foundation for this thesis was established before the end of my first teaching year.

What struck me immediately after entering the teaching profession in 2003 was the apparent change in student behaviour and discipline levels, which appeared very dissimilar when compared to the time that I was attending high school in 1995, less than a decade before returning to schools to teach. During breaks, one of the most prominent issues of discussion between colleagues seemed to be student misbehaviour, with teachers complaining and sharing stories about an incident of indiscipline in their classrooms or in the school yard, referrals that were never acted upon, the huge disrespect that many students exhibited towards their educators, teacher-student miscommunication, teacher frustration over disciplinary matters etc. Issues regarding discipline were never ending and found themselves to be among educators' top concerns irrespective of their years of working experience



and subject specialization. The observed rising levels of student indiscipline and the frustration that a large number of teachers, including myself, felt about disciplinary issues provided the basis for this PhD. In particular, I started contemplating about the changes that occurred in school disciplinary matters, the reasons behind the observed indiscipline, the existing disciplinary practices, their aims, use and effectiveness, as well as their possible relation to student misbehaviour.

Cameron (2006) argues that “student discipline is a necessary part for maintaining a salutary environment for children” (p.219). Of course, this is only one part of the equation, as, from an educator’s perspective, student discipline is necessary for maintaining a salutary environment for teachers as well. If indiscipline is prevalent in schools, both educators and students suffer by the school’s dysfunctional operation and by the negative feelings created in environments that are unwelcoming and hostile (O’ Moore, 2010). Therefore, it is incumbent both for the school and the Ministry of Education and Culture, as the competent educational authority in Cyprus, to make every effort they can to form and maintain a healthy school environment, where student discipline is under control and where school faculty and students enjoy working and being educated respectively in a constructive and conducive to learning atmosphere.

### **1.1 Problem Statement and Study Rationale:**

As student indiscipline is increasingly rising and all educational stakeholders are becoming more and more frustrated with the alarming situation created in secondary public schools in Cyprus, traditional disciplinary practices (such as in-school suspension) are still in place and widely used, despite the fact that they seem inadequate, nowadays, to deal with and prevent student indiscipline. In fact, a growing body of research demonstrates that disciplinary practices are not only ineffective in handling students’ disruptive behaviour, but they may also be potentially harmful to the students who are subjected to them (Bacon, 1990; Cameron & Sheppard, 2006; Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Christle, Nelson &

Jolivet, 1994; Comerfold & Jacobson, 1987; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Hart & Brassard, 1987; Ross Epp, 1996). Several scholars believe that disciplinary practices fail to combat students' externalizing behaviours<sup>1</sup> because their way of handling student problems is superficial and simplistic. As Mizell (1978) supported: "The problem with disciplinary practices is that they are designed more as an expedient response to real or perceived misbehaviour than as an effort to identify and remedy the cause of the behaviour. Such responses result in ineffective disciplinary practices" (p.216). Along the same lines with Mizell, Sullivan (1989) also emphasized that:

Punishment without meeting students' needs (...) provides motivation for reform. Specifically, if the root cause of inappropriate behaviour is not addressed, in school suspension is just another alternative to external suspension or merely a temporary solution to recurring student problems (p.33)

In order to identify, however, the root-causes of problematic student behaviour and make the implementation of disciplinary practices more effective and meaningful, schools should overcome the belief that student indiscipline is only related to potential family problems or the student's social, innate intellectual, physical or other problems and finally come to grips with the fact that they share as much, or even more of the responsibility for students' maladaptive behaviours.

Up until the 1970s, the notion that prevailed among educators, scholars and society at large, was that schools did not have any impact on children's development and that students' externalizing behaviours originated mostly from students' own problems and their families. With their renown book *"Fifteen thousand hours: Secondary schools and their effects on students"*, Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore and Ouston (1979), were among the first scholars to reject the aforementioned notion

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<sup>1</sup> "Externalizing behaviours are also referred to as antisocial, challenging, defiant, noncompliant, aggressive, and acting-out behaviours"(Ron & Roberts, 2000, p.2)

and establish just the opposite; That is, that schools, due to the large amount of time that students spend in these institutions and their complex structures, largely affect students' behaviour and accomplishments. In fact, research has shown that certain school factors have the power to create, maintain, or increase student indiscipline and inhibit the proper functioning of the school's disciplinary policies or programs, which are set up to prevent and discourage students' disruptive behaviours (Skiba & Peterson, 2003; Payne, Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2006). If these school factors, which are as constant in a student's life as a student's family, are not identified and addressed, student maladaptive behaviour will increase as years go by, and schools will reach a point where indiscipline will effectively cripple their ability to carry out even the most basic of the educational duties they have towards their students. As Burns (1985) very aptly stated "If we want to resolve our discipline problems we must deal with the school culture and the problems that grow out of that culture" (p.2).

In addition to identifying and addressing the school related factors that contribute to student indiscipline and affect the proper implementation of the school's disciplinary policies, schools should also evaluate and assess disciplinary practices used themselves, since their inappropriate utilization and implementation can have several undesirable or harmful effects on students. The common goal of all disciplinary practices is to target student indiscipline and try to reduce or eliminate it. As such, disciplinary practices essentially interfere with student misbehaviour and for this reason many scholars consider them to be a form of 'intervention'. Being an intervention, disciplinary practices can have a number of detrimental effects on students such as emotional, psychological and behavioural and therefore can be connected, for some, even to the notion of systemic violence and psychological maltreatment (Newsom, Favell & Rincover, 1983).

As mentioned earlier, during the last decade or so, student indiscipline has become a very prevalent issue in the Cypriot educational reality, and its occurrence not only concerns and frustrates all educational stakeholders, but it also harms the school's



environment and prevents the proper functioning of the public school, with negative consequences for both students and educators. The disciplinary practices that are currently used in secondary public schools seem to be inadequate in fulfilling the goals they were created for, namely to target student misbehaviour and prevent it from reoccurring. In addition to being inadequate, these practices may also have other harmful effects on students that need to be thoroughly examined. Therefore, the purpose of this study was twofold: 1) To assess the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as currently used in secondary public schools in Cyprus, examine the effects they have on students and their role in enhancing students' disruptive behaviour, 2) To gain knowledge and/or identify the school related factors that contribute to discipline related problems and may inhibit the proper functioning of the school's disciplinary practices.

## **1.2 Research Questions:**

In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, the following research questions were formulated to guide the self-administered survey-questionnaire that was distributed to secondary school students and the interviews that were carried out with a number of educators: 1) How effective do students and educators believe that their school's disciplinary practices are, 2) What are the effects of these disciplinary practices on students': a) social relations, b) emotional feelings towards disciplinary practices, c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour, 3) Are there any school related factors that contribute to disciplinary problems and affect the quality implementation of disciplinary practices.

## **1.3 Significance of the study:**

The significance of the study can be viewed within two contexts, the national context and the international context. In order to better understand and interpret the significance of the study, the research questions and the literature explored, one needs to be familiar with the unique nature of the education structures and system

in Cyprus. A comprehensive description of the Cypriot educational system is presented in Chapter 5 and readers who are unfamiliar with the system may find it useful to read Chapter 5 before reading Chapter 2 in order to acquaint themselves with the way that the educational system works.

a) *The national context:*

This study is unique to the Cypriot educational context, since no other study to date exists, which empirically evaluates the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used, namely in-school suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct, or examines the effects that these practices may have on students' social, emotional and academic life. Moreover, this study examined a number of school related factors that contribute both to the rising levels of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus and to the inefficient implementation of the existing disciplinary practices.

Even though the Ministry of Education and Culture recently acknowledged the problem of the rising levels of antisocial and disruptive behaviour, which has been observed in secondary public schools in Cyprus in the last decade, it has not conducted any research/study that examines empirically the issue of indiscipline and its root causes.

While in 2008, an ad hoc specialized committee was established to examine students' antisocial behaviour and make proposals for the implementation of specific measures to combat and prevent this behaviour, the Committee analyzed the issue theoretically by looking at studies conducted internationally for this phenomenon, and not by carrying out its own research into what may be responsible for student misbehaviour in schools in Cyprus. As such, the proposals of the Committee were based on its theoretical analysis of the situation and not on what may be creating and sustaining indiscipline in Cypriot schools. Based on the Committee's suggestions, the Ministry has so far implemented a number of

measures and initiatives to address the matter of indiscipline in schools. However, even though the Ministry acknowledges the fact that the school has a role to play in dealing with students' misbehaviour, none of the measures and initiatives it has undertaken takes into consideration that the school itself can create and sustain indiscipline and that, unless the school tackles its own problems first, student indiscipline cannot be dealt with in an effective and constructive way.

This study aims to provide a new angle into the way that the problem of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus is viewed, by looking specifically at the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used, the effects that these disciplinary practices may have on students and their maladaptive behaviours, and the school related factors which contribute to disciplinary problems and affect the quality implementation of disciplinary practices. In doing so, the study also aspires to offer the Ministry of Education and Culture, as the competent authority on educational matters, a detailed, balanced and objective study, which could guide educational stakeholders and serve as a basis for relevant policy changes.

b) *The international context:*

In the international context, this study's significance is attributed to the following reasons: 1) It reinforces previous research that investigates the relation between school related factors and the creation or maintenance of students' disruptive/maladaptive behaviours, 2) It provides additional research findings and strengthens the few that exist on the subject of in-school suspension as a 'measure of change'. Although there are a number of studies that look at suspension's relation to various student outcomes, such as student-dropout, absenteeism, recidivism, academic underachievement, stigmatization etc, there are limited studies that demonstrate whether a student's disruptive behaviour can change as a result of in-school suspension, 3) It contributes to the relatively new literature that connects school related factors to the poor implementation of disciplinary practices, 4) It offers a more objective account on the examination of the effectiveness of



disciplinary practices since, through the student-survey, the researcher divided the questionnaire in such a way, so as to elicit the opinion of all students on the issue at hand and not just those who are directly affected by disciplinary action and may thus be biased in their responses, 5) It presents a more comprehensive account of the research matter by combining both a quantitative and a qualitative research design so as to triangulate the data, and 6) It supports research that connects disciplinary practices to the notion of systemic violence and psychological maltreatment by demonstrating that aggression, vindictive feelings, the reinforcement of students' disruptive behaviour, poor concentration, and the creation of negative relations between students and their educators are among the undesirable effects that disciplinary practices can have on students, when inappropriately used.

#### **1.4 Organization of the thesis:**

The thesis is organized in eight chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 provides the introduction to this thesis, where a brief mention is made to the 'gestational seeds' of this dissertation, the statement of the problem examined and the rationale of the study. This chapter further informs the reader of the research questions that guided this thesis and refers to the significance of the study. The last part of this section outlines the organization of the study.

Chapter 2 is the first of three chapters that comprise the Literature Review and describes the aims, purposes and goals of disciplinary practices, as these are widely established in the existing literature. It further examines the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices used and reports on a number of studies that investigated the issue at hand.

Chapter 3 examines a number of school factors that a great body of research holds responsible for their contribution in creating and maintaining students' disruptive

or maladaptive behaviours. In particular, this chapter looks into the issues of: a) School Rules, 2) School Leadership, 3) The teacher-student relationship, 4) Curriculum and 5) Assessment.

Chapter 4, which comprises the last chapter of the Literature Review, discusses the harmful effects that disciplinary practices may have on students.

Chapter 5 provides a concise overview of the Cyprus educational system with special emphasis on the lyceum cycle, which comprises the last three years of secondary education. The chapter refers to the school rules and regulations that exist and are relevant to this study and also discusses the disciplinary practices or 'pedagogical measures' (as the Ministry of Education and Culture calls them) that are currently used. Lastly the chapter also refers to the Ministry's recent initiatives regarding the issue of student indiscipline.

Chapter 6 presents the methodology that was used for this study and discusses the research design and its rationale, the sampling procedures, the selection and description of the settings for this research, the data collection instruments that were used, their construction and rationale and the procedures that were undertaken to complete this study. The chapter also refers to issues of reliability and validity, the data analysis that was undertaken for both the questionnaire and the interviews and finally mentions the limitations of the study and the ethical issues involved.

Chapter 7 presents in detail the findings of the questionnaires and the interviews of this research. Wherever possible tables and graphs were added to represent a more explicit picture of the results.

Chapter 8 embarks on a comprehensive discussion of the results of the study, looks at the limitations of the study, the areas for future research and offers the final conclusions that come out of this research in light of the existing literature.

## Chapter 2

### **Disciplinary practices and their Effectiveness**

“So often we do something because we have always done it. We do not question a traditional way of acting or ask if it is achieving a desirable goal. Indeed we often forget what the goal is”

Children’s Defense Fund, 1975, p.1

#### **Introduction:**

While violent acts, vandalism, fighting and discipline problems, in general, continue to thrive, intensify and multiply in schools and classrooms, and most teachers are either already burned-out or on the verge of burnout, conventional disciplinary practices, such as suspension, expulsion etc, are still being widely used, despite growing skepticism about their efficacy to manage and reduce student misbehaviour and evidence that connects them with the notions of psychological maltreatment and systemic violence that can inflict students while in the school environment (Goodman, 2006; Cameron & Sheppard, 2006). Conventional disciplinary practices are mostly thought of, by many scholars today, as creating more problems than the ones they try to “solve” in the first place (Cameron & Sheppard, 2006; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Ross Epp, 1997; Maag, 2001; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Wehby, 1994). But before describing these practices, their aims, effectiveness, and the manifold impact they can have on students, the literature review will first focus on examining how these disciplinary practices came to be synonymous with punishment and the reasons that propel schools to continue using them as their preferred approach for managing student behaviour.



## 2.1 Discipline, Punishment and Social Cohesion:

Discipline's link to punishment takes us back to eras, where society was still formed by the amalgamation of values, moral traditions, ideals, practices and beliefs which, once established, they were internalized by all citizens, and constituted the core of society's authority and cohesion. Education's role, subsequently, was to "*secure the authority of [these] social norms*" [italics added] by "shap[ing] social beings (...) [in accordance with] shared moral traditions, practices and ideals" (Cladis, 1999, p. 5). Any violation of these social norms signified a breach of the power of authority's cohesion as well as a breach of the core values of the "conscience collective"<sup>2</sup>. It also signified the enactment of the procedure of the perpetrator's punishment, whose acts violated the "conscience collective" and consequently incited feelings of anger, outrage and vengeance against his/her actions. Therefore, punishment, as Garland (1999) supports, came as "a collective reaction sparked off by the violation of powerful sentiments" (p. 21) in order to "bolster the authority of society's moral form of life (...) [and] confirm (...) that social ideals and practices cannot be encroached without the proportionate repercussions" (Cladis, 1999, p. 5). Punishment, then, was used as an assurance of discipline's holistic reign over society, and as a substantial proof that the "conscience collective" was alert to transgressions and watchful not to allow societal values and moral bonds, that make society, to be disrespected or disregarded (Cladis, 1999).

For Durkheim, punishment was considered as "one of society's solidarity-producing mechanisms" as well as "an ancillary to moral education", which had the power to "limit the demoralizing effects of deviance and disobedience" (Garland, 1999, pp. 19, 23, 24). He also believed that punishment could not and should not be the means to create authority. Authority, according to Durkheim, should already be in place and punishment's role must be to bring order back, by sending moral messages to

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<sup>2</sup> Conscience Collective is an expression that French sociologist and philosopher, Emile Durkheim, used to refer to "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average citizens of the same society" (Garland, 1999, p.21)

citizens in order to remind them that there is a well established moral authority behind punishment, and *every time* authority is breached consequences will be administered (Garland, 1999).

At this point, it is noteworthy to mention the Latin proverb “Post verba verbera” (After words beating), which can effectively be compared with the known English saying “Spare the rod and spoil the child”, as an indicative example of moral authority’s intention to punish and discipline anyone who did not obey to authority’s rules. The Latin proverb basically meant that when words did not have the anticipated and prompt corrective effect, there were other ways to discipline a child, such as beating, which was considered a far more effective way of punishment compared to plain word intimidation. The proverb also entails in its meaning, the notions of *repetition* and *consistency* (Post: After, Verba: Words, Verbera: Beating) which are regarded as vital ingredients in the process of achieving conformation to authority and maintaining discipline.

Although the more severe forms of punishment (hard beating, corporal punishment, spanking, flogging with a whip etc) have gradually been abandoned by the majority of developed countries around the world, the ‘*punishment mentality*’ persevered throughout the years despite the natural and historical changes that have affected its form (Cladis, 1999). As societies evolved to become more culturally diverse, the “conscience collective” ceased being so ‘common’ and became instead “a patchwork of differentiated moral domains”, which learned to handle human transgression with greater understanding and sensitivity, by giving more consideration to those factors that can influence a person’s actions and outcomes. Thus, punishment became “less intense, less strict, less religious, [and] more flexible” and began to focus mostly on the psychological aspects and forms of punishment rather than the physical ones (Garland, 1999, p.22). Depriving, for instance, ‘freedom rights’ became, throughout the years, the most ordinary and ‘acceptable’ way of punishing and of socially controlling a culprit rather than physically tormenting him/her for their wrongdoing. However, even though the various forms of discipline have



become more lenient today, they still fall within the category of punishment and continue to represent society's tool to express indignation for the violation of the moral order. With punishment, it is argued, the perpetrator is expected to acknowledge his/her misconduct and 'experience remorse'. And with remorse, a "rebalancing of the moral scales and [a] reaffirmation of the standard that was violated" will follow (Goodman, 2006, p.222).

This remorseful and remedial effect that punishment supposedly has on people is one of the reasons that makes this form of discipline very attractive to use. A more appealing and practical reason for educators, though, who primarily choose punishment in any of its existing forms to discipline their students, is that punishment can end or suppress a variety of unwanted behaviours in an easy, quick and effective way (Bear, 1998; Cameron & Sheppard, 2006; Maag, 2001). The specific "property of punishment" that teachers find very reinforcing, is the pleasant and immediate feeling of relief they sense, as soon as they dismiss the student from the class and send him/her to the administrator's office in order to be punished for his/her improper behaviour. However, as Maag (2001) informs us, what teachers do not realize when employing this technique, is that by using punishment each time a student is being disruptive, they maintain a 'vicious cycle', which Patterson coined as the "negative reinforcement trap" (as cited in Maag, 2001, p. 176). In this "negative reinforcement trap", both teachers and students are, at the end of the day, negatively reinforced to repeat their behaviours. The teacher earns peace of mind and an undisturbed classroom environment by punishing the student for his/her disruptive behaviour and therefore keeps punishing the student, without reservation, on every occasion that he/she misbehaves. On the other side, the student who receives punishment is being removed from class and is being reinforced, most of the times, to repeat unwanted behaviours because by receiving punishment, he/she, for instance, escapes acting on a task or attending a class that he/she finds boring or of no interest to his/her future plans.

Besides the feeling of relief and self-reinforcement that teachers experience when

the student is dismissed from class, so that they can continue their lesson undisturbed, some research also shows that there is another very intrinsic and eloquent reason why punishment still holds a prominent place as a discipline method in the majority of public schools. It is easy to use, and it *usually* [italics added] discourages the maladaptive behaviour of 95% of the student population (Maag, 2001; Billings & Enger 1995; Morrison & D' Incau 1997; Morrison & Skiba, 2001). With only 5% of the student body exhibiting behaviours totally insolent and unmanageable, schools become overly persistent and relentless, by punishing these students repeatedly with more severe or 'lengthier'<sup>3</sup> forms of punishment. By following a gradual pattern of intervention, whereby punishment gradually extends in severity and length every time a student misbehaves, schools believe that this method will presumably lead to the solution of the problem (Maag, 2001). In addition to the abovementioned reasons for the use of punishment by educators, Goodman (2006) also suggested that: "The resort to punishment gives school sanctions a *moral imprimatur* [italics added] for punishment is usually associated with moral culpability and presumably experienced as such" (p.217).

With punishment continuing to be widely used in secondary public schools today, this chapter will now examine the disciplinary practices that schools mainly use, the infractions for which students receive disciplinary action and the effectiveness of the practices used.

## **2.2 Disciplinary practices: In-school suspension, out-of-school suspension and expulsion:**

In an effort to deal with students' maladaptive behaviour, the majority of schools, today, generally use in-school suspension (ISS) or out-of-school suspension<sup>4</sup> (OSS) as their primary disciplinary action, and expulsion or permanent exclusion as their last resort to address students' behavioural problems. This study focuses on the

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<sup>3</sup> Lengthier punishments: more days of in-school or out of school suspension.

<sup>4</sup> Otherwise called external suspension or fixed-term exclusion.

effectiveness of in-school suspension only, since out-of-school suspension and expulsion are rarely used in the public school system in Cyprus. Despite the fact that it is outside the spectrum of this study to focus on out-of-school suspension and expulsion, a brief description of these practices and their effectiveness will be included in this literature review, in order to be able to compare them and draw objective conclusions about the use of in-school suspension.

In general, suspension is a behavioural management technique, which attempts to correct a student's inappropriate behaviour by restraining a student's access to class or school for a period of time (Bowditch, 1993; Cameron, 2006; Christle, Nelson & Jolivette, 2004). One of the main goals of suspension is to rebuke and eliminate current misbehaviour and deter future behavioural problems. In addition, suspension aims to protect educators, other school staff and students from a student's aggressive and/or violent behaviour. Suspension can take place either in school or out of school.

In-school suspension (ISS) was developed back in the 1970's, as an alternative to out-of-school suspension, (OSS) (Silvey, 1995; Sullivan, 1989; Mizell, 1978). In contrast to out-of-school suspension, where the student has to spend his/her suspension time out of school, in-school suspension keeps the student in school grounds, in a designated room, most of the times, where the student is preoccupied with school work and supervised by any available member of the school staff or by selected people who have the skills to work and communicate with students who exhibit disruptive behaviour (Bacon, 1990; Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982; Diem, 1988). In general, ISS is considered 'more educationally sound' than OSS, because it keeps the student in the school environment, where he/she can learn appropriate behaviours (DeRidder, 1991). As Bacon asserts (1990), "Behavior is managed best in an atmosphere of acceptance-a learning environment that is structured to promote appropriate behavior and enhance interpersonal relationships. Within this positive environment, the number and severity of problem behaviors are reduced" (p. 599).



On the contrary, out-of-school suspension loses the advantage of teaching maladaptive students any appropriate behaviour because 'punishment' takes place out of school, in an environment that is not controlled by the school (Diem 1988; Pomeroy, 2000; Sullivan, 1989). Out-of-school suspension has been blamed for creating feelings of rejection to students as well as alienation, in that it distances the student from both their peers and the school personnel (Cameron 2006; Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982). It has also been linked to academic underachievement and higher dropout rates (Fine, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1987). At the same time, it affords them the opportunity to transfer their aberrant behaviour in the streets and involve with other deviant peers (Morrison & Skiba 2001). Moreover, out-of-school suspension is regarded, by some researchers, as a reward to students, who find school too boring and/or too distressing and who view suspension as a great way to stay out of school (Cameron, 2006; Christle, Nelson & Jolivet, 2004). From the abovementioned list of negative effects that OSS is responsible for, it is evident that the original intention of this disciplinary method, which is to 'punish' students or teach them a lesson, is not accomplished. To the contrary, as Skiba and Peterson (1999) very assertively argue, the only effect that out-of-school suspension has on students is to "accelerat[e] [their] (...) course to delinquency" which will only have a 'punitive effect' on their future (p.376).

The last resort to students' disciplinary problems, as mentioned above, is expulsion. Expulsion is considered a high-profile sanction and refers to a student's permanent exclusion from school, which gives the student no right to re-apply or be re-admitted to the same school (Imich, 1994). Expulsion, just like out-of-school suspension, has been heavily criticized for creating more problems to the existing predicaments of the students who receive this kind of sanction, as it increases their chances to fail academically, become more disruptive or drop out of school and involve with other deviant peers (Mellard & Seyberd, 1996; Morrison, D' Incau, Couto & Loose 1997; Uchitelle, Bartz & Hillman, 1989). In addition, it is argued that this disciplinary method makes students feel rejected and unwanted (Pomeroy, 2000).

All of the aforementioned practices, namely ISS, OSS and expulsion, can be enforced, as research shows, when students commit any of the following infractions: class disruptions such as talking out of turn or without permission, teasing, getting out of one's seat or class without permission, showing disrespect towards the teacher, being disobedient and violating class and school rules repeatedly, being habitually late to class (tardiness), skipping classes, skipping school (truancy), forging excuses, fighting, bullying, extortion, possessing a weapon, possessing, using or selling narcotics or other stimulant drugs, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, damaging, destroying or stealing school or private property (vandalism), exhibiting physical or verbal aggression toward peers or teachers, using offensive language etc (Bacon, 1990; Bear, 1998; Bowditch, 1993; Cameron, 2006; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Costenbader & Markson 1994; Diem 1988; Imich, 1994; Department of Education and Science, 2006; Morgan-D' Atrio, Northup, Lafleur & Spera, 1996; Morrison & D' Incau, 1997; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997).

The type of disciplinary action that students receive for their disruptive behaviour, however, depends entirely on each school's suspension and expulsion policy. For the same unruly behaviour, for instance, one school may give the student an in-school suspension, while another school (which may belong in the same district as the other school), may give the student an out-of-school suspension or an expulsion. Each school follows its own set of actions for particular types of misconducts and there is no consensus among schools, sometimes even within the same school, on which disciplinary action should be used/enforced for a given school rule violation (Nichols, Ludwin & Iadicola, 1999; Radin, 1988).

Up to this point, the chapter has examined and addressed the questions concerning the types of disciplinary practices that are currently used in the majority of schools, as well as the various reasons that can lead a student to suspension or expulsion. By using as a central framework the argument that "The usefulness of all human services ought to be judged by the *outcomes* [italics added] they produce"



(Costenbader & Markson, 1998, p.63), the rest of this chapter will examine the effectiveness of these disciplinary practices in helping students to acknowledge their mistakes, alter their behaviour and prevent future behavioural problems.

### **2.3 Effectiveness of disciplinary practices: Out-of-school suspension, expulsion and in-school suspension:**

A growing body of research argues that the traditional disciplinary practices being used at schools, are “short-term” fixes that do not really help students alter any of their exhibited disruptive behaviours (Bacon, 1990; Cameron & Sheppard, 2006; Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; Christle, Nelson & Jolivette, 1994; Comerfold & Jacobson, 1987; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Ross Epp, 1997; Maag, 2001; Mendler & Mendler, 2010; Morrison & Skiba, 2001; Nichols, Ludwin & Iadicola, 1999; Short & Noblit, 1985; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Sullivan, 1989; Wehby, 1994). On the contrary, these practices are held responsible for enhancing and reinforcing maladaptive behaviour and for provoking ‘oppositional behaviour’ to students as well as ‘reflexive aggression<sup>5</sup>’, which comes as a response to the “cycle of violence” that teachers and administrators initiate (O’ Moore, 2010; Ross Epp, 1996; Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997; Schwartz, 1978; Tobin & Sugai, 1996; Uchitelle, Bartz & Hillman, 1989).

Despite the fact that skepticism about the effectiveness of traditional disciplinary practices grows, little research actually “documents the effect of these disciplinary practices as measures of change” on a student’s maladaptive behaviour (Morrison & Skiba, 2001, p.179; see also Atkins, McKay, Frazier, Jakobson, Arvanitis et al. 2002; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997). The majority of research concerning suspension and expulsion focuses on the effects that these practices may have on certain

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<sup>5</sup> Schwartz (1978) explains reflexive aggression as the negative reaction that punishment causes on the subject receiving the action/punishment and argues that punishment is reliably observed to produce aggression (p. 239).

student outcomes, such as academic failure, grade retention, dropout, delinquency, truancy etc (Diem 1988; Fine, 1986; Uchitelle, Bartz & Hillman, 1989; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

When examining specifically the effectiveness of traditional practices on a student's maladaptive behaviour, research shows that both expulsion and suspension are not beneficial for students. Expulsion, for instance, is not the kind of sanction that can be applied and reapplied continuously to reduce a student's disruptive behaviour. It is rather the kind of sanction that is administered only once, as a last resort to a student's repeated violations or a student's outrageous and appalling behaviour, and its effectiveness is measured by its actual consequences, which are detrimental for the student, his/her family and society at large. When a student is expelled from school, the family is immediately burdened, both with financial worries and their child's future development in society. It has also been argued that the expelled student can be a very negative influence to his/her siblings and that his/her involvement with criminal activity is more probable than his/her involvement with education ever again (Pomeroy, 2000). This latter point is clearly illustrated by certain studies, which show that courts, prisons and social services eventually take over from school the responsibility to deal with the youth's deviant behaviour (Parsons, Castle, Howlett, & Worral, 1996).

Moreover, studies conducted on the effectiveness of suspension, have proved that this disciplinary practice is unsuccessful in fulfilling the goals for which it was designed. In Pomeroy's study (2000), which examined the effectiveness of out-of-school suspension, externally suspended students dismissed out of school suspension as a useless sanction since it failed to teach or provide them with guidance about anything. In addition, they supported that this kind of exclusion only alienates them from school and deprives them of their educational rights.

As far as the practice of in-school suspension is concerned, and its effectiveness on altering students' maladaptive behaviour, Diem (1988) carried out two sets of

interviews with a number of suspended students at an urban/suburban high school in order to find out if the particular school's on-campus suspension program was successful in accomplishing its twofold goal: to target and punish misbehaviour and to redirect students towards behaviour that is more appropriate. Suspended students were interviewed before entering the program and after they finished it, so that the researcher could compare the students' answers before and after suspension and therefore detect the effectiveness of the program for each particular student. The student interviews indicated that the program was not effective in altering or modifying misbehaviour and that the counseling part of the program also failed to help students solve their behavioural problems.

Along the same lines with Diem's study (1988), Costenbader and Markson's study (1998) invited suspended students to evaluate the effectiveness of suspension in solving their problems and changing their behaviour. Students did not consider suspension an effective punishment technique, as it did not solve any of their problems or deter them from repeating the same or other kind of misbehaviour again in the future. The participants of this study further talked about the feelings that suspension evoked to them which had mostly to do with feelings of anger and aggression. Some students felt angry with the person responsible for their suspension, while others had feelings of retaliation as they expressed the desire to "get back" or "get even" with that person. A few students expressed apathy towards the punishment they received and many others were just happy to leave class and avoid any of the uninteresting tasks they had to carry out. The different emotions expressed by students in the aforementioned study must not, of course, be the emotions or feelings that punishment techniques should stir up if they are to be effective and achieve their goals. In this aspect, the Costenbader and Markson study (1998) clearly illustrated that suspension did not act in the remedial and remorseful way that punishment is supposed to act, but instead acted as "a negative reinforcement of maladaptive behaviour or as an escape mechanism when difficult or unpleasant tasks existed in the school environment" (p. 76).



In another research, Tobin and Sugai (1996), examined the patterns of disciplinary records in middle schools to find that students' behavioural problems were mainly maintained and not solved or eliminated by disciplinary action (such as suspension). After examining a sample of sixth-graders' referral patterns, suspension frequency, and subsequent behaviour, Tobin and Sugai came to the conclusion that suspension might affect future discipline problems, or actually be one of the causes of maladaptive behaviour, since students who received suspension in the first term of their sixth grade had persistent referral patterns in subsequent school terms.

Adding to the previous studies, Short and Noblit (1985) who examined 10 supposedly "successful" in-school suspension programs also concluded that in-school suspension is not as effective as it was intended and designed to be and that it does not help students "do something constructive about their behavior" (p.115).

On the same issue about the efficacy of disciplinary school practices, Mellard and Seyberd's study (1996), examined the opinion of educators instead of students in order to find out what they thought about the use and effectiveness of suspension and expulsion in their school. The majority of the participants in this study questioned the efficacy of the practices and pointed out that their "positive influence (on students) is limited" (p.17).

As is evident from the above studies, in-school suspension cannot be regarded as being a successful disciplinary tool in decreasing unwanted behaviours or helping students solve their problems. After all, the continuous use of suspension by teachers on the one hand, and the continuous display of unwanted behaviours by students on the other hand, indicate that this type of 'punishment' is not as effective as it should have been since, if it were effective, it would not have been used as often. This point reminds us of Durkheim's assertion, which sounded more like a warning, that "Punishment loses its effectiveness every time is applied" (Pickering, 1999, p. 46; see also Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

## **2.4 In-school suspension and reasons of ineffectiveness:**

Since in-school suspension is the main focus of this study, the rest of the chapter will look into the potential reasons that can cause the ineffectiveness of in-school suspension and examine the following issues: Is in-school suspension an ineffective tool for all students or for a particular group of students? Are there any particular student characteristics that, when present, may make this practice an ineffective tool? Are there any inherent characteristics or weaknesses of this practice that make it ineffective? Are there any school related factors that may affect the implementation of suspension as an intervention and render this practice ineffective? (This question is addressed in chapter 3 that follows). Last, but not least What are the effects of suspension on students? (This question is addressed in chapter 4)

As supported by research, suspension may prove effective and may act as a deterrent of future misbehaviour for 'first time offenders' only (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). That is, students who are usually well behaved, do not have a habit of breaking the school rules, do not like confrontations with their teachers and usually feel embarrassed when a teacher refers them. Moreover, first time offenders do not seem to be having any other kind of serious problems such as personal, emotional, social, familial or school related problems (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Morrison & D' Incau 1997). On the contrary, suspension does not produce any positive results for repeat offenders, who are most of the times not very well behaved, make a habit out of breaking the school rules and getting into trouble and do not usually feel embarrassed at all when a teacher refers them (Costenbader & Markson, 1998). Research also supports that these students face deeper and more complex problems, for which they may or may not be receiving any appropriate help from the school. As The Children's' Defense Fund supports: "Many children who misbehave in school are expressing symptoms of other kinds of problems: their own, their families or their school's...they are crying out for help but they are doing it in the wrong way" (1975, p 52).

Along the same lines, Morgan-D' Atrio et al. (1996) found in their research that students who receive frequent suspensions and for whom suspension is not an effective tool, lack in social skills and have many academic achievement deficits and adjustment problems (p.190). Academic deficits and failing grades, in particular, are much highlighted by researchers as an indicator of maladjustment, since many underachieving students tend to act disruptively and out of frustration when they feel unable to handle or complete schoolwork (Hinshaw, 1992). As Skiba and Peterson (2003) sustain "as the difficulty of academic material increases, students with behaviour problems will turn to off-task and disruptive behaviour in order to escape from academic demands" (p. 68).

The fact, however, that many disruptive students face academic difficulties, is a problem that starts from the schools that these children attend. Starting from primary school all the way to high school, the majority of educational stakeholders are promoting children from one class to the other, although they are aware that there are children with many academic difficulties who are not ready to be promoted to the next grade (Bowditch, 1993). It is noteworthy to mention at this point a study that was conducted in Texas, which reported that out of the 1,252 children that participated in the study, only 57 found themselves in the correct academic level. The rest 1,195 children, although in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, at the time of the research, could only read as children in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). This is not a small number and academic underachievement is not an issue to be taken lightly by educational stakeholders, since frustration, as mentioned earlier and as further underlined by the Children's Defense Fund, can push children to voice their disappointment in very disruptive ways (Children's Defense Fund 1975). Early grade retention and attendance levels (high number of justified and unjustified absences) may also be indicative of disruptive students whom suspension may not be able to discipline or help eliminate behavioural problems (Morrison, D'Incau, Couto & Loose 1997).



As we have seen, then, there are a number of student characteristics and problems that may not work well with suspension. Why is that though? Suspension is considered a behavioural management technique that “works on the premise that exclusion from class or school is an effective deterrent or punishment” for students who misbehave (Morgan-D’Atrio et al. 1996, p. 190). Exclusion from class or school, however, may not be taken as a deterrent or as punishment by students who look forward to leave school or class and spare themselves from school or school work which they may find difficult, uninteresting or of no importance in comparison to the serious family, school or other problems that they may be dealing with (Cameron, 2006; Christle, Nelson & Jolivette, 2004).

Although the initial idea/objective of the in-school-suspension program was to move away from the ‘punitive aspect of discipline’ to a more developmental and rehabilitative form of discipline and try to redirect students’ maladaptive behaviours, this has not been achieved, and school suspension has “evolved into just an additional, more convenient form of punishment” (Silvey, 1995, p.12). In school suspension programs, just like their precursor, out-of school suspension, fail to take into account students’ real problems and their main objective is to ‘punish’ students rather than help them (Miller, 1986). The majority of suspension programs lack two important components: a) a ‘diagnostic’ component, which could help the school identify a student’s problems and/or reasons for acting disruptively and b) a therapeutic component, which could offer students the help they need most. As Morrison and Skiba (2001), sustain: “The provision of this assistance, as part of the punishment, could potentially enhance the protective factors in the child’s environment or enhance their personal resilience” (p.178). Both components, however, should be planned carefully in order to achieve the desirable effects. Hochman and Worner’s study (1987) demonstrated that the diagnostic and therapeutic component might work well with students who are repeat offenders. The students that were identified, in this study, as problematic and received counseling in their school’s ISS program, were less likely to return to the program or



be referred by their teachers often. On the contrary, students who did not receive any counseling at all had higher chances to return back to the ISS program.

Along the same lines, Miller (1986) conducted a study at a suburban high school where he examined if the therapeutic program that was applied in the school as part of the in-school-suspension program had any positive effects in regard to students' attendance problems. The program used four strategies to reduce truancy problems: bibliotherapy, writing therapy, contingency contracting and personal counseling (p. 49). The students, who were randomly assigned in this program after receiving suspension, were positively affected and greatly improved their attendance levels after the completion of the program. The students, however, who completed their school's traditional suspension program, did not have the same positive results.

The punitive orientation of the in-school-suspension program, as well as the lack of a diagnostic and therapeutic component, then, constitute part of the reason that this practice may be an ineffective tool when it comes to more disruptive students.

Another characteristic or weakness of suspension that makes this practice an ineffective instrument, is that suspension does not distinguish between minor or major and moral and non-moral violations, while it also does not provide students with any moral messages (Bowditch, 1993; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). All transgressions, whether that is vandalism, forgery, fighting, extortion, attendance, dress-code violations, teasing etc are 'treated' in the same way, with the same sort of 'punishment', which only increases in longevity according to the student's behaviour (e.g. a warning can become a suspension, a one day suspension can become a three day suspension if a student does not change his/her behaviour, and repeated suspensions can lead to permanent exclusion). Therefore, the punishment does not essentially help the student understand the gravity or seriousness of his/her transgression, since the non-classification of disciplinary practices to suit minor or major and moral or non-moral violations, coupled with the limited range of

sanctions that schools have at their disposal, usually result in disproportionate punishments that are, most of the times, unfair and unjust. If students, on their part, do not see any reason or any usefulness in the punishment that is administered to them, or feel that they are treated unfairly or harshly, they will not accept the punishment, they will find the sanction unfair, unreasonable, and uninformed and subsequently they will treat any of the school efforts to maintain a 'moral outlook' as meaningless and insignificant (Goodman, 2006; see also Bowditch, 1993; Pickering, 1999). Moreover, as it was already mentioned, a restricted range of sanctions can prove to be an inefficient tool in the hands of administrators since the repeated use of the same sanctions limits their effectiveness.

On the same issue about suspension's characteristics and/or weaknesses that can render this practice an ineffective tool one can count in the fact that suspension puts a label on disruptive students, and in this way it can cause or contribute to secondary school deviance. The Children's Defense Fund (1975) report on suspension, notes the following on labeling and its association with suspension:

Suspension often labels a child as a troublemaker. This label causes teachers, school officials and other students to foster expectations that breed misbehavior. One educational expert testified that "the labeling process does carry over from one teacher to another(...)the teacher expects a certain kind of behavior, namely, rebellious behavior, from a youngster, and with that kind of expectations as a pre-set, the youngster naturally is reinforced into producing that kind of behavior" (p. 50).

Clearly, suspension can put students' relationship with their teachers and administrators at odds. In reinforcing the above argument, Bowditch's research (1993) demonstrated that suspension (especially repeated suspension) could make administrators/disciplinarians become biased towards 'types of students' and not 'types of behaviors'. More specifically, when students were sent to the disciplinary office with a referral, they were asked questions that mostly concerned their profile

information (grades, attendance, previous suspension history and future educational or employment plans) rather than questions that dealt with the issue at hand, which was the student's 'new mischievous behavior'. The answers to these questions were then responsible for the student's classification as a 'troublemaker' that the school had to find a way to 'get rid of'. Thus, profile information was more significant to school disciplinarians, than the actual indiscipline itself, as this information was used in order to examine the level of a student's commitment and connection to school as well as his/her intentions for his/her future plans. If the student received suspension often, had bad grades, was not perceived by school officials to be interested in school, was not compliant to the various school requirements and did not attach importance or value to the time he/she spend at school, the conclusion of the school officials was that the student was not fit for education and therefore, he/she should be 'dispensed'.

The two ways that school officials mainly used to 'get rid of troublemakers' was to transfer them to another school, or expel them. According to Bowditch (1993), this, in essence, biased approach that disciplinarians used towards students also seemed to generate *secondary deviance*, as students who get disciplined tend to believe that the school has a "negative vision of (...) [their] social value and personal worth – the very conditions which may strengthen (...) [their] hostility toward the school and (...) foster (...) [their] commitment to the troublemaker role" (p. 503). The 'stigma' that the school puts on these students is what affects their behaviour and attitudes both with their teachers and their peers. In agreement with Bowditch's (1993) findings, Skiba and Peterson (1999) also found the school's way of using suspension as a "push out" tool to be unreliable and inappropriate.

## **2.5 Conclusion:**

In examining the reasons that may render in-school suspension an ineffective tool, the last few pages highlighted a number of issues that relate to the inherent characteristics and/or weaknesses of suspension as a practice, which have the



power to affect the quality of its implementation/effectiveness. As mentioned earlier, suspension can work well with a particular group of students who are generally well behaved and do not cause a lot of trouble. It cannot help students who are very disruptive and have other types of problems, since suspension adopts a more punitive rather than a rehabilitative approach. Another weakness of suspension has to do with the fact that it is a 'one punishment fits all' method that does not have the power to pass students the right messages. In order for suspension to be an effective tool, it should be able to teach students something. However, suspension not only teaches students nothing, it can also contribute to 'secondary school deviance' since it labels students and causes them to do what they are expected to do, namely to be disruptive (Bock, Tapscott & Savner, 1998; Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

Besides the inherent characteristics and weaknesses that make in-school suspension an ineffective practice, however, growing research shows that there are also some school related factors and/or characteristics that can definitely affect and play an important role in the quality implementation of any intervention program (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton & Leaf, 2009; Payne, Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2006).

Chapter 3 that follows will examine a number of these school related factors that can affect the implementation and effectiveness of disciplinary practices but are also associated with student misbehaviour and indiscipline.

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## Chapter 3

### **School related factors that contribute to students' problematic behaviour and influence the effectiveness of disciplinary practices**

#### **Introduction:**

The previous chapter looked into the aims, purposes and goals of the traditional disciplinary practices used, and in particular in-school suspension, and discussed the inherent characteristics and weaknesses that make this practice ineffective. However, taking into consideration or exploring only the weaknesses of an intervention program, in this case, in-school suspension, can only tell part of the story, since, for any program to work effectively, certain conditions or contextual factors should apply as well (Mizell, 1978). Schools, in fact, only acknowledge part of the equation when they consider that misbehaviour has to do mostly, and many times exclusively, with a student's own quality and circumstances, and fail to recognize that "the student may be only one factor in the root problem responsible for the student's real or perceived misbehavior" (Mizell, 1978, p. 216).

In trying to identify other conditions and factors which may encourage and foster student misbehaviour and decisively affect the effectiveness and quality implementation of disciplinary practices, a growing body of research has focused particularly on a number of school related factors and practices (Payne, Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2006; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Rutter, 1983). These institutional factors, which are constant in a student's life, are extremely important in successfully confronting indiscipline and student misbehaviour, since if they are not taken into consideration and are not viewed as part and parcel of the problem, then student misbehaviour will continue unabated and no matter what intervention program the school or the competent educational authority adopts, or invents, nothing will be able to work effectively, and produce positive outcomes (Welsh,

2001). As Burns (1985) very wisely said “The reason that specific problems and practices have not resolved our discipline problems is that they do not address the institutional culture of the schools. If we want to resolve our discipline problems, we must deal with the school culture and the problems that grow out of that culture” (p.2).

This chapter examines five school related factors that a great body of research holds responsible for their contribution in creating and maintaining students’ disruptive or maladaptive behaviours. In particular, this chapter looks into the issues of: a) School Rules, 2) School Leadership, 3) The teacher-student relationship, 4) Curriculum and 5) Assessment.

### 3.1 School Rules

#### 3.1.1 Rules and the school organization:

In order to understand how rules influence the organizational life of schools, one should first look into how they are defined by scholars and what their role is in structuring, regulating, and finally controlling the entire school environment and setting. Buckley and Cooper (1978) report that rules emanate from an ‘authority figure’ that passes edicts in a verbal or a written form. These mandates specify what proper behaviour is and expect members/citizens/students to abide by them (See also Merrett, Wilkins, Houghton & Wheldall, 1988; Leung & Lee, 2005). Along the same lines with Buckley and Cooper, Thornberg (2008a) regards school rules as “*prescriptions* (italics added), legitimized by teachers, about how to behave in school situations, [and as] *standards* (italics added) by which behaviour in school is judged to be appropriate, right, desirable, or inappropriate, wrong and forbidden” (p.25). In a brief synopsis, then, one could describe rules as a series of “dos and don’ts (...) all those guidelines for action and evaluation of action that the teacher expresses or implies through word or deed” (Boostrom, 1991 p. 194).

By telling students what they can or cannot do while in the school setting, what they should wear, how to behave in class and recess, with whom they may or may not sit in class, what to discuss during class time, and what they can bring to school or class with them, teachers and administrators are actually trying to regulate and control their students' overall behaviour, in an effort to "prevent all kinds of student conduct likely to disrupt activities, cause injury and damage school property" (Thornberg, 2008a, p. 25) and at the same time create a safe educational environment which is conducive to learning. As the direct recipients of their teachers' and administrators' absolute power over them, students are therefore regarded, as Muir (1986) pointedly put it, "the most heavily regulated party in the educational system" (p. 110).

This position that students automatically and unavoidably find themselves in once they join the educational setting, instinctively raises a number of questions regarding students' acceptance of their status, of the regulation and control they are constantly subjected to, and more importantly, of their acceptance and relationship to the rules that are imposed upon them and govern their school life. Do students really accept school rules, or do they embrace some rules and reject or contest others? Which rules do they accept more easily and which do they reject and why? How do teachers perceive students' rejection or resistance to school rules? For what other reasons do students defy rules? What are some of the inherent school code characteristics that are considered problematic and what consequences can they have? This section will try to address and provide some answers to these questions.

### **3.1.2 Students' relationship to school rules:**

Most people would think that if students were asked about the necessity of rules in schools, the majority of them would answer that rules are not needed in schools because they restrain them from being free to do or act as they wish. They would also assume that, if given the opportunity, students would unquestionably eliminate all rules. In contrast, however, to what the majority of people may believe about



students and how they think about rules, research indicated that students not only expect to have rules, but they also accept and trust to a great extent many of the school rules and the way that their teachers apply and uphold them (Cullingford, 1988; Raby & Domitrek, 2007; Thornberg, 2008b).

The reason behind this acceptance of rules by students comes from the plain fact that they are accustomed to having rules guiding their lives. From the day a person is born, he/she automatically enters an environment where rules already exist and are predetermined both in the family setting and society at large. These rules, as Boostrom (1991) sustained, “structure how we see the world and our place in it”. They are also “part of a pattern that one can call tradition or way of life”, which means that by the way a person responds to the existing rules (embraces or rejects them), he/she chooses ‘a tradition of life’ that automatically places him/her either in the category of the customary/conventional way of life or in the unconventional one (p. 195, 198, 201). In contrast to choosing a customary/conventional way of life, following a ‘tradition of life’ which is unconventional and possibly eccentric to the ‘normal’ others, usually carries with it various consequences. For, as Boostrom (1991), Thornberg (2008a,b) and Gordon (1983) argue, rules are there to also define and retain order in the world and therefore choosing the unconventional ‘tradition of life’ will definitely spur a strong reaction from society and bring about severe criticism and pressure to the ‘outsider’ to conform to the customary way of life.

The fact that students expect to have rules in schools and that to a great extent they accept and trust such rules, does not of course mean that students are passive recipients of school policies and that they do not question, doubt or disagree with any of them. Research has shown that the acceptance of rules by students does not apply across the board to all school rules and procedures, as students tend to discriminate between school rules, evaluate them differently and cherry-pick the rules they are willing to follow and respect, according always to their own moral and personal judgments. This discrimination of school rules is something that seems



to start from an early age, in primary school, and continues on to the secondary school level where students become even more selective with the rules they accept, in an effort to suit and serve their distinguished personalities that become more refined during adolescence.

The above argument is supported by several studies. Weston and Turiel's study in the 1980s, for instance, exemplified that children of the ages five to eleven tend to discern between moral and social conventional rules, treating the former as 'unalterable' and more severe than the latter which can be altered more easily. Moral rules refer, in general, to actions that result in causing harm to other people, such as hitting or stealing, whereas social conventional rules concern mainly "behavioural uniformities that coordinate the actions of individuals participating in a social system and constitute shared knowledge of expected uniformities in social interaction" (Weston & Turiel, 1980, p. 418).

In an attempt to understand how and if children discern rules, Weston and Turiel (1980) asked the young participants of their study to judge rules that refer to such acts as taking off your clothes in class and being naked, leaving toys on the floor, refusing to share, and hitting. From all actions, only the act of hitting and the rule that pertained to this act was judged as 'a must have rule', one that should definitely exist in school policies. What is of particular interest in this study is that the younger children regarded adherence to the school policy as very important, even though they did not agree with the policy that the school sustained. Although they judged the act of hitting as wrong, for example, they also justified it in the absence of a governing school rule that specifically prohibited the act. On the contrary, the older subjects maintained the same judgment/attitude about hitting both in the presence or the absence of a stated school policy. As the researchers explained, this difference among children about the legitimacy of school policies has to do with "age-related changes in how children explain causes of behavior". Therefore, while older children attribute a person's behaviour to his/her personality and temper (internal feature), younger children attribute behaviour to circumstances (external feature) (p. 423).

Consistent in their findings with the aforementioned study, Nucci's study (1981) as well as Tisak and Turiel's study (1984), also demonstrated the difference between moral and social conventional rules in children's minds and the clear perceptions that children have regarding the importance and severity of moral rules in comparison to social conventional rules. In addition to that, however, Nucci's study examined the perceptions that children have about rules that affect their so-called 'personal domain'. According to Nucci, most of the subjects of the ages 7-20 consider that personal matter transgressions, such as smoking, appearance etc, are not wrong, or are less wrong in comparison to moral or social conventional transgressions. Consequently, as students in Nucci's study support, there should be no rules governing these "wrongdoings" since the behaviours that a person exhibits in the 'personal domain' affect no other than the individual him/herself (p. 120).

In a much more recent study regarding the issue of students' acceptance and discrimination of school rules, Raby and Domitrek (2007) organized nine focus groups with secondary school students where the main theme of discussion was school rules. From the discussions, the researchers tried to extract students' perceptions and feelings about their school rules and to elicit students' reasons for accepting or rejecting certain rules. Students' answers were then analyzed and categorized under four issues, namely the issue of practicality of school rules, the issue of safety, the issue of context and finally the issue of consistency (p. 936).

Under the issue of *practicality*, the researchers found that students were inclined to challenge the rules that they considered impractical in nature and that clashed with their sense of "well-being" (e.g. dress codes that did not allow students to wear spaghetti straps in school when it was too hot) (Raby & Domitrek, 2007, p. 938). From all nine focus groups, only a few students did not agree with the 'big rules', the 'must have rules' that should unquestionably exist in the school's code of conduct and which concerned all students' *safety* (e.g. no weapons, no drugs, no fighting) and their interpersonal relations (no bullying). The majority of the participants,



however, agreed that it is not so much the 'big rules' but the 'minor rules' (e.g. no hats, no nose earrings in class etc) that can create tension, waste valuable classroom time and be the cause of major power struggles between students and administrators.

The study found the issue of the *context* of school rules to be one of the most contested subjects that provoked major 'power struggles' among students and school staff. Students, for instance, found most of the governing context rules as 'stupid', unreasonable or inappropriate and thought that the school should not try to regulate students' every single move, but on the contrary allow them to manage their 'personal time' as they wished (e.g. the school's rule which entirely forbade the use of cell phone in school, even when students were in recess, was thought to be irrational) (Raby and Domitrek, 2007, 938,939). Context was also brought up, by students, as an important factor to their defense when breaking a rule, and was expected to be taken into consideration before the enforcement of a disciplinary action/punishment by the administrative staff.

As far as the issue of consistency goes, the researchers found that students took advantage of and/or defied 'inconsistent rules' that were a topic of conflict between administrators themselves, or between teachers and administrators. Furthermore, students were opposed to rules that were permissible to teachers but not to them and to rules that were not applied equally and consistently across all students (if, however, context is something that students consider as important in their defense, then this last finding about consistency and equality in rule application is rather inconsistent with students' 'contextual demand') (Raby & Domitrek, 2007).

This last issue of consistency and equality in rule application is considered by several other scholars as one of the key factors that can cause school dissatisfaction, create tension among students and the school staff and enhance students' disruptive behaviour (Alderman 2000; Cullingford, 1988; Leung & Lee, 2005; Merrett & Jones, 1994; Straughan 1988; 1982; Thomson & Holland, 2002). All of these scholars agree

that rules are established to minimize commotion and uncertainty and 'regularize justice' so that all students enjoy fair treatment. Following procedures consistently, 'singing from the same song', and being impartial are all considered to be vital components of all educational processes, so that control can be administered uniformly to all students and not arbitrarily to the ones that are most unpopular.

### **3.1.3 Students as active agents of their socialization process:**

The acceptance or contestation of school rules, the way that students distinguish between rules and their tendency to follow some rules and disregard others, clearly demonstrates that students "are not passive recipients but active agents in their socialization process (...) [and] that [they] (...) reflect upon, value and judge school rules [as well as their] (...) teacher[']s interventions" (Thornberg, 2008a, p. 26). The fact that students nowadays exemplify the need to be active agents involved in the shaping of their own characters and do not unquestionably accept the authoritarian ways that schools may use in order to direct/guide them towards a more conventional way of life, is sustained by a body of research which supports that the cultural changes that took place over the years have altered the way that the individual sees/perceives him/herself.

More specifically, as Thomson and Holland (2002) explain, the individual has come to believe "in the efficacy and value of self (...) [while] authority has become increasingly located in the individual, responsible for making decisions about what is right and wrong" (p. 103). In other words, whereas in the past the legitimacy of external authority was unquestionable and required no justification or explanation, with the pass to the era of 'detraditionalization' or 'individualization', young people have come to doubt and challenge the legitimacy of different forms of power. Therefore, any attempt by teachers to impose on students a dominant school culture which is indisputable and infallible and which is based on strict rules and regulations, will face the strong *resistance* of students who, in an effort to avoid 'indoctrination' and 'negotiate the structural inequalities' they experience in the



school setting, will react to what they perceive as oppressive school practices and policies by exhibiting rule-breaking behaviour and by being involved in other norm breaking activities (Raby & Domitrek, 2007; see also McLaren, 1986; Leung & Lee, 2005).

From the school's point of view, such rule-breaking behaviour by students is usually not perceived as resistance against the school structure, but rather as deviance or 'youthful rebellion' that needs to be controlled or overpowered without delay, so that the school maintains control and succeeds in the role that has been ascribed to it by society. According to Muir (1986), "a civilized society expects educational institutions to help transform each young pupil willy-nilly, into an adult capable of self-government in an active and free society" (p.110). This school role, in turn, is perceived by students as a character shaping effort to which, as it was argued above, students will resist not only because they view these efforts as a violation of their own distinct personality but also because they consider "learning the particular skills and moral orientations of adulthood (...) [as] arduous, uncomfortable, and (...) [even] pointless [for some]," (Muir, 1986, p. 110). In reinforcing the above argument, Smith (2003) also sustains that efforts by teachers to transmit to students the basic school and societal values and principles can promote resistance, which can be manifested through indifference, mischief and other rule breaking behaviour.

#### **3.1.4 Students' resistance to rules: The home, the street and the student state:**

What causes students to react and resist, however, is not only linked to the various principles, values and ideas which comprise the cultural capital that teachers try to instill in them, but also to the *method and the means* that educators use to prevent students' disruptive behaviour, in order to achieve the school's goals. By using *coercion* and other negative disciplinary systems, such as suspension or expulsion, as their main tools, teachers try to compel students to follow the school's rules and regulations, which make up the dominant culture. In doing so, educators fail to

understand that the use of coercion, in other words intimidation, as a means to succeed their goals can cause various problems and create 'antagonistic relations' between teachers and students. As Muir (1986) explains, "in coercion, a detached person, one who is indifferent about the destruction of his possessions, is in as strong coercive position as one who has no possessions" (p.111). The detached person in the school setting is most likely the disruptive and defiant student who cares neither about school rules and procedures nor about disrupting his/her relations with his/her teachers. Therefore, in a situation where a teacher confronts and intimidates a student, the outcome will most likely be unfavourable for the teacher who has more personal effects/assets to lose (e.g. career) in comparison to the student who is relatively dispossessed and maybe indifferent about the outcomes of a confrontation with his/her teacher. Even if the student yields to his/her teacher's intimidation, it is the teacher yet again who will suffer the consequences of the 'defeat', because the student's morale will be lost along with his/her enthusiasm to actively and not passively and grudgingly follow the teacher's instructions (Schimmel, 2003).

Reaction and resistance to school structures is not only explained by the tendency of students nowadays to be active in their socialization process and to challenge the legitimacy of different forms of power or by the negative disciplinary methods and means used by schools to impose their power on their subjects. Raby and Domitrek (2007) also ascribe students' resistance, exhibited in rule-breaking behaviour, in boredom and apathy. McLaren (1986), on the other hand, explains that students' resistance comes from the incompatibility that occurs in students' transition from the '*streetcorner and home state*' to the '*student state*'.

The 'streetcorner state' is described by McLaren (1986) as a more physical/natural setting in comparison to the school, where students feel themselves and exhibit behaviours that characterize the 'street', that is, behaviour which is unrestricted and irrepressible. The 'home state', conversely, portrays family interactions such as the students' relationship with their parents and siblings. In the 'home state', parents



are in the role of the authority figure and expect their children to obey the rules they set. The 'normative rules' that govern the 'home state' are often quite similar to those that govern the school (e.g. respect to the authority figure). A feature of the 'home state' that does not apply to the 'student state', however, is that in the 'home state' a child has an easier access to the 'streetcorner state', whereas in the 'student state' such access is not an option. What makes the 'student state' very different from the aforementioned states, and which in essence explains students' resistance and disruptive behaviour, is that from the minute that a child enters the school, he/she has to 'readjust' and 'realign' his/her behaviour in accordance to the more formal and rigid setting of the school, where teachers are allowed to control and guide students through the use of 'enforcement procedures' (p.84). In the 'student state', students are expected to 'conform to a set of social standards' and adopt "the gestures, dispositions, attitudes and work habits expected of 'being a student'" (McLaren, 1986, p. 88), which at times can be quite different from the ones that govern the 'streetcorner' or the 'home state'.

Therefore, in order for an individual to be successfully adjusted to the 'student state', the values and the rules of the school should be relatively identical or very similar to the ones of the home and vice-versa. In this situation, the adjustment of the student will be easier since the familiarity between the school and the home environment will help the student understand and accept the school rules better and thus adjust his/her attitudes and behaviours accordingly. As Raby (2005) explains, "a young person's cultural capital (his/her acquired tastes, deportment etc which help or hinder in dealing with cultural institutions) and consequent relative familiarity with a middle class habitus<sup>6</sup> will assist him or her in negotiating normalizing school rules" (p. 79).

Similarly, students' adjustment to the 'student state' could be more easily facilitated

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<sup>6</sup> "Habitus involves a 'durable training' embedded in people's conscious and unconscious thoughts, language and bodies" "*that shapes their attitudes, behaviors, and responses to given situations*" (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, as cited in Raby, 2005, p. 79).



if a relative balance could be achieved between the 'streetcorner' and the 'student state', so that students will not feel as oppressed and as restricted in the school setting. In other words, a welcoming and more relaxed school environment will certainly enhance both students' connection to the school and their adjustment to the 'student state', while at the same time it will minimize/lessen students' resistance and rule-breaking behaviour as they will feel that they are part of an environment which is not far-off from their daily lives and routines at home and outside school. As already mentioned, student infringements should be understood and regarded by the authorities, not as oppositional and deviant but rather as resistance which is the typical and/or logical reaction to the 'incarcerated feelings' that the school may trigger to its students. As Giroux (1983) further remarks:

(...) the concept of resistance highlights the need for classroom teachers to decipher how the modes cultural production displayed by subordinate groups can be analyzed to reveal both their limits and their possibilities for enabling critical thinking, analytical discourse and new modes of intellectual appropriation. In the most profound sense, the concept of resistance points to the imperative of developing a theory of signification, a semiotic reading of behavior that not only takes discourse seriously, but also attempts to unravel how oppositional moments are embedded and displayed in non-discursive behavior (p. 111).

### **3.1.5 Resistance as a manifestation of desire:**

Another way of interpreting students' rule-breaking behaviour as Raby and Domitrek (2007) suggest, is by taking it not as resistance but as a 'manifestation of desire'. The authors argue that "desire overflows the social/institutional boundaries and binaries that try to categorize and contain people" (p. 948) and that desire can constitute a "source of rupture or disruption to order that cannot be entirely contained" (Deuluze and Guattari as cited in Raby & Domitrek, 2007, p. 948). In other words, this argument suggests that students manifest their desires or mode of

thinking, which deviates/digresses from the social institutions' established norm or line of thinking, by 'flighting away' from what is expected of them or by upsetting and/or disrupting the legitimacy of the established order.

As we have seen up to this point, "schools are organizations in which rules are very pervasive" (Gordon, 1983, p. 2007). Although students, like all human beings, are born in an environment where rules and regulations are established and predetermined both in the family setting and in society at large, rules are no longer universally accepted or unquestioned by students who are not nowadays passive recipients of established situations, but on the contrary active agents of their own socialization process. As such, students today are quite judgmental of school rules that they believe can hinder the development of their distinct personalities, while at the same time they are very selective of the rules they are willing to accept and/or follow. This unwillingness of students to blindly follow or abide by the existing school regulations, leads to a situation where teachers have to daily and constantly confront the rule breaking and disruptive behaviour of students, who strongly resist what they view as authoritarian and overbearing ways that teachers and administrators use to impose the dominant school culture and enforce the school's rules and regulations. In turn, students' critical attitude towards school rules and their resistance is perceived by the school authorities as deviance that needs to be immediately controlled and not as a reasonable response against the oppressive environment and the restrictive measures that students are forced to endure. This school approach leads to a vicious cycle whereby the school will respond to disruptive behaviour with even more force and oppression and the students will themselves reply with more resistance, deviance and rule breaking behaviour. Given this counterproductive approach, which leads to a vicious cycle with negative consequences for everybody involved, resistance in the school setting has to be analyzed and reviewed under a new scope which will take into account the evolution, change and realities of today's society.

### **3.1.6 Problematic characteristics of school codes of conduct:**

While, previously, this section examined the possible causes behind the reactions that students can have towards the various school rules and regulations and the way that teachers try to impose them on students, the remainder of this section will look into the inherent characteristics of school codes of conduct that are considered as problematic and are also responsible for a number of negative consequences. In sum, most school codes of conduct are:

- 1) "Negative, restrictive, ambiguous and unexplained": rules are phrased in a very negative and restrictive way, as a series of "thou shalt nots" that totally disregard student rights. Most rules are rather unclear in their meaning, which causes students and even administrators to interpret them in various ways that creates confusion (Schimmel, 2003, p. 18; see also Schimmel 1997b, p. 70).
- 2) "Authoritarian and illegitimate": rules are handed down to students in a very dogmatic and domineering way that can cause student reaction. The rules that are unrelated to students' education or safety and are perceived by students more like 'personal edicts' than anything else, tend to be totally disregarded and undermined by students because they seem subjective, illegitimate and constrict students' rights in an arbitrary manner.
- 3) Not-accepting student participation in the development/shaping of school rules. Students are not asked or invited to participate in the development of school rules either because the school feels that this is not a right that students should have, or because the school is concerned that trusting students with such a responsibility will lead to the creation of rules that are "lax in standards" with "nonexistent consequences" (Latham, 1998, p. 104). However, by not allowing students to participate and contribute in making school and classroom rules, schools are wasting their opportunity to teach their students how to practice their "citizenship skills". The process of rule-shaping places students in a position where they have to



cooperate with others, consider and respect their views, understand the importance and severity both of rules themselves and of the process of rule making, and finally develop a sense of responsibility for the decisions they take (Schimmel, 1997a, p. 43; see also Schimmel, 1997b; 2003).

4) "Legalistic and poorly taught": In Schimmel's words "the way school rules are taught often violates every norm of good teaching" because schools place more effort in distributing the rules rather than teaching them, in the same way that the formal curriculum is taught (2003, p. 20). More specifically, the majority of schools distribute their code of conduct in the form of a small booklet on the school's opening day. By simply signing a piece of paper, students and parents are then held responsible for receiving and understanding the rules that govern the school. What schools fail to comprehend, however, is that their casual and inattentive attitude towards the way they 'teach' their code of conduct undermines its legitimacy and significance. Rules are treated by the school administration as legal documents and are often written in a legalistic way, which in essence makes the understanding of the rules by students more problematic. Moreover, the failure of schools to assess their students' understanding of the rules further contributes to the undermining of the school's code of conduct, since the school is not in a position to differentiate between effective and ineffective rules, thus giving students the right to underestimate the legitimacy of the rules and take advantage of the school's 'laid back' approach towards their own policies.

5) Lacking established practices and guidelines for assessing rules. According to Schimmel (1997b), "there are usually no agreed upon standards or procedures for judging whether rules are unnecessary, discriminatory, irrelevant, ambiguous or inconsistent in the way in which they are written or enforced" (p. 70).

### **3.1.7 Negative consequences of problematic codes of conduct-The issue of procedural and distributive justice/fairness:**

The aforementioned characteristics of school codes of conduct can, in turn, produce several negative consequences such as:

a) Undermine the goals of citizenship education: The rigid adherence to the school rules and regulations creates an unhealthy school environment that places student obedience and submission at the top of the list, while at the same time it hinders the student's evolution into a responsible citizen. The constant undermining of citizenship skills may eventually drive students to 'cynicism', 'alienation' and 'apathy', as they are able to quite simply sense the irony of being taught the values of democratic participation in various civic fora in a school setting that does not always allow such participation. (Schimmel, 2003, p. 21; see also Schimmel, 1997b)

b) Undermine responsibility and self-discipline: Codes of conduct that aim to teach the sense of responsibility and self control through traditional techniques that are based on punishment, discipline, power and control, are deemed to be ineffective and counterproductive. Although, in the short run such techniques might have immediate results as students will follow rules without questioning them and teachers will be able to perform their work in a more peaceful environment, in the long run codes of conduct that use the 'obedience' approach will lead to the formation of immature and irresponsible students who experience feelings of helplessness that are demonstrated by symptoms of withdrawal, hostility, violence etc.

c) Distort the role of educators: The strict adherence of teachers to the school rules and regulations tends to distort the role of teachers and administrators who, in their attempt to enforce the school code of conduct, assume more often the 'disciplinarian role' rather than the educator one and spend most of their time on policing students instead of teaching them (Schimmel, 1997b).

d) Undermine rules and authority: Rules and authority are more likely to be undermined or disrespected, when people are not given the opportunity or the right of 'voice' in decision making processes or when they perceive that the processes or their outcome(s) are unfair (Chory-Assad, 2002; Fondacaro, Brank, Stuart et al. 2006; Murphy & Tyler, 2008; Schimmel, 1997b, 2003). The above theory is supported by research conducted in the field of procedural justice, which shows that "the importance of voice or participation in decision making is one of the several [but nonetheless very consistent] criteria people use to evaluate procedural fairness" (Fondacaro et al. 2006, p. 988). Procedural fairness constitutes one of the two elements that comprise the concept of justice and it refers to "the fairness of the procedures used to arrive at the decision (....) Differences in the procedure produce different judgments of fairness" as well as different reactions (Fondacaro et al. 2006, p. 987, 989). Distributive justice constitutes the second element of justice and it is mainly concerned with the fair outcome of a procedure. The notion of procedural justice, however, is what concerns us more here, since the non-participatory and unfair procedures of an organization or institution may have a range of negative and damaging effects on people. According to Chory-Assad (2002), "employees who perceive they have been treated unfairly tend to engage in aggressive behavior, deviant behavior and stealing" (p. 63), whereas in organizations or companies where employees perceive that decision making processes that concern them are made through just and fair procedures in their work environment tend to be more satisfied, enthusiastic and have better work outcomes. Similarly, the Van Yperen, Hagedoorn, Zweers and Postma, study (2000) showed that "procedural justice can buffer the negative effects of low distributive justice" (p. 291).

Another particularly interesting finding in the research of procedural justice/fairness is the strong relationship found between people's views and emotions about procedural justice and their subsequent compliance behaviour. Murphy's and Tyler's (2008) research, for instance, showed that employees are more likely to comply with their supervisors' rules and decisions, if they feel happy in their working environment and if they feel that they have been treated fairly by



their superiors. Noncompliant behaviour, on the other hand, is exemplified when people feel that they have been treated unfairly and negative emotions such as anger and frustration are left to determine their actions (Murphy & Tyler, 2008; see also Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000; Van Yperen et al., 2000).

This relationship also applies in the school setting, where students feeling irritated and outraged by their school's unjust and non-participatory proceedings, engage in deviant and other insolent behaviour to express their resentment. Conversely, if students perceive that their school is fair in decision making processes and that they also have an input in the procedures that concern them, they are more likely to feel content and have their motivational, learning and behavioural outcomes enhanced (Chory- Assad, 2002).

The knowledge of the problematic characteristics of school codes of conduct and of the consequences that these characteristics may have on students' behaviour and emotions towards authority and rules, can guide the search for an alternative approach which will, on the one hand, attempt to erase or at least find new ways to comprehensively deal with the challenging features of codes of conduct while on the other try to gain students' support, understanding and willing compliance to the rules.

### **3.1.8 Characteristics of ideal codes of conduct:**

Several researchers have suggested how an ideal code of conduct and its characteristics should be. First and foremost, all educational stakeholders should participate in the creation and/or shaping of the school's rules and regulations. By collaborating in the making of their 'own rules', teachers, students and parents will not only feel that they have a say in what concerns them, but they will further experience the sense of 'ownership', which is very crucial in the process of accepting, internalizing and finally willingly following rules. Moreover, rules should

be non-personal<sup>7</sup>, non-particular<sup>8</sup>, fair, reasonable, pedagogic, and congruent with social values (Buluc, 2006; Schimmel, 2003; Straughan, 1982). Another important characteristic of the ideal code of conduct is that rules should also be made clear/explicit to students and be taught in the same way as the main curriculum. As Straughan emphatically maintained, "One cannot properly be said to have learned a rule, or be following or obeying a rule, unless one knows that there is such a rule" (Straughan, 1982, p. 63; see also Schimmel, 2003; Thornberg, 2008a). In addition to clarity, scholars agree in that rules should be few and effective. According to these academics, codes of conduct should only have a minimum number of rules so that teachers and students do not get confused with a plethora of rules that ultimately might prove to be totally unnecessary and overly restrictive (Woodbury, 1997). In the words of Boostrom (1991), "too many rules (...) hamstring the efforts of students to learn and of teachers to teach" (p. 197). In the making of rules, scholars sustain that one should also take into consideration that rules be made affirmative and be phrased in positive terms. In order to make sure that rules are followed and obeyed, schools should make an effort to have as many rewards as punishments which can be easily reached by students of all abilities (Merrett and Jones, 1994).

### **3.1.9 Relationships of trust and their association with rule following:**

The above conditions are undeniably imperative in the formation of a code of conduct that will earn the respect and acknowledgment of all educational stakeholders. In order to reach the point where students truly respect and readily follow school rules, however, one has to first build a powerful relationship of 'trust and confidence' between the student and the 'rule-giver'. As Straughan (1982) explains, a child will never follow a rule just because it is a rule. Executing a task only to please someone or avoid scolding has nothing to do with comprehending and following rules. Rule following surpasses plain perfunctory and unconscious

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<sup>7</sup> Non-personal: rules are non-personal in that it is strictly irrelevant who enunciates and enforces a rule and how he/she feels about it (Straughan, 1982, p. 64).

<sup>8</sup> Non-particular: rules are non-particular in that they refer to a general class of behavior rather than to a specific action on a specific occasion (Straughan, 1982, p. 64).

acts, as it involves the development of trusting and confident relations that progressively lead the child to the internalization and conscious acceptance of rules. At first, children encounter rules in an 'interpersonal context' where 'obeying rules' and behaving depends upon the incentives a child receives from the 'rule-giving adult'. As the child matures, 'trust (or mistrust)' to the rule-giving authority steadily outpaces incentives, and the child begins to act in a compliant or defiant way according to the vote of confidence that he/she gives to the rule-giving adult. If the adult's reasons for administering a rule are justified and the child understands and trusts the adult's justifications, then actual rule following and obedience can take place. As Straughan (1982) put it "one comes to trust another person not because one likes or fears him, but because one accepts that there are consistently good reasons backing what the other says or does" (p. 67).

Therefore, effective schools that want to curtail and control misbehaviour should ensure that the relationships that students build with their teachers are based on trust and confidence and not on strict rules and fear of punishment. This can be achieved through the creation of rules that encompass the aforementioned rule characteristics, and through fairness and consistency in rule application. If students willingly accept and follow school rules, then schools will have a better chance of reducing rule-breaking behaviour. As research indicated, having faith and believing in school rules, is a strong 'social bond predictor' that prohibits students from engaging in deviant or delinquent behaviours. Consequently, by respecting, adopting and following school rules, students illustrate that they do not only internalize rules but that they also recognize the distinctive role of rules in protecting their rights, and in creating and maintaining a safe and conducive to learning school environment (Steward, 2003, p. 595).



## 3.2 School Leadership

### 3.2.1 School leadership and school effectiveness: The role of the principal in discouraging student indiscipline:

Outstanding leadership has been acknowledged by much research as a pivotal ingredient of school effectiveness. School leaders have the power to influence the organizational life of their schools to such a degree that they can either lead their schools to great heights or great depths. In guiding and determining their schools' outcomes, principals can assume many roles, such as the instructional, the disciplinarian, the humanitarian, and other more technical roles, and adopt different styles of leadership to bring about the desired effects. What is of more interest and relevant to this literature review, however, is the examination of the *disciplinarian role* of the principal that can directly or indirectly affect student behaviour in both positive and negative ways and further influence the implementation quality of disciplinary practices. The disciplinarian role of the principal is also of more interest to this literature review because it is the role that is most valued and appreciated by teachers as research shows. Montgomerie, McIntosh and Mattson's study (1988), examined the opinion of four different groups of educational stakeholders (principals, teachers, superintendents, board of chairs) in order to find out which of the assumed roles of the principal was more important to them. Although each of the four groups gave more value to the symbolic, disciplinarian and humanistic role of the principal, teachers, in particular, gave more credit to the disciplinarian role of the school leader. Along the same lines with the aforementioned study, Giannangelo and Malone's research (1987) demonstrated that 70% of the 143 surveyed teachers of their study positioned the disciplinarian role of the principal very high on their list of most favourable demonstrated principal roles.

Although not all school matters depend directly on the school principal, as there are some external influences that can greatly affect the principal's job and decision

making (discussed later in this section), most educational stakeholders, including parents and students, tend to turn to the principal for several matters, for answers or solutions, for help or support, to praise or condemn. School principals serve as role models to all educational stakeholders whether that is their intention or not. One of the most important matters that concern parents and teachers alike is the matter of discipline and more specifically the way that the principal handles or deals with it. For it is widely assumed that the way that a principal deals with disciplinary matters can greatly affect both teaching and learning outcomes (Wahlstrom & Seashore, 2008). As Johnson (1980) also supported:

It is the principal's responsibility to set the tone for a positive learning atmosphere in the school. The principal should serve as a role model for the staff, teachers, pupils, to emulate when they are concerned with preventing and eliminating disruptive problems. *Usually some of the discipline problems caused by students have direct relationship with the manner in which the principal organizes and operates the school* [italics added] (p.20).

The central focus of this section, therefore, is to examine the ways or the strategies that principals use to organize and operate their schools so as to prevent and discourage behavioural problems. The absence of these 'strategies' can affect a student's disruptive behaviour and, as a consequence, the learning environment of the school. For, "when a student is unable or unwilling to behave in an acceptable manner, the entire school, in a sense, fails" (Mukuria, 2003, p.433). The literature review on this issue comes particularly from research on effective schools and school leadership/principalship, which specifically examines and compares effective to non-effective schools and the connection or relationship of the leader with school success.

### **3.2.2 Discipline in relation to the 'sense of structure and order' that the principal initiates:**

As research shows, one of the most important strategies that leaders can use to maintain a good level of discipline in their schools is to initiate "a sense of structure and order" (Calabrese, 1985; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1990; Mukuria 2003). To accomplish this objective, the principal has to organize the school by establishing a common set of behavioural standards, as well as a set of disciplinary routines/practices that are accepted and valued by the faculty and at the same time consistently enforced by the school's administrative team. It is of outmost importance that the school faculty participates and comes to a consensus regarding the school's behavioural standards and set of disciplinary routines/practices that should be followed, when a student violates the agreed upon standards, since the school faculty's *uniformity* towards matters of discipline and the *consistent administration* of the school's disciplinary practices are considered vital ingredients of effective discipline and orderly environments.

In examining this theory, Mukuria's study (2003) observed leadership in schools with high and low suspension rates in order to find out how the principals of these schools dealt with disciplinary issues. One of the findings of this study showed that principals in low suspension rate schools applied uniformity in matters of discipline, since they considered it as a 'critical' element in student control and discipline. Besides uniformity, the Munn, Johnstone and Chalmers study (1992) further underlined that discipline works better and is "possible" when teachers, in particular, have a say and agree on the "kinds of offenses" that should be regulated and passed on to the administrative team to handle (p. 49). In reinforcing this argument, Gottfredson's study (1989), which analyzed data from 600 secondary schools, indicated that the schools which faced a plethora of disciplinary problems were the ones, that among other issues, had administrators and teachers who were not aware of their school's rules (or behavioural standards), who disagreed on the school's approach towards misbehaving students and were thus inconsistent and



ambiguous in their disciplinary responses (as cited in Gaustad, 1992; see also Hollingsworth, Lufler & Clune, 1984).

Therefore, while it is incorporated in the principal's disciplinarian role to organize the school by initiating "a sense of structure and order", and involve the school's faculty in doing so, it is also incumbent that the principal establishes the appropriate mechanisms to frequently evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the agreed upon policies and modify, amend or adjust them accordingly, should this be considered necessary (Johnson, 1980). By frequently reviewing the school's policies, a principal ensures their quality implementation, and sees to the realization of the school goals, which are essential for the day to day activities of the faculty and the meaningful functioning of the school (Duke, 1989; Manasse, 1985).

### **3.2.3 Discipline in relation to the sense of purpose, direction and vision that the principal initiates:**

The realization of the school goals as well as the 'school's meaningful functioning' are related to another successful strategy identified with effective schools and leaders. Principals of effective and well-disciplined schools provide their schools with "a sense of purpose and direction"(Manasse, 1985), which is particularly important for the school as an organization. As Karl Weick and other organizational theorists sustain, schools are not like most conventional organizations in which tight or formal structures are more characteristic. Schools are mostly depicted as "loose structures" organized by "loose coupling" in which people work in highly independent ways, especially when they are not guided (Weick, as cited in Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 11). In order for schools to become successfully organized unities, then, they need to have a leader who will provide:

A clear sense of purpose which defines the general thrust and nature of life for their inhabitants. At the same time, a great deal of freedom (...) [should be] given to teachers and others as to how these essential core values are to be

honored and realized. This combination of tight structure around clear and explicit themes, which represent the core of the school's culture and of autonomy for people to pursue these themes in ways that make sense to them, may well be a key reason for their success (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 13).

In other words, the principal needs to set clear goals and have high but achievable expectations for his/her school. The leader needs to have a vision of how he/she sees the school advancing in the future. As Manasse (1985) informs us: "The importance of this personal vision of the school as a whole is a recurring theme in studies of effective principals: vision, initiative, resourcefulness" (p. 445). One such study that proved the link between vision, effective principals and subsequently successful schools, was the one conducted by Mukuria (2003) who showcased that the low suspension rate schools, which participated in his research, were presided by principals who had preeminent visions for their schools. In addition to assisting the principal in prescribing clear guidelines for the everyday functioning of the school, having a comprehensible vision for the school also assists teachers concentrate their energy on 'task-goals' which, in turn, make them more effective with their job. As Barnett and McCormick (2004) explain "Vision has a direct effect on task focus goals and excellence in teaching" (p. 424). When people have a vision they feel that:

They are part of sensible projects [and thus] their action becomes richer, more confident and more satisfying, [especially] when it is linked with important underlying themes, values and movements (...) administrators must be attentive to the 'glue' that holds loosely coupled systems together because such forms are barely systems" (Weick as cited in Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 11).

Having a vision for their schools, therefore, is something that principals should strive for in order to be able to guide their schools in successful paths/direction and create orderly environments and well disciplined schools, where everyone feels

satisfied working in the framework of clearly established parameters and guidelines and towards achieving meaningful goals. However, even though it is necessary and admirable to have a vision, it is also essential to be able to fulfill that vision and this is something that cannot be achieved if the principal's vision is not accepted or supported by the faculty in its entirety. The question that rises at this point then is: How can principals obtain their faculty's support for a school vision? The answer is simple and that is by supporting their teachers. While this response may seem short, it is very meaningful and the literature review on this subject is quite extended.

#### **3.2.4 Principal-teacher support on discipline related issues:**

Much research has identified 'support' as the driving force in the teaching profession. Support, for example, has proved to have the power to influence a teacher's job satisfaction and decision to stay in the teaching profession. This conclusion was quite evident in Richards's study (2003), which investigated the perceptions of teachers on the issue of support and other related matters that had to do with teacher stress and 'school commitment'. More specifically, the teachers of this study highlighted that satisfaction with their job and their decision to stay in the teaching profession had mostly to do with their principals' attitudes towards matters of discipline and the support they received not only concerning student discipline but also concerning parental involvement with discipline. Teachers expected their principal to 'back them up' when they had issues with student discipline but also to support them when parents of misbehaving or disciplined students would come to school to complain about their child's 'punishment'.

Along the same lines with Richards (2003), Karge's study (1993), which examined data from 23,088 teacher questionnaires in order to find out whether some 'environmental demographic factors', such as administrative support, enforcement of rules etc, had an impact on teachers' decision to remain in teaching, found that administrative support was a very significant matter to teachers and clearly affected their decision to resign their jobs. Supporting teachers was also the central focus of



the research by Johnson, Birkeland, Kadros, Kauffman et al. (2001), who found as well that lack of support was a major reason in teachers' intention to abandon the profession (see also, Russell, Altmaier & Velzen, 1987).

Besides affecting teachers' job satisfaction and their decision to stay in the teaching profession or not, principal/administrative support seems to also affect teachers' involvement with discipline. This latter point was proved in the Blasé and Anderson study (1995) whose participant teachers reported that when principal and administrative support on discipline issues was low or inconsistent they distanced themselves from disciplinary matters, or became more 'cautious' and 'tentative', since they were uncertain of the outcome (p.57). As a result of the lack of support, teachers further developed the tendency to 'ignore' misbehaviour that was typical of certain students, despite the consequences that this attitude could have.

### **3.2.5 The principal-teacher relationship and organizational health:**

Principals and administrators, as we have seen, can be "assets or liabilities to teachers trying to maintain discipline" in class (Johnson, 1980, p. 22). As such, if principals wish to preside over schools that are orderly and well disciplined and want their teachers to aspire and support their vision, they should work towards placing themselves more on the 'assets' than the 'liabilities' side for their teachers. In order to achieve that, principals must establish quality relationships with their teachers and make them feel that they are listened to, cared for, valued and appreciated. For, as research illustrates, where teachers and principals have good/constructive relationships and communicate with each other, things work better.

Metz's study (1978), for instance, whose research investigated the way that two very different schools (with regard to authority structures and educational philosophies) dealt with disciplinary problems, found that the school where the principal communicated and collaborated well with teachers experienced less

disciplinary challenges. In the same line with Metz, Duckworth's study (1984), which investigated the role of school administrators on the effectiveness of school discipline, found that the principal-teacher relationship played a significant role in teachers' satisfaction with their school's disciplinary policy. In schools where principals communicated well with their teachers the school climate was better. On the contrary, in schools where teachers and principals had negative relationships, due to the fact that the principal largely ignored teacher referrals and there was not a shared educational vision/philosophy, teachers were less satisfied with school discipline. This important point was exemplified in Mukuria's study (2003), which indicated that principals of low suspension rate schools had established excellent relationships with their teachers and supported them "morally and materially by letting them know that their decisions and judgments were respected and valued" (p. 441).

Although past literature and research concludes that principals should cooperate with their teachers and support them on a variety of issues and especially on discipline matters, in order to achieve the proper functioning of the school and create orderly and well disciplined environments, the principal-teacher relationship itself has not been examined either exclusively or extensively. It is only more recently that the literature started placing more emphasis on this relationship by examining and acknowledging its vast importance on the organizational health of the school. Hoy, Smith and Sweetland (2002/2003) describe a school climate as healthy when the interpersonal relationships of the school's main actors, namely principals, administrators, teachers, students, are positive, friendly, supportive and respectful. The importance of the interpersonal relationships and direct communications between principals and teachers in achieving teacher support is also highlighted by Edgerson, Kritsonis, and Herrington (2006) who sustain that the:

Daily interpersonal interactions of a principal are necessary to garner trust and support from teachers. In schools, this means that, instead of worrying

constantly about setting the direction and then engaging teachers and others in a successful march (often known as planning, organizing, leading, motivating, and controlling) the “leader” can focus more on removing obstacles, providing material and emotional support, taking care of the management details that make any journey easier, sharing in the comradeship of the march and in the celebration when the journey is completed, and identifying a new, worthwhile destination for the next march. The march takes care of itself (p.3).

Furthermore, Walsh’s study (2005) which examined in particular ‘the nature of principal-teacher relationships’ in elementary schools in North Carolina, USA, discerned in his data analysis five themes which are very common in creating or sustaining positive principal-teacher relations: a) a supporting environment, 2) the resolution of problems and conflicts 3) collegiality 4) a caring principal and finally 5) a visible and involved principal.

In agreeing with Walsh (2005), Tate (2003) also believes that principal collegiality and caring are important parameters in gathering teacher support and building positive principal-teacher relationships. In promoting collegiality, and showing that they really care, however, principals have to be able to understand their colleagues concerns. As Tate (2003) argues:

They need to carefully listen to what members of their organizations worry about, are motivated by and are frustrated by. They need to sense what their followers feel and want as they go about their work. If effective leading is about bringing people together to accomplish specific goals and recognizing and appreciating different perspectives, then leading requires collaboration in which all members of the organization are open to listen to others and being influenced by them-listening to reflect and learn before decisions are made (p. 2).



Last but equally important in establishing a positive principal-teacher relationship, as Walsh (2005) found in his study, is the factor of visibility and involvement of the principal with the school community. A well-disciplined school must have a principal who is highly visible and approachable. Many scholars emphasize the importance of having a leader who engages in what Duke describes as “management by walking around” (Duke, 1989). By walking around the school on a regular basis, a principal can establish a clear and thorough idea of the situation in the school, from the smallest things (such as how buses are parked outside the school to pick up students) to the bigger and most important issues, such as student discipline (Ruder, 2008). By walking around the school, a principal also makes him/herself noticeable to faculty and students and thus sends a clear signal to everybody that he/she is involved and interested in his/her school affairs, and that he/she knows the situation as everybody else. This strategy may prove helpful in promoting campus safety by preventing or even eliminating minor or more serious disciplinary issues (Ruder, 2008; Kadel & Follman 1993). Moreover, the visibility and approachability of the principal can also have a great impact on the school as it can draw the school together (Munn, Johnstone & Chalmers, 1992; see also Teddlie, Kirby & Stringfield, 1989).

### **3.2.6 The principal-student relationship and its effects on student indiscipline:**

A principal who is visible and approachable gives both teachers and students the opportunity to get closer, meet and talk to each other. As research shows, creating positive relations is not only vital for teachers but also for students, who can greatly benefit from their relationship with the school’s principal by improving their behaviour. In a study conducted by Calabrese (1985), the principal of the school had to interact with 50 students (25 were chosen for the study and another 25 formed the control group) by meeting and working with them twice a week for a period of ten weeks (out of the 20 weeks which was the complete time period for this study) in order to complete a community service project. Data concerning students’

disciplinary record were gathered twice during the study: a) when the principal completed his/her 10-week involvement with the students, b) when the study was completed at the end of 20 weeks. The results of this study clearly demonstrated that misbehaviour reduced greatly during the time that the principal of the school was involved in the project and interacted with the students. To the contrary, when the principal's involvement came to an end, behavioural problems resurfaced. In his conclusion, Calabrese emphasized that the building of adult-adolescent relationships promotes both positive collaboration and the display of proper behaviour.

In line with Calabrese's study (1985), Carey's study (1980) investigated the impact that four administrators had on the disruptive behaviour of a group of students. The administrators met weekly with the students and advised them on a variety of issues, especially personal problems that seemed to influence their behaviour negatively. All four administrators in Carey's study concluded that positive adult-adolescent interactions may have a great impact on students' behaviour and on their school perspective. The same conclusion was also reached by Kadel and Follman (1993), who observed in their study that antisocial behaviours decreased when principals tried to establish caring relationships with their students (see also McDonald, 1999).

As it is evident from existing research, in order to create constructive and trusting relationships with students, the principal and his/her administrative team need to get closer to students and get to know them personally. As Johnson (1980) sustains, meeting students for the first time when they are being referred to the administrator's office, does not offer the most appropriate ground for creating trusting relationships, because when students earn themselves a referral they automatically switch-on their defensive mode. By getting to know students personally and ahead of possible problematic situations, the school faculty is "better able to anticipate potentially violent or disruptive behaviour and deal with it before it erupts" (Klonsky, 2002, p. 67). Personalization, however, may prove



problematic in large size schools, since it is practically unrealistic and/or impossible for both principals and the faculty to get to know all students. Personalization is in general a common characteristic of small schools, which, as research shows, are more effective in dealing with disciplinary problems. In an environment where there is an "increased sense of identity and community" the demonstration of problematic behaviours is largely decreased (Klonsky, 2002, p.66).

So far this section examined the disciplinarian role of the principal and the strategies that an effective leader should have in place so as to create an orderly school environment where disruptive behaviour is discouraged or prevented and where teachers feel satisfied with their work. Let us not forget that what a principal does can have a great impact both on the teacher and the student. In a school where the principal does not initiate 'a sense of order and structure' and there are no established behavioural standards or agreed upon disciplinary routines, everyone acts as they believe they should especially in cases involving disciplinary matters. The inconsistent handling of disruptive behaviour, as widely recognized, can generate or increase behavioural problems and affect the entire school climate. The principal of the school should also set some mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of disciplinary practices and alter them if necessary.

Providing their schools with 'a sense of purpose and direction' is another strategy used by leaders of well-disciplined and successful schools. Leaders should set goals, have high expectations and direct their schools towards a vision. When people work towards accomplishing certain goals, they feel that their life is meaningful and therefore worthy of their efforts. In order for principals, however, to win teachers' support for their vision they must support them right back and establish quality relationships with them. They should care for their teachers, listen to their concerns and 'back them' up when they have to. An effective disciplinarian-principal should also make him/herself highly visible and approachable and should get to know his/her students as well, since as research shows, the involvement of the principal with the students can highly affect their behaviour.



If the aforementioned strategies are not set up in a school, obstreperous situations will be created where nothing works well and nothing gets done. Every little or big thing in the school organization is interlinked, and where synergy is not present, chaos rules. School leaders are considered very significant in setting and creating a well-ordered school environment. With their actions and inactions they have the power to affect both the school's proper functioning as well as their teachers and students' outcomes.

### **3.2.7 Effect of external pressure on school principals:**

At this point, however, it has to be mentioned that there are some scholars who challenge the notion of the empowered school leader and argue that principals can only be as effective in their leadership as external influences permit them to be (DeBevoise, 1982). As Short and Greer (1997) explain, schools are characterized by bureaucratic patterns, in which the people at the top (i.e. Central Office, District Office, Ministry of Education) run the people at the bottom that is the people in the school. Principals are considered "middle managers" and their duty is to run the school according to the instructions and mandates of the competent authority, whether that is called Central Office, Ministry of Education or District office. As such, principals cannot act as autonomously as they would like or as some may think. Their actions are very much restrained by "bureaucratic realities [that] make the life of the successful middle-manager principal pretty routine and colorless" (Short & Greer, 1997, p. 57).

To that effect, Males' study (2001) examined the impact of external influences on beginning headteachers/principals in England. More specifically, Males looked at the pressure mostly felt by headteachers/principals from external sources and concluded from his data analysis that the greatest source of pressure was a result of the actions of the central government (legislation, new curricula, and national improvement projects) as well as the daily interactions of the headteachers/principals with students' parents. Furthermore, Trider and

Leithwood's research (1988), which looked at the influences on principals' practices found, *inter alia*, that although the majority of the principals in their study felt quite autonomous regarding their decision making process, they could only go as far as their boards permitted them to do so. They also felt constrained "by the amount and nature of planning by central office staff, their attitude and the assistance they provided" (p. 299) and expressed their desire both for more autonomy in their decision-making capacity and more support by the central office with regard to challenging disciplinary cases that involved students' parents (p.306).

However important the principal is considered by the literature because of his/her power to influence the school's environment and affect the behaviour of his/her students and staff, it has to be acknowledged that the principal can also be very restrained in his/her actions by the competent educational authority. Therefore, in order to have a school where an orderly environment is in place, consensus on a variety of issues should not only be established between the principal and the school staff, but also between the principal and the competent authority. The role of the competent authority should be to enable and provide the school leader and his/her faculty with the necessary autonomy in decision-making, which will ultimately allow the school to maintain the proper functioning of its policies and attain its vision.

### 3.3 The Teacher-Student relationship

#### 3.3.1 School context and students' behavioural adjustment:

As argued by the majority of scholars, the context/environment where one develops constitutes a very significant influence for the individual's personal and general social adjustment. Therefore, on examining the internalizing and externalizing problems that early adolescents may face, most researchers look for answers, initially, in the youngster's family and peer environment since it is the first social

context that an individual comes in contact with. The school context, which comprises the second largest social organization for teenagers, because of the time they spend there, has received trivial attention by scholars despite its absolute power to influence adolescents' development and adjustment and its great potential to shape inadvertently, but decisively children's self perceptions, experiences and life courses (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003; Loukas & Robinson, 2004; Rutter et al. 1979; Stockard, & Mayberry, 1992).

"Contextual influences", as Loukas and Robinson (2004) maintain, "may act as risk factors, elevating risk for negative outcomes, or as putative protective factors, moderating the impact of risk factors on adolescent outcomes" (p. 210). Many researchers have, in fact, suggested that the school climate/context has the capacity to serve as a protective factor, by protecting at-risk adolescents from experiencing emotional and behavioural problems, if what adolescents perceive and concomitantly receive from school is a positive, supportive and nurturing environment (McNeely & Falci, 2004; Loukas & Murphy, 2007; Loukas & Robinson, 2004). More specifically, the study of Kuperminc, Leadbeater and Blatt (2001), which examined the role of student-perceived overall school climate in the appearance of students' internalizing and externalizing problems, found that students who reported being satisfied by the high quality of their school climate exhibited no problems in the subsequent school year. Nonetheless, an in-depth analysis of each of the school climate components (among which were student interpersonal relationships, fairness, parent involvement, order and discipline, achievement motivation, sharing of resources, and teacher-student relationships) revealed that only teacher-student relationships and fairness were "unique predictors" of adolescent externalizing behaviours. In reinforcing Loukas and Robinson's statement, Resnick et al. also sustain that "Of the constellations of forces that influence adolescent health risk behaviour<sup>9</sup>, the most fundamental are the social contexts in which adolescents are embedded: the family and school contexts

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<sup>9</sup> Health risk behaviours: emotional health, suicidal thoughts and behaviours, violence, use of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana (Vitto, 2003, p.8).



are among the most critical" (in Vitto, 2003, p. 8). Their study, titled "Protecting adolescents from harm", found that positive emotional connections to teachers (besides students' connection to their parents) could help prevent students from engaging in any health risk behaviours (however, as we will later see in this section, there are limits to the effects that a positive emotional connection may have in preventing adolescents' health risk behaviours). According to their research, school policies, teacher training, classroom rules and class size did not prove as powerful to protect adolescents from destructive behaviours as strong positive relations with teachers. Besides protecting adolescents from destructive behaviours, positive teacher-student relationships are further cited as being able to motivate students, promote their academic achievement and prevent bullying, substance abuse, violence and student dropout (Baker et al., 2003; Bru, Stephens & Torsheim, 2002; Davis, 2003; Libbey, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Pomeroy, 1999; Simons-Morton, Davis-Crump, Haynie, & Saylor, 1999; Vitto, 2003)

### **3.3.2 The teacher-student relationship and its effects on disruptive behaviour-**

#### **The concept of social bonding:**

This section will deal particularly with the teacher-student relationship and examine its association with students' disruptive behaviour. The in-depth investigation of the nature of this relationship and its connection to disruptive behaviour is very essential, not only because such challenging behaviours disrupt school and societal harmony, but also because such behaviours can have deleterious effects both on the individual and others. As Ron and Roberts (2000) very aptly put it, "Disruptive behaviours may interfere with academic and vocational success as well as contribute to chronic maladjustment and unhappiness" (p.2). At the same time, the teacher-student relationship provides an intriguing quest to the researcher who can attempt to disclose the several different ways that teachers can affect "[...] their students' quality of life, including affecting whether students engage in harmful behaviours and affecting their emotional health and resilience" (Vitto, 2003, p. 4).

To examine, however, the possible connections which the teacher-student relationship may have on an adolescent's disruptive behaviour and emotional health, one has to first search for the ways in which teachers can have such a tremendous impact on their students' lives. The key idea here is social bonding. The concept of social bonding derives from social control theory<sup>10</sup>; a theory which proves, with the support of a consistent amount of empirical evidence, that social bonding has the potential not only to discourage anti-social behaviour but also to prevent the more serious initiation of risk-taking behaviour (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Hirschi, 1971; McBride, Curry, Cheadle, Anderman, Wagner, Diehr & Psaty, 1995; Simons- Morton et al. 1999; Wilson, 2004). The effects of social bonding can also be explained by the feeling of belongingness that it creates for individuals. If students feel bonded with their school and experience positive and nurturing relations with administrative staff, teachers and peers, then they will also experience a sense of belonging which is vital for an individual's well being and which will discourage them from engaging in norm-breaking activities. In stressing the significance of belongingness, Baumeister and Leary (1995) sustained that "Much of what humans do is done in the service of belongingness. Thus, if belongingness is a need rather than simply a want, then people who lack belongingness should exhibit pathological consequences beyond mere temporary distress" (p. 498).

School is a social institution in which social interactions and bonding take place. "Students who (...) develop positive social bonds with their schools are more likely to perform well academically and refrain from misconduct and other antisocial

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<sup>10</sup> Social Control Theory starts from the principle that human behaviour is by nature antisocial and delinquent. As Hirschi (1971) sustains "we are all animals and thus all naturally capable of committing criminal acts" (p.31). However, it also makes the acknowledgement that the majority of humans do not commit crimes and ascribes this 'accomplishment' to the social bonds that individuals create with key-people in their lives such as parents, teachers, friends and relatives who commit to, and internalize, societal norms and value things such as, among others, being educated, having a good job, and being successful. By creating social bonds, the individual is concomitantly creating an attachment to societal norms and deters from violating those norms out of fear (mostly) of losing his/her social bonds. "If [however] a person feels no emotional attachment to a person or institution, the rules of that person or institution tend to be denied legitimacy" (Hirschi, 1971, p. 127).



behaviour" (Simons-Morton et al., 1999, p.99). A more recent study by Decker, Dona and Christenson (2007), which examined the connection between having a positive student-teacher relationship and attaining positive outcomes, found that it was possible for students who felt that they had a good relationship with their teachers to engage less in behaviours that could lead to referrals and more in their academic courses. Therefore, although this study examined a specific group of students (only African-Americans who were behaviourally at-risk), it proved that the teacher-student relationship could be a reliable indicator of student engagement outcomes. In contrast, students who develop a negative affiliation with their teachers and feel detached and disliked by their school environment, tend to isolate themselves from others and thus run a greater risk of engaging in problematic behaviours (such as fighting, bullying, truancy, vandalism and substance use), since they feel unbounded by any contextual or societal restrains (Jessor, Van-de Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995).

Avoiding to engage in any norm-breaking behaviour occurs because '*bonding*' preconditions receptiveness and compliance to the conventional norms, values and beliefs that characterise the social system (Bru et al., 2002; Jessor et al., 1995). Catalano et al. (2004) believe that "Once [the social bond] is strongly established, [it] inhibits behaviours [which] are inconsistent with the beliefs held and behaviours practiced by the socialization unit (...)" (p. 252). The strong bond/attachment has even the power, according to Hirschi (1971), to act as an unconscious/informal protective factor, that can prevent individuals from behaving inappropriately even when there is no one 'present' to force them to comply with the social unit's rules. This prolific bond, however, will only act as a protective factor and provide the desirable outcomes, if the adolescent chooses the 'right bond/connection'. For, there are two types of bonds/connections: 1) the "conventional bond/connection" which entails that the youngster will relate to people who conform to social norms and who can also control/regulate the prosocial behaviour of others and 2) the "unconventional bond/connection" in which the adolescent relates to individuals,



peers or not, who are 'un-conformed', and who have a problematic behaviour (McNeely & Falci, 2004).

Teachers are more likely to provide the 'conventional option' for students, since they conform to societal, prescriptive norms and have the capacity and, in essence, the duty to guide their students through conventional paths that discourage risk-taking behaviour. The same, however, does not apply for peers, who can provide both 'conventional' and 'unconventional' options depending on the positive or negative orientations that the peer-group commits or is exposed to (McBride et al., 1995; McNeely & Falci, 2004). The question that rises here, then, is 'What can teachers do in order to attract and keep students to the 'conventional side' which can prevent them from involving in disruptive behaviour?

### **3.3.3 Factors that contribute to the development of student resilience**

Teacher support is one of the most prominent findings, as many studies show, which is related both with a student's connectedness/bonding to school and with sustaining a vigorous and balanced teacher-student relationship (Libbey, 2004; Pomeroy, 1999). Adolescents who feel personally cared for and supported by their teachers throughout their learning-journey, are more likely to remain connected and engaged to their school and learning process, try their best as students by sincerely committing to their educational pursuits, and involve less in misbehaviour or any health-risk behaviours (Geving, 2007; Hawkins, Doueck & Lishner, 1988; Klem & Connell, 2004; McNeely, & Falci, 2004). As Vitto (2003) argues, "Students who experience caring [and supportive] relationships develop the belief, I am cared for and [therefore] worthwhile" (p.11).

Being a supportive teacher, however, entails using a series of instructional/teaching practices which: a) ease the building of an excellent rapport with students, b) recognize and appreciate each student's strengths and weaknesses, c) help develop those skills that encourage students to actively participate in inside and outside

classroom activities, d) provide the right feedback and reinforcement in order to ensure the consistent involvement of students in their learning process, and e) facilitate the creation of a democratic environment where there is no use of ultimatums, emotional or physical threat, and inconsistency (Bru et al. 2002; Hawkins et al., 1988).

In order to be able to provide the appropriate learning support, it is necessary that a teacher possesses the quality of 'teaching well', a quality that entails, *inter alia*, teaching in a different, more lively and interesting way (Bru et al., 2002; Hirschi, 1971; Pomeroy, 1999). By 'teaching well', a teacher has more chances of establishing a good rapport with students, attracting their attention, engaging them in their learning process, and preventing them from developing or engaging in any norm-breaking behaviour (Hirschi, 1971). On the contrary, a teacher's failure to teach effectively is viewed as problematic by students, who lose interest in the subject fast and try to find other ways to spend their time in class, either more productively or disruptively. As Bru et al. (2002) put it, "When teachers teach well and provide [the] appropriate learning support, students are more likely to succeed instead of becoming frustrated and withdrawing or 'playing up'" (p.290).

Despite the fact, though, that supportive teacher-student relationships may prevent severe student misbehaviour in the classroom and school, it is an extremely hard task for teachers to forestall any health risk behaviours for students that are already involved in them, with the exception of violence (McNeely & Falci, 2004). And this is because a student's tendency to involve in health risk behaviours shows that the student is willing to disengage from conventional rules despite the support he/she may receive from the teacher. Therefore, teacher support can be beneficial and provide positive outcomes only when applied *proactively* on a student.

Apart from engaging students in their learning, promoting achievement and preventing students from misbehaviour, considerable research has revealed that teacher support/care also constitutes one of the three main protective factors



connected to the development of *resilience* (Baker et al., 2003; Smith Harvey 2007; Vitto, 2003); a unique quality which every human being should possess in order to be able to defeat and overcome any existing or upcoming adverse circumstances and misfortunes. Without resilience, as Smith Harvey (2007) informs us, one cannot deal “effectively with difficulties that might otherwise lead to anxiety, depression, withdrawal, physical symptoms, or poor achievement” (p.34). A teacher cannot rectify, of course, all the adversities that students face or will face in the future (such as divorced parents, illness, death of a beloved person, sexual/verbal abuse, racism, financial difficulties, moving, alcoholism, friendship problems etc), but if a student perceives that his/her teacher understands, sympathizes, encourages, cares and supports him/her, he/she may feel more secure to deal with adversities and therefore more willing to behave well and constantly improve. In supporting, caring and sympathizing with students, however, teachers should not allow students, under any circumstances, to benefit from their misfortunes or disabilities since, as Robertson (1996) argued, students “can turn their problems to passports for educational immunity” (p.109). What teachers should do is to teach their students to take the situation in their hands and guide their progress by never allowing themselves to become “passive victims of circumstance”.

Having high expectations for students and giving them the opportunity to participate and contribute, constitute the remaining two of the most significant protective factors which, along with teacher support/care, can foster ‘resilience’ to students, protect them from harm and reinforce the conventional bond to teachers (Vitto, 2003). In an effective, interactive classroom, teachers convey high expectations and expect the best both from themselves and from all students (Davis, 2003). To achieve such an outcome, however, it is of outmost importance for teachers not to make any differentiations between high and low achievers, but on the contrary to promote and positively reinforce each student’s unique intelligences and varied abilities. This in-class teacher attitude is essential for student development since, as Raider Roth (2005) argued, “The fundamental relationships of school shape the ways that students learn to see themselves as effective



participants in the learning process who have the capacity to develop their own ideas, articulate these ideas, and participate in collective thinking” (p.22). Moreover, research has also proved that children and adolescents ‘thrive developmentally’ on approval, recognition and confirmation and that in a school environment teachers, counsellors and administrators can facilitate this development by cooperating with students and by paying particular attention to their attributes in order to assist them to realise their own competencies (Metcalf, 2003, p. 101, 103).

In-class participation, validation and approval, in turn, are directly linked with achievement levels and misbehaviour. As McEvoy and Welker (2000) explain, “Opportunities for all to [participate] [and] achieve mastery can increase achievement levels and reduce antisocial behaviours” (p. 137). Being antisocial, acting out and misbehaving is, most of the times, the outcome of not feeling accepted, validated and successful. As for the relation that teacher expectation has on achievement levels and anti-social behaviours, years of research into teacher expectation effects has revealed that expectations definitely exist in classrooms and that students’ achievement levels and attitudes towards school can be significantly influenced, either in a positive or negative way, by what teachers think and expect from them, as well as by how they deem their efforts (Eisenhower, Baker & Blacher, 2007; Hawkins et al., 1988; Martin, 1984; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Rubie-Davies, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006).

It should be noted that teacher expectation effects form two categories: a) Sustaining expectation effects and b) Self-fulfilling prophecy effects. The first category is largely based on teachers’ beliefs that their students cannot change either their attitude or performance level and will continue to act and perform in the same way they always have. On the other hand, self-fulfilling prophecy effects, occur when a belief which seemed to be false at the beginning proved to be true at the end. The major self-fulfilling prophecy effects are known as Golem and Galatea effects. As Rubie-Davies et al. (2006) explained: “Golem effects are undesirable and negative effects which are the result of low teacher expectations that impede student

academic achievement. Galatea effects, in contrast, are desirable and positive effects, which are the result of high teacher expectations that augment student academic achievement" (p. 430).

#### **3.3.4 Class victims, teachers' pets and disruptive behaviour:**

Most teachers not only vary in the expectations they have from their students but also tend to equate their personal professional success with the results their students attain on standardized tests. This attitude, subsequently, prompts teachers to give their undivided attention to those students who can validate their profession and promote their careers, while neglecting those who receive low scores and presumably have other, non-academic life expectations after school (McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Martin, 1984). This obvious 'segregation' of students into high and low achievers by their teachers and the relative handling of students according to their intelligence or capabilities, gave rise to two categories of students, identified as the 'class victims' and the 'teacher's pets'. What needs to be clarified here is that both categories are formed by how students themselves perceive their interactions with their teachers and peers in the classroom. 'Class victims', are evidently the students who feel uncared for, rejected and/or mistreated by their teachers, while 'teachers' pets' can be defined as the students who receive exclusive attention, support and preferential treatment/favouritism by their teachers.

In Martin's study (1984), which examined students' perceptions of 'class victims' and 'teacher's pets', students reported that the criteria, they believed, their teachers used in order to compare and differentiate them were their 'smartness' or 'stupidity' levels, as well as the results they received on written exams and assignments. One of the consequences of teachers' 'favouritism' was that students who felt mistreated by their teachers reported that "they bec[a]me 'annoyed' with their teachers and 'turned off' from their school work" (p.94). The students' answers in Martin's study revealed that their teachers' behaviour and perceptions of their capacities greatly influenced both their learning process and their behaviour in the class setting. For



these 'left out' students, academic failure, disciplinary problems and even dropping out of school can be explained, up to a point, by the teachers' perceptions, actions in the classroom, and plans of action for each student.

Another consequence felt by 'class victims' is that their teachers always 'picked on' them, most of the times unfairly, and practically charged them with all the wrongdoing in the classroom, such as noise, disruption etc. The majority of teachers do not of course admit or feel that they 'pick on' some students. For them, anyone who interrupts normal classroom proceedings may receive or be subjected to the same kind of treatment, such as a soft reprimand or a more severe sanction according to the student's behaviour. However, a research study by Babad, Bernieri and Rosenthal (1989) revealed that students who think that they are 'picked on' by their teachers might not be entirely mistaken or imagining things after all. In this study, a group of people observed and filmed teachers while teaching in a number of classrooms. Observers examined how teachers talked and behaved towards students that they described beforehand as 'good students of high potential' or 'weak students of low potential'. The observations revealed that teachers do behave differently when talking about a 'good' or a 'weak' student. This finding was also apparent on teachers' facial expressions in the short films that the observers recorded (the short films were watched with the mute button on, in order to specifically observe the teachers' facial expressions when talking to a 'good' or a 'weak' student. The mute button helped the observers concentrate on the teacher's face without being affected by what the teacher actually said to the student).

In supporting the Babad et al. study, Decker et al. (2007) also found that teachers are more likely to refer students that they have a negative relationship with than students that they have a positive relationship, proving also that teachers are less tolerant with students they do not get along with.

Classroom interactions were also studied by Ron and Roberts (2000) who, in a three year study, examined in detail the on-going reciprocal interactions between



teachers and students in the field of disruptive behaviours. Their study showed that teachers were inclined to respond differently to students who repeatedly exhibited high-rates or severe forms of disruptive behaviour (*target students*) than to students who did not exhibit disruptive behaviour often (*criterion students*). While target students would, more often than not, receive a reprimand for their act of misbehaviour, criterion students would only receive a simple command/instruction (e.g. Do not repeat what you just did). Ron and Roberts' findings are consistent with the Babad et al. study (1989), which suggests that teachers do tend to interact negatively rather than positively with students who have behavioural problems. However, although Ron and Roberts (2000) find this tendency to be, up to a point, reasonable and justified in that teachers must also protect the rights of other students whose classmates' behaviour might be cruel and offensive, Babad et al. (1989) stress particularly the harmful effects that this tendency may have, since it can lead to the reinforcement of the deviant identity of the offender (thus contributing to the process of 'labeling'<sup>11</sup> as described by sociologists) and to the imminent apprehensive or angry reaction of the student who is being continually reprimanded in front of his/her classmates/peers.

According to Long (2005), the student who 'loses face' in front of his/her classmates can either have a 'fight' or 'flight' response. In the 'fight' response, the student may attack the teacher verbally or physically in order to defend him/herself and to show his/her classmates that the teacher's attitude did not bother him/her. In the 'flight' response, the offended student may be unable to attack the teacher and thus leaves the classroom quickly to avoid compliance or further escalation of the conflict. In Pomeroy's study (1999), which examined the perceptions of excluded students on teachers' qualities that can either encourage or thwart the development of positive

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<sup>11</sup>Labeling theory (or social reaction theory): refers to the classification of an individual (who is seen as deviant from the norm) into a specific social category and his/her differential treatment because of this classification (Schur, 1971). The labeling process also refers to the great impact that such a classification may have on the labeled individual's self-identity and behavior. As Rains, Kitsuse, Duster and Freidson (2003) sustain "[the differential] treatment may allocate identities which are real for those around the person and must therefore be taken into account by the deviant, even when those identities appear murky, elusive and difficult to confront" (p. 112)

relations, students stressed how important they considered the way that their teachers talked and interacted with them. For these students, respectful interactions, proper talk and being treated as adults rather than small children made the perfect ingredients for the ideal teacher-student relationship.

In the field of teacher-student interactions, we also come across Pollard's study (cited in Cullingford & Morrison, 1995), which paid particular attention to the way that teachers can differentiate or label students. More specifically, Pollard's study examined how subtle forms of bullying employed by teachers, either consciously or unconsciously, tend to create unfriendly and hostile environments where some students feel accepted and cared for, and others rejected and isolated. As Cullingford and Morrison (1995) underlined, "The classroom situation is always potentially threatening for children and constant evaluation may leave them vulnerable. Criticism and praise are felt directly and have a significant influence upon children's self image" (p.551).

Although research on teacher-to-student bullying seems scarce (there are no national studies of this phenomenon) compared to the research on peer-to-peer bullying, it should be mentioned that this type of bullying can have as grave consequences for students as peer-to-peer bullying. McEvoy's related pilot study (2005), indicated that students who are being bullied by teachers often "experience confusion, anger [...] [and at the same time] feel emotionally distraught and fearful with no place to turn for help" (p.7). In addition, teacher-to-student bullying may as well hinder student learning since children who are singled out and treated by their teachers as 'stupid', 'slow' or 'maladapted' may in time adopt the labels ascribed to them and create strong feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. What is more worrying, is that these students may at the end develop a strong aversion towards the teacher(s) who threatened their sense of self worth, treated them unfairly, and rejected them and gradually disengage or even dropout from school altogether (Thomas, 2003).



Teachers' different expectations, negative attitudes, and subtle forms of bullying towards some students, may provoke peer-to peer-bullying as well. Even though there is no concrete evidence to suggest that teacher-to-student bullying can lead to peer-to-peer bullying, McEvoy's pilot study (2005) implied that the differential treatment that some students experience from their teachers can definitely set them apart from the rest of the class and make the targeted student a 'scapegoat' among peers. In contrast, Martin's study (1984), indicated how the antipathetic feelings that 'targeted students' or 'class victims' develop towards their teachers and peers may lead them to engage themselves in the process of victimising those classmates they consider as being favoured by their teachers. Thus, students who seek their teachers' attention and eventually become their teachers' favourites, may sometimes undergo their own path of isolation as they find it difficult to be accepted by their classmates who, in every given opportunity, harass and ridicule them. Such hostile environments can, of course, be prevented and positive peer relationships can be fostered, if teachers are supportive, employ uniformity and equality in their expectations and do not show favouritism to any particular students. As Bru at al. (2002) argue, the higher the levels of teacher support perceived by all students, irrespective of their abilities, the less the antisocial relations will be exhibited by them.

### **3.3.5 Teacher-fairness and student-misbehaviour:**

Besides teachers' support, having high expectations for students and giving them the opportunity to participate and contribute, fairness is another teacher attribute which strikes a cord to students' minds and an adept way of attracting students to the 'conventional bond'. As mentioned earlier in this section, the study conducted by Kuperminc, Leadbeater and Blatt, (2001) indicated that 'fairness' was one of the school climate components which, along with the teacher-student relationship component, were found to be unique predictors of adolescents' externalizing behaviours. In addition, fairness proved to be associated with student satisfaction, as students who felt satisfied and enjoyed their classes believed that their respective



teachers were fair, firm and consistent (Libbey, 2004; Simons-Morton et al., 1999). Fairness and consistency are two concepts that are clearly interconnected for students, who deem that in order for teachers to be fair, they need to also be impartial, show no signs of favouritism to certain individuals (e.g. high-achieving students) or group of students (e.g. students who participate in the school's choir or athletic team etc) and consistently reprimand or sanction any student who misbehaves, no matter who the student is or how many times in the past he/she has misbehaved.

The application, therefore, of a homogeneous/uniform system of sanctions for all acts of student misbehaviour, irrespective of the identity of the student, is key to students' perception of teacher fairness and consistency. Consistency, however, should not only be employed on the type of sanctions but also on the timing of the imposed sanctions, since the credibility of the teacher and of the rules in general could be jeopardized if a teacher does not act on misbehaviour right when it occurs. If a teacher makes the critical mistake of not sanctioning the student right away and decides to act on it after repeated disruptions, then the consequence might not be well taken by the youngster, who could become upset and react in an angry fashion because he/she feels that the teacher is being totally unfair, in that the same misbehaviour which has occurred several times in the past (by the same or a different student) did not receive an equal or similar reaction (Geving, 2007; Vitto, 2003).

### **3.3.6 Teacher burnout and consequences:**

One should keep in my mind, of course, that anger is a two-way emotion since the provocative actions of one person can stir up a response from the receiver (Schwartz, 1978). In our case, student anger can provoke teacher anger which, when exemplified, can result in grave consequences both for teachers and students. When teachers get angry, they can either confront students straight away (by reprimanding them, or by sending them to the principal's/headmaster's office) or

suppress their anger and develop “passive-aggressive” reactions to revenge and punish students, such as pop-up tests which can lower students’ grades, being ill-prepared for classes which leads to an ineffective learning environment for all students, and generally display less zeal for teaching. As Thomas (2003) informs us, “When [anger piles up] [and] conflict remains unresolved, there may be prolonged rumination about grievances, eventually leading to such sequelae as lowered self-esteem, depression, and *burnout*”(p. 21).

Burnout is considered to be one of the worst consequences facing teachers today, because of its potentially severe effects for teachers’ career and students’ learning outcomes. “[Professional] burnout, has long been recognized as an important stress-related problem for people who work in interpersonally oriented occupations such as the human services” (Maslach & Leiter, 1999, p. 295); it refers to “a set of symptoms that an individual may develop during prolonged exposure to high levels of work stress and that negatively affects mental and physical fitness, job satisfaction and perceived performance” (Van Der Linden, Keijsers, Eling, Van Schaijk, 2005, p. 23). One of the main dimensions of the burnout syndrome is *emotional exhaustion*, which describes individuals who feel completely depleted and emotionally drained because of high levels of stress stemming from their jobs. *Depersonalization* constitutes the second dimension of burnout and it refers to the growth of unfriendly/uncongenial responses as well as the creation of negative feelings and attitudes towards people with whom one cooperates or relates. Lastly, *personal accomplishment* composes the third dimension of the burnout syndrome which denotes to the personal feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem that characterize burnout individuals (Friesen & Sarros, 1989).

Teaching is considered to be an interpersonally oriented occupation, as it involves continuous contact and interaction with students. In addition, due to its interpersonal and interactive character as well as its capacity to offer emotional, affective and moral services to students, teaching further falls in the category of ‘*emotional practices*’ (Hargreaves, 2000; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999).



In their interactions with students, teachers need to often use 'surface acting'<sup>12</sup> in order to display or overstress some emotions and reduce or repress the expression of others. To attract their students' attention and to create and maintain a dynamic classroom environment, a teacher needs to be passionate and active. When trying to encourage and cajole apathetic and unmotivated students, teachers need to show enthusiasm and patience. When students are putting on their worst behaviour, offend, disrupt the lesson, or threaten the teacher, the teacher has to act calmly and deal with the situation in a non-aggressive way. When faced with an angry, judgmental parent, teachers need to be tranquil and cooperative. In general, teaching is high in emotional labour,<sup>13</sup> and while it can prove a very pleasurable and rewarding profession, as teachers can form wonderful relationships with their students and other educational stakeholders, it can also prove to be the starting place of 'emotionally draining and discouraging experiences' which are the outcome of faking emotions in order to satisfy and serve other people's purposes and objectives (Hargreaves, 2000; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). The experience from constant 'acting' and from faking emotions has proved capable of causing unprecedented stress to teachers and over time lead to the creation of emotional exhaustion (Näring, Briët and Brouwers, 2006). As Grandey (2003) explains, "While surface acting, an individual experiences emotional dissonance owing to the discrepancy between expressions and inner feelings (p.89).

Apart from the teachers' role to 'act', in the majority of times, there are many other stress factors that can emotionally wear teachers out. Student misbehaviour is one of the most commonly reported factors of teacher stress (Department of Education and Science, 2006). A study by Innes and Kitto, which examined Australian teachers' main causes of stress, ranked 'student misbehaviour' in the first place, while 'time pressure' and 'poor work environment' received lower but nonetheless important

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<sup>12</sup> "Surface Acting: the display of the characteristics of an emotion that are regarded as appropriate but are not actually felt" (Näring, Briët and Brouwers, 2006, p.304)

<sup>13</sup> Emotional labour: the expression of feelings you do not really feel (Näring et al., 2006).



rankings (in Geving, 2007). More recent studies have also pointed to the fact that student misbehaviour is progressively becoming more and more prevalent as a factor of teacher stress (Geving, 2007). Furthermore, student indiscipline, lack of appropriate language and tactful manners, disrespect, apathy, physical and psychological abuse, disregard of authority and noisiness are also included among student misbehaviours that can cause unmediated teacher stress and lead to emotional exhaustion (Department of Education and Science, 2006; Kyriacou, 2000; Smylie, 1999; Travers & Cooper, 1996).

Other than the student related causes, a great deal of research that dealt with the issue at hand, revealed that there are forces, beyond a teacher's control, that can become great stressors for teachers and consequently wear them out, such as constantly imposed change, administrative and managerial problems, being evaluated by inspectors, strained relationships with colleagues, slow or inadequate promotional opportunities, workload, lack of materials/resources<sup>14</sup> and unacceptable working conditions (Friesen & Williams, 1985; Kyriacou, 2000; Smylie, 1999; Travers & Cooper, 1996).

Teachers experiencing burnout usually exhibit symptoms in five broad areas: physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and behavioural. In the physical domain, burnout individuals experience symptoms such as a constant feeling of tiredness, fatigue, and a complete lack of energy to endure the school hours and confront another working day. If overly stressed, these individuals might even develop a heart disease or a psychosomatic illness (Kyriacou, 2000; Travers and Cooper, 1996).

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<sup>14</sup> Lack of materials/resources: Teachers are being urged to work more with fewer resources while at the same time they receive insignificant or no rewards and recognition for their efforts. Among teachers, there is the general feeling that although 'outside bodies' demand from teachers to use more modern methods, they do not provide them with the equipment to do so (Travers & Cooper, 1996; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999).

Being unable to concentrate in on-going thoughts as well as withholding a response, which might feel right to give at the moment but is completely inappropriate, are among the intellectual symptoms of burnout teachers. In general, burnout individuals show more lapses of attention, they are more distracted and forgetful, and have the tendency to give automatic responses which they might regret giving afterwards. The feelings of inadequacy that burnout teachers feel can worsen their intellectual capacity, weaken their work performance and further lead to regular absences from school.

Teachers' social behaviour towards their students is another area which can be affected by burnout. As Maslach and Leiter (1999), describe, '[...] burnout is predictive of "*minimalist*" [italics added] responses in terms of teacher effort, involvement, and investment" (p.298). This means that the teacher ceases to put so much effort or enthusiasm into identifying his/her students' achievements and positively encouraging them. Instead, it is more likely that burnout teachers will criticize their students more and provide them with negative feedback. An even worse outcome of the social symptoms of burnout is that teachers do not even feel like preparing or participating in any classroom activities which they would have, under other circumstances, thoroughly planned in advance. As the quality of their work steadily deteriorates, their teaching becomes more and more sterile and arid of imagination and creativity. According to Thomas (2003), "Some teachers are [even] known to adopt DBM (Doing the Bare Minimum) and counting the days to vacation or retirement" (p. 21).

Emotional symptoms can take the form of anxiety, helplessness, depression, irritability, general uneasiness, low self-esteem and insecurity (Kyriacou, 2000; Travers & Cooper, 1996). Moreover, burnout teachers gradually detach from their students and working environment and tend to treat everyone and everything with 'a minimum of emotions'. Their students' personal or even academic problems do not concern them and their desire to get involved with or sympathize with their students' circumstances lessens. As their burnout level increases, their

understanding and interest towards students decreases. The majority of them build an “emotional wall” around them and strive to ward off any proximity efforts. In addition, they become inflexible and more inclined to adopt zero tolerance policies and plans of action to deal with any classroom noisiness or disruption (Pomeroy, 1999; Ron & Roberts, 2000; Rudow, 1999). Their social interactions with students are restricted in following the ordinary routine as well as relying on prescribed rules and procedures. In other cases of communication, burnout teachers may handle students in an extremely negative and contemptuous way by using sarcasm as a mean which can help them reduce, but more importantly release their tension and frustration. Also, the colleagues of burnout individuals may become the recipients of their scornful comments against the students, the school administration and even the school district (Brock & Grady, 2000).

Lastly, the behavioural manifestations of the burnout syndrome can be noticed in various problematic attitudes adopted by the affected individuals, such as not being able to control their behaviour, developing appetite or sleeping disorders, using drugs, smoking and consuming excessive quantities of alcohol, being violent, abusive etc (Travers & Coopers, 1996).

The consequences of teacher burnout are severe and leave their mark not only on teachers but also on their students who, along with their educators, pay the ‘high price’ of burnout as well. In response to teacher burnout symptoms, “students are likely to change their perception of the teacher, their feelings towards the teacher and their behaviour in the classroom” (Maslach & Leiter, 1999, p. 298). As burnout levels increase and teachers become less involved and less willing to respond to their students’ educational and emotional needs, students become less enthusiastic, less motivated and gradually less engaged with their learning and performance (Davis, 2003). What is worse is that they may develop a lower sense of efficacy or competency because of the negative feedback they receive from their teachers, see no connection between school and their future and ultimately disengage from school and their learning process (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). This is an outcome most



feared by both teachers and parents because students' disengagement from school can possibly lead to other less conventional and riskier activities.

Given the above mentioned consequences that teacher burnout may have on an adolescent's behaviour and future, it is imperative that teacher burnout is effectively treated, so that teachers' negative behaviours will not be able to trigger stressful student behaviours. The key to combat teacher burnout can be traced in the same elements that students need, in order to keep on being productive and motivated and refrain from engaging in disruptive or harmful behaviours. As is the case for students, teachers also have the need to feel that they belong in the school and the system that they work for, and that they are being supported, respected, recognised and rewarded for their efforts (Wangberg, 1982). Moreover, they need to feel satisfied with the way that their school administration and their superiors handle and solve their immediate or long-term problems. Most importantly, teachers need to have the power to influence or at least have a real say in any policy that can affect their job satisfaction and/or their relationship with students. Policy makers do not understand and do not experience the classroom or the students as teachers do. This is why they tend to create school structures which are so 'detailed' and 'complex' in nature that they prohibit the development of any kind of understanding or meaningful relationship between teachers and students. As Hargreaves (2000) explains, "[in a] (...) subject-centred organization of schooling which makes integration difficult and [which] fragments the interactions between teachers and the excessive number of students they are required to teach, [both teachers and students feel unhappy, unproductive and unsatisfied]" (p. 815).

If policy makers, therefore, are to meet the best interests of teachers and students and make them happy, satisfied and productive, school structures should be designed in ways that would allow teachers and students to form positive meaningful relationships. As we have seen, such relationships can offer students the required social bond and appropriate support in order to discourage them from engaging in any disruptive or other risk-taking behaviours while, at the same time,

provide teachers with more satisfaction for their profession and with more tools to fight the catastrophic appearance of burnout.

As we have examined in this section, the formation of meaningful relationships is very significant for teachers and students, as it can affect their respective behaviours, attitude and well being. Through the mechanisms of receptiveness and compliance that permit the formation of a social bond, students can form positive conventional relationships with their teachers that can virtually discourage them from engaging in any norm-breaking or even health risk behaviour, out of respect to the values, beliefs and conventional norms of the created bond, as well as out of fear of ruining the much valued relation and losing their teachers' love and support. However, not all students opt for the conventional bond and teachers need to try their best to attract students to 'their side' and keep them out of trouble. This goal can, in essence, be achieved if teachers support their students, have high expectations for every single one of them, avoid showing any signs of favouritism to any student, provide their students with the opportunity to participate and contribute, 'teach well' and apply a fair and consistent attitude when dealing with misbehaviour. This teaching attitude, in turn, will provide teachers the opportunity to achieve three fundamental purposes: a) to develop bonding and a sense of belongingness to their students, b) foster resilience and c) help prevent them from developing norm-breaking or risk-taking behaviours.

Attracting students to the conventional bond and getting them to embrace and comply with the norms, values and beliefs that characterise the wider social system, is not only essential for the development of a healthy adolescent, but also for the well being and professional career of the teacher himself/herself. As it was argued in this section, students who develop a strong bond with their teachers tend to be connected and remain engaged in the school process and learning and are more likely to have increased academic achievement and involvement. Such classroom environments are ideal for teachers as well, since in these situations teachers do not have to face the stress created by student misbehaviour, which can emotionally

wear them out and gradually result in burnout. By bonding with students, fostering resilience and preventing them from developing norm-breaking or risk-taking behaviours, teachers, in essence, ensure their own personal well being and prevent the occurrence of burnout which can lead to negative consequences for teachers and students.

Unfortunately, however, even in the cases where teachers are eager and capable to form meaningful relationships with students, other outside forces which are beyond a teacher's control, confine the teacher role, constrain the teacher-student relationship and ultimately create enormous stress that may lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout. As Vitto (2003) puts it, "Most teachers want to connect with students. Time constraints [however], curricular demands, accountability and testing pressures can interfere with the teacher's desire to have positive and personal relationships with students" (p. 4). Therefore, if one is to help both teachers and students feel well and satisfied in their school environment, more emphasis has to be afforded in strengthening and maintaining a healthy, positive and qualitative relationship between teacher and student.

### 3.4 Curriculum

#### ***3.4.1 Disaffection as a motivational related problem:***

Fervent determination, insistence, and a desire to achieve certain goals constitute a few of the most prominent characteristics that a person should possess in order to attain his/her aspirations. These characteristics are considered prominent because they launch a person's motivational wheels that can eventually drive him/her to success. Without motivation there can be no result, no aspiration or goal achieved. According to Legault, Pelletier and Green-Demers (2006), "the absence of motivation can [also] lead to feelings of frustration, and discontentment and can encumber productivity and well-being" (p. 567).



Sadly, in the last two decades a decrease or even complete lack of academic motivation among high school students has been observed. Whereas in the past there were fewer students who exhibited feelings of academic amotivation, alienation and discontentment with school, nowadays more and more students seem to be lacking any desire to carry out any of the academic assignments required of them (Legault et al. 2006; see also Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1996; Johnson, McGue & Iacono, 2005; Reid, 1986; Solomon & Rogers, 2001; Tattum, 1986). What makes the situation even worse, is that these students do not even seem to bother with the consequences of an uncompleted task. This completely indifferent and apathetic attitude is explained by Legault et al. (2006) as the natural response of "Amotivated individuals [who] cannot predict the consequences of their behaviour, nor can they see the motive behind it. [These individuals] may feel disintegrated or detached from their action[s] and will (...) invest little effort or energy in its effectuation" (p.567).

A number of scholars concur that amotivation in school may be the result of several different reasons which are initially linked to: (a) a person's 'ability beliefs', (b) a person's 'effort beliefs', (c) the 'value' that a person 'places on the task' and (d) the 'characteristics of the task' (Hargreaves, 1982; Legault et al. 2006; Solomon & Rogers, 2001; Tattum, 1986).

a) A person's '*ability beliefs*' (also known as Self Efficacy Theory<sup>15</sup>), reflects "a person's expectations/beliefs about their ability/efficacy to apply appropriate strategies in order to execute a task" (Legault et al., 2006, p. 568). These beliefs seem to be directly influenced by the feedback a person receives from his/her environment. As McGuinness and Craggs (1986) inform us, "We all form two mental

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of self efficacy is a vital element in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and has become one of the most studied and popular issues amongst psychologists and educators alike since the publication of Bandura's book in 1977 "Self-Efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change". The main reason that this subject has gained such prominence is that self-efficacy has the power to influence a person's self-esteem, motivational drive and behavior (Bandura, 1977).

constructs: a picture of ourselves, a self image, and a clear perception of the kind of person who is valued, admired, imitated in our environment, an ideal self" (p.16). Our self-image and ideal self is reinforced when we receive positive feedback for our efforts when executing a task. On the contrary, if the feedback we receive for our efforts is negative, our self-image and ideal self will be distorted. Therefore, according to this theory, our responses are determined by the support and help we may or may not receive from our environment, especially our family, school and friends, which in turn can either result in relinquishing our efforts or act as a driving force that will push us to pursue our goals harder.

In applying the abovementioned theory to children, Tattum (1986) argues that children who fail to match their ideal self to their self-image might end up developing disruptive behaviour as a mechanism to protect their wounded self-esteem. Poor belief in one's ability is also, as Legault et al. (2006) sustain, "a driving component of academic disengagement [whereas] poor academic achievement is one of the strongest predictors of high school dropout" (p.568).

b) Scholars argue that 'Effort beliefs' is the second reason that can cause amotivation. According to this theory, a task is only completed when you apply the appropriate energy and effort. Although most students may have the ability to bring a task to an end and are fully aware of their capacity to do so, they are apathetic and unwilling to exert any kind of effort either because they feel uncertain of their aptitude to initiate a task or because they don't feel willing to sustain the energy required to carry out an academic task (Legault et al. 2006; see also Elliot, 1998; Johnson, McGue & Iacono, 2005; Solomon & Rogers, 2001).

c) Amotivation can also result when a task seems insignificant to deal with in the first place or irrelevant to an individual's life (Rudduck, Chaplain & Wallace, 1996). As Legault et al. (2006) support, "activities that are incongruent with self-expression are more difficult to maintain, and academic amotivation may be the

characteristic of school activities that are not expressions of one's self or of one's values" (p. 569).

d) Besides the strong influence of values that are ascribed on a given task, there are also the characteristics of the task that might push an individual to amotivation or complete academic disengagement. If a task seems monotonous, uninteresting, or difficult to a student, then he/she will most likely abandon the task or find ways to avoid executing the work required of him/her. 'Unappealing task characteristics' might cause students to act in disruptive ways, since they may find it impossible to concentrate on executing a task which is distasteful or hard (Elliot, 1998; Legault et al. 2006; Solomon & Rogers, 2001; Walker, 2003).

### **3.4.2 Curriculum and Disaffection:**

If one looks closely at the last two reasons that can cause amotivation in school, namely the value placed on the task and the characteristics of the task, it becomes apparent that student amotivation is the end result of accumulated disaffection that can spur from school related activities.

In this section, we will examine one of the most prominent factors connected to school disaffection, the curriculum and its offerings, which many scholars hold responsible for the disruptive and truant behaviour exhibited by disaffected pupils (Elliot, 1998; Gray, McPherson, & Raffee, 1983; Hargreaves et al., 1996; Reid, 1986; Schostak, 1991; Walker, 2003).

In order to examine this connection between the curriculum and school disaffection amongst students, we will turn our focus on investigating the following questions: Why do many students find school boring, valueless and uninteresting? In what ways do secondary schools and their curriculum offerings fail to engage students in the process of learning? Is there any evidence to support that it is not only



underachieving students that feel disengaged from the curriculum? How can students act or react when they are feeling disengaged?

According to a number of researchers and observers, the current educational system is outdated, as it has not really changed regarding its 'subject specialization', 'duration of program' and 'class periods' since the beginning of the twentieth century (Gray, McPherson, & Raffee, 1983; Tattum, 1986; Tyack & Tobin, 1994). On the issue of 'subject specialization' especially (which was a product of the Carnegie Unit-1906), Corbett et al. argue that this "is considered very much a 'sacred norm' at the secondary school level. Although these sacred norms of schooling appear timeless, natural or divine, they are, in many respects, arbitrary, developed for other purposes in other times" (as cited in Hargreaves et al. 1996, p.87). Yet, these "sacred norms" persist, and as time goes by they appear more and more timeless and fixed and cannot be changed easily, since they are so embedded in the school system that they are, in a way, considered to be the starting point upon which everything else revolves.

According to Tyack and Tobin (1994), this unchanging and static nature of the educational system is essentially the result of what they characterize as the 'grammar of schooling'. Just like the grammar of language, they argue, has set and determined rules and regulations for the use of language that are established and not easily challenged, the grammar of schooling has in a similar way "(...) become so well established [and institutionalized] that it is typically taken for granted..." (p.454) and is reluctant to embrace changes.

School subjects were in fact made up to serve the interests of working class students who wanted to take the opportunity provided to them, at the time, to attend high school. In Wake's words, "today's natural curriculum is an historically specific one that *does not meet the needs of all students* [italics added]" (as cited in Hargreaves et al. 1996, p. 87), since it remains dedicated to:

A particular constellation of knowledge, skills and abilities, the intellectual cognitive domain of propositional knowledge, which constitutes the central context of the main school subjects and which is assessed in public examinations. Other forms of knowledge, skill and ability are not by any means always ignored or excluded, but they are accorded a secondary position and are therefore less important (Hargreaves, 1982, p.59).

If we, therefore, take into consideration that the current school curriculum is outdated and fixated on a particular kind of knowledge, skills and abilities that serve only a part of the student population today, it should come as no surprise why some students, particularly the under-achieving or at-risk ones, are disaffected and dissatisfied by the curriculum, as their personal abilities and capacities are neither recognized, or taken into consideration by the given curriculum nor are they as highly regarded as the intellectual-cognitive abilities of others. As a result, these students are left feeling bored, detached and unvalued in their school setting.

As Gardner (1983) explains, however, intelligence is not a 'fixed' 'unitary trait' and there is not only one but a multiplicity of intelligences. As a consequence, a person may be much stronger and exceptional in some aspects of intelligence and less in others, but unfortunately have his/her intelligence ignored and not recognized by the current outdated school curriculum that may place absolutely no value on the particular kind of intelligence. In this respect, the curriculum should be more open and nurturing to all kinds of intelligences so that every single student achievement will be equally recognized and promoted (Gardner, 1983; Schostak, 1991).

Aside from the fact that the system is dated and does not serve the needs of all students, research has also shown that there are a number of ways in which secondary schools and their curriculum fail to engage students in the process of learning. According to many scholars, students find the curriculum too academic, very demanding and remarkably irrelevant to their lives (Elliot, 1998; Cawelti, 2006; Hargreaves et al. 1996; Reid, 1986; Schostak, 1991; Walker, 2003).

A research study by Rudduck et al. (1996), which examined students' experiences of learning and the way they receive teaching at the secondary school level, indicated that students' low levels of engagement in academic tasks were the result of: a) Unclear/vague links of the subject matter with the world outside school, and b) Insufficient involvement and identification of the student with the task. In a nutshell, students felt passive and unrelated towards the learning object, something which caused their disengagement from the entire process of learning.

The outcome of the students' interviews in the above mentioned research is reminiscent of Sayer's understanding of disaffected students. Sayer argues that the problem of disaffection "lies in curricular practices-whose aims, purposes and norms have failed to keep pace with social change" (as cited in Elliot, 1998, p. 47), thus leaving students indifferent towards the 'archaic' school practices. Sayer, of course, takes his argument a step further in suggesting that since nowadays students are able to access knowledge on their own, through their computers at home or through the Media, they do not need to attend school and to learn through outdated books and archaic teacher practices. For Sayer, it is students who attend school that have a serious problem (pathology of presence) and not the students who do not do so (pathology of absence). "Why", he asks, "should students prolong their dependence on adult authority through an organization invented for the ignorant and un-travelled masses when they have been the first to learn the use of information networks which proliferate around us, and brings the world to their fingertips?" (as cited in Elliot, 1998, p. 48). Sayer ends up claiming that students who attend school do so for other reasons (unthreatening school environment, company) and not because of the school's formal curriculum provision (Elliot, 1998; see also Carlen, Gleeson & Wardhaugh, 1992).

In a similar line as Sayer (as cited in Elliot, 1998) and Rudduck et al. (1996), O' Keefe's study on the reasons that students, of ages 10-11 truant from school, showed that around 30 percent of the students who truant do so because of their



disliking of particular school subjects. Only one in ten students reported that the reason they are absent from school is because they feel totally alienated from it, while the answer 'Not relevant to their lives' represented the most frequent response students gave in explaining why they feel disaffected from the school's curriculum offerings. 'Teacher not making the lessons attractive' and 'unappealing subject matter' were among the other reasons they reported (O' Keefe as cited in Elliot, 1998).

In a survey, which examined among others, the teachers' point of view on the main reasons of student disaffection, Kinder, Harland and Wakefield (1995) revealed that teachers, in accord with students, consider that the curriculum plays a significant role on student disengagement from the whole school procedure. Moreover, teachers linked curriculum disliking to student pressure and failure resulting from particular subject assessment at the end of the school year, an issue which will be examined in the following section.

In reinforcing the argument about the irrelevance of school subjects to students' daily lives, Carlen, et al. (1992) maintained that the National Curriculum undeniably fails to also reflect the continually changing realities of the labour market and the actual job opportunities that exist outside school, thus providing students with no incentive or motivation to understand and ultimately value the process of schooling. Carlen et al. (1992) believe, in fact, that the nonexistent relationship between the curriculum and the labour market forces influences students' attendance and discipline patterns in schools. It also discourages the comeback of dropout students, who cannot find any reason why they should return to school and resign themselves to the authority and control of any school system that will not provide them, at the end of the day, with any added-value skills for their lives outside school.

Hargreaves and his colleagues (1996) also pondered over the 'enormous gap' that exists between the skills and knowledge that the school currently provides its students with the ones they will actually need in the future, outside of school. If one

of the major goals of schooling is to prepare students to face the real world in the future, the secondary school education and curriculum has, in many ways, failed to do so, since it has not evolved to reflect the changes and meet the needs of modern and varied society. This failure, therefore, of the curriculum to engage students and make school exciting, interesting and meaningful to their lives has led to the disenchantment of numerous students with the school system and has created a severe 'crisis of secondary education and curriculum'.

Most people would very logically, but erroneously, assume that this curriculum crisis is only affecting underachieving students, since they are the ones who usually exhibit feelings of disillusionment with the school system by not attending school or by being disruptive when they are at school. On the basis of this assumption, therefore, one could very reasonably conclude that the curriculum crisis is not as severe or alarming as some scholars would like to present it, since it concerns only one group of students – the underachieving ones – who are more or less expected, in any event, to create problems, as they are neither academically oriented nor do they illustrate any kind of interest towards school and learning (Johnson, McGue & Iacono, 2005).

However, as the Gray et al. study (1983) very eloquently exemplified, such a conclusion is far from the truth, as successful students can be as disenchanted by the curriculum as underachieving ones. According to Hargreaves et al. (1996), what distinguishes successful students from underachieving ones with regard to their disenchantment with the school curriculum, are the characteristics of 'inner drive' or 'need for achievement' that successful students possess, attributes which keep them well motivated and amenable against all adversities and at the same time prevent them from manifesting their discontentment with the school system. For successful students, compliance to the school curriculum and authority is the only available path towards achievement, regardless of how bored, disengaged or uninterested they may feel by what they are being taught. These students' 'inner drive' and motivation is also drastically reinforced by their cultural background,

which greatly discourages them from displaying any feelings of disappointment or discontentment with the school system that could consequently lead them to failure.

In contrast to successful students, whose 'inner drive' keeps them well motivated and conformed to authority, underachieving students who lack the necessary 'inner drive' may actively oppose the established curriculum by either acting incongruously against the authority or "by forming countercultures of opposition" (Hargreaves et al., 1996; Mortimore & Blackstone, 1986; Schostak, 1991; Walker, 2003). These countercultures of opposition, also known as gangs or subgroups, form their own values and discredit, in turn, the existing value system and culture of the secondary school which displays such favouritism to cognitive skills and ranks students according to their academic achievement. Feeling detached and dishonored, these subgroups either engage in anti-school attitudes, such as swearing, fighting, sexual promiscuity and untidy dress in order to exhibit their 'inverted values' and undermine authority, or end up abandoning school forever (Hargreaves et al., 1996; see also Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Schostak (1991) believes that countercultures can be avoided if we only replace our 'authoritarian structures' with more 'negotiative' ones. In Schostak's mindset, "the only relevant curriculum material is an individual's own life" (p.171) and the reason that education fails students is because it comes from contexts which are 'alien' to them. As Schostak puts it:

Education is a study of life in change and action. It is a study of what is in the interests of that life, how these interests find their fulfillment in or transformation through action and expression. It is not a study of academic disciplines or traditional cultural forms and how these come to be transmitted to individuals (p. 166).

To put it simply, Schostak takes into consideration that students come to school carrying with them their entire personal experiences and emotional baggage.



Unemployment, poverty, unhealthy house conditions, divorce, promiscuous and abusive parental behaviour, alcoholism and racial discrimination, are few of the real and daily life situations that might combine a child's personal baggage. A school curriculum which is not tailored to meet the needs and daily life situations that all children encounter will, therefore, be naturally treated by them as irrelevant, boring and as 'a waste of time', since the curriculum material will be completely foreign to them and it will not coincide with their own 'conceptual framework'.

The only way of preventing the alienation of these students from school, according to Schostak (1991), is by offering them an education, a 'life education' as Schostak calls it, which will expand their horizons, give choices and find a balance that serves all kinds of students. In 'life education', skill and talent should not prevail over writing, reading and numeracy and at the same time neither should the exact opposite happen. Furthermore, students should be able to understand the problems of the day, as well as all the social and cultural issues that arise, feel free to express themselves, and be appreciated and encouraged whatever their talents are.

Thus far, this chapter has examined the school curriculum and its offerings, which are related to disruptive and other behaviour exhibited by disaffected students. In a nutshell, research shows that the curriculum is outdated; a product of the twentieth century that was made for other purposes and which does not meet the needs of all students anymore, as it still places more gravity in the cognitive-intellectual skills of students to the detriment of other skills and talents. In addition, a number of scholars, through their research findings, point to the fact that disaffection can be the outcome of chronically disengaged students who find no connection or relevance of the curriculum to their lives and who also fail to relate the skills, abilities and knowledge that the school system provides them with to their future. Disaffection, however, seems not to be confined only within the circles of lower-attaining students, since many successful students also share feelings of disenchantment with the school curriculum.

### **3.4.3 Issues of curriculum relevance:**

Given the importance of curriculum as a major factor affecting school disaffection and by extension disruptive behaviour, this section will now turn in examining issues related to curriculum itself and will, therefore, address the following questions: What is to be considered an appropriate or relevant curriculum to students' lives nowadays? Should we let students choose their own curriculum and if yes, to what extent? Can schools and teachers be left to choose the curriculum they believe to be more suitable to their students' needs? Should we teach all students the same curriculum or should we offer them courses, which are closer to their individual capabilities? Is there any kind of assurance that a more relevant or individualized curriculum will not cause the same disaffection to students?

It is a fact that our society has experienced several social, technological and moral changes over the last century, especially as a result of globalization. In the domain of social changes, there has been a restructuring of the definition of the concept of 'family' to include all the different kinds of families that one can currently find in our society: single parent families, divorced and remarried parents with children from both marriages living under the same roof, same sex families, two income families etc. Moreover, children are nowadays spending less and less time with their parents, as the percentage of working parents has increased substantially over the past century.

In the realm of technological change, computers, the internet, digital services and the automatization, in general, of the overwhelming majority of services that required physical presence twenty years ago, have in essence ushered in a completely new era where everything, even knowledge and education, is at our fingertips and just a click of a button away.

One can further argue that we are faced with a new situation in the moral domain as well. Values and norms that many of us considered sacred for years are now being

challenged and some of them have even been demolished completely. In an era where society at large experienced drastic and revolutionary transformations, it was only natural that schools, as smaller societies, would sooner or later experience their impact. Educational institutions became larger, more diverse and quite impersonal. Students and parents obtained numerous rights and more freedom. The curriculum also faced a plethora of new issues that needed to be addressed, while a variety of new subjects and courses had to be included in the curriculum's main corpus, in order to reflect the numerous societal and technological changes and deal with the challenges of modern societies.

In referring to these changes, Lawton (1982) observes the variety that they created and argues that especially in curriculum related matters "such variety can reflect a healthy environment (...) [a] vigorous and purposeful development in response to local need and opportunity; but equally it can be associated with an inadequate sense of direction and priorities (...)" (p. 31).

Geralds' study (1982) also reflects the above skepticism of curriculum variety and examines the notion of relevance, as well as the possibility of changing the traditional curriculum to include subjects, which are more relevant to students' lives. In his research, the teacher sample was divided into two distinctly different groups according to their opinion towards change and making the curriculum more relevant to students' lives. One group of teachers, faithful defenders of the traditional curriculum, opposed any change that had 'relevance' as its driving force. For this group of teachers, "the traditional curriculum enshrined the best that has been thought and known" (Gerald, 1982, p. 54). They moreover considered the contents of the traditional curriculum as "windows to other worlds, (...) the means [with which] pupils could escape both imaginatively and (for a minority) actually, from the grimness of inner city living" (Gerald, 1982, p.55). This group also supported that students should be taught what they cannot learn by themselves and furthermore be inspired to want to learn the traditional subjects of history and



math, which they themselves might never aspire to learn, if it was left to their judgment (Gerald, 1982).

In agreement with the opinions of Gerald's first group of teachers, and in opposition to Sayer's view (as cited in Elliot, 1998) who believes that children can access knowledge on their own and thus no longer need to attend school, Walker (2003) believes that "no one, certainly not children, can know in advance what learning may mean to them (...) [and that] if students avoid the risks of learning something new, they may never learn what they are capable of and what life has to offer them" (p. 183).

In referring to the relevance between curriculum and students' lives, Hargreaves (1982) also concurs with Gerald (1982) and Walker (2003), emphasizing in a quite eloquent way that:

Whilst one would hope that relevance and interest would be characteristic of any new curriculum, they cannot be the criteria with which we begin. To establish a curriculum on what happens to interest young people is to risk trivializing the curriculum into a content (such as popular music and football) for which they require hardly any formal education (...) (p.82).

The second group of teachers in Gerald's study (1982), although highly convinced that the curriculum was not sufficiently relevant to their students' lives and therefore should change to become more modern and more effective to the educational experience of students, hesitated to deduct any subjects offered by the traditional curriculum in fear that they would trivialize the curriculum and make it look inferior.

In addition, they found it extremely difficult to define what the notion of being more relevant should entail. More specifically, when they contemplated the ways in which they could make the curriculum more relevant and interesting to students, they

came upon a number of themes stemming from the principle of relevance, which, if applied, would produce both a pandemonium and a huge amount of subjects to be included in the traditional curriculum. For instance, the use of the principle of relevance to the realities of contemporary society and economy would legitimize the inclusion of sociology, economics, computer studies, technology etc to the core curriculum; The principle of relevance applied to a particular ability category of pupils, especially the underachieving ones, would justify social education; The relevance to a particular community or locality would point towards community education and finally relevance to a particular social category of pupils would bring up community rights and subjects (Gerald, 1982).

Lawton (1982), foresaw that an extended curriculum with great variety would certainly correspond to students' future aspirations and provide them with numerous career options. However, he cautioned that too much freedom in choosing subjects could lead students to the construction of a fairly 'arbitrary' and 'incoherent' program, a choice they might regret later on in their lives. 'Continuity' and 'progression of knowledge and understanding' should not be impaired by immature decisions. Decisions, according to Lawton, should only be made when a pupil is mature enough to anticipate the skills and the knowledge he/she will need further on in his/her future.

A severely premature decision, as Lawton (1982) emphatically asserts, will be to abandon history, art, music, philosophy and physical sciences which constitute subjects of the "higher culture", as well as essential elements of one's heritage and civilization. One of the most significant purposes of general education concerns precisely this transmission of culture and civilization to all students. By the age that students are permitted to leave school by law, it must be required that they be acquainted with the most essential elements of their culture and civilization. An options system may well prevent this from happening, as students will be given the freedom to discontinue studying any subject they dislike, including subjects of the

“higher culture”, thus wrongfully excluding themselves from being introduced to their cultural heritage.

White (1982) is highly supportive of Lawton’s views, as he also refers to the significance of the introduction of students to the subjects of the “higher culture”. For White, there doesn’t have to be a linkage between a professional career and access to the ‘higher culture’. In a good society, each individual provides equally to the common good irrespective of his/her profession. Therefore:

If most children will later have to do jobs, which are not intellectually demanding, there is no reason why they should be taught only those things which will make them efficient workers-and perhaps efficient consumers and law abiding citizens as well. For, men are not only workers or consumers or good citizens; they are also men, able, if taught, to contemplate the world as a poem or a metaphysical system as well as enjoy more easily accessible pursuits (White, 1982, pp. 25-26).

According to this argument, children should be highly discouraged or totally forbidden to drop any of the subjects of the ‘higher culture’ until they are sufficiently ‘inside’ them to understand their contribution to their cultural heritage (Lawton, 1982; White, 1982). School curricula, then, should be constructed on the basic premise that important kinds of knowledge are not neglected or ignored and that too much specialization in one area should not be made at the expense of other areas. In comparing the importance of attaining a complete, meaningful and culturally enriched education, with the art of sailing, Wragg (1997) argued that “ if you live by a river, then learning to sail a boat might be a useful investment for the future, but sailing should not be the whole curriculum” (p. 2).

Given, therefore, the goal of mandatory teaching of the ‘higher culture’ subjects to all students up to a certain age, a number of researchers (Hargreaves, 1982; Reid, 1986; Walker, 2003; White, 1982) also concur that schools and teachers, just like students, must not be allowed to follow their own individual preferences and alter,



when they choose to, the content of the subjects of the curriculum. Such a scenario can confuse students and parents alike, but most importantly it can lead to great incoherence. To avoid such a development, certain scholars argue that there must be some sort of public control over the curriculum, "a public guarantee that no child will be deprived of access to the higher culture" (White, 1982, p. 27). As Reid (1986) explains, the lack of public control or of agreed national guidelines for the secondary school curriculum can only prove to be a 'handicap', since it can lead to immense disorder.

Public control over the curriculum must not signify that the curriculum will be left in the hands of 'the government of the day', since such a development can be a reason for distress among educational stakeholders. While the competent authority handling educational issues should have an input in the procedure of forming a common curriculum with 'permissible variations', teacher-unions should and must maintain the absolute control of the entire process to ensure that teachers will not feel as outsiders on a matter that deeply affects them and their students (Hargreaves, 1982; Cawelti, 2006; Reid, 1986; Walker, 2003; White, 1982).

A question set at the beginning of this section that still remains unanswered, concerns a "recurring dilemma for educationists [of] whether to teach all students the same curriculum or whether to offer them different courses which are more 'suited' to their individual capabilities" (Mortimore & Blackstone, 1986, p. 71). In answering this question, one should bear in mind that the existence of a common or national curriculum, which permanently includes subjects of the 'higher culture', does not rule out other subjects, which are closer to each student's individual interests and capabilities. What is also important to note is that irrespective of the decision to offer students either a common or an individualized curriculum, we must ensure that all subjects, whether common or electives, will serve accordingly the needs and abilities of all students.

If one insists, however, that individualized programs are superior to common programs because they purportedly serve the personal needs of students better, he/she should be warned that there is nothing to prove that individualized programs can guarantee absolute success, since some students may not perform as well in an individualized program as in a common program (Walker, 2003). In fact, most scholars seem to believe that 'real curriculums' can neither assure satisfaction to everyone at all times nor can they operate as efficiently as their planners would expect or desire (Hargreaves, 1982; Hargreaves et al. 1996; Johnson et al., 2005; Solomon & Rogers, 2001; Walker, 2003). As Walker (2003) asserts, "Every curriculum is a compromise that [can] leave (...) some students with a curriculum which is not optimal to them (...) and some sensitive teachers (...) dissatisfied and searching for something better" (p. 189).

Continuous calls for curriculum reform are undeniably a proof of malfunctioning and curriculum disaffection. Some students, either because they are bored or indifferent towards the subject being offered to them, or because they just prefer to save their energy for other subjects they happen to like more, fail to learn all that the planned curriculum offers them and end up rejecting it. As Walker (2003) asserts, "Rejection of the official curriculum by rebellious students [particularly] is [more now than ever before] commonplace in classroom life and poses a [severe] challenge to teacher's authority [and] (...) expertise" (p. 188). The challenge comes from the fact that disaffected students have the power to influence the flow of their classroom's curriculum by being disruptive (in a number of ways), lazy or slow to do what is required of them, or by just being passive and bored. Teachers are not well, or at all, prepared to deal with such situations which could ultimately cause great stress and frustration to them (Johnson et al., 2005; Solomon & Rogers, 2001; Walker, 2003). A suggestion by Walker (2003) that is definitely worthy of further exploration, is that one might be able to combat students' alienation and boredom with the official curriculum simply by explaining to students the rationale and importance of a required teaching subject and perhaps by involving them in the procedure of structuring their classroom's curriculum.



For Solomon and Rodgers (2001), however, even if the curriculum is altered in order to make it more relevant and interesting to students, the issue of student disaffection will not be resolved since, according to their research, school disaffection is not only a curriculum related problem. In particular, Solomon and Rodgers (2001) found that most of the students they interviewed were generally indifferent towards any form of education no matter how relevant or practical it was to their lives and that pupils appeared to also avoid or disrupt lessons that they found extremely stressful or difficult, irrespective of the relevance of the subject matter to their lives. In fact, the study by Solomon and Rodgers illustrated that many of the interviewees were indifferent and disaffected even though they seemed to believe that not only the school curriculum was relevant to their lives and future career aspirations but that it also had an “intrinsic value that went beyond this immediate [job – career] prospect” (p. 336). The researchers further supported that school disaffection is the result “of an ongoing school career in which a number of agencies play a part, as influences on expectations, and as more general cultural differences” (Solomon and Rogers, 2001, p. 337). Given the irrelevance of curriculum with student disaffection, Solomon and Rogers conclude that offering a more relevant or more individualized curriculum to students cannot provide any kind of reassurance that student disaffection will decrease or become less prevalent.

Whether the school system is outdated and does not serve the needs of all students, whether pupils are disaffected because they find that the curriculum and its offerings are too demanding, too academic and too irrelevant to their lives and whether the hotly contested issue of curriculum relevance is not satisfactorily answered, we have to come to terms with the realization that finding a curriculum which is suitable for a wide range of students with varied abilities and interests is an extremely difficult task whose solution will not satisfy everyone at the end of the day. What is important to understand is that the curriculum is only one of a number of factors affecting disaffection and disruptive behaviour. In the following section,



we will examine assessment as a possible cause of student disaffection and a student's disruptive behaviour.

### 3.5 Assessment

#### 3.5.1 Assessment as an essential part of the curriculum:

Several scholars believe that assessment has the power to drive and shape the curriculum. In this section we will mainly focus our attention on examining the side effects that the current assessment system has on teaching and learning, the limitations of this system and the way it can cause student disaffection. As a final point, we will briefly touch upon the reasons that examinations cannot be eliminated and also discuss the factors that should be taken into consideration before offering alternatives to public exams.

Assessment forms a significant element of the curriculum, since it serves as a seal to the educational effort being undertaken throughout the entire school year, by evaluating and measuring the level of knowledge each individual student has attained by following the set curriculum. Students are evaluated orally or by written examinations several times in the course of the year. These 'smaller' tests can be characterized as the *faithful servants* of the final and most important examinations, which take place at the end of the school year. The objectives of final exams are to assess primarily students' knowledge on what they have been taught during the year and secondly, depending on the student's stage in his/her school 'career', to either promote him/her to the next level, or to provide them with the opportunity to 'cash in' their subject-based grades and qualifications in order to achieve enrollment to post secondary institutions (Hargreaves, 1989). As a result of their central aims and purposes, all educational stakeholders alike consider examinations very significant.

### **3.5.2 Assessment and its effects on the curriculum, teaching and learning:**

However important to the educational system, examinations have been at the receiving end of much skepticism and criticism as to the effects they have both on the curriculum and the processes of teaching and learning that are associated with it. A number of scholars, researchers, educators, and policy makers believe that exams have come to have a remarkably dictating, controlling and limiting effect on the curriculum (Cuff & Payne, 1985; Gray et al., 1983; Hargreaves, 1989; Hargreaves et al. 1996; Kapferer, 1986; Mann, 1983). This point was particularly proved in a study that was conducted in 376 elementary and secondary schools in New Jersey, which revealed that teachers, due to the pressure they felt to deliver the examination syllabus, concentrated in teaching only those topics they thought the examiners favoured, while deliberately neglecting others that did not fall in the 'testing category' (Cawelti, 2006).

Besides constraining teachers on what they teach, many scholars argue that examinations also dominate the way they teach (Blenkin, 1992; Cuff & Payne, 1985; Hargreaves, 1989; Mortimore, Mortimore & Chitty, 1986). In order to prepare students for exams, teachers are essentially driven, or in a way forced, to spend most of their time using 'technical skills', which help them deliver with accuracy all the information that students will need to achieve the best possible results on their tests. Thus, as Giltin argues, "teachers [tend to] develop a repertoire of narrow technical skills which, when used often enough, become habitual and assume a greater place within the teaching role" (as cited in Blenkin, 1992, p. 63). These narrow technical skills used by teachers are, in turn, internalized by students who, in time, develop their own personal skills on how to use an instrumental and limited approach to learning and how to save studying time, whilst also receiving the best possible results on their exams. In commenting on these sterilized and narrow teaching styles that the examination system generates, Hargreaves (1989) also added that exams "limit innovations and inhibit teacher's willingness to explore new teaching strategies" (p. 81).

In contrast to the above positions, the Hammersley and Scarth study, which investigated the damaging effects that examinations may have on teaching and learning, came to the conclusion that testing does not really affect a teacher's teaching or pedagogic style. To come to this conclusion, Hammersley and Scarth compared, at first, assessed to non-assessed subjects which were taught by different teachers. They then compared how the same teachers taught subjects which were to be tested at the end of the school year with subjects that were not to be tested. What they wanted to observe was if a teacher changed his/her teaching style depending on whether the subject was tested at the end of the school year or not (as cited in Hargreaves et al. 1996).

Although the results of the study are interesting, one has to take into consideration that the study has critical limitations which are based on the fact that Hammersley and Scarth only looked at the amount of 'teacher-initiated talk' in examined and unexamined courses and neglected other patterns of pedagogy that teachers could have used if the subject was not to be tested, such as team-work or group discussion (as cited in Hargreaves et al. 1996; see also Hargreaves, 1989).

### **3.5.3 Other limitations of assessment:**

Another negative effect of assessment, according to many scholars, is that exams also provide teachers with a reason to avoid engaging in any curriculum change or development, since having to follow a fixed and predetermined, by the state, curriculum and examination syllabus keeps them, most of the times, very busy and uninterested in change. At the same time, however, exams empower teachers in their relationships with students and through this authority teachers are able to manage their classes more effectively (Blenkin, 1992; Hargreaves, 1982; Hargreaves, 1989; Mortimore et al. 1986). As Hargreaves (1982) claims:

[Examinations have managed] to transform (...) an interpersonal problem, of teacher's control of pupils, into an impersonal problem: teachers needed no



longer to impose their authority confrontationally, but could appeal to outside forces, the examination board, the pupil's own interests, and the value of examinations in the job market, as an incentive to every pupil to behave well and work hard at the school syllabus (p. 50).

While teachers might be able to 'appeal to outside forces' to solve their interpersonal problems with some students, we should not forget that classrooms include different kinds of students whose capacities and capabilities vary. Therefore, 'appealing to outside forces' could work only with a specific group of students, those being the ones whose 'inner drive', as we have already seen, can motivate and keep them well compliant until they reach their goals. How are the relationships, however, of teachers with those students who are not interested in exams and whose talents and interests are not to be found in the intellectual-cognitive domain that the examination system promotes, as is the case with the curriculum? Do teachers tend to focus their attention not only on the curriculum that is examined, but also on students who are keen to succeed on exams and will probably yield the best results?

Examination results are very essential to a teacher's feeling of competency and professionalism "[as] in a work environment where few other adults directly witness the quality of the teacher's work, examinations provide one of the few public and apparently objective indicators of a teacher's competence" (Hargreaves, 1989, p.82). Therefore, it is only natural for teachers to pay more attention to examination-oriented students and work with them more closely, since their reputation and career path may essentially depend on the performance of these students on the exams.

What teachers fail to understand, however, is that with their attitude they pass the *hidden message* to all their students irrespectively, that only examined subjects are important to teachers, the school system and society and that the only valuable knowledge, skills and abilities are the ones that can be easily measured on written

tests (Broadfoot, 1979; Hargreaves, 1982; Hargreaves, 1989; Kinder et al., 1995; Mortimore et al. 1986).

### **3.5.4 Assessment and its relation to the intellectual-cognitive domain and labeling:**

An even more profound and alarming message of this approach, according to Hargreaves (1982), is that by making the exams the nucleus of the educational system and the basis on which everything else is measured, "(...) the very concept of ability becomes closely tied to the intellectual-cognitive domain [and] intelligence becomes defined as the ability to master the cognitive-intellectual aspects of school subjects" (p.60). Unfortunately, this established and in a way standardized chain-evaluation that the educational system employs to assess students' skills and abilities, ultimately leads to the labeling of students as 'bright' or 'less able' according to their competence and performance in the intellectual-cognitive domain.

Hargreaves (1982) further argues that students are deeply aware of the 'ability labels' the educational system grants them with and the connotations that these labels carry for their own personal assessment and moral worth, as their meanings are self-explanatory. As the evaluation process employed by the educational system for measuring the performance, skills and abilities of a student is in essence established and standardized, pupils gradually learn to identify the subjects and areas in which skills and performance are being valued and therefore discover, in due course, how to realistically evaluate their own selves on the basis of what is being expected of them in school and to determine and alter their personal aspirations accordingly.

Broadfoot (1979) argues that "The internalization by pupils of such assessments results in time in the very clear differences of *behavior* and *motivation* [italics added] characterizing those labeled 'bright' and marked out for success and those

'less able' pupils destined for failure" (p. 25). These 'less able' students are essentially the ones who might eventually feel disaffected by the entire school system. They may proceed to manifest their disaffection by polarizing themselves both from their school's value system and from their successful "law-abiding" classmates, and by forming their own counter-cultures where they feel secure, respected and valued.

It is clear, therefore, that traditional assessment, just like the curriculum, tends to favour and place more emphasis on the intellectual aspects of achievement, thus ignoring all other skills and abilities exhibited by many other students. A more pertinent approach to the issue, however, would be to question what does traditional assessment really test and whether this assessment is sufficient for the development and formation of a multi-talented and dexterous individual who will be ready to join the modern society.

Standardized tests are, for the most part, based on logical, analytical, and linguistic intelligences. On these written-structured tests, questions can take various forms and formats (multiple choice, essay, yes or no questions etc), which in order to be answered one needs only to *memorize* knowledge and then *recall* it during the test. 'Plain memorization' and 'isolated recall' is what Burgess and Adams refer to as the 'lowest category of performance' (as cited in Mortimore et al., 1986, p.32) since, according to Shramm (2002), with tests of this sort "one cannot measure things such as risk-taking, higher order thinking skills and creative problem solving strategies, which are necessary for a vital democratic citizenry in the twenty first century" (p.vii).

For a vital democratic citizenry, Shramm (2002) and Guilfoyle (2006) argue that the modern society needs citizens who can 'think outside the box', who can be critical and independent thinkers and whose mindset will not revolve around what will or will not be on a test. The twenty-first century needs citizens who will become life-learners and who will continue to study and be educated for the sake of their



personal interests and not just because they will be evaluated at some point in their lives in order to be promoted, receive funding or for any other purpose (Bantock, 1982; Gray et al. 1983).

How can one, though, create a balanced democratic society where every citizen would feel equal, respected and valued, if the examination system, which was initially developed to provide equality of opportunity to all students irrespective of class and privilege and regulate social mobility, is overtly biased and rewards mostly the intellectual-cognitive aspects of achievement?

In the current system, as Mortimore et al. argue (1986), "public examinations have a very clear selection function [...]" and "to a certain extent [...] [they] ha[ve] taken over the function of providing differential access to power, money and status that class and privilege previously operated" (p. 80). Examinations according to Bantock (1982), are the means through which school distributes life chances. In other words, when students graduate from secondary schools they are aware of the choices they have concerning their future, since their success or failure in examinations could determine whether they could proceed to attain tertiary education and subsequently have access to all the benefits that such achievement entails (status, money, power). As Eggleton (1984) puts it:

It is certainly the case that success in competitive examinations is, for most people, an essential prelude to the legitimate exercise of power, responsibility and status throughout modern societies. Lack of accreditation constitutes a severe limitation and there is abundant evidence that the examination system, despite its technical and ideological critics, enjoys widespread public acceptance" (as cited in Broadfoot, 1986, p. 58).

Unfortunately, although the existence of an exams' system is up to a degree understandable and justifiable on the grounds that it is necessary for the selection of students who will proceed to further and higher education and then employment,

this system cannot be considered to be in the best interest of our society, since the selection process it promotes legitimizes school failure in essence, creates excessive stress and anxiety and damages the self confidence and self esteem of several students (Broadfoot 1979; Broadfoot, 1986; Mortimore et al. 1986).

Moreover, besides the fact that examinations limit the possibilities for success and are for numerous pupils a 'failure system' (Mann, 1983), they also create a curriculum that is confined only to academic achievement and which consequently 'screens out' the everyday experience of pupils from the subjects that form the rest of the curriculum (Hargreaves et al. 1996). In other words, the focus and the attention that exam based subjects receive in the school curriculum, in connection to the fact that teachers and students pay particular attention to these subjects, give the impression that the rest of the curriculum is inferior and that it only exists to fill the gaps, release tension, and retain some balance in the curriculum.

Confining the curriculum is the obvious consequence of public examinations. The not so obvious and 'unintended' consequence, however, is that exams "reduce education to forms that routinize and package knowledge and skills so that one person's performance can be compared to another's. Education is thus commodified as qualifications and grades and these can be sold in the open market" (Schostak, 1991, p. 156). This argument basically asserts that since all students follow the same curriculum, the exam grades along with the ability that a student has in 'selling' him/herself to the market become the only ways to differentiate amongst essentially equal students. The most important thing in this theory, according to Schostak, is to master the game of "selling". Those who cannot convince an employer for their uniqueness and exceptionality are doomed to be hired and fired repeatedly and to be one of the mass.

Although Schostak's (1991) theory might seem intriguing to some, not all scholars are on the same wave length with him, as they believe that being able to compare one person's performance to another's should be taken as an advantage of the

examination system and not as a disadvantage. One of the functions of public examinations is to provide precisely the 'benchmarks' which teachers, employers and the society at large, among others, can use to accomplish certain purposes. 'Benchmarks' help teachers draw educational goals, and evaluate to what extent these are being reached by their students. They also provide them with the opportunity to give their students feedback on their progress, which will ultimately help them improve (Mortimore et al. 1986). Employers and society, on the other hand, can use 'benchmarks' to evaluate the students who have reached the standards that the labour market and society themselves have progressively set, and on the basis of meeting those standards, to provide the individuals with the best achievements with an occupation (Broadfoot, 1986). This selection and promotion of the 'best' to work in the society, echoes Plato's thinking in his work, the 'Republic', where according to the ancient philosopher, only the best citizens, the chosen ones, who have prevailed over all others should work for the 'city', as this was the only way in which a city could flourish.

Examinations form a significant part of the school life. For a number of teachers, "examinations are 'a fact of life', an assumed and taken for granted part of the secondary school system to which their practice is routinely directed" (Hargreaves, 1989, p.81). For other educational stakeholders, our current examination system has lost its initial purpose, which was to provide the 'objective means' of identifying reward and merit (Broadfoot, 1986; Mortimore et al. 1986). Our current system of assessment is so restrictive in its effects on teaching and learning, so limiting in providing opportunities to all students and so biased towards favouring the cognitive-intellectual domain of achievement which is more likely to cause severe damage in the self esteem of several students than provide them with anything worthwhile. Mann (1983) advises that "Schools need to recognize the limitations of the present examination framework, [...] mitigate its potential ill effects [...] and follow the Norwood example [which preaches that] examinations should follow the curriculum and not determine it" (p. 36)



If we could only retain the advantages of examinations (given that they provide the necessary incentive, feedback and motivation to students, who are not able to value, at their young age, the more far-reaching benefits of the education they receive) without lowering the standards, that would be the most beneficial result for all. The elimination of examinations is not currently an option as “they [still] remain essential instruments of allocation in a society that requires so many gradations of expertise for its running. They are instruments of efficiency and, in a society geared in large measure to efficiency, they are obviously here to stay” (Bantock, 1982, p. 23). According to Broadfoot (1986):

Any attempt to abolish or replace public examinations is likely to be constrained by the degree to which any alternative procedure has as much credibility in attesting competence, in providing some degree of control over what is to be taught, and most important, in regulating and legitimating the process of occupational selection and rejection (p. 58).

Therefore, before we start searching for an alternative to public examinations we should make sure that we have clearly understood and identified the strengths and limitations of the current system, so that any possible option will stand a decent chance to function properly. Any school reform efforts should include, among other changes, the development of an assessment system that will be designed to support and not distort the curriculum. The curriculum should also be impartial and in proportion to all students needs so that every single student will be given the opportunity to succeed. It is imperative that ‘failure must be the individual’s and not the school’s fault’ so that no student will feel neglected or undervalued by the school system (Broadfoot, 1979).

### **3.6 Conclusion:**

This chapter examined five school related factors that a great body of research holds responsible for their contribution in creating and maintaining students’ disruptive

or maladaptive behaviours. In particular, this chapter reviewed the existing literature for the following school related factors: 1) School Rules, 2) School Leadership, 3) The teacher-student relationship, 4) Curriculum and 5) Assessment.

In discussing the issue of school rules, existing literature points to the fact that even though students expect to have rules and acknowledge the need to have them in their school environment, they do not accept across the board all rules and defy, in fact, those that they find, among others, very personal, restrictive, authoritative, unexplainable, inconsistently applied and unfair. As such, policy makers should take into consideration the aforementioned characteristics in order to avoid the establishment of rules and regulations, which will be disrespected and defied by students. For students to be in a position to abide by their school's rules and regulations, however, schools should teach their students the 'school's code of conduct', just as they teach the curriculum, develop relationships of trust with students and allow them to participate in the creation of the rules. Literature shows that students can be prohibited from engaging in deviant and delinquent behaviours when they feel that they have some ownership of the rules and regulations, believe and respect them, and form relations with their teachers that are based on trust and confidence and not on strict rules and fear of punishment.

In examining the issue of school leadership, the chapter looked in particular at the disciplinarian role of the leader, since, besides being the focus of this study, this role seems to be the one most valued and appreciated by teachers. According to the existing literature, the strategies that principals use to organize and operate schools are important in discouraging maladaptive behaviours and in keeping teachers satisfied with their work. Principals should be able to initiate a sense of structure and order, provide a sense of purpose and direction and support their teachers by forming meaningful and quality relationships with them and establishing communication. If they are successful in implementing these strategies, principals will be able to preside over a structured environment, where maladaptive behaviours will be discouraged and order will be able to be maintained. At the same

time, principals can also positively affect a student's behaviour by forming closer relationships with them. However, even though school leaders are considered very significant in setting and creating a well-ordered school environment, since with their actions and inactions they have the power to affect both the school's proper functioning and their teachers and students' outcomes, external influences can always come into play and limit the leadership abilities of a principal.

In looking at the teacher-student relationship, existing literature considers this relationship to be the most important component in predicting externalizing behaviours in the school context, since the formation of positive and meaningful relationships can offer students the required social bond and appropriate support in order to discourage them from engaging in any disruptive or other risk-taking behaviours. If teachers support their students, have high expectations for every single one of them, avoid showing any signs of favouritism to any student, provide their students with the opportunity to participate and contribute, 'teach well' and apply a fair and consistent attitude, then students will be more easily attracted to the 'conventional' social bond and thus stay out of trouble and avoid exhibiting disruptive behaviours. Besides helping the student, however, a positive teacher-student relationship will also provide teachers with more satisfaction for their profession and with more tools to fight the catastrophic appearance of burnout, which also has its own adverse effects on the levels of indiscipline exhibited in schools.

The fourth school related factor examined in this chapter that is related to students' disruptive or maladaptive behaviours is the issue of curriculum. In the last two decades, a decrease or even complete lack of academic motivation among high school students has been observed. Part of this academic amotivation is considered, by scholars, to be the end result of accumulated dissatisfaction that can spur from school related activities and in particular the curriculum and its offerings, which many scholars hold responsible for the disruptive and truant behaviour exhibited by disaffected pupils. Students nowadays find the current school system outdated and



the curriculum too demanding, too academic, too irrelevant to their lives and unable to serve the needs of all students and manifest their frustration and disaffection at the situation by exhibiting more and more disruptive behaviours.

The fifth and last school related factor examined in this chapter that is related to students' disruptive or maladaptive behaviours is the issue of assessment. Although assessment is a significant element of the educational system, it has a dictating, controlling and limiting effect on the curriculum, as it constrains teachers to concentrate only on the issues that will be in the exams, leads them to be skeptical of any curriculum change and forces them to focus their attention only on good students who have the skills and abilities to follow the demanding curriculum. In this way, by making the exams the nucleus of the educational system and the basis on which everything else is measured, schools link ability to the cognitive-intellectual domain, therefore creating labels for each student and leading to the disaffection of the "less able" students from the school system, with all the negative repercussions that this disaffection and alienation might have in respect to the exhibition of maladaptive behaviours.

As is evident from this chapter, the aforementioned school related factors are directly associated with student misbehaviour and can definitely affect the implementation and effectiveness of disciplinary practices. As such, the competent educational authorities need to take them into serious consideration and view them as part of the problem, if they wish to be successful and effective in tackling indiscipline.

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## Chapter 4

### Effects of disciplinary practices on students

#### Introduction:

The literature on the effectiveness of traditional disciplinary practices, such as suspension and expulsion, indicates, as we have seen in chapter 2, that these practices are not successful in dealing with problems of misbehaviour. Their ineffectiveness is related to various factors that have to do with student characteristics, the inherent characteristics and weaknesses of the practices themselves, and a number of school related factors, such as school rules, school leadership, the teacher-student relationship, the curriculum and the assessment practices currently used. All these factors, in one way or another, contribute to the development and enhancement of student misbehaviour and indiscipline and subsequently impact the effective implementation and functioning of the traditional disciplinary practices (Chapter 3).

Besides the fact that traditional disciplinary practices are being challenged for their effectiveness to handle student indiscipline, however, they have also been challenged about the “effects [they may have] on behaviors other than those targeted for suppression” (Newsom, Favell, & Rincover, 1983, p. 285). Disciplinary practices intervene with student misbehaviour and are used in order to “punish” and deter it. As Newsom, Favell and Rincover (1983) inform us, punishment is considered an ‘intervention’, and interventions run the risk of having to encounter side effects which are undesirable. Although the side effects generated by punishment are mostly trivial and negligible, they can sometimes be very intense and significant and may result in four types of effects, which are marked as primary, physical, secondary and social effects.

#### **4.1 Punishment as a form of intervention: The primary, physical, secondary and social effects that disciplinary practices may have on students:**

The *primary effects* refer to the power of any punishment to suppress, diminish or eliminate undesirable responses or behaviours. The *physical effects* include reactions such as reddening of the skin, pain, or discomfort. These effects appear only when the punishment technique uses physical or other force to cause pain, such as corporal punishment, slapping, whipping etc. *Secondary effects* include adverse behavioural changes, such as an increase in maladaptive behaviours, which were not targeted by the 'punishing agent' in the first place. Lastly, the *social effects* do not concern the punished person, but instead the 'punishing agent' and the reactions that he/she can have when using punishment.

From the aforementioned types of effects created by punishment techniques, the '*secondary effects*' category is the most intriguing and challenging one, because of the spontaneous development of symptoms and behaviours that the student generates as a result of punishment and which can prove irrepressible and harder to detect and manage in comparison to a student's overt disruptive behaviour. Students who are subjected to school discipline may react to it in several different ways. However, as Newsom, Favell, and Rincover (1983) argue, all of these ways must certainly be connected "with a considerable degree of emotionality, in the sense that they are accompanied by intense autonomic activity" (p. 289).

Thus, when students receive frequent or severe disciplinary action, one can expect that they may develop symptoms or behaviours such as anxiety, anger, vindictive feelings, hypersensitivity to criticism, poor concentration, rumination, reduced social functioning, school refusal, truancy, withdrawal, avoidance of school staff members, increased hostility, counter-aggression against teachers and peers, destruction, vandalism of school property, disgust for oneself, neglect of duty, self destruction, courting with danger, addiction to drugs and other substances, defiance, low self esteem, depression, underachievement, desensitization towards



their own pain and the pain they can cause to others etc (Brassard, Germain, & Hart, 1987; Cameron & Sheppard, 2006; Christle et al., 2004; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Hart & Brassard, 1987; Hyman & Perone, 1998; McCord, 1991; Ross Epp, 1997;1996; Walker & Sprague, 1999; Wehby, 1994). In other words, a school's disciplinary practices may not only reinforce and exacerbate a student's disruptive behaviour, but they can also encumber students with a vast amount of negative symptoms and feelings, which can only be very harmful to them. At the same time, the detrimental effects of the existing disciplinary practices are exactly what connect them to the notion of "systemic violence".

#### **4.2 Disciplinary Practices: The notion of systemic violence and psychological maltreatment:**

Systemic violence is defined "as any institutional practice and procedure that adversely impacts on individuals or groups by burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically or physically. Applied to education it means practices and procedures that prevent students from learning" (Ross Epp, 1996, p. 1). As Ross Epp (1996) further explains, the competent authorities are unaware or do not acknowledge the existence of systemic violence because they believe that school policies, practices, and procedures are not designed to 'harm' students, but on the contrary to promote the students' best interests and provide them with the best possible education. This unawareness of the existence of systemic violence is therefore not deliberate. Instead, it is supported by the theory that in a school which aims to provide the best possible education, administrators and teachers should follow the 'protocol' by supporting a facilitating school environment which promotes learning and enhances standards, while at the same time allows them to use any disciplinary practice that can help them achieve their main goal. In such an environment, it is argued, everybody does only and exactly what is being asked of them and as such they cannot be held liable for doing so.

Although systemic violence is experienced by all students irrespectively, its effects

are not uniformly felt by all individuals (Watkinson, 1997). Even though it will be natural that disadvantaged students might be more damaged by it, 'privileged' students can also experience the damaging effects of systemic violence when they get punished for disobeying meaningless rules or for opposing the standard curriculum which they may find uninteresting and boring. As Ross Epp argues, even the "intentional exposure to boredom and repetition is part of (...) what is systematically violent in our schools" (1996, p. 2). In fact, according to Ross Epp (1996)

[All] school practices which are associated with standardization, exclusive pedagogy and punishment, prevent learning and may also foster a climate of violence. The same practices, contribute to dehumanization, stratification and abuse, which are systematically violent and cause students to respond in violent ways. Sometimes, the violence is aimed at teachers and administrators, but more often it is directed toward fellow students or the self (p. 16).

Besides the subject of systemic violence, the negative effects that disciplinary practices can have on students have also been linked with the issue of 'psychological maltreatment'. In Hart and Brassard's (1987) words "Psychological maltreatment of children and youth consists of acts of omission and commission which are judged by community standards and professional expertise to be psychologically damaging" (p.160). Such acts, are mostly carried out by people who find themselves in advantageous or powerful positions, because of their status or age, and they can damage the behavioural, affective, physical, and cognitive functioning of the child. The examples of psychological maltreatment that Hart and Brassard (1987) offer are related to a child's intentional isolation by his/her teacher(s) or classmates, mistreatment, rejection and the formation of negative and discouraging relationships. Disciplinary practices can certainly constitute a source of psychological maltreatment, as they include in their repertoire all of the aforementioned examples and can damage children both emotionally and behaviourally.



Given the problematic, counter-productive and ineffective results that disciplinary practices seem to have on students, it is imperative that the competent educational authorities place more emphasis on evaluating them in an objective way, in order to be able to accurately determine their negative consequences, limitations and shortcomings and proceed in either correcting them, or finding and exploring new practices that could better help their efforts in forming citizens that will be self-disciplined and respect both themselves and others. At the same time, teachers and administrators should also openly acknowledge that the use of power and punitive methods to manage students' maladaptive behaviours often reinforce the continuation of such attitudes and lead to a vicious cycle with no ending. This cycle is of course damaging both to the student and the teacher, not only because of the immediate consequences that it prompts (e.g. students' aggression), but also because it essentially institutionalizes the acceptance of 'authoritative methods of punishment' as a standard practice that is carried on from one generation to the other, without any consideration about the fairness or the effectiveness of the process (Ross Epp, 1996). Moreover, the strong adherence to and the unwillingness to depart from these authoritative methods of control, makes the search for more effective ways to deal with students' indiscipline and transgressions harder.

#### **4.3 Positive reinforcement in dealing with disruptive behaviour:**

Some scholars argue that the best programs for handling student indiscipline are the ones that are not punitive, do not provoke aggressive reactions and try to tackle the students' real problems (DeRidder, 1991; McCord, 1991; O' Moore, 2010). Others believe that the solution to students' disruptive behaviour lies in the implementation of rewarding and proactive methods such as the use of 'positive reinforcement', which is considered a far more efficient way to deal with students' disruptive behaviour in comparison to punishment (Maag 2001; Maag & Webber, 1995). The idea behind 'positive reinforcement' is essentially "catching" the student being good rather than being bad, and reinforcing his/her appropriate behaviour with praise rather than discouraging inappropriate behaviours with condemnation.



An inherent disadvantage of 'positive reinforcement' is that it is being regarded as an *external reward*, which makes students behave in desirable ways not because they really understand the necessity of doing so, but because they see a benefit in it. In contrast, all educational stakeholders accept "punishment" more easily because it is believed to respect a person's autonomy, in that it gives him/her the freedom to choose how to behave in order to avoid punishment. Moreover, most teachers suppose that positive reinforcement needs a lot of effort and in-advance planning in order to be effective, something which they are not willing to do since they do not consider handling students' challenging behaviours as part of their already demanding job. In teachers' mindset, students should behave well within the boundaries set by the school and if they fail to do so, punishment is the only quick and easy way to deal with misbehaviours. However, as Maag (2001) sustains such an attitude is a "prescription to failure" and teachers will keep on facing disappointment and frustration with students' challenging behaviours, since the only effect that punishment or any other correction technique has on students is reactive and oppositional behaviour. According to Maag (2001), the success of both positive reinforcement and punishment techniques should be measured by the effects they have on students' behaviour and especially by their ability to increase or decrease problematic behaviour.

In evaluating punishment, positive reinforcement and/or other reward-based practices by the effects they can have on students' behaviour, McCord (1991), in contrast to Maag (2001) and Maag and Webber (1995) rejected these methods as capable of dealing and solving problems of misbehaviour and supported that "corrective techniques" are egocentric in nature in that they can teach people to consider their personal benefits. In explaining his argument, McCord (1991) sustains that in order to attract the receiver's attention, reward must be something valuable to him/her. Therefore, whoever tries to receive the reward might be seeking to satisfy his/her self-interest. On the other hand, punishment 'desensitizes' people and makes them rather indifferent towards the pain of other people. As McCord argues, people learn to "focus on their own pains and pleasures in deciding

how to act” and “no increase in punishment or in reward can guarantee that children will make choices adults wish them to make” (1991, p. 175). Instead of punishment or reward practices, McCord is of the view, that *reciprocity* is the key in dealing with children’s maladapted behaviours. If adults do what children want, he argues, then children will reciprocate and do what adults want them to do as well.

However, such a simplistic argument is unrealistic since if it could work effectively it would have had an application on many other issues. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on the way that the issue is perceived by someone, the society we live in should not permit equations of the sort ‘I will do what you want, if you do what I want’, since today’s society works in a much more complex way than simple equations. In a lawful society, citizens have to obey the rules and the law to maintain order. The same should apply to schools, which supposedly reflect society or, as others put it, are a microcosm or mirror image of society. Students should follow rules in order to be able to learn in an undisturbed, responsive, productive and structured environment. In society, there are courts, fines and prisons that deal with transgressions of the law. In schools, there are disciplinary methods such as suspension, detention, expulsion and other measures that deal with students’ violation of the school ‘law’.

#### **4.4 Conclusion:**

Given the fact that the traditional disciplinary practices are deemed by many scholars as ineffective and that their effects on students are negative, a review of these practices is a crucial matter that needs to be examined expeditiously not only for the benefit of the students and schools, but also for the good of society in general, which eventually becomes the receiver of troubled youth. Continuing on the path of using traditional disciplinary techniques in schools the way we always have, is neither sustainable nor acceptable, since these techniques are inappropriately used and have failed to catch up with the wider societal development and changes. Suspending difficult and defiant students repeatedly or transferring them from one

school to the other and forcing them, through certain policies, to drop-out of school, do not represent viable solutions to existing problems, as they do not deal and more importantly do not solve the students' real problems. If schools, however, decide to effectively 'own' their students' problems and dismiss their 'hands-off' response to students' behavioural issues, they will be able to search and find better and more effective ways to handle disruptive behaviour and combat violence. As Braaten (1997) argues, "Despite the currently popular rhetoric about getting tough with troubling students and bringing the role of the school back to basics, schools are part of an increasingly complex and diverse society, and must respond to the varied needs students inevitably bring with them" (p. 48).

The adherence to the 'punishment regime' that we have inherited from the past, a past which was so immensely different from our world today, can only be taken as naive romanticism or nostalgia of previous eras where different codes of cultural ethos reigned. Historians recommend that people read the past with a 'critical eye'. They argue that people can be taught from the past by taking advantage and using as examples the successes of our predecessors and by learning from their mistakes so that they can correct and reinvent the conditions that do not seem to apply nowadays. This is also the theory that schools today should ascribe to, namely reevaluate, or remove, if necessary, the impractical and damaging methods that harm children and reinvent or restructure the existing methods in order to manage students' disruptive behaviours in a way that respects both the school and its students.

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## Chapter 5

### **The Educational System in Cyprus**

#### **Introduction:**

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the educational system in Cyprus, discuss the pedagogical measures currently used in secondary public schools and refer to the recent attempts made within the national context to deal with disruptive behaviour in schools.

All information for the educational system in Cyprus, as presented below, is obtained from various sources of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus (booklets, webpage).

#### **5.1 Aim:**

The main aim of secondary public education in Cyprus is to “promot[e] and develop a healthy and moral personality in view of creating able democratic and law abiding citizens. It also aims at ingraining the national identity, the cultural values and the universal ideals for Freedom, Justice and Peace as well as nurturing love, respect for fellow-men in order to establish mutual understanding and democracy” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003, p.24).

#### **5.2 Duration and Division of Secondary Public Education:**

The duration of public secondary education in Cyprus is six years and is divided in two cycles: a) The Gymnasium Cycle (lower secondary school), which serves students of the age group 12-15 and b) The Lyceum Cycle (upper secondary school), which serves students of the age group 15-18. Education is compulsory until the student completes the gymnasium cycle or until he/she reaches the age of 15.

### **5.3 School Setting:**

Schools in Cyprus are divided in five main districts (Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, Paphos, and Ammochostos). All public schools are co-educational and all classes consist of mixed ability students. In contrast to gymnasiums which are established in rural, suburban and urban areas, lyceums are established in major cities only and serve all different populations. Gymnasiums can either be small or large depending on the area and the number of students they serve, whereas lyceums are larger schools as they serve a bigger population of students.

Since this study focuses on upper secondary school students, the information provided below concerns only the lyceum cycle.

### **5.4 Academic Year:**

The academic school year for students commences sometime around the first ten days of September and ends around the last ten days of May. The exact date for both the beginning and the end of the school year for students is determined on an annual basis by the Minister of Education and Culture. The entire school year is divided in three trimesters (September - December 10, December 11 - March 10 and March 11- May). June is the month of the final written examinations. Schools run five days a week (Monday to Friday) and each day is divided in seven, forty-five minute periods. Classes are organized by age-groups, but nonetheless students must receive the minimum passing grade on all subjects to proceed from one class level to the other.

### **5.5 Curriculum:**

The curriculum/syllabi for each age group and subject is prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and is supplemented by material produced by the Curriculum Development Unit. Teachers have the freedom to select added teaching

material for their subjects, if they wish, but they are obliged to fulfill the curriculum requirements set by the Ministry of Education and Culture and prepare students for the final written examinations.

In the lyceum cycle, the curriculum is common for the first year only, and as such all subjects are predetermined and compulsory for all students. In the remaining two years, students are obliged to take certain common core subjects, but at the same time they also have the flexibility to choose a specific number of 'stream subjects' in order to accommodate their individual inclinations, talents and interests. By doing so, the last two years of the lyceum cycle prepare students to attend Colleges and Universities and/or follow the career path they choose.

#### **5.6 Assessment:**

At the end of each trimester, students receive an academic report, which displays their grades in each subject, based on written exams and in-class performance. The scale used for grading written exams and for determining a student's overall academic performance on each subject is the following:

EXCELLENT: 19-20 out of 20 (A)

VERY WELL: 16-18 out of 20 (B)

GOOD: 13-15 out of 20 (C)

SATISFACTORY: 10-12 out of 20 (D)

POOR: 1-9 out of 20 (E)

At the end of the school year, students are required to take final written examinations. In the first year of the lyceum cycle, the examination courses are common for all students and consist of four subjects (Modern Greek, Mathematics, History and Natural Studies). In the second and third year, however, students are required to take final written examinations in two set common core subjects (Modern Greek and Mathematics) and two optional 'stream subjects' chosen by the



student. Exams in the last year of the lyceum cycle are the same for all students across the country and are known as 'Common School Leaving Examinations'. Students, who successfully pass their exams and graduate, receive a 'School Leaving Certificate'.

A student is promoted to the next class when he/she has a yearly grade of 10 out of 20 on each subject. For non-examined subjects, the yearly grade is calculated as the average grade for three trimesters. In other words, a student has to accumulate a minimum of thirty points in three trimesters in order to pass the subject. Students who fail to obtain the aforementioned yearly grade in non-examined courses have to take final written examinations on these courses as well in order to avoid grade retention. For examined subjects, the yearly grade is calculated as the average grade of the three trimesters and the written examination. This means that students have to accumulate a minimum of forty points from the three trimesters and the written examination to pass the subject.

As mentioned earlier, June is the month of the final written examinations. Students who fail to pass a subject in June are referred for written and/or oral examinations in September, right before the beginning of the new school year. Those who do not pass the examinations in September face grade retention.

### **5.7 Academic staff, Disciplinary Board and Pedagogical Team:**

The academic staff of each school consists of the following: 1) Principal, 2) A number of vice-principals, which varies, according to the size of the school, 3) Teaching Staff, and 4) A Career Guidance Counselor (otherwise referred to as Teacher of Advisory or Vocational Education).

All teachers, principals and vice-principals are civil servants who come under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Educational Service Commission of the Republic of Cyprus, which is responsible, *inter alia*, for teacher

transfers, promotions, appointments etc. As such, teachers can be transferred to any school in Cyprus during their career. Teachers are obliged to have one registered school district (out of the five school districts that exist in Cyprus), which is the district they reside. The Educational Service Commission, which decides on teachers' school appointments and transfers each year, attempts to satisfy the needs of all teachers by appointing them within their registered school district every year. However, no teacher can stay in the same school for more than ten years, while all teachers are required to serve at least two years of their teaching career outside their registered school district so as to gain the experience of other academic settings. Given the above, the academic staff of each lyceum is not always permanent, since each school year some faculty members may be transferred to another school or district and new faculty arrives to replace them. Each member of the academic teaching staff can serve as a *mentor* for a secondary school class to guide, support and communicate with students on a regular basis. Usually, in order to be able to be assigned as a mentor, the teacher should teach in his/her assigned class for a number of hours each week. Members of the teaching staff can also serve as *personal tutors* in the support programme that their school offers to students who experience rigorous academic difficulties.

At the beginning of each school year, the academic staff of each school forms bodies and committees to serve different functions. Two important bodies formed every year and which are directly related to the issues examined in this study, are the disciplinary board of the school and the pedagogical team of each class.

a) Disciplinary Board:

The disciplinary board consists of: 1) The principal of the school or an assigned vice-principal (who substitutes the principal in case of absence), who acts as the chairman of the board, 2) Two teachers 3) The mentor of the class, 4) The president of the Central Students' Council and 5) The student president of the class in which the disciplined student belongs to (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003, p.82).

The disciplinary board convenes when it needs to examine student cases of referred students that are deemed very serious. The board is obliged to examine each of the referred student cases within fifteen or maximum thirty days, depending on the severity of the student's misconduct. The student who is referred to the disciplinary board has the right to present the facts of his/her case before the board while the student's parents are also allowed to be present or participate in this procedure or hearing. Before reaching a final decision, "The chairman of the board can obtain the opinion of the teacher of Advisory or Vocational Education [otherwise known as career guidance counselor] the educational psychologist or another specialist, upon request of at least one member of the board or upon request of the student's parents or guardians" (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003, p. 83). After considering each student's case and all the facts and circumstances that concern the student at hand, the board takes its disciplinary decision.

b) Pedagogical Team:

The pedagogical team is class-specific and consists of: a) The mentor of the class b) The total number of teachers that teach in the class, c) Career guidance counselor d) Educational psychologist. The aim of the pedagogical team is to observe the learning and behavioural course of the class and of each student separately, in order to be able, if needed, to suggest or take any precautionary or corrective measures to help a student.

Besides the formation of the aforementioned board and teams by a school's academic staff, students, on their behalf, form their own bodies/councils, which represent their interests in the wider school community. The two main bodies formed by students, are the *Class Council* and the *Central Student Council*. *Class councils* are elected by the students of each class at the beginning of the school year and represent the interests of the students in the class. After their formation, the members of each class council are called to elect the members of the Central Student Council, which, as the main student body, represents all students in their school.



Lastly, parents of students in each school have the opportunity to participate, if they are interested, in what is known as the *Parent Association*. This association has its own Central Council or Executive Committee, which is elected by the parent members of the association.

### **5.8 School rules and regulations:**

The Ministry of Education and Culture is the competent authority on all educational matters in Cyprus and as such it formulates the policies, rules and regulations that permeate the functioning of public schools.

Each school, however, has the right to develop and distribute its own internal rules and regulations, which have to be within the framework of the wider rules and regulations determined by the Ministry and in accordance with a) The existing law/legislation, b) The Convention on the Rights of the Child, c) The principle of legality in the implementation of the procedures and disciplinary practices, d) The right of all individuals affected to express their opinions equally, e) The principle of proportionality and personalization of disciplinary practices and f) The rules of natural justice (Pavlou, 2005)

Within the aforementioned limitations, the internal rules and regulations of each school must be the product of collaboration between the school's teaching staff, and the Central Student Council who after agreeing on the internal rules, should meet to affirm and validate them. Before the publication of the school's internal rules, however, the Parent Association of the school should also be informed and consulted on this matter by the school's administration. Once agreed upon, affirmed and validated, internal rules should then be published in a handbook format and distributed to all parties. Rules should be revisited often in order to be evaluated and assessed, if the school administration deems important to do so.

### **5.8.1 School rules and regulations relevant to this study:**

a) Absences: The Ministry of Education and Culture has a certain predetermined quota of absences that a student is allowed to make before consequences and penalties can be implemented. There are essentially four different quotas that the Ministry has and two consequences/penalties effected if a student exceeds the quota. According to the regulations, an absence of a student from one class period equals one absence. Therefore, the absence of a student from school for an entire day equals seven absences, since each school day, as mentioned above, is divided in seven class periods. Absences can either be justified or unjustified.

A student who accumulates a number of 42-50 unjustified absences or a number of 150-160 total absences, of which the 110 are justified, is not allowed to take the school's final exams at the end of the school year in June. Instead, the student is given only one opportunity to take the exams at the beginning of September right before the new academic year begins. If a student accumulates more than 51 unjustified absences, or more than 161 overall justified and unjustified absences, he/she must not pass to the next grade and is forced to repeat the same year. In extremely rare cases, a student that has a number of 275 overall absences, of which the unjustified number does not exceed 50, may also be allowed to take the exams in September in order to pass to the next level. A student is also ineligible to take his/her exams in June and is forced to take them in September if he/she has: 1) a number of absences in a specific subject, which is seven times greater than the number of hours that this specific subject is taught per week (e.g. if a student takes Mathematics for five teaching hours per week, then he/she cannot exceed the number of 35 absences in that class), and 2) a number of 14-17 unjustified absences in the third trimester or a total of 51-54 absences of which 37 are justified.

Despite the above set quotas and regulations regarding absences, the teaching and administrative staff of a school has the authority to evaluate students on a case-by-case basis and make use of discretion towards students who display special

circumstances in order to help them avoid grade retention. These special circumstances mostly relate to serious health, personal and family issues. A student, however, may also avoid grade retention, if he/she displays a great effort to change and advance despite his/her weaknesses and personal adversities.

b) School Uniform and Appearance: Students are obliged to wear a school uniform at school every day, which is designated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The details for the uniform are specified in circulars that the Ministry of Education and Culture distributes to schools. Students can be informed about these circulars from their schools.

Complying with the rules and regulations pertaining to the school uniform is the responsibility of the student and his/her family. Students, who face financial difficulties and cannot comply with the school uniform regulations, are required to inform the school they attend in advance, so that the school can provide the student with the financial help needed. Attending school without a uniform is considered an indiscretion and is “punished” by the school’s administration through the use of the traditional disciplinary practices. There is also a designated uniform for physical education classes (P.E) and laboratories, which students should also adhere to.

Besides the school uniform, the Ministry of Education and Culture also tries to regulate students’ overall appearance, which according to the Ministry should be in line with their status as students. In this regard, the regulations of the Ministry as well as the public school regulations provide that students should not be allowed to embellish their appearance while in school with very long hair, rings, bracelets, earrings, elaborate necklaces, long manicured nails, dyed or fuzzy hair and make-up. Female students are allowed to wear, if they wish so, a simple ring and a pair of simple earrings.



## **5.9 Pedagogical Measures and Implementation:**

'Pedagogical measures' is the new term selected to replace the term 'Disciplinary Practices' which was used in the past. This study, however, uses the term disciplinary practices, which is essentially the term used in the international literature on the subject. The purpose of the pedagogical measures is to improve a student's overall behaviour by helping the student recognize and/or understand his/her mistakes so as not to repeat his/her misbehaviour. They also aim to enhance the student's personal accountability and self-discipline and establish a democratic and nurturing environment, which is a vital prerequisite for the smooth and productive functioning of the school unit.

According to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Culture, a list of pedagogical measures should be used and implemented by schools and teachers when dealing with undisciplined students. These pedagogical measures are displayed in the booklet "Operational rules of public secondary schools from 1990-2005" (Pavlou, 2005). It is noted that the list of the pedagogical measures, as displayed in the aforementioned booklet and presented below, was translated in English by the researcher.

1. Constructive Conversation → Teacher, Vice-Principal, Vice-Principal A, Principal
2. Comment → Teacher, Vice-Principal, Vice-Principal A, Principal
3. Reprimand → Teacher, Vice-Principal, Vice-Principal A, Principal
4. Teacher-Student Contract (Mutual contract between the teacher and the student in which the student commits not to repeat his/her misbehaviour and that he/she will follow/commit to the internal school rules. The contract should be signed by both the student and the teacher) → Teacher
5. Reprimand followed by a written, detailed and justified report to inform the parents → Teacher

6. Student removal from class. The student is sent to the principal's/vice-principal's office → Teacher
7. Compensation for school damage → Vice-Principal, Vice-Principal A, Principal
8. School Service (executing school related work aiming at utilizing the abilities and capabilities of the student for the benefit of the school community. This work should be executed during school hours with the exception of breaks) → Principal, Teaching Staff
9. Suspension (up to two days) → Principal, Vice-Principal, Vice-Principal A.
10. Moving a student to another class. Both the student and his/her parents or guardians should be notified in writing that the teaching staff has deemed it important to move the student to another class → Pedagogical Team.
11. Moving a student to another class upon a student's request. This can be done only once → Teaching Staff
12. Suspension (1-4 days) → Principal
13. Suspension (1-6 days) → Disciplinary Board
14. Suspension (1-8 days) → Teaching Staff
15. Definite expulsion from school with the right to enroll to another school → Teaching staff

A pedagogical measure that is not found in the aforementioned "Pedagogical Measures List", but is used in secondary public schools in Cyprus and is examined in this study, is the practice of 'downgrading a student's conduct' either after repeated suspensions or when a student is involved in a serious offense. This pedagogical measure is taken in combination with suspension, and its application/implementation has to be decided by the unanimous vote of the teaching staff at the final assembly, which takes place at the end of each semester.

Since this study focuses on the two main disciplinary practices currently used in public secondary schools in Cyprus, namely suspension and downgrading a student's conduct, a brief description of these practices is provided below:

Suspension: A student who is suspended from class has to remain at school until the end of the school day. The school has to notify his/her parents or guardians and engage the student into an activity according to the internal regulations of the school. The student should be supervised at all times by a member of the teaching staff that is assigned by the school's principal. The internal regulations of the majority of secondary public schools today provide that suspended students remain in class and attend lessons. In this way, the student stays in touch with the class and the curriculum and does not have to catch up later and fill in the gaps created from missing class time. By being allowed to stay in class and attend the lesson, the only substantial consequence for the suspended student is that he/she receives an absence that counts towards the number of justified absences that he/she is allowed to reach.

Downgrading of a student's conduct: A student's overall conduct/behaviour is assessed and characterized by the teaching and administrative staff at the end of each trimester as: a) Exceptional (Kosmiotati), b) Decent (Kosmia), c) Good (Kali), d) Reprehensible (Epimempti) and e) Poor (Kaki). The behavioural characterization appears in the academic report that each student receives at the end of each trimester. A student who has no disciplinary record automatically receives the exceptional characterization. If a student, however, displays unacceptable behaviour and has a record of one or more suspensions, then the student's behaviour is subjected to examination and the school's teaching staff may decide a downgrading of the student's conduct. If a student accumulates three consecutive downgradings of his/her conduct, then his/her yearly behavioural conduct is downgraded and is registered as such in the final academic report of the year. If, however, a student receives two downgrades during the school year and before the end of the year improves his/her behaviour greatly, then the student's conduct is not downgraded at the end of the school year and thus not registered in his/her final academic report. For students who are in the senior year in the lyceum cycle (17-18 age group), this policy takes a slightly different form. Although a student's conduct characterization is displayed on the student's report at the end of each trimester, it



appears nowhere on the School Leaving Certificate, which is the final and official report that students receive from their school when they graduate. The School Leaving Certificate concerns only a student's academic performance and is submitted when applying for entry in Colleges and Universities. Students can request a separate conduct report from their school, if the University or College that they apply to requires such documentation. In those instances, the school provides a conduct report in an essay format that describes in length the student's overall behaviour.

All negative behavioural characterizations must be fully justified in writing by the teaching and administrative staff who took the decision. Students whose behaviour is assessed as Poor (Kaki), or Reprehensible (Epimempti), the two lowest characterizations, are still allowed to continue attending their school, unless the school's staff has reasons to believe that the student should be expelled from school and enroll to another school for the sake of both the student him/herself and the school. If the teaching staff decides to apply such measure, then the school that the student already attends and the school that the student is to be transferred to, are obliged to cooperate and work together to design a specific schedule which will take into consideration the student's needs in order to help him/her adjust in his/her new environment and solve his/her problems.

In cases where a student faces severe health, psychological or family problems, which are known or have been brought to the attention of the school, the school's career guidance counselor or appointed psychologist prepares an essay concerning the student, and his/her behaviour will be assessed by the assembly of the teaching staff. The essay aims to present the student's facts of life and assist the teaching and administrative staff in reaching a more fact-based and informed decision about the student's behaviour.

### **5.10 Initiatives by the Ministry of Education and Culture to combat indiscipline** (Ministry of Education, 2010):

In acknowledging the rising levels of antisocial and disruptive behaviour in secondary public schools in Cyprus during the last decade, the Ministry of Education and Culture established in 2008 an ad hoc specialized committee to examine students' antisocial behaviour and make proposals for the implementation of specific measures to combat and prevent this behaviour.

After studying the issue for two months, the Committee submitted to the Ministry, in June 2008, a report recommending the implementation of a number of measures and initiatives to address the matter of indiscipline in schools. On the basis of the Committee's recommendations, the Ministry of Education and Culture decided to take, *inter alia*, the following actions/measures:

- 1) Establish a 'Coordinating Body' in the Ministry to produce policy, coordinate, guide, promote and evaluate programmes/initiatives and actions aimed at dealing with and preventing violence and antisocial behaviour in schools .
- 2) Establish a 'Unit of Immediate Interference' to deal with serious problems and cases of school violence and student indiscipline. This team is composed of educators, clinical psychologists and other specialized individuals.
- 3) Establish a unit known as the 'Observatory on Violence in School' to deal with delinquency matters. The Observatory records, codifies and evaluates information and data regarding the extent and the exhibited forms of school violence. The 'Observatory on Violence in School', which already operates in the Ministry of Education and Culture, is in close and systematic contact with the 'International Observatory on Violence in School'.

4) Promote the restructuring of the Educational Psychology Service and the Counseling and Career Education Service of the Ministry of Education and Culture on the basis of external evaluations from scientific committees.

5) Extend the institution of the Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP) and implement additional measures to support the already existing ones.

6) Implement on an experimental/pilot basis the institution of the 'School Social Worker'.

7) Significantly broaden educator-training programs with regard to the prevention and treatment of school violence and disruptive behaviour.

9) Extend the institution of the 'Open School' so that it operates in more municipalities, with the purpose to turn/convert schools into Community/Neighbourhood Cultural Centres and utilize their facilities for cultural, creative, sporting and recreational activities.

10) In the framework of curriculum development, the Ministry established a subcommittee for health education, aiming at integrating this education at all school levels.

### **5.11 Conclusion:**

The purpose of this chapter was to familiarize the reader with the national education context, by providing a concise overview of the Cyprus educational system and in particular of the lyceum cycle, which comprises the last three years of secondary education. The chapter refers, *inter alia*, to the school rules and regulations that exist in secondary public schools in Cyprus and explains in detail how these function. It also talks about the two main disciplinary practices currently used in secondary public schools in Cyprus, today, namely suspension and the



downgrading a student's conduct, and how these are being implemented. By providing this background information, the chapter aims to set the stage for the chapters that will follow, by helping the reader not only understand the educational realities in Cyprus, but also follow easier the reporting of the results and the discussion of this thesis.

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## Chapter 6

### Methodology

#### Introduction:

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) To assess the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as currently used in secondary public schools in Cyprus, examine the effects they have on students and their role in enhancing students' disruptive behaviour, 2) To gain knowledge and/or identify the school related factors that contribute to discipline related problems and may inhibit the proper functioning of the school's disciplinary practices. In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, the following research questions were formulated: 1) How effective do students and educators believe that their school's disciplinary practices are? 2) What are the effects of these disciplinary practices on students': a) social relations, b) emotional feelings towards disciplinary practices, c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour? 3) Are there any school related factors that contribute to disciplinary problems and affect the quality implementation of disciplinary practices?

#### 6.1 Research Design:

To address the aforementioned research questions, the study adopted a mixed methods research design, which is formally defined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as:

The class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study. Philosophically, it is the "third wave" or third research movement, a movement that moves past the paradigm wars by offering a logical and practical alternative...its logic of inquiry includes the

use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing theories and hypotheses) and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one's result (p.17).

The mixed methods research design was considered by the researcher as the most suitable, constructive and comprehensive way to address the aforementioned research questions since, as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) support, this method does not restrict the researcher in using either the quantitative or qualitative research method but instead offers him/her the opportunity to mix and combine the advantages of each method in order to obtain the best possible results. In fact, the goal of mixed methods research is not to replace either the quantitative or the qualitative approach, but rather to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in a single research studies and across studies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14). The mixed methods research design also provides the researcher the opportunity to use what Johnston and Turner call the "fundamental principle of mixed research" (as cited in Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). According to this principle, researchers should collect multiple data using different strategies, approaches and methods in such a way that the resulting mixture or combination is likely to result in complementary strengths and not overlapping weaknesses.

Since the effective use of this principle is a major source of justification for mixed methods research because the end product will naturally be superior to monomethod studies, the researcher thought that carefully joining the two paradigms, which many scholars/researchers consider as contradicting in nature, in that they use different philosophies and methodologies in collecting data, would not only successfully address the research questions of this study, but would also provide her research and results with added validity and strength.

In implementing the quantitative part of the study, the researcher used a non-experimental method, the survey research, which facilitated the examination of a wide-range of questions in a large number of students. The quantitative approach



also helped in the identification of variable-relationships, which proved statistically significant. In the quantitative part of the study the researcher managed to obtain qualitative data, through a number of open-ended questions that were integrated in the survey-questionnaire. In using the qualitative part of the study, the researcher used the method of interviews, which enabled her to engage educators in the study more easily and explore questions that could be more simply prompted by face-to-face interaction rather than by a survey-questionnaire.

Besides being the most suitable and comprehensive way to address the aforementioned research questions, implementing a mixed methods research design also gave the researcher the opportunity to use a triangulated approach to the study, which arguably provided her research and its findings with additional validity and safeguarded against a lack of reliability. Vidovich defines triangulation, as “a method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data” (O’ Donoghue & Punch, 2003, p.78).

## **6.2 The Sample:**

### **6.2.1 Sampling Approach:**

The sampling approach used for this study was a combination of *stratified and multistage cluster sampling* (or more specifically two-stage cluster sampling). Grades A, B, C, of the lyceum cycle served as the stratified part of this particular study. As explained in the previous chapter, the lyceum cycle in Cyprus consists of students, which fall within the age-range of 15-18 years old. Grade A consists of 15-16 year old students, Grade B of 16-17 year olds and Grade C of 17-18 year olds. To ensure equal representation of all age groups in the study, the researcher selected two grade A, two grade B, and two grade C classes from every school that participated in the study. The multistage cluster part of the sampling approach was satisfied by randomly selecting schools and classrooms. Schools comprised the first stage cluster while classrooms comprised the second stage cluster. Seven schools

were randomly selected out of the 38 lyceums that exist on the island. The schools were selected from a list, which was provided to the researcher by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus, while classrooms were randomly selected from a list provided to the researcher by each individual school that participated in the study. The only precaution applied to the classroom list was to have two classrooms from each Grade.

### **6.2.2 Sample Description:**

According to the statistical data provided to the researcher by the Ministry of Education and Culture, 23,083 students attended the lyceum cycle in the academic year 2008-2009 when this study was conducted. Of the 23,083, 12,882 (55.9%) were female and 10,201 (44.1%) were male. The ethnic composition of students for the same academic year was 95.5 percent Greek Cypriots and 4.5 percent foreigners. The 4.5 percent of foreigners also included students of Greek nationality, who speak the same maternal language and share the same religion and many of the cultural characteristics as Greek-Cypriots. In the present study a total of 717 students participated. The composition of the sample was essentially in line with the overall student population as 53.4% (n=383) were female and 46.6% (n=334) were male, while 95.8% (n=687) were Greek-Cypriots and 4.1% (n=30) were foreigners. The study consisted of three stages: A) Pilot Study, B) Homogeneity-Test Study and C) Main Study. In particular, the pilot study was conducted with 22 students of which (n=12) were female and (n=10) were male. The homogeneity test study was conducted with 119 students of which (n=57) were female and (n=62) were male. Finally the main study was conducted with 576 students of which (n=314) were female and (n=262) were male students.

### **6.2.3 Sample Recruitment:**

According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Culture about educational research, a researcher is required to apply for a research

permission/approval by submitting to the Ministry's appropriate Department (in this case, the Department of Secondary Education) all the necessary information and documentation regarding his/her research. The researcher then awaits to receive the Ministry's written approval/permission in order to be able to legally enter any public school for the purpose of conducting research. In line with the aforementioned regulations, the researcher submitted to the Ministry a file containing the following necessary information and documentation for this research: a) An information letter regarding this study ([Appendix A](#)), b) A Consent Form ([Appendix A](#)) c) Student Questionnaire ([Appendix D](#)) and d) Interview-Protocol for teachers ([Appendix E](#)). The Ministry's Ethics Review Committee, which is composed by members of the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, reviewed the documentation submitted, stressed the importance of implementing some of the precautionary measures that were mentioned by the researcher in the information letter (e.g. the researcher should contact schools in advance and receive parental consent before approaching the students) and approved the research proposal a month after the application for approval/permission was submitted.

The Ministry provided the researcher with a complete list of all secondary public schools, which contained the names of the principals of the schools, the addresses, and the contact details of schools in all educational districts in Cyprus, namely Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, Paphos and Ammochostos. To serve the needs of the pilot study, the homogeneity-test and the main research, the researcher randomly selected five secondary public schools from Limassol, one from Nicosia and one from Larnaca.

The initial contact with the schools was made with each school's main office where the researcher requested an appointment with the school's principal and handed in an envelope which contained a letter of information and a consent form to be reviewed and considered by the principal before the meeting. In the meetings that followed, the researcher met with each school's principal, discussed all the matters concerning the research (including the minor inconveniences that the research



could cause in the normal operation of the school on the days of the fieldwork) and received the principals' signed consent forms to proceed with the study. The vast majority of the school principals showed great interest in the study and were more than willing to help the researcher organize and carry out her research. Some of them even assigned a vice-principal to assist the researcher with any help needed, while others assigned the responsibility to the main office. In all cases, the researcher was supplied with the school's timetable, indicating the teachers' names, the days and times that each subject was taught, as well as with the map of the school's layout, when necessary. Due to scheduling issues, the researcher had to review each school's timetable and approach teachers that had accommodating schedules. Obviously with this method, not all teachers and not all classrooms in each school had the exact same probability of being selected, since scheduling and timetabling issues and constraints would not allow for a completely randomly selected sample. However, notwithstanding this minor constraint, the researcher applied the randomly selected principle by approaching all available teachers and their classrooms. Of course, this did not mean that all teachers who were approached and were invited to participate in the research with their classroom did so at the end, since some opted not to participate for their own reasons. This essentially meant that the teachers and classrooms who finally participated in the study were able to do so because of their schedule, time availability, the school circumstances and their interest in the study.

The teachers, who agreed to participate in the research with their classroom, also took the responsibility of allocating to their students the information letter and the parent consent form. Clarifications were made to students that if they wanted to participate in the research they had to return the consent form signed by their parents before the survey date. Students who failed to do so, would not be able to participate in the research and would instead be preoccupied by their teacher with classroom work until their classmates completed the questionnaire.

## **6.3 School Setting**

### **6.3.1 Selection of Settings:**

The selection of settings for this research was decided upon a number of characteristics that concern the student population of public secondary schools in Cyprus. All public secondary schools in Cyprus share a relatively homogeneous student population since, as mentioned above, 95.5 percent of the students are Greek-Cypriots. In addition, all lyceums in Cyprus attract students from various socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds, since students from urban, rural and suburban areas attend the small number of lyceums, which are situated only in cities. Therefore, lyceums are quite similar with regard to their student population.

Based on the above information about the student population, the researcher decided to randomly select schools from one of the educational districts of the island, namely Limassol, to conduct the pilot as well as the main research study. Before proceeding from the pilot study to the main research, however, and finalize the selection of one educational district for the study, the researcher decided to test the theoretically homogeneous secondary school student population in Cyprus in order to ensure that: a) The selection of one educational district was sufficient for the purposes of this study in that schools in other districts would produce quite similar results and thus would not have to be studied further, b) the student population is as homogeneous in practice as it is in theory, and c) the final results of the study could safely be generalized to all the secondary school student population.

The homogeneity test took place right after the pilot study, which was carried out with 22 students in Limassol. After reviewing, restructuring and eliminating some of the questions in the questionnaire based on the students' responses and finalizing the questionnaire to be used for the study, the researcher randomly selected one secondary public school from Nicosia (capital of Cyprus) and one from Larnaca (the

third largest educational district) to test the level of homogeneity by comparing these students' answers with the answers of students that the researcher would obtain from one randomly selected school in Limassol that would participate in the main study. Important differences among students' answers in the different districts would disprove the homogeneity argument and thus result to a more extensive survey in schools from all the educational districts of Cyprus. Conversely, similar results would allow the researcher to reduce her survey to schools located in only one district without jeopardizing or limiting the generalizability of the study. Results showed that the answers of students from the districts of Nicosia and Larnaca were very consistent with the answers of students from Limassol (See Table 6.1 below)

Table 6.1: Comparative tables of findings in selected questions (Main study-Nicosia sample-Larnaca sample)

QUESTION 16: Inconsistency in disciplinary action promotes disruptive behaviour			
	MAIN STUDY	NICOSIA SAMPLE	LARNACA SAMPLE
NO	9.4 %	7.1 %	6.4%
SOMETIMES	25.3 %	22.8%	27.4%
YES	65.3 %	70.2%	66.1%

QUESTION 18 : Disciplinary action helps solve problematic behaviours			
	MAIN STUDY	NICOSIA SAMPLE	LARNACA SAMPLE
NO	65.8 %	61.4 %	48.4 %
SOMETIMES	25.5 %	24.6 %	35.5 %
YES	8.6 %	14 %	16.1 %



**QUESTION 21: Effectiveness of suspension in dealing with disruptive behaviour**

	MAIN STUDY	NICOSIA SAMPLE	LARNACA SAMPLE
<b>NO</b>	<b>70.7 %</b>	<b>75.4 %</b>	<b>59.7 %</b>
SOMETIMES	23.4 %	14 %	22.6 %
YES	5.9 %	10.5 %	17.8 %

**QUESTION 23: Effectiveness of downgrading of a student's conduct in dealing with disruptive behaviour**

	MAIN STUDY	NICOSIA SAMPLE	LARNACA SAMPLE
<b>NO</b>	<b>70 %</b>	<b>66.7 %</b>	<b>59.6 %</b>
SOMETIMES	18.8 %	21.1 %	16.1 %
YES	11.3 %	12.3 %	24.2 %

**QUESTION 27: Effect of disciplinary action on teacher-student relationship**

	MAIN STUDY	NICOSIA SAMPLE	LARNACA SAMPLE
NO	4.5 %	3.5 %	3.2 %
SOMETIMES	17 %	21.1 %	16.1 %
<b>YES</b>	<b>78.5 %</b>	<b>75.4 %</b>	<b>80.7 %</b>

**QUESTION 42: Feelings of anger against the teacher who refers the student**

	MAIN STUDY	NICOSIA SAMPLE	LARNACA SAMPLE
NO	9.9 %	6.2 %	9.6 %
SOMETIMES	15.1 %	18.8 %	4.8 %
<b>YES</b>	<b>74.9 %</b>	<b>75 %</b>	<b>85.7 %</b>

**QUESTION 44: Feelings of revenge against the teacher who refers the student**

	MAIN STUDY	NICOSIA SAMPLE	LARNACA SAMPLE
NO	30.6 %	31.6 %	14.3 %

SOMETIMES	23.6 %	15.6 %	14.3 %
YES	45.8 %	53.2 %	71.4 %

QUESTION 49: Suspension helps not being suspended again			
	MAIN STUDY	NICOSIA SAMPLE	LARNACA SAMPLE
NO	74.5 %	75 %	68.8 %
SOMETIMES	8.7 %	17.9 %	18.8 %
YES	16.5 %	7.1 %	12.5 %

In light of these results, the district of Limassol was selected as the main field for this study. From the list of schools that the researcher obtained from the Ministry of Education and Culture, five schools were randomly selected from Limassol to serve the purposes of the main study.

### 6.3.2 Description of Settings:

The five schools that were selected for the main study, which, for confidentiality reasons will be labeled as School A, School B, School C, School D and School E, are all situated in the city of Limassol. Despite the fact that School A and School B find themselves in areas of the city that are more socioeconomically advanced in comparison to School C, D and E, all five schools, as mentioned earlier, admit students that live both around the school area as well as students that reside in rural areas. Therefore, all five schools serve an amalgamation of students, which come from demographically different areas and socioeconomic statuses.

School A accommodates the largest number of students (n=760), while the rest of the schools are slightly smaller with a range of 600-700 students each. School A also differs from the rest of the schools in its architectural design. The school was built nine years ago and its premises are quite extensive and cause great inconvenience to students' transitions from one classroom to the other. A map is definitely needed

for a visitor or a new student to find his/her way around. School B is not as massive as school A, but it shares the same problem in students' transition from one classroom to the other, since the school is comprised of two buildings, that are separated by the school's athletic courts, which also serve as the schoolyard. The majority of students attend classes to both buildings every day. Tardiness is a common characteristic among students with distance being the standard excuse. School C also had a minor problem with students' transition from one building to the other but has recently solved by connecting the two buildings through the expansion of their corridors. Schools D, E are concentrated in one main building that does not create as many problems with transition. Due to the extensive and continuous destruction of the schools' property by students, especially during breaks, all schools keep their classrooms locked during non-teaching hours. Inappropriate graffiti on most of the five schools' walls is another negative characteristic observed, although some of these schools made great efforts to involve and engage students in repainting the walls with art. None of the schools had an organized schoolyard, where students could sit around, spend time with their peers and chat during breaks. School A was the only school making a decent effort to accommodate students' need.

The schools that were randomly selected from the districts of Nicosia and Larnaca for the homogeneity-test, were very similar to the schools described above both in the student number and the student population they accommodate as well as the other school problems that were presented relating to the architectural design, destruction of school property etc.

## **6.4 Data Collection:**

The Measurement Instruments: A) Questionnaire B) Interview

### **6.4.1 Questionnaire: (Appendix D)**



#### **6.4.1.1 Why use a survey-questionnaire:**

A survey-questionnaire was considered as the most suitable instrument to collect data for this research for a number of reasons. First of all, a survey-questionnaire enables a researcher to accumulate a substantial and wide amount of data from a large number of people. When the data are gathered and analyzed, it makes it simple to make comparisons between respondents' answers. The survey-questionnaire is also considered a highly efficient instrument for the collection of information regarding people's opinions and perceptions on any subject (Muijs, 2008). With regard to its use and practicality, most people are familiar with the paper-pencil questionnaire as it is the most widely used among research instruments. Another benefit of this instrument is related to ethical issues since it can easily assure anonymity, a value that is most appraised by respondents, who find it easier to unreservedly express their opinions, thoughts and feelings without being concerned about being judged or criticized. A value also appraised by researchers, is that the answers they receive from respondents can be very sincere and open.

Despite the benefits of the survey-questionnaire, there are of course inherent faults and limitations that are associated with the use of this method, which can prevent a researcher from adopting or implementing this instrument. The most important limitation of this method is probably its inability to provide in-depth answers, which essentially hinders a researcher from discovering causality between variables. The typical structure of the questionnaire with the standardized answer-format and its relatively limited length does not facilitate the extraction of such causalities. Even if a researcher succeeds in reaching a possible "cause-effect" relationship through respondents' answers, it is not as easy to prove the relationship as in an experiment, where the environment is controlled (Muijs, 2008). Nevertheless, the important thing is that a researcher can presumably draw some conclusions that may lead to further research.

Another limitation of this instrument is that it does not allow the researcher to understand the respondent's behaviour. The instrument is designed to understand and register a subject's views and perceptions, but it is quite difficult to register the subject's behaviour and feelings. This drawback, however, can be counteracted by the use of qualitative method features. In the survey-questionnaire such a feature is the open-ended question that is able to elicit a clear and deeper reply on a respondent's behaviour and feelings. The open-ended question does not expect a standardized answer, but rather a more sincere and intimate account. This is why respondents are provided with space (usually a few lines) so that they can write their answer in their own words. In the present study, the researcher included open-ended questions in the otherwise structured with close-ended questions questionnaire, in an attempt to give respondents the opportunity to further elaborate on their feelings and behaviour after they have received suspension or a downgrading of their conduct.

#### **6.4.1.2 Construction of the Questionnaire:**

The questionnaire for this study was specifically designed and constructed to meet and satisfy the needs and purposes of this particular research. The questionnaire was developed following a close review of the literature on subjects that were related to the use of disciplinary practices in schools (mainly suspension), effectiveness of disciplinary practices and consequences, school factors that create or sustain indiscipline, disruptive behaviour, school climate, students' relationship with their school etc. Scales validated in other relevant studies, such as Costenbader and Markson (1998), Simons-Morton et al. (1999), O' Moore, Kirkham and Smith (1997) served as sources for the questionnaire. With the literature review completed and with the research questions at hand, the researcher started drafting several questions that could answer the main research questions. Before being finalized, and with my supervisor's valuable assistance, expertise and consultation the questionnaire went through several phases, several changes, extensive

reviewing and restructuring. The translated Greek version of the questionnaire was further commented and evaluated by a group of teachers, as well as by the Ethics Review Committee of the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, which had to approve the questionnaire in order for the researcher to be able to proceed with the research. Teachers' comments mostly concentrated on the language-level of the questionnaire. They considered the language-level above average for most students and remarked that questions should be simpler and more straightforward in order to avoid any confusion on the part of students.

Another issue that teachers raised, concerned one of the disciplinary practices that was originally chosen for this study, namely expulsion. They argued that the practice of expulsion in secondary public schools in Cyprus is not used as much today as in the past and that the actual percentages of students being expelled from schools are insignificant. Teachers thought that it would be statistically better for the study to replace expulsion with the disciplinary practice of downgrading a student's conduct since this practice is more frequently used in comparison to expulsion.

The Ethics Review Committee of the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus made two remarks, of which only one was valid. The first remark pertained to the term 'disruptive student' which was used by the researcher in the questionnaire. The committee thought that the term should be replaced in such a way as to describe the student's behaviour and not the student as a person. Thus, instead of the term 'disruptive student' it suggested the use of the term 'student who displays disruptive behaviour'. The second remark of the Committee, which was, in reality, not applicable, though, regarded section 7 in the questionnaire, where the researcher asks suspended students about their concentration and participation in the lesson being conducted at the same time they are suspended in class. The Committee was not aware or informed about secondary public schools' practice to retain students in class when they receive suspension and therefore instructed the researcher to correct the questionnaire by eliminating that section.



#### **6.4.1.3 Outline, length and language of the Questionnaire:**

As far as the outline of the questionnaire is concerned, the researcher chose the *booklet format* due to the size of the questionnaire and the fact that the booklet format would be more manageable and user friendly in comparison to other formats. The questionnaire extended to six pages including the front and the back cover. The front cover included the title of the study, the researcher's name and the name of the University that the researcher attends. The back cover included the last section of the questionnaire, as well as a thank you note by the researcher to all students who participated in the study. The first page of the questionnaire included a cover letter which: 1) Explained students the aims of the study, 2) Offered an explanation of the term disruptive behaviour and 3) Provided instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was originally prepared in English and was then translated accordingly in Greek, which is the native language of the Greek-Cypriot student population.

#### **6.4.1.4 Pilot-testing the Questionnaire:**

Following the comments of both the teacher group and the Ethics Review Committee of the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, the questionnaire was revised accordingly before being tested through the pilot study. The main aim of the pilot study was of course to ensure that the questionnaire was easily manageable and understood by the students and that all ambiguities in the instructions or in the wording of the questions would be checked upon and sufficiently clarified or altered before carrying out the rest of the study. Even though a pilot study does not demand more than 6 to 12 volunteers (Anderson, 2001), the researcher carried out the pilot study with an entire, randomly selected class of 22 students in a school in Limassol. Logistically, it was much easier for the teacher who offered his class for the pilot study, to have the entire class engaged with this task rather than half of it, because with the whole class engaged disruptions would be eliminated and all students

would be able to concentrate in answering the questionnaire to provide more valid and concrete results. Teachers notified their students in advance for the date and time of the pilot study. The researcher asked the teacher to distribute the information letter and parent consent form to the prospective participating students and explain to them how the procedure works, as well as what is expected from them concerning the return of the parent consent form.

On the day of the pilot study, the teacher informed the researcher that all students had returned the consent form signed by their parents and that the entire class would participate in the pilot study. The researcher was present the entire time for the pilot study, whereas the teacher left, after first asking and confirming that the researcher was comfortable in taking over the class. Students were greatly encouraged by the researcher to write comments next to questions and notify the researcher, by raising their hand, whenever they encountered difficulties in comprehending or answering any question. When all students finished answering the questionnaire, the researcher had a very constructive discussion with them as to what they liked or not, what they had difficulty in understanding, what would they change in the questionnaire, if they found the subject interesting etc. Most students demonstrated great enthusiasm with the subject and had strong opinions about the disciplinary practices used in their school. The questionnaire used in the pilot study was then closely examined by the researcher, who proceeded to simplify some questions and completely eliminate others. The overall results, however, proved to be very promising and encouraging to the researcher.

#### **6.4.1.5 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire:**

In line with the recommendations of several scholars (Anderson 2001; Cresswell 2008; Muijs 2008) on the fundamentals of educational research, the researcher took a number of measures to ensure that the reliability of the questionnaire would be secured. The length of the questionnaire was sufficient and within the suggested limits (4-6 pages). The wording of the questions as well as the format of the

questionnaire was examined, improved and appraised by the researcher's supervisor, a group of teachers and the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus. The questionnaire further included questions that were related to each other, but worded differently in order to check the consistency and reliability of students' answers. The pilot study that was conducted to test the questionnaire and its reliability demonstrated a student group that was enthusiastic about the subject and results that were very promising to the researcher. By having a number of experts evaluate the content of the questionnaire, scan the questions and check whether the questions can measure what they are supposed to measure, was one way to increase the validity of the instrument. The student questionnaire results were rational and consistent, thus allowing the researcher to draw valid conclusions from them (Creswell 2008).

#### **6.4.1.6 Final version of the Questionnaire:**

##### ***a) Structure:***

The questionnaire developed for this study examined students' opinions on the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as currently used in secondary public schools in Cyprus as well as the effects that these practices can have on students. Teachers' beliefs on this subject were examined separately in interviews that are described below in section 6.4.2. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 66 questions. 45 out of the 66 questions were close-ended questions and used a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much', to rate the frequency of each question, as well as the degree of agreement or disagreement with the question. Another 14 of the questions were also close-ended questions that provided however, mostly 'yes-no' possible answers. Two questions out of these 14 further invited an open-ended comment. Six questions were entirely open-ended and one question was a ranking question. The questionnaire aimed to serve three categories of students: 1) The non-suspended students, 2) The suspended students and 3) The students who were both suspended and further received a downgrading



of their conduct. Students who never received suspension were required to answer questions 1-34. Students who received suspension were asked to answer questions 1-53, and students who received both suspension and a downgrading of their conduct were expected to answer the entire questionnaire from question 1 to 66. In this way, the researcher could look into and statistically compare the answers of all three groups of students.

As mentioned before, the main research questions that the survey-questionnaire had to answer were the following: 1) How effective do students believe that the disciplinary practices currently used in their secondary public school are? 2) What are the effects of these disciplinary practices on students': a) social relations, b) emotional feelings and reactions towards disciplinary practices c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour?

To answer these questions, the researcher divided the questionnaire into nine sections, namely: 1) General demographic and academic information (Questions: 1-8), 2) Students' perception of disciplinary practices and relationship to disruptive behaviour (Questions: 9-17), 3) Effectiveness of disciplinary practices (Questions: 18-26), 4) Social effects of disciplinary practices on students (Questions: 27-33), 5) Disciplinary Record and reasons for misbehaviour/disruptive behaviour (Questions: 34-37), 6) Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students (Questions: 38-49), 7) Academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students (Questions: 50-53), 8) Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students who further received a downgrading of their conduct (Questions: 54-63) and 9) Academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students who further received a downgrading of their conduct (Questions: 64-66).

### ***b) Rationale:***

The rationale that the researcher used for each individual question in the questionnaire is as follows:

## **1) General demographic and academic information (Questions 1-8):**

**Question 1:** With this question the age of the student is requested in order to know precisely the age- group that the researcher is dealing with.

**Question 2:** With this question the gender of the student is requested in order to be able to differentiate the answers of boys from girls and draw conclusions/evaluate if there are any statistically significant results in the way that boys and girls answer the questions.

**Question 3:** This question asks to identify the place of residence of the respondent student. There are three options available and students should check one of them: Urban, Rural, Suburbs. This demographic information is needed in order for the researcher to compare, if she so wishes, the answers of students that live in the city, in a rural area or in the suburbs and observe any statistical differences in their answers.

**Question 4:** General question which aims to get a broad idea of how students feel about school. The question is important because the way students feel about school can influence both their learning and behaviour.

**Question 5:** Students are requested to check the appropriate answer about their academic performance, otherwise known as Grade Point Average (GPA). The five options available to them correspond to the scales used by schools to evaluate a student's academic performance as presented on the report they receive each trimester. The researcher aimed to correlate this question with a student's disciplinary record and find out whether there are any statistically significant results.

**Question 6:** This close-ended 'Yes-No' question inquires about students' learning difficulties and then provides a few lines to students to give them the opportunity to

expand on their learning difficulty, should they have one. It is important for the researcher to be aware of such difficulties in order to be able to make comparisons/correlations between students' answers. Students' learning difficulties may influence their overall experience with the school system as well as their behaviour.

**Question 7:** Close-ended 'Yes-No' question. Secondary public schools in Cyprus provide students with learning difficulties the opportunity to participate in their school's support program. At the beginning of each school year schools identify the students who have learning difficulties and problems and ask them, if they so wish to register to their school's support program, which is basically a tutorial course that helps students on a one-to-one basis fill their academic gaps and deal with their learning difficulties. The question was set so as to give the researcher the opportunity to correlate this question with other questions and find out whether a student's participation in his/her school support program may influence their opinion regarding their school's disciplinary practices, their behaviour, disciplinary record etc.

**Question 8:** Close-ended 'Yes-No' question. Students' involvement in extracurricular activities also provides room for correlations and comparisons between students' answers and attitudes.

## **2) Students' perceptions about their school's disciplinary practices and relationship to disruptive behaviour (Questions 9-17):**

**Questions 9-10:** Close-ended 'Yes-No' questions that are offered for correlations, comparisons and comments. A school's booklet on rules and regulations which includes, *inter alia*, the disciplinary practices and procedures that the school uses is normally distributed to students at the beginning of the school year, as it is the school's responsibility to inform their students of their rules, regulations and practices and see to their enforcement. It is important that students are aware of



their school's rules and regulations as well as of the disciplinary practices that are enforced in order to know in advance that misbehaviour carries with it specific consequences and penalties. It is also acknowledged by several researchers, as mentioned earlier, that sufficient information and school-student communication may deter students from disrespecting the rules and from acting out. If students are aware of their school's rules and practices and still break the rules without considering the consequences, then this may be an indication of poor rules and ineffective practices.

**Questions 11-17:** Close-ended questions, using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much', asking students about their evaluation and perceptions regarding the disciplinary practices that their school uses and examining possible connections/links between students' perceptions of the disciplinary practices and disruptive behaviour. Although causality cannot be proved by the statistical analysis of these questions, Muijs (2008) sustains that "by collecting data on as many relevant variables as possible (...) and careful statistical modeling it is sometimes possible to tentatively reach a view on cause and effect although it will never be as clear cut as an experiment" (p. 45). According to the existing literature, as we have seen, disciplinary practices can enhance disruptive behaviour when they are perceived as unfair, strict, inconsistent or unnecessary. As such, these questions are very important as they aim to examine whether students who perceive the disciplinary practices that their school uses as unfair, strict, inconsistent or unnecessary are also very likely to reject these practices and react in a negative and disruptive way every time that disciplinary action is enforced upon them.

### **3) Effectiveness of disciplinary practices (Questions 18-26):**

**Question 18:** Close-ended question using a five-point scale which ranged from 'Yes very much' to 'No, not at all'. 'This question seeks to find out students' beliefs/perceptions about disciplinary practices and their ability to resolve

students' problematic behaviour. If students believe that disciplinary practices benefit them, it is more likely that they will accept and acknowledge their use. If, on the other hand, students have no faith in the capacity of disciplinary practices to help them resolve their disruptive behaviour, then disciplinary practices must probably be regarded as useless and ineffective procedures.

**Question 19-20:** Close-ended questions using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. The purpose of the questions is twofold: i) examine whether students believe that disciplinary practices can actually reduce or worsen a student's behavioural problems and 2) attempt to establish a link or association between ineffective practices and disruptive behaviour. According to research, ineffective practices may have an adverse effect on students' problematic behaviour.

**Questions 21, 22:** Close-ended questions using a five-point scale, which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. Whereas questions 18-20 referred to disciplinary practices in a more general way, questions 21 and 22 are specifically designed to address the disciplinary practice of suspension. Students are inquired about the effectiveness of this disciplinary practice, and whether they believe that it can deter disruptive students from misbehaving again. Questions 21 and 22 are essentially the same question, but worded in a different way in order to check the reliability of the students' answers when analyzing the data.

**Questions 23, 24:** Close-ended questions using a five-point scale, which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. As in questions 21 and 22, questions 23 and 24 are specifically designed to address the other main disciplinary practice being used in secondary public schools in Cyprus, namely the downgrading of a student's conduct. Similar to questions 21 and 22, questions 23 and 24 ask about the effectiveness of this particular practice and its ability to deter students from misbehaving again. Questions 23 and 24 are essentially the same question, but worded in a different

way in order to check the reliability of the students' answers when analyzing the data.

**Question 25:** Ranking question. Students are asked to rank six specific suggestions provided in the question which concern other measures/practices that their school could implement to tackle disruptive behaviour. The suggestions were based on practices and measures used in other countries. As disruptive behaviour and disciplinary practices currently used in schools directly concern and affect all students, their beliefs, views and needs about what alternative practices and methods could reduce a student's disruptive behaviour, should be taken into consideration. This ranking question also provides the researcher with a general idea about what students' needs really are. In other words, what students believe could serve them better is maybe what the school should do to effectively handle the problem. Communicating with students about their problems and how they can be solved is fundamental in reaching at the root of a problem. The question, although restricting students to six options in order to provide realistic alternatives used in schools in other countries, offers students the opportunity to have a say and participate in the formation of alternative disciplinary practices in schools.

**Question 26:** Open-ended question. This question is a continuation of the previous ranking question and refers to the same matter. This open-ended question, however, does not restrict students with options. On the contrary, this question invites students themselves to think and suggest a practice that they believe could work proactively and effectively to counteract disruptive behaviour. In the researcher's view, this is an important question as besides giving students the opportunity to suggest new and alternative practices to deal with disruptive behaviour, it also puts students to the test, since one can examine through their answers their maturity and responsibility levels and whether they can be involved with matters that directly affect them.

#### **4) Social effects of disciplinary practices on students (Questions 27-33):**



These questions are concerned with the social effects/consequences that disciplinary practices may have on students. How do disciplinary practices may affect a student's relationship with his/her teachers, vice-principals, parents and peers? How are disciplined students treated in their school environment? It is important that all students (disciplined and not) answer these questions so as to receive a more holistic idea on what is really happening. Sometimes disciplined students may feel hard done by or unappreciated due to the disciplinary measure they have received and this may or may not always be the case.

**Questions 27-30:** Close-ended questions using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. The questions ask how disciplinary actions affect a student's relationship with his/her teachers, vice-principals, peers and parents. The questions are important in helping the researcher determine whether disciplinary actions have an effect on the social development and relations that students have with their social fabric. Research shows that the teacher-student relationship is very vital for both teacher and student, since the establishment of warm relations as well as close communication between teachers and students is considered to be one of the main elements in reducing students' disruptive behaviour. The same essentially applies in the case of vice-principals. The question regarding students' relationships with their classmates and peers is also important, since it can be used to determine whether disciplinary practices result in the stigmatization, rejection or alienation of disruptive students from their school environment. Such a development could lead students to react with further misbehaviour, which would prove that the disciplinary practices used are ineffective and do not achieve their intended goal. Lastly, the relationship of students with their parents is examined since the way that parents react to their children's misbehaviour is important in how students perceive the seriousness of their offense and treat the disciplinary action taken against them. In other words, if parents treat their children's indiscipline with indifference they send their children the message that their misbehaviour is acceptable and consequently their children will not mind the disciplinary action taken against them.

Question 31, 33: Close-ended question using a five-point scale, which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. Both questions are designed to obtain students' views on the social effects of the two specific disciplinary practices examined in this research, namely suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct. In particular, both questions ask whether these practices lead students to being isolated from their school environment. Questions 31 and 33 are essentially related with questions 27-29 since possible isolation of both suspended students and/or students who have received a downgrading of their conduct in school, may be the result of strained relationships with their teachers, vice-principals or peers.

Question 32: Close-ended question using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. Research shows that students who are disruptive and are often being disciplined, tend to socialize with peers falling in the same category as them. Question 32 will help the researcher evaluate the validity of this finding and in addition reexamine the disciplined student's relationship with his/her peers/classmates.

#### **5) Disciplinary record and reasons for misbehaviour/disruptive behaviour (Questions 34-37):**

These questions deal with a student's own record of disruptive behaviour and disciplinary action that was taken against him/her. With these questions, the researcher wanted to discern between three categories of students: a) Never disciplined, b) Disciplined with suspension, c) Disciplined with suspension and downgrading of the student's conduct. Depending on their answer of question 34, only the students who belonged in categories b and c could proceed with answering the remaining questions namely questions 35-66 of the questionnaire. Students who belonged in category a, were requested to review their answers on all questions from 1-34, ensure that they had answered all questions, hand the questionnaire to their teacher or the researcher who was present in their class and keep quiet until

the rest of their classmates finished with the questionnaire. The division of students into three categories according to their disciplinary record was deemed necessary, since the questions that follow concern a student's feelings/emotional state and reaction towards disciplinary practices. Comparisons and correlations are also easier to make when categories exist.

**Question 34:** Close-ended 'Yes-No' question. Students answering yes to this question would proceed to the questions that followed. Students answering no would finish the questionnaire on question 34 and return the questionnaire to the researcher.

**Question 35:** Close ended question that asks disciplined students about the frequency of disciplinary action in the last six months (from the beginning of the school year until March 2009 when the fieldwork was conducted). The question provided the following five possible options: A) Once in the last 6 months, B) Twice in the last six months, C) Approximately once a month, D) Approximately twice a month, E) Every week.

**Question 36:** Open ended question that invites students to write in their own words which was the last disciplinary action/practice they have received and why. With this question, the researcher was interested in finding out what kind of disruptive behaviour can elicit disciplinary action and which are the most common 'offenses'/misconducts displayed by students. Valuable suggestions may emerge from students' answers on what the school can do to counteract problematic/disruptive behaviour.

**Question 37:** Close-ended question that discerns students into two categories: a) Those who have received suspension and b) Those who have received a downgrading of their conduct. The answers to this question will provide the researcher with figures on the frequency of use of the two practices and will determine the amount of questions that the two categories of students will be called to answer. Suspended students will answer questions 38-53 and students who have



further received a downgrading of their conduct will answer the entire questionnaire.

#### **6) Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students (Questions 38-49):**

This section deals with suspended students' emotional response towards the disciplinary action of suspension. How students feel and react towards suspension is important not only for uncovering the emotional consequences that this disciplinary practice may have on students but also for evaluating its effectiveness. If this disciplinary action causes more harm than good, more problems than solutions, then there is plenty of reason to revisit and reevaluate this practice so as to make it better or abandon it altogether and find other alternatives that may be more prolific in solving a student's behavioural problems.

**Question 38:** Close ended 'Yes-No' question. This question examines students' feelings towards the last suspension they have received. The researcher is interested in finding out the percentage of students who deem that the disciplinary action or "punishment" they have received is appropriate and fair. By answering yes to this question, students essentially indicate that they understand why they were "punished" and that they consider their "punishment" fair. Accepting "punishment" may also mean that the student has considered his/her actions and that he/she would probably not repeat them again. On the other hand, students who negatively answer this question are usually the ones who feel bitter by their "punishment" and sometimes even revengeful. Question 38 invites an open-ended comment by the students who feel that suspension was not appropriate or fair to their situation. Students' open ended comments on this issue should be taken into consideration by policy makers since what works and what does not work for students is something that should interest them. If the majority of students feel that the disciplinary action they have received was not appropriate and fair, then this

might mean that suspension might not be an effective disciplinary measure anymore or that the procedural justice or distributive part of this practice is not applied.

**Questions 39-41:** Close-ended questions using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. Questions 39-41 deal with students' feelings about themselves when they receive suspension and as such they can help the researcher determine the effectiveness of this disciplinary practice. As research suggests, "punishment" can be regarded as a successful measure if it causes feelings of remorse to the affected individual and deters him/her from misbehaving again. If a student treats "punishment" with indifference, does not exhibit any feelings of remorse and is apathetic in general about the rejection of his/her actions, then obviously punishment cannot be considered as an effective measure to combat the student's maladaptive behaviour.

**Questions 42-45:** Close-ended questions using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. The purpose of these questions is twofold: 1) elicit students' feelings towards the teacher who referred them and the vice-principal who enforced the disciplinary action 2) examine whether suspension may cause feelings of revenge to students thus reinforcing their disruptive behaviour. Students who feel resentful towards their teacher or vice-principal are more likely to repeat their misbehaviour or even cause material or physical harm to the person they take as responsible for their "punishment". These questions are important since they will help the researcher assess if suspension is an effective disciplinary tool or if the only effect it has is to stir up students' emotions and eventually lead them to even more misbehaving conduct. According to research, successful measures should not cause escalation of a problem, but rather correct the situation, encourage appropriate behaviour and appease relationships. These questions will therefore assist the researcher in determining whether these are some of the effects that suspension has.

**Question 46:** Close-ended question using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. This question asks students if they would be inclined to repeat their disruptive behaviour after being suspended. The thinking behind question 46 is identical to the one in questions 42-45, as this question also aims at examining if problematic/disruptive behaviour is being reinforced with a disciplinary measure instead of being reduced and/or eliminated by it.

**Question 47:** Close-ended question using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much' asking students if they feel stigmatized due to their disciplinary record. This question could provide answers for the effectiveness of disciplinary practices and point to the socio emotional effects that suspension may have on students. As explained before, research indicates that students, who feel stigmatized by their school's disciplinary practices and consequently by their teachers and vice-principals, may isolate themselves from their peers and teachers/administrators, detach from school, involve with other deviant peers and/or become more aggressive.

**Question 48:** Open-ended question which provides students the opportunity to freely express their feelings on suspension and add anything that may have not been included in the close ended questions of this section. The purpose of this question is to try to receive valuable insights into the feelings of disciplined students regarding suspension, and thus help policy makers evaluate the effects that this practice has on students and its effectiveness.

**Question 49:** Open-ended question: This question also provides students with a few lines to express themselves on how they feel about this practice's capacity to help students avoid misbehaviour and future disciplinary action. By acquiring more information on students' feelings about this practice this question also aims to help the researcher in further assessing or evaluating its effectiveness.



**7) Academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students (Questions 50-53):**

Close-ended questions using a five-point scale which ranged from 'No, not at all' to 'Yes very much'. These questions deal with the academic effects that disciplinary practices may have on suspended students. Research shows that besides social and emotional effects, repeated suspension may have a negative impact on students' academic performance as well. As mentioned earlier, in secondary public schools in Cyprus, suspended students spend their suspension time in class attending lessons. While the thinking behind this application is mainly to keep the disciplined student in class in order not to fall behind on the taught curriculum, both teachers and students are challenging this practice. Having in mind the implementation of this practice by the vast majority of public schools in Cyprus, questions 50-53 aim at examining whether the thinking behind this practice is justified, by asking students if they can concentrate and participate in class while being suspended and whether they perceive or believe that suspension affects their academic performance and future aspirations.

**8) Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students who further received a downgrading of their conduct (Questions: 54-63)**

**9) Academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students who further received a downgrading of their conduct (Questions: 64-66)**

The last two sections of the questionnaire, namely section 8 (Questions: 54-63) and 9 (Questions: 64-66) deal with the emotional and academic effects that the practice of downgrading a student's conduct has on students who receive this sanction. Both sections 8 and 9 are identical in their rationale and wording as sections 6 and 7, which examine the emotional and academic effects that suspension has on students who receive this sanction. The only difference in these sections is that the disciplinary practice of suspension is replaced with the disciplinary practice of

downgrading a student's conduct and that instead of asking students about their concentration and participation levels in class while disciplined, it asks them about how they feel about participating in their school activities after receiving a downgrading of their conduct.

***c) Procedure:***

The main study was conducted from March 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 to April 8<sup>th</sup> 2009. Thirty-six classes from Grades A, B, C participated in total (12 A, 12 B, 12 C). The information letter and parent consent form were handed out to students by their teachers in advance of the study. Only students who returned their parent consent form signed were able to participate in the study. The questionnaires were distributed and collected in each class by the researcher herself.

The researcher explained to students that the questionnaire concerned the disciplinary practices used in their schools, namely suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct and that their views and thoughts about the use and effectiveness of these practices were very important to the study. The researcher requested that students work on their own and that they honestly and truthfully answer the questions. It was also underlined that the only information that students should write on the questionnaire regarding their identity was their school, class and date and that their name should appear nowhere on the questionnaire. The researcher remained in class while students filled the questionnaires and answered any questions that were raised by students in relation to the questionnaire. Students had about 30-35 minutes to answer the questionnaire and were asked to place their completed questionnaire at the side of their desk so as to make it easier for the researcher to collect it and check if all questions were answered. The researcher counted the questionnaires at the end of each class and placed them in an envelope in which she wrote the school name, date, class, time, teacher name, and finally the total number of valid questionnaires collected from each class.

#### **6.4.2 Interviews:** (Appendices E & F)

Interviews were scheduled and conducted with 40 educators in total (n=20 female and n=20 male), of which 30 were teachers and 10 were vice-principals. The teachers and vice-principals who participated in the study, represented a range of subject specializations within secondary public schools and had varied years of working experience ranging from four years of experience to 34. The teachers were approached by the researcher at their schools during the 'questionnaire phase' of the study and were invited to participate in this research by giving an interview. An information letter and a consent form were initially handed out to a number of randomly selected teachers with the agreement to have them returned to the researcher before the 'questionnaire phase' in their school was completed. The teachers who finally agreed to participate set a date and time for the interview at the beginning of May 2009, after the holiday recess of the Greek Orthodox Easter. Some of the teachers who consented to an interview were also the ones who agreed to have one of their classes participate in the study.

Interviews ranged between 15-35 minutes and were conducted at the schools' libraries or at the offices of vice-principals. The interviews followed essentially the same line as the students' questionnaires so as to answer to the main research questions of this study. However, teachers were further asked to indicate if there are any school related factors that could be influencing the effectiveness of disciplinary practices and make suggestions regarding the issue of school discipline and the implementation of disciplinary practices in public schools. Therefore, the main focus of the interviews was to elicit the perceptions of the educational staff about the discipline level in their school, the effectiveness of disciplinary practices, the factors that may be affecting the quality implementation of their school's disciplinary practices, the effects that disciplinary practices can have on students and their suggestions regarding school discipline and the effective implementation of the existing disciplinary practices. The interview protocol contained mostly open-ended questions, which facilitated probing the participants' views on the subject.



Close-ended questions were used at the beginning of the interview in order to establish good rapport with the participants. With the participants' permission, all interviews were tape-recorded for accuracy. However, participants were also informed that if they did not wish to be tape-recorded, written notes were to be kept, instead, during and after the conclusion of the interview. Only two teachers declined tape-recording and thus the researcher took written notes. The interviewees were also informed that the interviews would be transcribed and that the researcher was to draw her conclusions on their comments.

## **6.5 Data Analysis:**

### **6.5.1 Questionnaire:**

The researcher used the SPSS statistical data analysis software (now known as PASW) to analyze her data, as it was understood that this software would best serve the needs of this research. Moreover, the SPSS program is also the most common and user-friendly package for educational research. In order to be able to analyze the data, the answers were coded as follows:

#### **Close-Ended Questions:**

##### **Question 2: Gender:**

1: boy

2: girl

##### **Question 3: Origin:**

1: city

2: village

3: suburbs

##### **Yes-No questions:**

- 1: No
- 2: Yes

**Ordinal questions:**

- 1: No, not at all
- 2: Not so much
- 3: Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- 4: Mostly
- 5: Yes, very much so

**Open-Ended Questions:** Regarding the open-ended questions, the categories were formed after examining the data and were coded as follows:

**Question 26:** *Other suggestions for treating disruptive behaviour at schools:*

- 1: School-Home communication
- 2: Better teacher-student communication
- 3: More flexibility with rules
- 4: Out-of-school suspension for misbehaving students
- 5: Better rule communication and enforcement
- 6: School psychologist in every school
- 7: Make school more interesting and attractive
- 8: Definite expulsion of misbehaving students from school
- 9: Prohibit misbehaving students from participating in in-school or out-of-school activities
- 10: Misbehaving students to stay after school hours and engage in school related work (e.g. cleaning)

**Question 36:** *Reason for recent punishment:*

- 1: School Uniform

- 2: School truancy-Staying out of class
- 3: Teacher-student communication
- 4: Curse at a teacher
- 5: School property damage
- 6: Fighting
- 7: Disturb class
- 8: Smoking

**Question 38:** *What should have been done instead of suspension:*

- 1: Be treated more justly
- 2: No suspension
- 3: Warning

**Question 48:** *Other feelings because of suspension:*

- 1: Anger
- 2: Feeling bad
- 3: Feeling ashamed
- 4: Feelings of revenge
- 5: Feeling unjustified
- 6: Indifference

**Question 49:** *Suspension helps not being suspended again:*

- 1: No
- 2: Yes
- 3: Sometimes

**Question 54:** *What should have been done instead of the downgrading of your conduct:*

- 1: No downgrading



2: Warning

**Question 62:** *Other feelings because of the downgrading of your conduct:*

1: Shame

2: Anger

3: Revenge

4: Feeling sad

**Question 63:** *Downgrading of your conduct helps not being suspended again:*

1: No

2: Yes

Each valid questionnaire was given a number by the SPSS program. No student, who was present on the day of the survey, declined to participate in the study. However, the total number of students that participated in the study with a valid questionnaire was 717 out of the 812, which was the total number of students in the classes that were randomly selected to participate in this study. 76 students were absent on the date that the survey took place in their class and 19 questionnaires were disqualified by the researcher because of incomplete/missing information, unreadable information and copying. After coding them, the data were submitted to the SPSS program and were analyzed. Initial analysis of the data included a univariate analysis or a frequency distributions analysis, which offers the researcher general descriptive information needed to check the study's variables and the research questions. By using the univariate analysis or a frequency distributions analysis of the data, the researcher firstly examined the results of each individual variable in order to check, for example, how many respondents replied to a question in a certain way, how many respondents reside in the city, suburbs or a rural area, what was the percentage of males and females that participated in the study etc. Following this initial analysis, the researcher proceeded with a bivariate analysis in which the relationship between variables was examined. The alpha level for the

bivariate analysis was set at the .05 significance level. In this study, the bivariate analysis included a number of statistical tests: 1) Chi-square: was used as a test of significance when the data were expressed in frequencies. For 2x2 tables, Fisher's exact test was applied when there were fewer than 21 cases. Yates' corrected chi-square was applied for all other 2x2 table 2) Correlation analyses were used to examine the association between variables using the Pearson product-moment correlation etc (crosstabulation, Spearman test and phi-coefficient.) The results of these tests will be presented in the Results chapter that follows.

### **6.5.2 Interviews:**

As Strauss and Corbin stated, "By breaking down [the data] and conceptualizing we mean taking apart an observation, a sentence, a paragraph and giving each discrete incident, idea or event, a name, something that stands for or represents a phenomenon" (as cited in Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p. 18). The interview protocol was structured under five categories coded/titled: a) General Information, b) School Discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices (suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct, c) Students' reaction/response towards disciplinary practices, d) General effects/Consequences of disciplinary practices on students' and on students' disruptive behaviour and e) Suggestions. With the exception of the first category, which served the purpose of establishing good rapport with the interviewees, all other categories contained specific questions that aimed to provide answers to the general themes as coded/titled above. The participants' responses were examined for trends and similarities and from the information that emerged the researcher was able to categorize/group the data in certain thematic clusters. The results of this analysis will also be presented in the Results chapter that follows.

### **6.6 Limitations of the study:**

The study is limited to upper secondary school students of the ages 15-18 and is specific to the educational realities of secondary public schools in Cyprus. It does

not examine the effectiveness of disciplinary practices or the effects that these practices have on students of the ages 12-15. Another limitation of this study is that in the examination of the academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students, the researcher did not consider the participation and concentration levels of suspended students prior to the application of the disciplinary action and thus the study cannot infer that suspended students are negatively affected in their class participation and concentration because of the disciplinary action applied on them.

## **6.7 Ethical Issues:**

### **a) Questionnaire:**

Teachers handed out a letter of information and a consent form, which were prepared by the researcher, to all potential student participants and their parents (Appendix B). The letter aimed to: a) Explain the purposes and procedures of this study, b) Inform the participant of any foreseeable risks and inconveniences, c) Bring to their attention confidentiality issues and rules regarding participation, d) Inform participants that participation was voluntary and that an explanation was not needed for anyone not wishing to participate, e) Explain how the participants could benefit from this research and finally f) Let the participants know that the findings of this study would be submitted to their school's main office and made available to them as soon as the study was completed.

### **b) Interviews:**

The researcher handed out a letter of information and a consent form to all potential teachers and vice-principals (Appendix C). The letter that was given to the teachers and vice-principals had the same aims as the letter that was given to students and parents. However, it further informed potential participants that pseudonyms were to be used (instead of the interviewees real names) in an attempt to foster anonymity. Potential participants were warned, though, that even the use of masking techniques could not necessarily guarantee anonymity, since most of the



times 'insiders' are able to unmask their own people by their sayings. The interview-recordings were coded by pseudonyms and are being kept in a secure place. All recordings will be destroyed six months after the completion of the study.

### **c) Research Bias:**

Another ethical consideration that needs to be taken into consideration is the possibility of researcher bias. The researcher has worked as a secondary school teacher for a period of two years and has formed views on the issue of the discipline level in secondary public schools and the disciplinary practices that are being used. Nevertheless, the researcher kept in mind from the beginning of this research that objectivity is key to the validity and reliability of this study and analyzed the information received by the participants in the best objective way.

## **6.8 Conclusion:**

This chapter presented the methodology that was used for this study and discussed, *inter alia*, the research design and its rationale, the sampling procedures, the selection and description of the settings for this research, the data collection instruments that were used, their construction and rationale and the procedures that were undertaken to complete this study.

In summing up, the purpose of this study was twofold: 1) To assess the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as currently used in secondary public schools in Cyprus, examine the effects they have on students and their role in enhancing students' disruptive behaviour, 2) To gain knowledge and/or identify the school related factors that contribute to discipline related problems and may inhibit the proper functioning of the school's disciplinary practices. In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, the following research questions were formulated: 1) How effective do students and educators believe that their school's disciplinary practices are, 2) What are the effects of these disciplinary practices on students': a) social relations, b)

emotional feelings towards disciplinary practices, c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour, 3) Are there any school related factors that contribute to disciplinary problems and affect the quality implementation of disciplinary practices.

To address the aforementioned research questions, the study adopted a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative part of this study consisted of three stages, namely the pilot study, the homogeneity-test study and the main study. In particular, the pilot study was conducted with 22 students, the homogeneity test with 119 students and the main study with 576 students. The 717 students that participated in this research were of the ages 15-18 and were attending the lyceum cycle at the time of the study. The survey questionnaire that they had to answer consisted of 66 questions. With regard to the qualitative part of this study, 30 teachers and 10 vice-principals (20 male and 20 female) of different specialties and years of experience and from different schools consented to be interviewed by the researcher.

To analyze the data from the questionnaires, the researcher used the SPSS statistical data analysis software (now known as PASW), while for the interviews the researcher used the interview protocol, which was structured under five specific categories, to examine participants' responses for trends and similarities and categorize/group the data in certain thematic clusters depending on the information that emerged.

The results of the study are analyzed in great detail in the chapter that follows.

## Chapter 7

### Results

#### Introduction:

As mentioned before, the main research questions of this study were: 1) How effective do students and educators believe that their school's disciplinary practices are? 2) What are the effects of these disciplinary practices on students: a) social relations, b) emotional feelings towards disciplinary practices, c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour? 3) Are there any school related factors that contribute to disciplinary problems and affect the quality implementation of disciplinary practices?

#### 7.1 Student Questionnaires:

The survey part of this study aimed to answer only the first two questions while the interview part of this study sought to obtain answers for all three questions. For the purposes of answering the first two questions the researcher developed a self-administered questionnaire which consisted of nine sections: 1) General demographic and academic information (Questions: 1-8), 2) Students' perception of disciplinary practices and relationship to disruptive behaviour (Questions: 9-17), 3) Effectiveness of disciplinary practices (Questions: 18-26), 4) Social effects of disciplinary practices on students (Questions: 27-33), 5) Disciplinary record and reasons for misbehaviour/disruptive behaviour (Questions: 34-37), 6) Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students (Questions: 38-49), 7) Academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students (Questions: 50-53), 8) Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students who further received a downgrading of their conduct (Questions: 54-63), 9) Academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students who further received a downgrading of their conduct (Questions: 64-66).



Students' questionnaires were coded and analyzed with the use of the SPSS program. In addressing the first main research question of this study as mentioned above, data analysis showed that students, both disciplined and non-disciplined, strongly believe that the disciplinary practices used in their school, and more specifically suspension and suspension with a further downgrading of the student's conduct, are not very effective in dealing, reducing or resolving a student's disruptive behaviour, since they cannot deter or discourage a student from being disruptive. On the contrary, according to students' responses, the only effect that the aforementioned disciplinary practices may have on students is to create more problems and increase rather than decrease a student's disruptive behaviour.

Responding on the first part of the second main research question of this study, which dealt with the effects that these disciplinary practices may have on students' social relations with their teachers, vice-principals, peers and parents, data analysis indicated that students' social life is partly affected by the disciplinary practices examined. While students mainly underlined the deterioration of relations between disciplined students and their teachers and vice-principals, the study found no such effect on students' relations with their peers. On this latter point, students' answers clearly showed that neither suspended students nor students who further received a downgrading of their conduct are isolated in their school environment. Regarding disciplined students' relation with their parents, students' answers varied to a great extent. A large part of students admitted that disciplinary action does affect the relationship with their parents, as their parents do not approve of their misconducts, which lead to disciplinary action, while another considerable number of students reported that disciplinary action does not affect the relationship with their parents. The biggest percentage of students, however, did not report a black or white effect in their relationship with their parents, but said that disciplinary action may sometimes have some impact on their relationship. The great variation in students' answers considering this subject can be justified and/or explained, up to a point, by the fact that each parent deals differently with his/her child's school misbehaviour and "punishment".

Moving on to examine the emotional feelings and reactions of disciplined students towards disciplinary practices, the study found that disciplined students expressed feelings of anger and revenge towards the teacher who referred them and the vice-principal who enforced the disciplinary action against them.

Moreover, in addressing the effects that disciplinary practices may have on students' academic performance, students' responses revealed that disciplinary action negatively affects both their concentration and participation in class, while they also pointed to the fact that repeated disciplinary action may affect their overall school performance and to a degree their future plans.

Finally, in the last part of the second main research question, the study found both in-school suspension and suspension with a further downgrading of a student's conduct to be enhancers of disruptive behaviour. Disciplined students observed that disciplinary action does not prevent them from being disruptive and reported that they are more likely to repeat their misbehaviour even after they have been disciplined.

The results of each of the nine sections of the questionnaires are presented in detail below. Any statistically significant results are reported at the end of each section. Section 1 was used to obtain general demographic and academic information while some of its questions served as the basis for the correlations made for this study. In sections 2, 3 and 4 of the questionnaire, correlations were made between selected questions in each section and the student's gender (Q.2), school activities (Q.8) and disciplinary record (Q.34). In the correlations that concerned a student's disciplinary record (Q.34), gender was added as a layer so as to examine the difference between disciplined and non-disciplined boys and disciplined and non-disciplined girls. Since disciplinary record was a given, the remaining sections, namely sections 5-9, correlations were made with gender and school activities only.

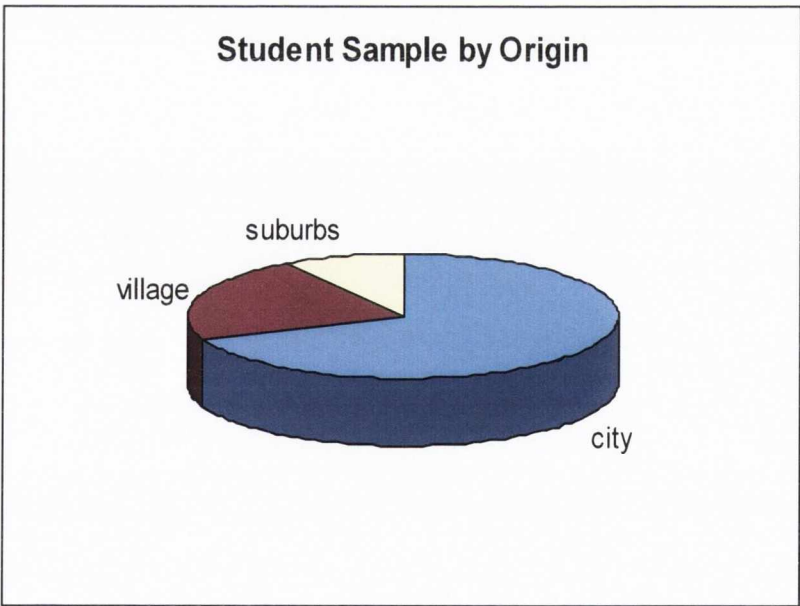
**7.1.1 Section 1: General Demographic and Academic Information (Questions: 1-8)**

As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, the main study consisted of 576 students of which 314 (54,5 percent) were girls and 262 (45,5 percent) were boys **(Q.2)**.

In regard to student age, 107 students reported that they were 15 years old (18.6 percent), 224 were 16 years old (38.9 percent), 197 were 17 years old (34.2 percent), 47 were 18 years old (8.2 percent) and one student was 19 years old (.2 percent) **(Q.1)**.

Moreover, 396 students (68.8 percent) stated that they reside in the city while 127 students (22 percent) said that they live in villages. Only 53 students (9.2 percent) reported living in the suburbs **(Q.3)**.

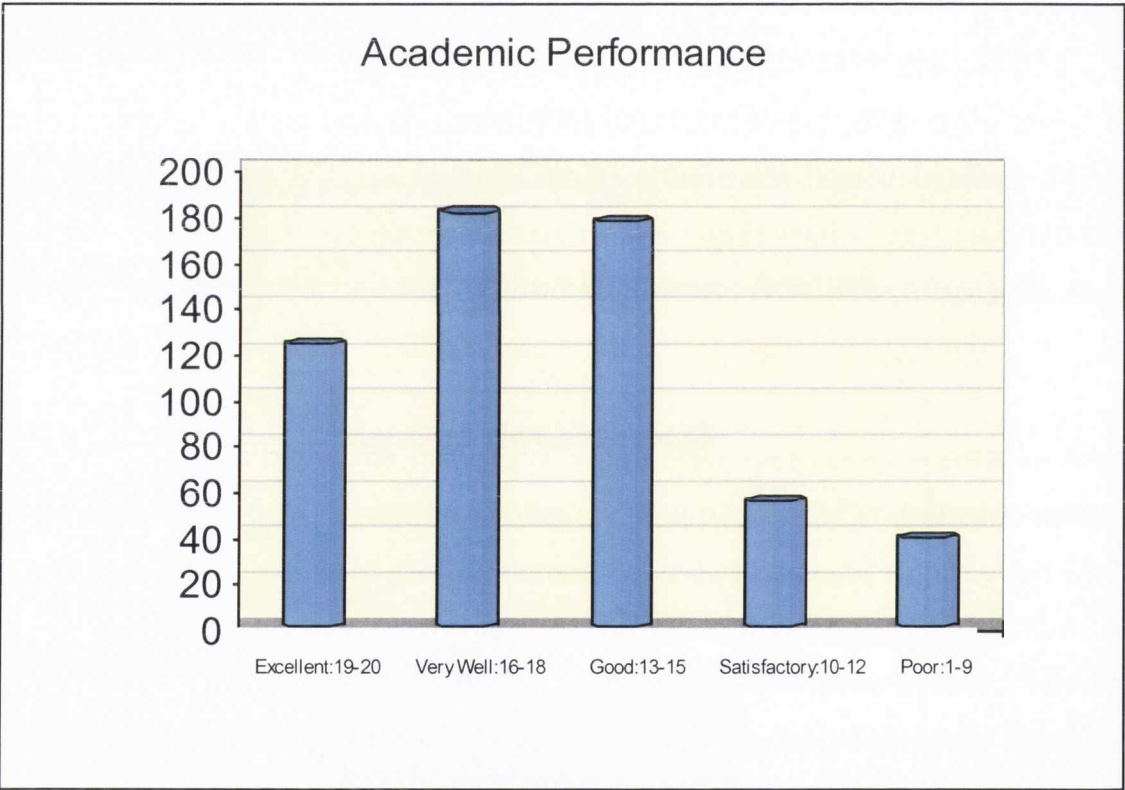
Figure 7.1: STUDENT SAMPLE BY ORIGIN





As far as students' academic performance is concerned **(Q.5)**, 124 students (21.5 percent) declared that they find themselves in the category of excellent students (19-20), 181 (31.4 percent) reported doing very good (16-18), 177 (30.7 percent) said that they fall in the category of good students (13-15), 55 (9.5 percent) said that they belong to the category of students who perform satisfactory (10-12) and 39 (6.8 percent) reported doing poorly (1-9). Graphic representation of students' academic performance is presented in figure 7.2 below:

Figure 7.2: STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE



The majority of students, namely 556 (96.5 percent) reported having no learning problems **(Q.6)** while 553 (96 percent) further reported that they do not attend their school's support program **(Q.7)**. Out of the 576, 345 students (59.9 percent) that participated in the main survey also said that they do not participate in extracurricular school activities **(Q.8)**.

Despite the fact that almost 305 students (52.9 percent) reported being in the category of doing excellent or very well academically, only 152 students (26.4 percent) answered that they either like school very much or mostly **(Q.4)**. The greater part of students, namely 313 (54.3 percent), declared that they sometimes like school while 111 students (19.2 percent) negatively answered this question by stating that they do not like school.

### ***CORRELATIONS:***

The correlations made with school activities in all sections yielded no statistically significant results but one. This finding indicates that even though there was one important and statistically significant result, which will be discussed below, one can safely and decisively infer that a student's participation in his/her school's extracurricular activities is not correlated with his/her opinion about his/her school's disciplinary practices. In other words, the almost complete absence of any statistically significant result shows that the involvement of students in their schools' extracurricular activities does not impact their opinion about their schools' disciplinary practices.

This general pattern, however, has a single exception as evidenced by the one and only statistically significant result, which this study found when correlating questions with school activities. In particular, only question 34, which regarded a student's disciplinary record, was found to be marginally correlated with a student's extracurricular activities (Q.8), thereby signifying that the involvement of a student in extracurricular activities can be considered, albeit marginally, an important indicator of a student's clean disciplinary and behavioural record. This is verified by the specific result of the study, which showed that the majority of students (58.4%) who reported being involved with their school's extracurricular activities didn't have a disciplinary record. The statistically significant difference was  $\chi^2=3.8$ , 1df,  $p<.05$ . Table 7.1 below shows the difference in student number and percentages.

**Table 7.1: School Activities-Disciplinary Record**

	Disciplinary Record		
	NO	YES	TOTAL
<b>School Activities</b>			
<b>NO</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>345</b>
% within school activities	50.1%	49.9%	100%
<b>YES</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>231</b>
% within school activities	58.4%	41.6%	100%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>576</b>

Academic performance (Q.5) from section 1 was correlated to question 34 only, in order to examine if there was any correlation between a student’s academic performance and his/her disciplinary record. Data analysis found a statistically significant result  $\chi^2=59.2$ , 4df,  $p<.001$ . The results are presented below in table 7.2

**Table 7.2: Academic Performance – Disciplinary Record**

	Disciplinary Record		
	NO	YES	TOTAL
<b>ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE</b>			
<b>A) Excellent (19-20)</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>124</b>
%within academic performance	73.4%	26.6%	100%
<b>B) Very Well (16-18)</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>181</b>
% within academic performance	63.5%	36.5%	100%
<b>C) Good (13-15)</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>177</b>
% within academic performance	42.4%	57.6%	100%
<b>D) Satisfactory (10-12)</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>55</b>
% within academic performance	30.9%	69.1%	100%
<b>E) Poor (1-9)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>39</b>



% within academic performance	25.6%	74.4%	100%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>576</b>

As it is exhibited by table 7.2, 74,4 percent of the students who reported being in the academic category, ‘Poor’, 69.1 percent of the students who reported being in the category ‘Satisfactory’ and 57,6 percent of the students who reported being in the category ‘Good’ had a disciplinary record. On the contrary, only 36,5 percent of the students who reported being in the category ‘Very Well’ and 26,6 percent of the students who reported being in the category ‘Excellent’ ‘reported that they had a disciplinary record. It is, therefore, clear from the results, that academic performance and student behaviour are strongly correlated.

**7.1.2 Section 2: Students’ perception of disciplinary practices and relationship to disruptive behaviour (Questions: 9-17)**

a) Students Perception of Disciplinary Practices:

While 522 students (90.6 percent) out of the 576 students said that they are aware that their school has a Code of Discipline **(Q.9)**, only 368 (63.9 percent) reported that they are familiar with the Code and with the disciplinary action which is enforced for each rule violation **(Q.10)**. Almost one fifth of the students (19.3 percent), characterized the disciplinary practices used in their school as not fair at all **(Q.11)** while another 143 students (24.8 percent) claimed that the disciplinary practices are not that fair. Only 52 students (9 percent) felt that their school’s practices are either very fair or fair enough. Consistent with their answers in question 11 regarding the fairness of disciplinary practices, 113 (19.6 percent) students out of the 576 participating in this study felt that the disciplinary practices are very strict, while 142 students (24.7 percent) regarded them as mostly strict **(Q.13)**. However, whereas only 52 students (9 percent) felt that their school’s practices are either very fair or fair enough, 111 students (19.3 percent) thought that the currently used disciplinary practices were not strict at all or not that strict.

Consistency was the third variable examined in this section concerning students' perception of disciplinary practices **(Q.15)**. A large majority of the participants, and in particular 394 students (68.4 percent) stated that the disciplinary practices used in their school are not consistent. On the contrary, only 66 students (11.4 percent) expressed the view that the disciplinary practices used by their school are consistent.

b) Relationship of disciplinary practices to disruptive behaviour:

Out of the 576 students that participated in the main study, 163 students (28.3 percent) reported that they would react in a disruptive way if they perceived the disciplinary action taken against them as unfair **(Q.12)**. A further 139 students (24.1 percent) stated that they would most likely react in a disruptive way if they found their 'punishment' unfair. Only 57 students (9.9 percent) answered that they would not react at all even if they considered the disciplinary practice used by the school authorities unfair. Concerning the strictness of disciplinary practices and their relationship to disruptive behaviour **(Q.14)**, results showed that 98 students (17 percent) would react in a disruptive way or misbehave if they thought that the disciplinary action taken against them was strict while another 121 students (21 percent) would most probably react if they felt the same way about the strictness of the disciplinary action applied. 114 students out of the 576 (19.8 percent) were ambivalent about their reaction towards a strict disciplinary action, while 243 students (42.2 percent) reported that they would not misbehave at all, or not that much if they considered their "punishment" as strict.

The element, however, which students considered as the most important enhancer of disruptive behaviour, was the *inconsistency in the application of disciplinary practices* **(Q.16)**. Out of 576 students, 190 (33 percent) thought that inconsistency in the application of disciplinary practices provides disruptive students with the opportunity to continue or repeat their misbehaviour. A further 186 students (32.3

percent) considered inconsistency to be mostly responsible for the continuation or repetition of misbehaviour. Only 54 students (9.4 percent) answered that inconsistency does not play any role at all or not that much of a role in enhancing disruptive behaviour.

Finally **question 17** of this section aimed to grasp an idea of how students feel about the necessity of disciplinary practices. Out of the total sample of 576 students, 268 students (46.5 percent) thought that the disciplinary practices are either very necessary or mostly necessary, while only one in four students reported that disciplinary practices are not necessary. The rest of the students reported the middle answer on this question, thus indicating their uncertainty regarding this issue.

**CORRELATIONS:**

Questions 12 and 14 of this section were correlated with: a) student’s gender (Q.2), b) disciplinary record (Q.34) with gender as a layer and c) school activities (Q.8).

a) Student’s Gender: In **question 12**, students were asked to report whether they would react in a disruptive way if they considered the disciplinary action taken against them as unfair. More boys than girls reported that they would react in a disruptive way and the statistic difference was significant with  $\chi^2=14.5, 4df, p<.01$ . The table below shows the difference between boys and girls. In other words, gender was found to be strongly correlated with disruptive behaviour when the disciplinary action taken was considered unfair.

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**Table 7.3: React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is unfair- Gender**

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	Gender		
	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
<b>React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is unfair</b>			
<b>Yes, very much so</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>163</b>
% within gender	32.8%	24.5 %	
<b>Mostly</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>139</b>
% within gender	24.8 %	23.6 %	
<b>Sometimes yes, sometimes no</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>123</b>
% within gender	23.0 %	20.0 %	
<b>Not so much</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>94</b>
% within gender	13.7 %	18.5 %	
<b>No, not at all</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>57</b>
% within gender	5.7 %	13.4 %	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>576</b>
	100%	100%	

**Question 14**, asked students whether they would react in a disruptive way if they considered the disciplinary action taken against them strict. The result in this question was also statistically significant, with more boys than girls reporting that they would misbehave if they thought that their “punishment” was strict. The chi-square result showed a difference of **x<sup>2</sup>=20.4, 4df, p<.001** which points to a strong correlation between the two variables. Table 7.4 below shows the difference between boys and girls.

**Table 7.4: React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is strict- Gender**

	Gender		
	Boys	Girls	TOTAL

	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
<b>React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is strict</b>			
<b>Yes, very much so</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>98</b>
% within gender	23.3%	11.8 %	
<b>Mostly</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>121</b>
% within gender	21.8 %	20.4 %	
<b>Sometimes yes, sometimes no</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>114</b>
% within gender	20.6%	19.1 %	
<b>Not so much</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>153</b>
% within gender	23.7 %	29.0 %	
<b>No, not at all</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>90</b>
% within gender	10.6 %	19.7 %	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>576</b>
	100%	100%	

b) Disciplinary record and gender as a layer: The correlation of Q.12 with Q.34 found a statistically significant result only for boys and in particular amongst disciplined and non-disciplined male participants. Data analysis showed a statistically significant chi-square result with the difference being **x<sup>2</sup>= 17.6, 4df, p<.001**, which points to the fact that the disciplinary record of a boy is directly related to the way he reacts when he considers the disciplinary action he receives as unfair. In other words, this result shows that disciplined boys tend to react in a disruptive way more often than their non-disciplined counterparts when they consider the disciplinary action imposed on them as unfair. Table 7.5 below shows the difference:

**Table 7.5: React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is unfair-Disciplinary status**

Disciplinary Status			
	Disciplined Boys	Non Disciplined Boys	TOTAL
<b>React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is unfair</b>			
<b>Yes, very much so</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>86</b>
% within disciplinary status	37.9 %	24.7%	
<b>Mostly</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>65</b>
% within disciplinary status	28 %	19.8%	
<b>Sometimes yes, sometimes no</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>60</b>
% within disciplinary status	21.7 %	24.8%	
<b>Not so much</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>36</b>
% within disciplinary status	7.4 %	23.8%	
<b>No, not at all</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>
% within disciplinary status	5 %	6.9%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>262</b>
	100%	100%	

Contrary to the male participants, data analysis indicated that the disciplinary record of girls does not influence their reaction when they consider a disciplinary action to be unfair, since both disciplined and non-disciplined girls answered in a similar way to the same question.

While gender is an important factor in the way that disciplined and non-disciplined students react when they consider the disciplinary action taken against them as unfair, the study showed that gender is not in fact related to the way that students react when they deem the disciplinary action as strict. In the case of strictness, the study found that what is important is a student’s disciplinary status irrespective of gender. According to the data analysis, a student’s disciplinary status was directly related to the way that the student would react if he/she thought the disciplinary action taken against him/her to be strict **(Q.14)**. The difference was statistically



significant for both disciplined and non-disciplined boys ( $\chi^2 = 28.7, 4df, p<.001$ ) as well as disciplined and non-disciplined girls ( $\chi^2 = 16.1, 4df, p<.01$ ). In particular, more disciplined boys than non-disciplined boys and more disciplined girls than not would react disruptively if they considered the disciplinary action taken against them as strict. Table 7.6 shows the difference between disciplined and non-disciplined boys and table 7.7 shows the difference between disciplined and non-disciplined girls.

**Table 7.6: React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is strict**

	Disciplinary Status		
	Disciplined Boys	Non Disciplined Boys	TOTAL
React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is strict			
<b>Yes, very much so</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>61</b>
% within disciplinary status	31.6 %	9.9 %	
<b>Mostly</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>57</b>
% within disciplinary status	23.6 %	18.8 %	
<b>Sometimes yes, sometimes no</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>54</b>
% within disciplinary status	19.9 %	21.8%	
<b>Not so much</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>62</b>
% within disciplinary status	19.9 %	29.7 %	
<b>No, not at all</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>
% within disciplinary status	5 %	19.8 %	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>262</b>
	100%	100%	

**Table 7.7: React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is strict**

	Disciplinary Status	

	Disciplined Girls	Non Disciplined Girls	TOTAL
<b>React in a disruptive way if disciplinary action is strict</b>			
<b>Yes, very much so</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>37</b>
% within disciplinary status	20.5 %	7.2 %	
<b>Mostly</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>64</b>
% within disciplinary status	15%	23.2 %	
<b>Sometimes yes, sometimes no</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>60</b>
% within disciplinary status	21.5 %	17.9%	
<b>Not so much</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>91</b>
% within disciplinary status	29%	29 %	
<b>No, not at all</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>62</b>
% within disciplinary status	14%	22.7 %	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>314</b>
	100%	100%	

c) School Activities: As explained above, no statistically significant results were found between questions 12, 14 and question 8. More specifically, there seem to be no significant correlations between a student’s extracurricular activities (Q. 8) and how students may react if they consider their school’s disciplinary practices either fair (Q. 12) or strict (Q. 14).

### 7.1.3 Section 3: Effectiveness of disciplinary practices (Questions: 18-26)

Out of the 576 students, 156 (27.1 percent) reported that they do not regard the disciplinary practices used in their school as effective in solving a student’s behavioural problems **(Q.18)** while another 223 students (38.7 percent) also found disciplinary practices not that effective. Only 50 students (8.6 percent) thought that the practices are either effective or mostly effective. The remaining 147 students (25.5 percent) chose the middle answer by stating that the disciplinary practices

currently used are sometimes effective and sometimes not. Similar numbers were reported in **Q.20** with a total of 348 students out of the 576 (60.4 percent) stating that disciplinary practices could increase a student's behavioural issues. In particular 137 students (23.8 percent) believed strongly in this view while another 211 students (36.6 percent) reported that this is most likely the case.

The study further asked students' opinion on each of the two disciplinary practices mainly used in secondary public schools in Cyprus, namely suspension and downgrading of a student's report. An overwhelming majority of 407 students (70.7 percent) felt that suspension is either not that much (43.6 percent) or not effective at all (27.1 percent) in dealing with students who display disruptive behaviour (**Q.21**). A staggering number of 34 students only (5.9 percent) adopted the opposite view, saying that suspension is either very effective in treating disruptive behaviour (1.6 percent) or effective enough (4.3 percent). Students felt essentially the same way about the practice of downgrading a student's conduct (**Q.23**), since 403 (70 percent) of the respondents considered this practice to be either not that effective (35.1 percent) or not effective at all (34.9 percent) in dealing with disruptive behaviour. As in the case of suspension, only a small number of students (65= 11.3 percent) viewed the practice of downgrading a student's conduct to be either very effective (3.5 percent) or mostly effective (7.8) in dealing with disruptive behaviour.

In **Q.25** the researcher asked students to rank six suggested practices that they believed could work most effectively with students who displayed disruptive behaviour. Students were asked to place a number ranging from 1-6 next to the letters A-F in order to rank the suggested practices in order of preference. Number 1 corresponded to the practice they found as an Excellent suggestion, Number 2 = Very Good, Number 3 = Good, Number 4 = Not so Good, Number 5 = Not Good and Number 6 = Bad suggestion. Since each of these suggestions could receive any ranking number by each student, the researcher had to analyze each suggestion individually and examine the frequency patterns that emerged from students' responses for each one. In reporting on each individual suggestion below, the

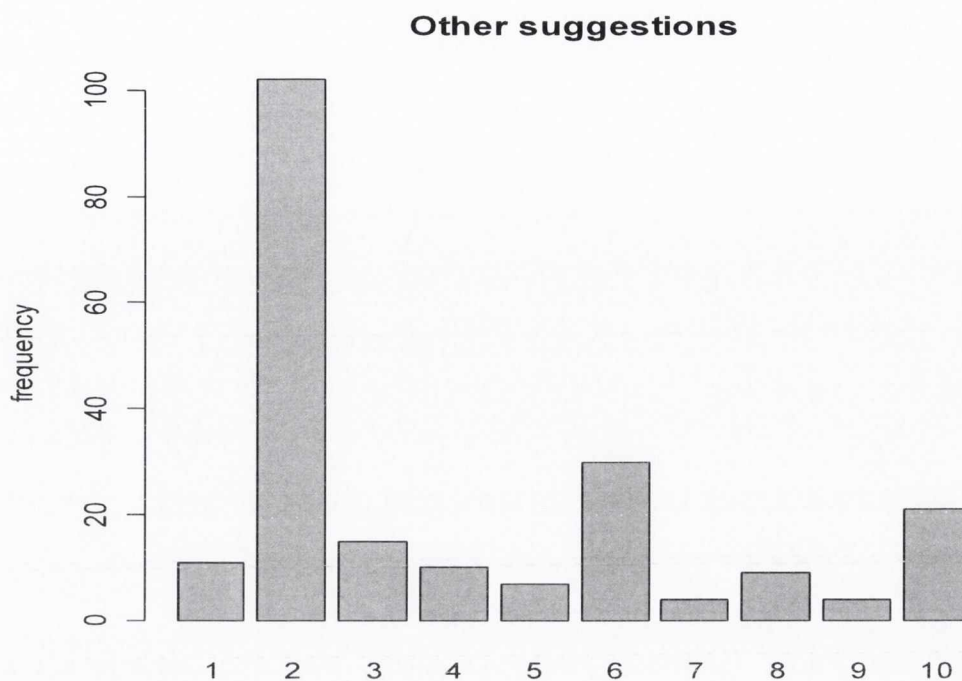


researcher highlights the ranking that received the highest percentage for that suggestion.

**Suggestion A:** Have someone at school at an everyday basis to whom students can talk to about their problems → 321 students (55.7 percent) found this suggestion to be 'Excellent', **Suggestion B:** Public schools can offer conflict resolution classes → 230 students (39.9 percent) found this suggestion to be 'Very Good', **Suggestion C:** Mandatory social work for students who display disruptive behaviour → 165 students (28.6 percent) found this suggestion to be 'Not so Good', **Suggestion D:** Mandatory Saturday school for students who display disruptive behaviour → 270 students (46.9 percent) found this suggestion to be "The Worst", **Suggestion E:** The suspended student should never stay in class. Instead he/she should be assigned/transferred to another room where he/she will be supervised and engaged in creative activities → 139 students (24.1 percent) found this suggestion to be 'Not so Good', **Suggestion F:** The downgrading of a student's conduct should be displayed on the School Leaving Certificate and be taken into consideration by Colleges and Universities → 175 students (30.4 percent) found this suggestion to be 'The Worst'.

The last question **(Q.26)** of this section was an open-ended question, which invited students to suggest a practice other than the aforementioned ones, that their school could enforce to deal effectively with students who display disruptive behaviour. Out of 576 students that participated in this study, only 213 students (37 percent) answered this question. Students' answers were explored for common themes and 10 categories were formed which yielded the following results:

Figure 7.3: STUDENTS' DISCIPLINARY SUGGESTIONS



**SUGGESTIONS:**

- 1 = "School-Home communication"
- 2 = "Better teacher-student communication-dialogue"
- 3 = "More flexibility with rules"
- 4 = "Out-of-school suspension for misbehaving students"
- 5 = "Better rule communication and enforcement"
- 6 = "School psychologist in every school"
- 7 = "Make school more interesting and attractive"
- 8 = "Definite expulsion of misbehaving students from school"
- 9 = "Prohibit misbehaving students from participating in in-school or out-of school activities"
- 10 = "Misbehaving students to stay in school after normal hours and perform school chores (e.g. cleaning)"

**CORRELATIONS:**

In this section of the questionnaire, correlations were made between questions 18, 20, 21, 23 and: a) Student Gender, b) Disciplinary Record with gender as a layer, and c) School Activities. The chi-square tests yielded no statistically significant results. Therefore, gender, disciplinary record and participation in extra curricular activities do not seem to influence students' opinions and perceptions about the effectiveness of their school's disciplinary practices. This result should come as no surprise given the fact that, as we have seen, the overwhelming majority of students, irrespective of gender and disciplinary record, believe that the disciplinary practices currently used are not effective in dealing with misbehaving students and in solving behavioural problems.

#### **7.1.4 Section 4: Social effects of disciplinary practices on disciplined students** (Questions: 27-33):

In examining the relationship between teachers and disciplined students and the way that disciplinary action may adversely affect it **(Q.27)**, data showed that 210 out of the 576 students (36.5 percent) that participated in this study felt that disciplinary action does affect this relationship very much while another 242 (42 percent) concurred that this is mostly the case. Only 7 students (1.2 percent) out of the 576 believed that disciplinary action does not affect the relationship between teachers and disciplined students at all while 98 of the participants (17 percent) thought that the relationship can be affected sometimes. In agreement with the above findings, students also reported that disciplinary action can either greatly (29.9 percent) or mostly (38.4 percent) affect the relationship between disciplined students and vice-principals, who apply the disciplinary action **(Q.28)**. Just as in the case of question 27, only 1.2 percent of students believed that this relationship is not affected at all by disciplinary action. Lastly 24 percent of students thought that the disciplined student-vice-principal relationship may sometimes be affected by disciplinary action.



Contrary to the findings on the negative effect that disciplinary action may have on the relationship between disciplined students and their teachers and vice-principals, data analysis showed that disciplinary action has a minimal effect on the relationship of disciplined students with their classmates **(Q.29)**. In particular, out of the total number of 576 students that participated in the main study, 315 students (54.7 percent) felt that disciplinary action does not affect the disciplined student's relationship with his/her classmates either at all (20.3 percent) or not so much (34.4 percent). A further 167 students (29 percent) thought that disciplinary action can only sometimes affect the relationship, while only 94 students (16.3 percent) reported that disciplinary action affects the disciplined student's relationship with his/her classmates either very much or mostly.

The opinion of students on the relationship between disciplined students and their parents **(Q.30)** largely varied. As the data analysis indicated, 84 students (14.6 percent) reported that the disciplined student-parent relationship is very much affected by disciplinary action. Another 129 students out of the 576 (22.4 percent) thought that the relationship is mostly affected, while a further 204 participants (35.4 percent) felt that disciplinary action can sometimes upset the relationship and sometimes not. In the other end of the Likert scale, 49 students (8.5 percent) stated that the relationship is not affected at all by disciplinary action and another 110 (19.1 percent) reported that the relationship is not affected that much. The varied results on this question illustrate how differently each parent deals with their child's disciplinary problems at school.

In addition to examining the relationship of disciplined students with their teachers, vice-principals and classmates this section also included three more questions to assess the impact that disciplinary action can have on a disciplined student's relation with his/her wider school environment. **Questions 31** asked students if they find that suspended students tend to be isolated in their school environment. The large majority of students, namely 408 students (70.8 percent) out of the 576 answered that suspended students are either not isolated at all (37.3 percent) or not

that much isolated (33.5 percent) in their school environment. Only 80 students (13.9 percent) stated the opposite, namely, that suspended students are either very much (4.2 percent) or mostly isolated (9.7 percent) in their school environment. Another 88 students (15.3 percent) selected the middle and more neutral answer stating that suspended students do get isolated sometimes and other times not.

Students with a downgrading of their conduct (**Q. 33**) were also viewed as not being isolated in their school environment with 232 respondents (40.3 percent) saying that these students are not isolated at all and a further 168 students (29.2 percent) stating that they are not that much isolated in school. Again, only 76 of the respondents (13.2 percent) declared that they do find students with a downgrading of their conduct as being either very much (4.0 percent) or mostly isolated (9.2 percent) in their school environment, while 100 participants (17.4 percent) chose the neutral answer.

Another interesting result in this section is that disciplined students tend to socialize with peers who have similar disciplinary records with them (**Q.32**). The study found that 122 students (22.2 percent) thought this to be very true whereas another 190 (33 percent) reported that this is most likely the case. Less than a fifth of the respondents disagreed with this statement, reporting that this is not the case either at all (42=7.3 percent) or not as much (65=11.3 percent). A further 151 students (26.2 percent) replied that this is sometimes the case.

### ***CORRELATIONS:***

The correlations by disciplinary status (using gender as a layer) yielded a statistically significant result only for question 32 in this section, which examined whether disruptive students are associated with other students who exhibit disruptive behaviour. Disciplined boys' opinion on this matter statistically differed from the opinion of non-disciplined boys with the difference being ( $x^2 = 19.2$ , 4df,

**p<.001**). The result, however, among disciplined and non-disciplined girls was not found to be statistically significant.

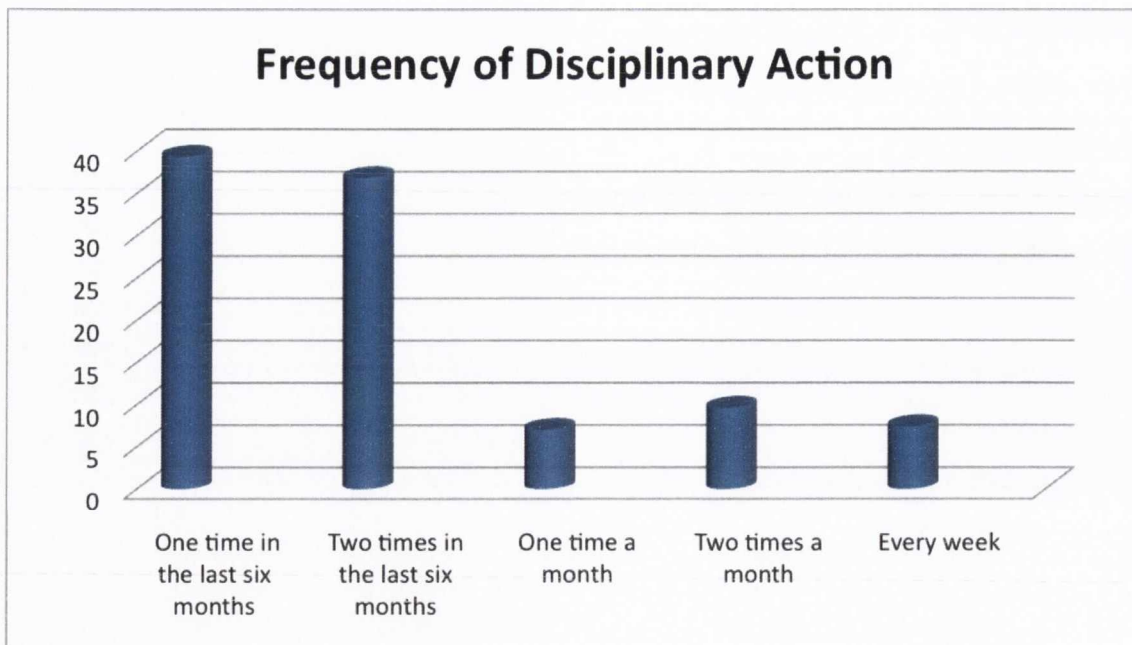
**7.1.5 Section 5: Disciplinary record and reason for disruptive behaviour**  
(Questions: 34-37):

Up to this point, the questionnaire examined the view of both disciplined and non-disciplined students in order to gain an overall, as well as a more objective understanding of the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as used in secondary public schools in Cyprus. From question 35 onward, the questionnaire focuses exclusively on the views of disciplined students in order to examine closely the emotional and academic effects that disciplinary practices may have on them.

Out of the 576 students that participated in the main study, almost half of them 271 (47 percent) had a disciplinary record. From these 271 students, 108 were girls and 163 were boys. The difference between them was found to be statistically significant with  **$x^2=43.0$ , 1df,  $p<.001$** , therefore showing that boys are more likely to have a disciplinary record than girls. 233 students received only suspension whereas 38 received suspension along with a downgrading of their conduct. In figure 7.4 that follows, one can see the frequency with which disciplined students received disciplinary action in the last six months prior to the commencement of the study.

Figure 7.4: FREQUENCY OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION





In **question 36**, which was an open-ended question, students were asked to report the reasons for the latest disciplinary action they received prior to the commencement of the study. The highest-ranking reason that caused a student his/her “punishment” was a violation of the rule concerning the school uniform (77 students). Another 68 students out of the total number of 233 that answered this question reported that they were disciplined because of truancy reasons (they skipped school or stayed out of class). The third highest-ranking reason was ‘class disturbance’ which was reported by 51 students. Fighting was also pointed out as a reason for receiving disciplinary action with 22 students reporting this to be the reason in their case.

**7.1.6 SECTION 6: Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students (Questions: 38-49):**

Disciplinary action can certainly affect a student’s emotional state, which is the element examined in this section. It is important to comprehend how disciplined students feel when they receive disciplinary action, and how they may react to it so that their emotions and reactions can be taken into consideration when evaluating

the effectiveness of disciplinary practices. Otherwise, disciplinary practices may end up being counterproductive and achieving the exact opposite results from what they were initially intended and designed for.

The first question in this section **(Q.38)**, investigated disciplined students' feelings about the fairness of their suspension and found that an overwhelming number of 191 students (70.5 percent) out of the 271 that reported having a disciplinary record, felt that the disciplinary practice of suspension that was taken against them was not fair. Question 38 also included an open-ended part, which asked disciplined students who felt that their suspension was unfair, to state what the school authorities should have done with their case instead of suspension. Almost half of the students who answered this question (60 students) responded that the school should have issued 'just a warning'. 41 students thought that the school authorities should have done nothing about their misbehaviour, while 29 students out of the 130 that answered this question thought that they should have been treated more justly.

In answering whether it bothers them to receive suspension **(Question 39)**, the study showed that two-thirds of the respondents are either very much bothered (115 students) or mostly bothered (66 students). Less than one-fifth of the 271 students that answered this question, reported that suspension does not bother them that much (24 students) or at all (19 students) while 47 students reported that it sometimes bothers them and sometimes not.

The next question **(Q.40)** indicated that more than half of the disciplined students participating in this study do not feel rejected when they receive suspension. In particular, 74 out of the 271 disciplined students (27.3 percent) reported that suspension does not make them feel rejected at all, whereas 70 students (25.8 percent) stated that suspension does not make them feel that much rejected. On the contrary, 79 students (29.2 percent) answered that they felt either mostly rejected

(15.9 percent) or very rejected (13.3 percent) by suspension, while 48 students (17.7 percent) chose to remain neutral on this subject.

Similar to question 39, **question 41** inquired whether suspension stirred feelings of shame in disciplined students. As was the case in answers in question 39, 117 (43.2 percent) of the disciplined student population replied that they did not feel ashamed of themselves when they received suspension, while another 63 students (23.2 percent) stated that they did not experience that much shame. 46 students (17 percent) reported that they were either very ashamed or mostly ashamed when they were suspended and 45 students (16.6 percent) chose the middle answer on this matter (sometimes yes and sometimes no).

The following four questions (**Qs. 42-46**) explored disciplined students' feelings towards teachers and vice-principals whom they deemed responsible for their suspension. In questions 42 and 43, students were asked whether they felt angry towards the teacher (**Q.42**) and the vice-principal (**Q.43**) who were responsible for their suspension. Although disciplined students' answers clearly pointed to the fact that they felt very or mostly angry towards both the teacher and the vice-principal for their suspension, the teacher stirred up feelings of anger in a much higher percentage (74.9 percent) than the vice-principal (58.7 percent). In other words, students felt angrier towards the teacher who referred them rather than the vice-principal who actually enforced the disciplinary action. The same outcome was detected in the next two questions (**Qs. 44-45**), which asked students whether they felt inclined to retaliate against the teacher that referred them or the vice-principal that suspended them. The number of students who answered that they would very much or mostly retaliate the teacher who referred them was 142 (45.8 percent), whereas for the vice-principal the number dropped to 92 students (34 percent). It is also worthy of note that the number of students who stated that they did not want to retaliate the teacher at all or not that much was 83 (30.6 percent), whereas for the vice-principal that number increased to 125 students (46.1 percent).



In this section, students were further asked to report whether they felt like misbehaving again after receiving suspension **(Q.46)**. The aim of this question was twofold, in that it sought to examine both students' reaction towards suspension and the effectiveness of the particular disciplinary practice. Out of the total number of 271 students who responded that they have been disciplined, 142 (52.4 percent) claimed that they would either very much (23.2 percent) or most likely (29.2 percent) misbehave again after receiving suspension. 78 students (28.8 percent) reported that they might misbehave again in the future after receiving suspension, while 51 students (18.8 percent) declared that they would either not (8.1 percent) or most likely not (10.7 percent) misbehave again after suspension.

Since disciplined students may feel that they are being rejected or stigmatized because of suspension, **question 47** sought to examine whether suspension does indeed make disciplined students feel stigmatized. Data analysis for this question revealed that more than half of the suspended students do feel that they are being stigmatized by the practice of suspension either very much so (33.2 percent) or mostly (23.2 percent). Approximately one in every four respondents (24.3 percent) thought that this is not the case at all (12.9 percent) or not so much the case (11.5 percent) while a further percentage of 19.2 students felt that this is sometimes the case and sometimes not.

**Question 48** was an open-ended question, which invited disciplined students to report any other feelings that they might have experienced when they were suspended. Although only 71 students out of the 271 that reported having a disciplinary record answered this open-ended question, the prevailing feeling that half of them reported was anger, followed by feelings of injustice and feelings of revenge. Very few students reported feeling bad, ashamed or indifferent towards suspension.

The last question in this section **(Q.49)** was also an open-ended question, asking disciplined students whether suspension was effective in helping them behave

positively so as not to be suspended again. The predominant answer in this question was a laconic ‘no’, which was reported by 172 suspended students. Only 38 students out of the 231 that answered this question gave a positive answer while only 21 students said that suspension may sometimes help them with their behaviour.

**CORRELATIONS:**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, starting with question 34 the study made correlations only with gender and school activities since the disciplinary record of students answering the questionnaire beyond question 34 was a given. Correlations made with school activities (Q.8) as was mentioned above, yielded no statistically significant results (except in one case mentioned in an earlier section). The only statistically significant result of this section was produced by correlating question 40 with gender (Q.2), which showed that gender is directly related to the feelings of rejection exhibited by disciplined students after they receive suspension. As is evident from the table below, more boys than girls reported feeling rejected after receiving suspension with the chi-square difference being  $\chi^2=14.1, 4df, p<.01$ .

**Table 7.8: Percentage of boys and girls who reported feeling rejected after receiving suspension**

	Gender		TOTAL
	Boys	Girls	
Feel rejected when suspended:			
Yes, very much so	24	12	36
% within gender	14.7%	11.1%	
Mostly	29	14	43
% within gender	17.8%	13.0%	
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	37	11	48
	22.7%	10.2%	

% within gender			
<b>Not so much</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>70</b>
% within gender	24.0%	28.7%	
<b>No, not at all</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>74</b>
% within gender	20.8%	37.0%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>271</b>
	100%	100%	100%

**7.1.7 Section 7: Academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students** (Questions: 50-53):

As explained in the Methodology chapter suspended students in secondary schools in Cyprus spend their suspension time in class, attending classes as normal, like all other non-suspended students. It is recalled that the main thinking behind this practice is to minimize a student’s absence from class so that the student will not miss any valuable curriculum time and have his/her academic achievement affected. Since this policy is a departure from the traditional concept of suspension, which provided that a student would spend his/her suspension time out of class and be involved in a constructive and supervised activity, the researcher thought that it will be interesting and useful to examine the validity of the main thinking behind this practice in order to find out from suspended students themselves whether in class suspension is effective in helping them keep up with the curriculum and academic achievement. Questions 50 to 52 deal exclusively with this issue, while question 53 is more general and is concerned with the effects that suspension can have on the student’s future aspirations/plans.

**Question 50** asked suspended students whether they could concentrate in class while being suspended. Results showed that 171 out of the total number of 271 (63.1 percent) suspended students could not concentrate while being suspended in class either at all (40.2 percent) or not that much (22.9 percent). Only 24 students



(8.9 percent) felt that suspension has no bearing on their concentration levels and that they can stay concentrated in class, as usual, while being suspended.

**Question 51** dealt with the suspended student's participation levels while being suspended in class. The outcome was very similar to the aforementioned results regarding in class concentration while being suspended, with 173 students (63.9 percent) claiming that they cannot participate in class either at all (41 percent) or not so much (22.9 percent). A small number of students totaling 20 (7.4 percent) stated that they could very much participate in class as they normally do.

The object of inquiry in **question 52** was whether students think that repeated suspension could negatively influence their academic achievement. Data showed that a whopping number of 213 students out of the 271 that received disciplinary action (78.6 percent) felt that suspension could influence their academic achievement either very much (49.1 percent) or mostly (29.5 percent). A large number of students also thought that frequent suspension has the power to damage their future aspirations (**Q.53**), with 93 of them (34.3 percent) saying that it can affect those aspirations very much and 63 out of the 271 (23.2 percent) reporting that it can mostly affect them. At the same time, however, 82 students (30.3 percent) thought that suspension can have no consequences at all (14.8 percent) or not so many consequences (15.5 percent) on their future plans.

#### **7.1.8 Section 8: Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students who further received a downgrading of their conduct (Questions 54-63):**

The questions asked in section 8 are identical to the ones in section 6 with the only difference being that in this section, the researcher aimed to examine the answers of students who, further to suspension, they also received a downgrading of their conduct. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the number of students who reported receiving a downgrading of their conduct in addition to suspension was 38 students.

**Question 54** asked students whether the downgrading of their conduct was appropriate and fair. 30 students out of the 38 that received a downgrading of their conduct felt that the disciplinary action taken against them was not appropriate and fair and when asked what should the school have done in their case, 15 out of the total number of 38 students simply stated that they should not have received this kind of ‘punishment’.

In **question 55**, 21 students (55.3 percent) out of the total number of 38 students who received a downgrading of their conduct further admitted to feeling very much annoyed by this practice while another 9 students (23.7 percent) reported feeling mostly annoyed. Although the largest part of disciplined students admitted to feeling annoyed by the downgrading of their conduct, students’ answers varied greatly when asked whether this disciplinary practice brought any feelings of shame to them (**Q.56**). More specifically, 18 students (47.4 percent) reported that they felt either no shame at all (23.7 percent) or not so much shame (23.7 percent) after receiving a downgrading of their conduct. At the same time, 14 students (36.8 percent) said that this disciplinary practice made them feel either very ashamed (28.9 percent) or mostly ashamed (7.9 percent) of themselves.

In reporting whether the downgrading of their conduct stirred any feelings of rejection to them, a combined number of 17 students (44.7 percent) claimed that this disciplinary practice made them feel very rejected or mostly rejected (**Q.57**). At the other end of the Likert scale, an almost identical number of students, that is 16 students (44.7 percent), stated the exact opposite, namely that they feel no rejection or not as much rejection by this practice. Although feelings of rejection seem to greatly diverge between students’ opinions, feelings of anger and revenge are very prominent among students’ answers. More specifically, 32 (84.2 percent) out of the total number of 38 students that received a downgrading of their conduct declared that they feel very angry (57.9 percent) or mostly angry (26.3 percent) with the educational staff that voted in favour of the downgrading of their conduct (**Q.58**). A mere number of 2 students (5.2 percent) stated that they do not feel angry at all or



not that much angry. As far as feelings of revenge are concerned (**Q.59**), the vast majority of disciplined students admitted that they are inclined to retaliate either very much (55.3 percent) or mostly (18.4 percent) against the members of the educational staff who voted in favour of implementing this disciplinary practice.

In **question 60** more than half of the students who received a downgrading of their conduct (57.9 percent) expressed their inclination to misbehave again, with 26.3 percent reporting that they would very likely demonstrate disruptive behaviour after receiving this disciplinary practice and 31.6 percent stating that this would most probably be the case. Less than one in five students (18.4 percent) claimed that the downgrading of their conduct would not lead them to repeat their misbehaviour either at all (10.5 percent) or not that much (7.9 percent).

The percentage of students who admitted feeling stigmatized in their school environment because of the downgrading of their conduct (**Q.61**) was quite high, since three-quarters of the students who received this disciplinary action stated that they feel either very much stigmatized (57.9 percent) or mostly stigmatized (18.4 percent) by this practice. A small percentage of students stated that they sometimes feel stigmatized (15.8 percent) while only 2.6 percent of students reported that they do not feel stigmatized at all or not that much stigmatized by this practice (5.3 percent).

In **question 62**, the researcher requested students to describe any other feelings that the downgrading of their conduct can trigger, aside from the ones already examined. Although a small number of students answered this question, it is worth mentioning that anger was the most prominent of the reported feelings. In the last question of this section (**Q.63**), the researcher examined the effectiveness of this specific disciplinary practice by asking students whether the downgrading of their conduct helped their behaviour in such a way, which could deter them from engaging in behaviour that could lead to receiving this disciplinary action again. The vast majority of students reported that it could not.



**CORRELATIONS:**

The only statistically significant correlation was obtained by the correlation of question 57 with gender. The correlation, which produced a statistically significant result of  $\chi^2=10.58$ , 4df,  $p<.05$  showed that gender is directly related to feelings of rejection by students after receiving a downgrading of their conduct. Data analysis showed that more boys than girls reported feeling rejected after receiving this practice, a result which is in line with the correlation of question 40 with gender. Table 7.9 below presents the difference in percentages.

**Table 7.9: Percentage of boys and girls who reported feeling rejected after receiving a downgrading of their conduct**

	Gender		TOTAL
	Boys	Girls	
Feel rejected when receiving a downgrading of their conduct			
Yes, very much so	10	1	11
% within gender	34.5%	11.1%	
Mostly	5	1	6
% within gender	17.2%	11.1%	
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	1	4	5
% within gender	3.4%	44.5%	
Not so much	6	1	7
% within gender	20.7%	11.1%	
No, not at all	7	2	9
% within gender	24.2%	22.2%	
TOTAL	29	9	38
	100%	100%	

### **7.1.9 Section 9: Academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students who further received a downgrading of their conduct (Questions: 64-66):**

Data analysis showed that the number of students who do not feel like participating in any school activities after receiving a downgrading of their conduct (**Q.64**) is almost identical to the number of students who stated that they did not mind participating in school activities even after receiving such a disciplinary action (14 and 16 respectively). Eight students reported that they would sometimes participate in school activities and sometimes not.

When asked whether receiving a downgrading of their conduct can negatively affect a student's academic performance (**Q.65**), 18 students (47.4 percent) said that it does affect their performance either very much (23.7 percent) or mostly (23.7 percent). 10 students (26.3 percent) thought that the downgrading of their conduct does not have any effect on their school performance either at all (15.8 percent) or not that much (10.5 percent) while another 10 students (26.3 percent) chose the neutral answer.

The final question of the questionnaire (**Q.66**) inquired whether the downgrading of a student's conduct has any adverse effect on his/her future aspirations. More than half of the respondents (55.3 percent) thought that this disciplinary practice can affect their future plans either to a great extent (34.2 percent) or mostly (21.1 percent). Another 29 percent of students thought that the aforementioned disciplinary practice does not influence a student's future plans either at all (13.2 percent) or not that much (15.8 percent). Lastly, 15.8 percent of the students who received a downgrading of their conduct maintained that the report can sometimes have an effect on a student's future plans.

**CORRELATIONS:** There were no statistically significant results found in this section.

## **7.2 Educator Interviews:**

As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, 30 teachers and 10 vice-principals (20 male and 20 female) of different specialties and years of experience and from different schools consented/agreed to be interviewed by the researcher regarding the issue of discipline and disciplinary practices used in their schools. The interview protocol was composed of questions grouped in five categories: a) General Information, b) School discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices (suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct), c) Students' reaction/response towards disciplinary practices d) General effects/consequences of disciplinary practices on students' and on students' disruptive behaviour, and finally e) Teachers' and vice-principals' suggestions on the issue of discipline and disciplinary practices.

All forty interviews (with the exception of two) were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Common themes emerged from each question-category, which the researcher organized in specific thematic clusters. An analysis of the interview findings is presented below.

### **7.2.1 General Information:**

The first category of the interview protocol concerned only questions of general nature that purported in establishing good rapport with the interviewees and in gathering information about the participants (i.e. name, specialty, years of experience both in the teaching profession and the school they worked at when the interviews took place).



### **7.2.2 School discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices (suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct):**

The second category of the interview protocol titled "*School discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices*", consisted of three main questions and three sub-questions: 1) How do you evaluate the level of discipline in public schools? Has anything changed over the course of the years? If yes, what has changed? 2) How do you evaluate the disciplinary action that is currently used at schools, namely in-school suspension and suspension with a downgrading of a student's conduct? Are these practices effective? 3) Are there any school related factors that can affect the effectiveness or quality implementation of disciplinary practices? All of the questions and sub-questions produced a number of interesting and noteworthy common themes, which are presented ahead consecutively.

#### **7.2.2.1 Evaluation of discipline levels in secondary public schools. Has anything changed over the course of the years and what?**

When teachers and vice-principals were asked to evaluate the level of discipline in public schools and reckon if anything has changed over the years, the vast majority of them talked with great fervor and sincerity about the rising levels of indiscipline found in secondary public schools today and admitted that things have taken a negative course in comparison to the past. In discussing the issue, the most prominent terms or key words that prevailed amongst the respondents' answers were: *slackness in discipline, impunity, permissiveness, rule flexibility, leniency and tolerance*. Teachers and vice-principals said, *inter alia*, that:

"One can instantly observe that there is great slackness in discipline at public schools. One can say that students do not behave in the same way as in the past. They are not obedient. Student behaviour is slack and it hinders normal class procedures"

“There is no discipline in schools anymore. The situation worsens year by year and students become more and more unruly. There exists a great slackness concerning all school matters. *Slackness* in disciplinary practices, slackness in student behaviour...we are extraordinarily *permissive* and students go unpunished...they understand no consequences. Students’ behaviour towards their teachers and their classmates is unacceptable”

The first question of the second category led the majority of the interviewees to proceed naturally in discussing the changes that occurred in discipline matters in the last few years and offer their opinions on the reasons they hold responsible for the negative development they noticed. These reasons are the following, in order of frequency reported:

**a) *Lack of common policy - Inconsistent use of disciplinary practices:***

Both teachers and vice-principals emphasized that there is a lack of a *common policy* to ensure that all educational stakeholders follow and implement the same rules and practices at the appropriate situation and time. The respondents claimed that most teachers and vice-principals bend the school’s rules, each for their own reasons and benefits, thus failing to adhere to the consistent use of disciplinary practices. For example, vice-principals who do not want to create any negative feelings between themselves and students avoid imposing any disciplinary action on them. Teachers who want to get along with their students, may choose not to refer disruptive students in order to avoid possible negative repercussions in their classes with the creation of feelings of anger and animosity. Fear of student retaliation, which may cause damage to personal property, is another element that some teachers and vice-principals consider before they decide to take action against misbehaving students. Given this reality to which educators referred to extensively, referrals are written and disciplinary practices are enforced only when it suits the teacher and the vice-principal or when it is absolutely necessary. This essentially selfish and improper way of using rules and practices, however, leads to the inconsistent application of

disciplinary practices, which in turn, creates several problems. Inconsistency is instantly recognized by students (as can be seen from students' answers on the questionnaires) who tend to take advantage of the situation and act as they want. As some respondents said:

"...I may yell at a student to put away his/her cell phone during class time. The answer I get from him/her is that the previous teacher did not rebuke him/her on using his/her cell phone during class time. So you understand that it is the school's fault for the bad situation. We do not follow the same policies and we allow students to do things they shouldn't do. This is why they take advantage of us"

"In order to be able to teach I have to make a deal with some students. It is really embarrassing to admit this, its really outrageous, but this is my reality and this is what I have to do in order to be able to teach at least some of the children that want to learn. I let the students who are not interested or who do not want to participate in class to use their cell phones during class time and preoccupy themselves so that they can keep quiet and do not disturb the rest of the class"

"Disciplinary measures may not always be applied/enforced as they should. We tend to *ignore* or *disregard* some acts of misbehaviour...this is true. Sometimes we have so many things to do, our mind is set on covering the curriculum and on teaching. Sometimes we also have in our mind that we, as teachers but also as appointed vice-principals of students do not want to discipline students who are referred to us by other teachers, because we don't want to have a negative confrontation with the student and create negative feelings. The student may come to school without complying with the regulation concerning school uniform...I may just turn a *blind eye* on the act just to avoid creating further problems"

"When serious disciplinary action must be enforced, 75 percent or even more of the educational staff backs off either because they are irresponsible or because they are afraid of students' reaction. There are faculty members, you know, who reveal the



proceedings and decisions of the educational staff's meeting to students (which is totally wrong). Then, the student who receives disciplinary action by the unanimous vote of the educational staff damages the property (i.e. damages the car) of the person who considers responsible for his/her 'punishment'. This is not right. Therefore, neither suspension nor the downgrading of a student's conduct are applied where and as they should"

***b) Change in teachers' role and in the way that teachers are perceived and treated by society:***

A number of the interviewees brought up the issue of change in the teacher's role that took place gradually in the last decade or so. According to them, the teacher is no longer considered as a primary source of knowledge and learning, since children today have easy access to information, which is directly available to them through the Internet, the Media and many other alternative sources. As such, children can nowadays obtain all the information and knowledge they need by themselves and the teachers' role becomes secondary and increasingly challenged by students. The majority of the respondents felt that because of the change in their role, there was also a change in how students, their parents, the Ministry and society at large, perceive or value them. Teachers believe that they no longer receive the acknowledgment, the credit and the respect that was given to them in the past by students, parents and the wider society or the support and protection of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The word 'disrespect' was frequently used by the interviewees, who sadly admitted that respect does no longer exist in schools. In summing up the change of the teacher's role and the connection that this change brought to the levels of indiscipline one respondent stated that:

"Lack of discipline has to do with the fact that there have been several changes that utterly altered the teacher's role. In reality it is technology that has brought all the change. The teacher nowadays is no longer a primary source of knowledge. Knowledge is everywhere today and anyone can acquire knowledge...even outside

school. The teacher is summoned to perform a different role, today, that of the instructor. He/she is just there to instruct and guide students. In the past, teachers were perceived as the educated or knowledgeable ones. Nowadays, this kind of knowledge is accessible to everyone...with personal effort of course. But you don't have to come to school to learn and become knowledgeable"

While the devaluation of the teacher's role as a result of technological innovations and developments as well as wider societal changes was frequently mentioned by the respondents as an important element for the rising levels of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus today and for the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used, the greater blow to the teacher's role came from within the teaching profession itself and the Cypriot educational system. As mentioned previously, the lyceum cycle in Cyprus is an exams, knowledge-based educational system, which predominantly serves the needs of students who want to attend Universities and Colleges. Since public education in Cyprus is Greek-based, the lyceum cycle effectively prepares students for entry into higher education institutions of Cyprus and Greece. To enter Universities and Colleges in Cyprus and Greece, students who attend their senior year in the lyceum cycle (or in technical and vocational schools) have to take final written examinations known as the Pancyprian examinations, which are organized and prepared by the Examinations Service of the Department of Higher and Tertiary Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture. These examinations take place only once at the end of each school year.

Due to the limited spaces in the Universities and Colleges in Cyprus and Greece on the one hand and the increase of students wishing to pursue higher education on the other, competition has grown over the years to such an extent that private tutoring is widely considered in the last decade or so as a necessity for students who aspire to enter such institutions. One of the reasons that students tend to rush to private tutors is related to the fact that tutors offer smaller and ability-compatible settings/environments, where students are gathered in the same room for one

common purpose, which is to enter Universities and Colleges after they graduate from high school. As such, they receive the personal attention of their tutor, who prepares them in a rigorous environment, caters to their needs and ensures that the examination curriculum for the subjects that are to be examined for entry into tertiary education institutions is not only covered, but also covered in the best possible way without any gaps. Since private tutors have the ability to choose their 'clientele' and terminate their services to any student considered a 'burden', their services are considered important for the achievement of a student's goals.

The setting/environment that the private tutor is able to provide comes in stark contrast to the large, mixed ability classes that characterize schools in Cyprus, where not all students are interested in pursuing higher education, each one of them has his/her own learning pace and the teacher is obliged to attend to all students' needs. As it will be discussed later in the section on mixed ability classes and type of school that students attend, teachers are essentially prohibited from conducting their job effectively in such an environment, since students who cannot follow the curriculum and who are either not interested in pursuing higher education or are not able to pursue such education, usually get bored quickly and start disturbing class, thus forcing the teacher to interrupt normal class proceedings to deal with disruptive behaviour. While this situation may not impact the students uninterested in pursuing higher education, the students who want to learn and be prepared to take the Pancyprrian examinations to enter tertiary education institutions find themselves in a disadvantaged position, as the teacher is not allowed to deliver effectively the examination curriculum and cannot cater to the individual needs of students like private/personal tutors can.

Moreover, secondary public schools in Cyprus offer a wide curriculum to students, which include both subjects which are examined and are prerequisites for University or College entrance, as well as subjects that are not examined.



The combination of having a school system where all the main, examined subjects are covered by private tutors and all other subjects are considered secondary and are not valued by students because they do not interest and/or serve their needs for University entrance, has created a situation in the educational system in Cyprus, where attending secondary public schools has almost taken the form of 'forced labour' for students, while having a private tutor is a must.

This situation, according to some respondents, has obviously had an impact on teachers' role in the classroom and has made their job much more difficult and complicated, since teachers nowadays have to deal with three very distinct categories of students: a) The students who receive private tutoring and need something more to attract their interest, b) The students who do not receive private tutoring and need extra attention and effort to learn the examination curriculum and c) The students who are not interested in learning at all and have no purpose of following higher/tertiary education.

Adding to the difficulties of teachers, which come as a result of the negative change in their role, many interviewees also blamed the aforementioned situation for the rising levels of indiscipline in school, since a large number of students who receive private tutoring for the examined subjects, have nothing to gain from attending school, as they are already familiar with the curriculum being taught and have sometimes even covered that curriculum way in advance. Moreover, the goal of entering a University or College makes these students concentrate only on the examined subjects, therefore treating all other subjects as secondary and not important. In the words of one respondent which are quite representative of the feelings expressed by other educators as well:

"Private tutoring has its share for the bad situation and the lack of discipline that we observe in schools. A large number of students come to school and are not interested in what you have to say because they know everything already...sometimes they even challenge you in class about the teaching material

you give them and have the nerve to say that their private tutors gave them that material already or more than that. Other students don't have private tutors and need more help in class, while others do not even care about exams or your existence (sarcastically said). So you can understand that the educator's job has tremendously changed through the years and has become much more challenging...You just can't cater to the needs of all students"

***c) External Pressure and Involvement both of the Ministry of Education and Culture and of students' parents in school affairs:***

The majority of the teachers and vice-principals interviewed felt that the lack of acknowledgment, credit and respect for their profession and their perceived role by students, parents and the wider society, is also a result of the external pressure and involvement of the Ministry and of students' parents in school affairs. In particular, interviewees reported that parents are nowadays essentially allowed to be involved in school affairs, especially when it concerns their children's disciplinary matters, and exert pressure on the school, either directly or indirectly, to change its decisions. Interviewees argued that this situation is made possible because the Ministry of Education and Culture not only provides students and parents with the necessary means to overrule a school's decision on discipline issues, but it also engages itself in applying pressure to schools by disputing decisions and constantly supporting students and their parents on any given occasion.

Some interviewees even reported cases where school faculties were threatened by parents that if they refused to change their decisions regarding their children they would take their case to the Ministry. Given the track record of the Ministry, which tends to side with students and their parents, respondents claimed that the pressure and the involvement of the Ministry in discipline related issues in schools basically leaves the school vulnerable and open to criticism by both parents and students who feel, at the end of the day, that they have the power to override the school's decision and determine the course of action. At the same time, teachers and vice-

principals felt that this practice also creates a climate of impunity for students and sends the message to both, students and parents, that it is acceptable to disrespect the school as well as its rules and regulations. As interviewees argued:

“...The fact that students demonstrate great disrespect towards their teachers by using obscene and very hurtful language, especially in the last few years, is something that we need to pay more attention to. Students feel that they have the power to behave and act as they want...and this is the message *we* sent to them, since at the end of day *we*, with ‘some force’ (*ironically said*) from the Ministry of Education and Culture, let them do what they want. Formally addressing your teacher is a practice that has been utterly abandoned<sup>16</sup>. Sometimes when you argue with students, you notice that they do not hesitate to treat you in the worst possible way. Students do not feel that they are dealing with someone who is, for the lack of a better word, say ‘superior’ to them, or with someone who is older than them, someone who educates them....they feel nothing. They have their backup”

“Students feel that the most likely scenario when they misbehave is to simply get away with it....and they are right because this is what we do, this is what the Ministry ‘forces us’ to do, and this is what some principals think is best to do in order to make sure that they do not look bad to the Ministry”

“Students and parents are totally disrespectful. Students believe that they can do whatever they want and they do not care about suspension or absences. Why would they care? They know that in the end they will pass the class, despite their absences and despite the fact that, according to rules and regulations, set by the Ministry of Education and Culture, they shouldn’t. The educational staff will ‘unlawfully’ erase their absences, with the blessings of the Ministry of course, or the Ministry itself will instruct the school to pass the student for this or that reason. They always find something. So, tell me, what is the message that we sent to students and their

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<sup>16</sup> In Greek, one can use the second plural person pronoun to politely or formally address someone. Formally addressing your teachers was an established and undisputed common practice in the past.



parents? Isn't that a good enough reason to disrespect us? *We allow them to disrespect us*"

"The Ministry of Education and Culture has to realize what the consequences of their slack policies are. The Ministry supports all parents who file complaints about the decisions taken against their children by schools. I honestly do not know any case, *any case at all*, which was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry did not defend the student and overruled the school's decision. The Ministry has never come back to the school and say: "You are right. Your decision to take action against this student was right and the 'punishment' should have been stricter". *They have never done that!* They always tell us to show 'reasonable leniency' and by that they mean to simply let the student off the hook. I am tired of this 'reasonable leniency' argument. This is what brought us to the dreadful situation that we find ourselves today. There is no respect, no discipline, no nothing. What prevails is flexibility, inconsistency and rule leniency. A great number of students treat us as if we are nothing. They point their finger to us and tell us 'Do not speak to me this way'".

***d) The use of unclear, loose/inattentive rules and policies by the Ministry of Education and Culture:***

As already mentioned, the Ministry of Education and Culture was blamed by teachers for the lack of respect that students and their parents show towards them, and as a result for the rising levels of indiscipline. As the majority of the interviewees supported, the Ministry does not permit the school to carry out its duty. On the contrary, respondents held the Ministry accountable for producing *slack measures/rules and unclear policies*, which create more confusion and problems with students. To justify their argument, nearly all teachers mentioned two very characteristic examples of the Ministry's loose and unclear policies:

**1) *The school uniform issue:*** As teachers said, and this was also illustrated by the answers of suspended students on the main reason they were suspended, the Ministry is unclear about the dress code policy. In public schools in Cyprus there is a uniform dress code, which is prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. In the small booklet that each school hands out to students either at the beginning of the school year or on registration day, which regards the internal school regulations, there is a section on the school uniform, which informs students about what they should wear to school.

In the past, the school uniform was very strictly set by the Ministry and all students of public schools in Cyprus essentially wore the exact same uniform, with some very limited variations decided by each school independently. However, in the last decade or so, the Ministry decided to abolish the school uniform, as it was widely known in Cyprus, and introduced a dress code which is quite flexible on what students can wear in school. The Ministry's unclear and flexible guidelines have led students to interpret the dress code as they like and have created a confusing situation, which results in a lot of tension between educators and students. Adding to this confusion, educators stated that the Ministry changes the uniform guidelines, practically every year, and/or issues different mandates for schools and students to follow, even during the same school year. The Ministry's indecisiveness on this matter not only generates continuous problems between the educational staff and students but also between the educational staff itself, as it leads to the inconsistent application of rules and regulations on this matter. One teacher, for instance, may decide to ignore a school uniform violation while another may take the issue very seriously and refer the student to the vice-principal's office. On their behalf one vice-principal might decide to suspend the student for violating the school uniform regulation while another might simply ignore the transgression. In respondents' words:

"The Ministry of Education and Culture is out of touch with reality. They are unclear on many issues. They don't know what they want with the school uniform. I

personally feel very tired about this uniform issue. Students should either have a uniform or not. They (the Ministry) should take a final decision on this matter and let us know once and for all what to do and get it over with. We have reached a point where we pay more attention to the students' uniform rather than their attitude. There is no consistency and students are aware of that"

"...Coming back to the uniform issue...You cannot say that you have a uniform when you constantly alter or allow changes to the uniform. You either have a uniform or not. Why should teachers argue with students or between themselves about this matter? And why should I continually check on students' uniforms to detect if they are wearing the appropriate shade of grey or black or pink that is prescribed by the uniform policy? Students should either have a uniform or not. The uniform should be strictly defined and that's it. Why do we allow this slackening, which has unfortunately become a characteristic of our society? Why do students and parents follow the rules when they attend private schools but do not act the same way when it comes to public schools? Is it because they pay tuitions fees there (private schools)? Why don't they act the same in public schools where everything is free for them and where the educational level is very good (for those of course who want to learn)? Public schools used to be extremely prestigious and highly regarded. Now, they (the Government) just want to destroy the public school. You see, people look after their economic interests all the time"

**2) The absence issue:** Students are allowed a maximum of 110 justified and 50 unjustified absences. As explained in the Methodology Chapter, the internal regulations of the majority of secondary public schools in Cyprus provide that suspended students remain in class and attend lessons as usual in order to stay in touch with the curriculum and not waste valuable time. However, despite remaining in class, suspended students receive an absence for each class period they are suspended. For example, if a student is suspended for five class periods, he/she receives five justified absences, which count towards the 110 justified absences that a student is allowed to have during the school year. As mentioned earlier, if a



student exceeds the number of justified and unjustified absences that he/she is allowed to have, he/she must repeat the same year. This is the rule, as prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and contained in the booklet that each school hands out to students which concerns the internal school regulations. Despite the clarity of this regulation, however, which is well-known to students and their parents, schools tend to frequently ignore the regulation and pass to the next grade, students who have exceeded the aforementioned quotas of justified and unjustified absences. The interviewees that mentioned this 'infringement' did not feel that they were revealing a top school secret, but rather a common practice that secondary public schools use. Both the Ministry of Education and Culture and the school's administrative team were held responsible by the respondents for this unlawful practice, which, they believed, sends students the wrong messages both with regard to what they can do in school and outside school. According to some of the interviewees:

"The message that we send to students is that they can do whatever they want, since their absences will be erased and they will pass to the next grade one way or the other"

"A student does not care if he/she receives suspension. It doesn't cost him/her anything. What could happen to students who receive suspension? They just collect absences. When time comes to accumulate these absences in order to evaluate whether the student should pass the grade or not, according to the rules regarding absences, the school educational staff along with the Ministry, in total disrespect of the established rules and regulations, will erase the student's absences for whatever reason and will pass the student to the next grade when, in fact, the student should have failed the grade and should repeat the same year. The worst thing of all is that students are aware of this informal and, at same time, illegitimate practice"

***e) Lack of strong leadership and a strong administrative team:***

The issue of having an effective leader in schools and a strong administrative team was also mentioned frequently by the interviewees. Most of them brought up the issue of the principal first, and linked it to the administrative team, which basically follows the instructions of the leader of the school. They all talked about the importance of having a principal who has strong managerial skills, is dedicated into keeping order and discipline in school, does not bend rules and wards off external pressure (i.e. Ministry of Education and Culture) by holding his/her ground. Most principals and vice-principals were blamed for not taking responsibilities and for ignoring 'situations' too often in order to be likable to students, parents, the Ministry and the Media. Teachers also talked about serious school incidents, which should have been reported to the police, but were instead 'shoved under the rug' so that the school would not lose its reputation. In the words of some interviewees:

"For me, the key to having and retaining discipline in school has to do with having a strong and effective principal and administrative team. If they bend and ignore rules, who will obey and respect them? There are students who misbehave unreservedly, because they know that they will not get 'punished' by their vice-principal. I have referred students many times, in the past, but they have never been 'punished'. How can I retain discipline in my class and carry on with doing my job properly, when I know, and most importantly students know, that the vice-principal or even worse, the principal of the school him/herself will not take disciplinary action when he/she should? "

"The school principal plays an important role in retaining a good level of discipline in school. The more rigid and consistent he/she is, the better things are. It is just not right for principals to tolerate students bursting into their offices, using offensive language and never suspend them for their behaviour. Such incidences happen all the time and we tolerate them. When the school's principal retains this attitude, his/her colleagues show the same behaviour as well. We have reached a point

where students (and their parents) threaten us that if we refer them, they will take the issue to the principal...isn't that for laughs? And they keep threatening us with any issue that concerns them, i.e. grades. If you don't have anybody supporting you then you can do nothing"

"The first measures to be taken with regard to the issue of discipline should be taken by the school's administrative team. Administrative teams are remarkably loose/slack because they receive their guidelines from 'above' (the Ministry). The Ministry wants democratic schools...but I do not really understand how they define democracy... when the school's principal is being 'afraid' to suspend a student? This is just miserable. I also want to add that there are students in school that have committed crimes, they have transgressed civil laws...do you understand what I am saying? (emphatically said) It is not a great number of students but we do have students who have violated laws, and instead of doing something about this we cover it up, so that people like us, so that we do not lose face"

***f) Lack of meaningful relationships and communication between teachers and students:***

There was wide agreement among the interviewees that indiscipline is also an outcome of the lack of meaningful relationships and communication between teachers and students. Teachers and administrators accredited this lack to the following reasons: 1) *The large size of schools and classes* and 2) *The curriculum and examination-based system*.

***1) Large schools and classes:*** Most respondents claimed that large schools and classes prohibit the creation of closer, more humane and warmer relations with students. Teachers cannot get to know all students and cannot pay the required or even desired attention to them. If schools and consequently classes were smaller, teachers and students could feel that they belonged in a community where one knows each other, where communication is fundamental and where help is available



when needed. In this way, more communication could prevent or maybe solve several student problems. According to some interviewees:

“Small schools and classes are key to the student-teacher relationship and communication. In small schools you can detect problems more easily and prevent them. In large schools, a student does not feel like he/she belongs in a community, in a team. In small communities you have the power to influence things and prevent problems from being created, whereas in larger schools, there are bigger problems. Students are anonymous in big schools; they feel detached and alienated. There is no communication and the student is lost in the crowd”

“No matter how many rules, regulations and practices we create, we cannot make them work if there is no relationship, no communication between people and in this situation, between teachers and students. When you get to know someone, you get to respect him/her and you can also help him/her better. Large schools prevent this from happening and if the impersonal factor is not eliminated from schools, problems will always exist”

**2) *The curriculum and examination-based system:*** As mentioned in Chapter 5, the educational system in Cyprus is exams-based and students of all grades take final written exams at the end of each school year. Teachers have prescribed curriculums to follow for their subjects and have to deliver the examination syllabus before the end of the year. Teachers complain that the curriculum material they have to teach is excessive and that the pressure laid on themselves and students is frantic. By being pressured to concentrate on delivering the examination syllabus, teachers have no time to create closer relations and communicate with their students. In addition, teachers argue that the exam-based system fails to provide any kind of guidance and cultural or humanistic education to students, which could help create well-rounded individuals who will be able to join the wider society when they graduate. Sensing that the curriculum and exam-based system only serves part of the student population, many students tend to react and misbehave when they see

their own abilities – which do not fall in the cognitive-intellectual domain – being neglected and ignored. As some of the respondents stated:

“Knowledge and learning is conquered through tests and exams. Our schools are totally exams-centered and the entire curriculum is guided by exams. All our attention is focused on preparing students for Universities, while we pay no attention whatsoever in providing students with the life education they need to join the wider society/community after graduating and irrespective of the professional career that each student will decide to take in his/her life. Someone once said that ‘The school is the University’s employee’, but I think that it is more concise to say that ‘The school is rather the University’s servant’. What we offer students is bare knowledge, which doesn’t help them develop other skills that they may have, beyond the intellectual-cognitive ones”

“Today, as it has always been the case, we consider the student who excels in Math and Greek Literature as an intelligent student. We also consider that Math and Greek Literature are two of the main subjects that one should acquire and neglect other subjects such as music, physical exercise and art, that could promote other than the cognitive-intellectual skills. In general, we tend to ignore or consider less intelligent the student who has other abilities or who has no interest in attending Universities after school. However, students understand their teachers’ indifference and react. Nobody likes to be called or looked at as “less able”. Also, I have to say that the cultural education that we so much neglect today used to be a big part of education in ancient Greece, part of our civilization. In ancient Greece, they read poems of great men and played music to calm their spirit and avoid misconduct. Cultural education is connected with discipline in so many ways...ways that we cannot always understand”

***g) Mixed ability classes and School-type:***

One of the main issues that emerged from the interviews as an extremely important factor responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus, today, and the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices used, is the issue of mixed ability classes and by extension the type of school that students attend.

As was mentioned in Chapter 5, all classes in the lyceum cycle in Cyprus are mixed ability. Teachers complained that these mixed ability classes contain students whose educational level is so dissimilar in comparison to the rest of the students, that essentially prohibits teachers from conducting their job the way they should, as they have to constantly deal with issues of disruptive behaviour while teaching. According to the interviewees, the majority of the extremely weak students who cannot follow the curriculum and who are either not interested in pursuing higher education or are not able to pursue such education, usually get bored quickly and start disturbing class, thus forcing the teacher to interrupt normal class proceedings and deal with them. Therefore, teachers felt that the exams, knowledge-based educational system of the lyceum cycle is not fitting for weak students and for students who are not particularly interested to pursue higher education, since these students are not only incapable of following the curriculum and are uninterested in the education that the lyceum cycle has to offer, but also, and perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this study, they are made feel worthless in a system that values primarily, and maybe only, the cognitive intellectual knowledge and no other skills. As such, teachers and vice-principals concurred that students who feel unappreciated and worthless and are also uninterested and/or incapable of following the curriculum, resort in manifesting their frustration by exhibiting more and more disruptive behaviour. This development naturally leads not only to higher levels of disruptive behaviour, but also to the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices, since these students will simply continue to misbehave no matter what disciplinary action is applied.



In directly linking the issue of mixed ability classes with the type of school that students attend, the majority of the interviewees also agreed that the lyceum cycle should not accept students with very low educational levels, or whose interests and capabilities are not found in the cognitive intellectual domain. Instead, teachers and vice-principals referred to another type of secondary public school which exists in Cyprus, namely the secondary technical and vocational schools. Besides the lyceum cycle, it has to be mentioned that the education system in Cyprus provides students the opportunity to attend secondary technical and vocational schools after they complete the first three years of the gymnasium cycle. While, as mentioned previously, the lyceum cycle predominantly serves the needs of students who want to attend Universities and Colleges, the technical and vocational schools are geared primarily towards providing students technical skills and capabilities that will enable them to become part of the labour force and integrate easier into the wider society (this does not mean that graduates of technical and vocational schools cannot pursue tertiary education and enter Universities and Colleges). Teachers and vice-principals believed that one of the main factors contributing to the rising levels of indiscipline and rendering the disciplinary practices currently used as ineffective, was the fact that students with very low educational levels or whose needs and interests are not met by what the lyceum cycle has to offer, find themselves in the wrong type of school and manifest their frustration by exhibiting disruptive behaviour.

For the formation of extremely uneven ability classes and for the fact that many students find themselves in the wrong type of school, educators held, once again, the Ministry of Education and Culture as responsible since, as they argued, the Ministry creates this situation by insisting on passing to the next grade students who are totally incompetent and unqualified and who should attend another type of school that caters better to their abilities and needs. As some of the educators stated:

"We pass all students irrespective of their qualifications. This is what the Ministry wants. In other countries, they fail students who are illiterate (i.e. they do not even

know how to spell their name) while in Cyprus these students graduate with our blessings. It is our job to know a student's abilities starting from primary school. A student should learn the basics, know how to read and write and then be sent to the appropriate school, which is able to serve his/her talent/abilities. Weak students are lost in our public school system. They feel they do not belong here. And what can you do when you cannot follow the class? You disrupt the class and break the school's rules and regulations just because you feel bored. How long can you sit in a class that does not interest you and that you cannot follow because your educational level is lower than the one you find yourself in?"

"Do you remember the class you visited when you first came in this school and handed out questionnaires (the interviewee was referring to the researcher)? In that class, there are 22 students. Out of the 22 students, the 14 should not be in that grade because their yearly grade average is beyond low. They come to school essentially as "tourists". They cannot follow the curriculum. They don't even know the basics. Therefore, for me the problem starts from there. You see...these "tourists" should have been placed in another type of school. They should not have been placed in the lyceum cycle. The moment that we accept and sort of force these students to join the lyceum cycle, is the moment that we create ourselves huge problems. This is where all problems of indiscipline begin...because this student, "the tourist" who comes at school cannot understand or follow the curriculum. How long can he/she sit on the chair, keep quiet and attend a class that he/she cannot understand? He/she gets bored and starts acting out. The main cause of indiscipline for me, then, is that *most students find themselves in the wrong place (type of school)* "

"I strongly believe that compulsory/mandatory education is a main cause of disruptive behaviour and indiscipline in schools. I have students at the two final grades of the lyceum cycle that do not even know the basics in Math. How can they follow or handle a higher level of Math? How long can this student be in class without disrupting the normal class procedures? Ten-fifteen minute the most. When I was a student education was not compulsory. Now it is. And I honestly believe that



not everyone is suited for the kind of education we offer at the public school. We force everyone to go to the same type of school. These students who are not suitable for this kind of education should attend another type of school offered, like the technical and vocational school. We shouldn't let students with a very low educational level join public schools. In that way, we damage both the weak student him/herself and the rest of the students who want to learn but cannot learn properly because the students who cannot follow the class disrupt the class all the time. It is not fair for any of them or for the teacher"

#### ***h) Weak or nonexistent family bonds:***

The child-parent relationship was also found guilty for the disruptive and disrespectful behaviour that some students exhibit. Most of the interviewees commented on the weak family bonds that portray our society today. Parents were blamed, *inter alia*, for not instilling in their children values and principles, for not giving their children the right upbringing and for not teaching them how to respect themselves and others, thus creating individuals who fully know their rights but completely ignore their obligations. They were also blamed that they spoil their children out of guilt since they work too many hours and cannot pay the necessary attention or listen to their children's concerns and problems. In the words of some of the educators:

"There are many reasons that can cause indiscipline in school. One of them is the student's family and home environment. For it is the family that lays the basis for the child's personal development, isn't it? Then, the child comes to school where some other factors will help enforce or influence the child's personality. Most of the parents, nowadays, face problems in their marriage or they work too many hours and never have the time to deal or communicate with their children. These children come to school and have no goals because their families did not help them set their goals. In school they find other children who are in the same situation as them...so they negatively influence each other to exhibiting disruptive behaviour"



“In essence, students embody habits they have acquired from their homes and families. They have no sense of boundaries. These have never been determined or set by their parents. In other words, they are fully aware of their rights but they totally disregard their obligations. This is, of course, a societal problem. Parents give their children material goods to substitute the love, affection and time they cannot spend with them because of their heavy work schedules. In order to have these material goods they work for hours and leave their children alone or with some relative. Parents are not there to communicate with their children and guide them. This is why children are lost today and react disruptively in the school environment against their teachers and peers”

#### **7.2.2.2 Evaluation of the disciplinary practices currently used at schools. Are they effective?**

The second question of the category *“School discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices”*, invited the interviewees to evaluate the disciplinary practices that are currently used by secondary public schools in Cyprus, namely in-school suspension and suspension with a downgrading of a student’s conduct and to assess their effectiveness. All of the interviewees, with no exception, concurred that the current disciplinary practices are largely ineffective and are unable to resolve a student’s behavioural issues. As the respondents supported, the only students that the existing disciplinary practices may be able to help are the students who do not normally exhibit disruptive behaviour and are usually very well behaved and proper, but who may, out of the ordinary, do something that they later regret. On the contrary, the interviewees argued that the current disciplinary practices fail to resolve and deal with repeat offenders, that is with students who repeatedly break the school’s rules and regulations and who seem to have greater behavioural and other problems. The effectiveness of disciplinary practices with this category of students was deemed superficial and meaningless. As some teachers and vice-principals said:

“The only students that have some fear towards disciplinary practices are those who do not normally break the rules, those who are good students, usually disciplined, who may at some point do something which can lead to their ‘punishment’. The rest of the students do not care about disciplinary practices. You warn them that you will write a referral and suspend them and they laugh in your face”

“With the current disciplinary practices you only help the students who are generally well behaved and who just happen to misbehave once every now and then. A few hours of suspension are enough to make them realize their mistake. On the contrary, disciplinary practices are not an effective way of dealing with students who are very disruptive and who may possibly have other problems as well, i.e. family issues”

#### **7.2.2.3 School related factors that can affect the effectiveness or quality implementation of the disciplinary practices currently used:**

The third question of the category “School discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices” asked interviewees to comment on the school related factors that they believe can affect the effectiveness or quality implementation of the existing disciplinary practices.

In answering this question, all teachers and vice-principals referred again to the factors they held responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline and underlined that these exact reasons are also accountable for the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used. In explaining this direct linkage, the interviewees thought that no disciplinary practice whatsoever will be effective and able to work towards achieving its intended goals, unless the constant school related factors, which lead to indiscipline, are altered in a way which will discourage and/or prohibit disruptive behaviour.

Further to the above reasons, however, the interviewees offered three additional factors that they considered responsible for the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices. These factors are the following, in the order of frequency reported:

***1) The role of career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists in school disciplinary matters:***

The first additional school related factor that respondents claimed to be responsible for the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices used in secondary public schools in Cyprus, is the role of career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists in school disciplinary matters. Teachers and vice-principals also linked this school related factor to the inconsistent application of disciplinary practices. In particular, as many of the respondents reported, the involvement of career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists in the decision making process regarding a student's disciplinary action has done more harm than good. Due to the nature of their job, both career guidance counselors and educational psychologists are there to identify students' personal problems and find ways to assist them in dealing with those issues. Since the majority of the students who are disruptive and have behavioural issues are usually the ones who also face many personal, academic, family or other problems, the main role of the career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists in schools, is to help those students deal with their problems and help them change their behaviour.

However, in their responses many interviewees expressed the view that career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists try to help students only by alleviating or even canceling a student's disciplinary sentence. This, they argued, is done through the participation of career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists in the educational staff assembly, which convenes at the end of each trimester to examine, *inter alia*, all cases of students who have behavioural or passing-failing issues, and decide the way that these issues should be dealt with by the school (i.e. if a student should receive a downgrading of his/her conduct, repeat



the same grade etc). In this assembly, career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists are present to talk about the students at hand and let the educational staff know what may be affecting the students' behaviour, before they reach a decision. According to the procedure followed, both the assigned teacher-mentor of the class and the vice-principal responsible for the class in which the 'problematic' student belongs to, talk about the student and present the problem. Following their presentation, the career guidance counselor and/or educational psychologist brief the educational staff about the problems the student is facing which may, in their opinion, lead to their misbehaviour or failing the class. After all presentations are concluded, the educational staff is called to vote (by raising their hand) for each case.

In their responses, interviewees complained that the presentations of the career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists influence the educational staff's decision to a great degree and that the students who are disruptive and cause many problems during the school year end up being repeatedly excused for their disruptive behaviour and misconducts, due to their background and their personal problems. Most importantly, the interviewees highlighted that the message that these students and their peers receive, is one of complete impunity where students can act as they wish and not have to face any kind of consequences about their wrongdoings simply because they face some kind of problem. As the respondents put it:

"What really irritates me is that at the staff assembly, where teachers are called to vote regarding the disciplinary action to be taken against the student who creates problems, the wrong decisions are taken for the wrong reasons just because the student has 'personal issues'. In last year's assembly many teachers left feeling very angry and upset from the assembly because the wrong decisions were taken for particular students. In the new school year, those students, whose cases were discussed and they were all excused, are still disruptive and create a lot of problems to the teachers that teach in that class. But the message we have sent to those

students is that they can do whatever they want because they will be excused no matter what their deeds”

“The basic problem for me (concerning student indiscipline and the ineffectiveness of disciplinary policies) has started from educational psychologists. There exists a remarkably erroneous perception that the student who has personal or other problems has the alibi to do whatever he/she wants. This perception, however, creates huge problems to society...what will become of this student when he/she enters the wider society of adults. He/she will steal and be excused. He/she will kill and be excused, *because he/she is a child of divorced parents or a child in a family of domestic abuse*. Students should understand that the school is there to support them, not to excuse them. They should know and feel that there is someone at school to help them deal with their problems, not to help them take advantage of their situation. Students with problems should be treated within the social team and not outside of it”

“Disciplinary action has been greatly reduced. We only take disciplinary action for extreme cases. This reduction of the use of disciplinary practices has to do of course with the policies that the Ministry of Education and Culture wants to adhere to. Moreover, it has been around ten years, now, since educational psychologists have been introduced to schools, and they have certainly influenced both the educational staff to a great degree and the disciplinary action that we take against students. Because of them, our intervention is extremely minimal”

## ***2) The inconsequential character of disciplinary practices:***

The second additional school related factor that respondents added with regard to the ineffective implementation of the existing disciplinary practices is that disciplinary practices are virtually inconsequential, as they have no real consequences for the students and the students are fully aware of that. The majority of the interviewees referred in particular to the ‘issue of absences’ from school,

which was mentioned and analyzed above, and linked this issue especially to the ineffectiveness of suspension. The respondents felt that the number of 110 justified absences that a student is allowed to have during the school year, is 'enormous' and that suspension time which counts towards that number, and is effectively the only consequence that suspension can have on students, is essentially irrelevant since students who do not reach that amount of absences have nothing to worry about (i.e. grade retention). Relating the issue to the inconsistency of disciplinary practices and the loose policies of the Ministry, respondents argued that even in the situations where students reach the maximum number of absences, there are still ways to 'magically erase' the excessive number of their absences, and pass to the next grade, something of course which is well-known to students and parents. As such, suspension effectively cannot deal with issues of misbehaviour. As many of the respondents said:

"The problem is that we both have and have not disciplinary practices. Although in some extreme cases of disruptive behaviour we do find the culprits we never 'punish' them in an exemplary way so that they themselves and others learn something. Students do not receive the right message. What they receive is the following: "Ok, they (teachers) will notice our misbehaviour, they will warn us, someone we know will talk in our favour, and at the end of the day, we will get away with whatever we do"

"There are no disciplinary practices. Whoever thinks that what we have are disciplinary practices, they are totally misguided. In the past if a student received suspension, he/she would also receive unjustified absences (which are a lot less in comparison to the justified absences that a student is allowed) whereas today he/she receives a justified absence. Do you know how big the number of justified absences is? Therefore why should the student care if he/she receives suspension?"

"Students do not realize what a disciplinary action really is. It does not even touch them. We suspend students and then, we, again do not take their suspension into



consideration when the educational staff assembly takes place. Therefore, we annul the decisions we took by erasing their absences and letting them get away with what they did. *In reality, we apply other measures on top of the measures that we have already applied.* This is so wrong and this is why students disregard suspension. Since it means nothing to us it means nothing to them”

Besides the “absence issue”, however, there was also another matter, heavily and repeatedly emphasized by the interviewees, that adds to the trivial treatment of suspension by students. Suspended students spend suspension time in their usual classroom. They are not being removed from the classroom environment and transferred somewhere else, in order not to waste ‘valuable curriculum time’. This practice, however, generates many problems for the smooth functioning of the class since, as many of the respondents explained, suspended students may feel bitter about their suspension or towards the teacher who referred them and become more aggravated by being in class and attending lessons. Such a situation, in turn, impacts not only the teacher him/herself but also, and more importantly, the suspended student’s classmates whose own ‘valuable curriculum time’ is wasted since the teacher has to spend much of his/her teaching time dealing with the suspended student’s disquieting behaviour. Instead of in-class suspension teachers supported that time-off might work better for these students because it will give them time to ‘calm down’ and maybe reconsider their behaviour. As they reported:

“Students should feel that they are disciplined. Staying in class does not help them realize that. Moreover, some suspended students react negatively in class and they do not want to either attend or participate in the lesson. They don’t want you to bother them”

“The fact that the student remains in class when suspended negatively influences the student. The student thinks: “Why should I be in class since I am suspended?” And they are right, you know. They are in class and should participate in the lesson and other class related activities, while at the same time they receive a justified

absence. They are in class but essentially they are not. We should have placed them somewhere else and give them time to calm down”

“What does suspension mean to the student nowadays? NOTHING. Whereas if you have sent him/her home, as you should have, for this is the meaning of the word suspension (in Greek we use the word “apovoli” - which means send out), his/her parents would have to deal with the situation as they will have to decide what to do with their children. What does the student understand by staying in class? He/she gets more aggravated and creates more fuss”

In addition to the inconsequential character of suspension, the interviewees further highlighted that the practice of downgrading a student’s conduct comes also with no consequences, since it is incorrectly handled by the school and bears no meaning to either the students or their parents. In the past, the downgrading of a student’s conduct appeared on the ‘School Leaving Certificate’ that students received when they graduated. Thus, receiving a ‘School Leaving Certificate’ with an unfavourable assessment of one’s character or behaviour was something that mattered to students, since those who wanted to continue their education in Universities and Colleges could face difficulties enrolling in tertiary education institutions, while the ones who were interested in entering the labour force straight after finishing school had to face the hesitation of employers who could potentially hire them. This practice has been abandoned, however, in the last decade or so, and neither higher institutions nor employers are aware anymore of the student’s behavioural conduct in school, unless they specifically ask the student for such a record. Thus, receiving a downgrading of their conduct bears no meaning to students anymore, something, which reinforces the ineffectiveness of this disciplinary practice as well. As teachers and vice-principals mentioned:

“How can the disciplinary practice of downgrading a student’s conduct be used against the student or be meaningful to students, since regulations prohibit the downgrading of the student’s conduct to appear anywhere? Why do you even bother

to vote about this thing and waste so much time to decide about this, when it means nothing? What difference does it make to students? *(the interviewee becomes very sarcastic at this point)* Does the day become night? Does the student goes to bed at night and has nightmares? Or is his/her psychology and well being affected? It means nothing to the student and nothing happens to him/her”

“Giving a downgrading of conduct to a student is a disciplinary practice that has almost been abandoned. It happens very rarely and in very extreme cases. In the last few years we have given a downgrading of conduct to an insignificant number of students, although indiscipline and disruptive behaviour have greatly increased. What does it mean to receive a downgrading of conduct? It means nothing. At the end of the day all the students that graduate are “exceptional” in their behaviour, because they have all given us a great time throughout the year *(very sarcastically said)*

### **3) ‘Negative’ parental support:**

The third additional school related factor that teachers and vice-principals added to the reasons held responsible for the ineffectiveness of the existing disciplinary practices is ‘negative parental support’. Nearly all of the interviewees mentioned that parents do not take their children’s misconducts and subsequent disciplinary action seriously. Instead, parents tend to ‘back up’ their children and do whatever it takes to excuse them, justify their absences and finally annul any educational staff’s decision that is taken against their child, by filing a complaint with the Ministry of Education and Culture. The respondents claimed that parents effectively inhibit the school’s disciplinary and other procedures and render the school’s disciplinary practices inactive, an attitude which is imitated at the end of the day by their children, who learn that indiscipline comes without consequences, since their parents will always there to come to their rescue. As educators reported:



“For students to take disciplinary action seriously it has to matter to their parents as well. They have to know that disciplinary action will be followed by consequences. If nobody in their family cares about whether they receive disciplinary action or not, why should the student care?”

“Parents’ behaviour is out of control as well. They will back up their children for anything, even if something is totally unlawful. They do not spend enough time with their children and in order to please them they do anything for them. I will just mention one example that happened yesterday in order to show you to what extremes parents can go. Yesterday, a parent called the school and asked to speak to me. Do you know what this mother required me to do? She wanted me to ignore the fact that her daughter was absent from class and asked me not to mark her absence in the ‘absence book’. She said that despite the fact that her daughter would be out of school for a few days, she would in fact be learning something because she would be receiving private tutoring during school hours and that I should disregard her absences from class. Can you believe this? How outrageous, unacceptable and ridiculous is this (very emphatically said). Of course, if something happened to her daughter during the school hours that she was receiving private tutoring, out of school, the parents would take the school and me personally to court for counting their daughter as present in school, while she was clearly not”

“With regard to the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices, parents’ role is major. Not only do they not allow us to show some strictness towards their children...they do not even let us apply the existing rules and regulations. I want to mention this very characteristic example: A student had 225 justified absences and 80 unjustified absences. The limit is 110 for justified and 50 for unjustified absences. According to the school’s rules and regulations or I should better say, the Ministry’s rules and regulations, the aforementioned student should have failed the grade and not even be allowed to take exams in September to be given a chance to pass the grade. We decided to give this student the chance to take the exams in September and upon passing the exams to pass to the next grade. But this decision did not satisfy his

father, who instead of understanding that we were doing his son a favour, he called the school and threatened that if we dared not to allow his son to take the final written exams in June as everybody else, we would be 'playing with fire'. This is the expression he used. Finally, he got what he wanted, because he involved the Ministry of Education and Culture"

### **7.2.3 Students' reaction towards disciplinary practices:**

In the third category of the interview protocol, the interviewees were asked to offer their point of view on students' reaction towards disciplinary practices. The common themes that emerged from this category concerned three groups of students: 1) The students who take disciplinary action seriously, are offended by it and feel remorseful, 2) The students who take disciplinary action seriously and react to it only when it poses a 'risk' to them (i.e. grade retention) and 3) The students who do not take disciplinary action seriously at all, because they do not care about school or its practices in general.

As the majority of the interviewees reported, the first category of students, namely the ones who take disciplinary action seriously, are offended by it and feel remorseful, are students who do not normally exhibit disruptive behaviour and break the rules. These students take 'punishment' very personally, they stress out about it and feel sad, because they are generally self-disciplined and know their boundaries.

"Nowadays, students do not take disciplinary action seriously. The only students that care about disciplinary action are the good students, the well-behaved students who take it personally if they receive disciplinary action. It's a matter of decency to them"

The second category of students, namely the ones who take disciplinary action seriously only when it poses a risk to them, are students who generally disregard

disciplinary action and break the rules very often. These students do not feel remorseful when they receive disciplinary action and tend to repeat their misbehaviour. According to the interviewees, the only situation that can make this group of students take disciplinary action seriously and be more mindful of its “consequences”, is when they approach the maximum number of absences they are allowed to have in a year and there is a risk for grade retention. This is the only development that this group of students “fears” although, as many of the interviewees stressed again, students are fully aware that there are ways to circumvent the consequences that can be effected when they exceed the number of the absences they are allowed to have in a year. Despite this reality, however, teachers and vice-principals acknowledged that not all students want to reach the point where an intervention that violates the school rules and regulation is necessary to “save” them, because there is always the risk that they may eventually “lose the game”. In the respondents’ words:

“The students who break the rules almost every day and receive disciplinary action quite often, do not really care about disciplinary action. But when they come close to exceeding the number of absences they are allowed to have and they are at great risk of repeating the grade, then they start caring and start reacting by yelling and creating all sorts of problems”

“The worst thing for a student is grade retention. It is essentially the only reason that will make a student take disciplinary action seriously and make them start asking about their absences “How many do I have left? Will I pass the class etc?”

The last category of students, namely the ones who do not take disciplinary action seriously at all because they do not care about the school and its practices in general, are the students that the school does not have the means to discipline, influence or help within the framework of the existing disciplinary practices. These students are extremely and repeatedly disruptive and have other serious issues that need to be dealt with professionally and in advance before they are in a position to



alter their behaviour. As the interviewees supported, these students need another type of approach that, they, as educators cannot offer to them. They need more attention and guidance, which they can only receive from professionals who are able to help these students deal with their problems, their frustration and anger. They also emphasized that the existing disciplinary practices cannot help them and can only make things worse.

“The students who are ‘serial offenders’ do not care about disciplinary practices. They have developed some sort of immunity towards them. You warn them that you will suspend them and their reaction is “So what?” These students have no goals, no dreams for their life. And we need to find out what the reasons are”

“I believe that the existing disciplinary practices are completely ineffective with students who are really disruptive. Students who have personal problems at home or other sort of issues are indifferent both towards suspension and the downgrading of their conduct. These practices will not help them solve their problems. What they need is specialized help. Each school should have a psychologist who will be there just to deal with the students who have problems; and I am not talking about the sort of psychologists we have now at schools who have so many tasks that at the end of the day they cannot deal with the student’s problems at all. I am talking about ‘psychologists’ who know how to deal and help the students who are extremely disruptive because they have serious issues”

In talking about the same issue of how students react towards disciplinary practices most of the interviewees, especially the vice-principals that participated in this study, emphasized that the way you *approach* students when they face disciplinary action, may make a big difference in how they react towards it. Participating vice-principals claimed that if students feel that they are treated with respect and they understand that what is being ‘punished’ is their actions and not ‘them’ as ‘personalities’, they tend to react to disciplinary action much better. As some of the interviewees stressed, the vice-principals’ role is to ‘convince’ the student that

his/her action was wrong and that it is the student him/herself who chose with his/her action to be disciplined. Students need to know and feel that disciplinary action is not an act of revenge, but rather an act of principle, for there are laws that should be respected and protected and consequences when these laws are violated. In the words of some vice-principals:

"My goal is to *convince* students that disciplinary action is unavoidable due to their misbehaviour. It is the road that they chose. If I convince them of that, they even come and thank me afterwards because they realize that the disciplinary action I applied on them was minimal. If you just tell the student, 'Here's what you did and you will be "punished"', he /she will not understand the rationale and create further problems. The whole issue is to *convince* the student that he/she is being 'punished'/disciplined because there is no other way to deal with this. You explain to them that they have violated the school's rules. Due to their violation, other problems have been created that hindered the normal functioning of the school. If you show undisciplined students that you respect them and that you have another picture of him/her, a better picture of them rather than that of the person that should be "punished", then you earn the student and his/her trust"

"The student should be *convinced* that the reason he/she is being disciplined is that he/she broke the rules. After I have a talk with a student who comes into my office with a referral, I ask the student to tell me what course of action we should follow to deal with his/her case and what kind of disciplinary action I should enforce on them. If the student does not understand his/her mistake, then whatever action you take against him/her will be in vain. The purpose of disciplinary action should be to teach students something, make the student realize his/her mistake, and not repeat it, or at least try not to repeat it. If you simply enforce disciplinary action for the sake of enforcing it, then the disciplinary action becomes an end in itself and ends up having no meaning"

#### **7.2.4 General effects/consequences of disciplinary practices on students and on students' disruptive behaviour:**

The next category of the interview protocol, deals with the effects/consequences that disciplinary practices may have on students and more specifically on their disruptive behaviour. The previous categories that composed the 'interview protocol', generated issues that touched upon some of the effects that disciplinary practices may have on students in general, like aggravating the student who spends his/her suspension time in the normal classroom attending lessons as usual, negatively affecting the teacher-student relationship and deterring communication. Disciplinary practices were also deemed responsible for creating feelings of revenge and retaliation and for aggravating, instead of resolving, a student's problematic behaviour, especially in cases where disciplinary action is *recurrent* and considered *unjustified* by students. Therefore, in this interview category, the respondents gave more emphasis to the effects that disciplinary action can have on students' disruptive behaviour. All of the interviewees, with no exception, concurred that *disciplinary action may reinforce a student's disruptive behaviour*. However, they advanced different reasons as to when this can happen:

##### ***1) Students do not understand or are not convinced of the reason that caused their "punishment":***

"Disciplinary action may reinforce a student's disruptive behaviour. It may cause anger to some students because they believe that they shouldn't be 'disciplined'. They feel *stigmatized* and *rejected* by their teachers and their school environment. If disciplinary action makes students feel this way, then they react to it and will repeat or do things that are even worse"

"Disruptive behaviour is definitely reinforced by disciplinary action. Mainly with students who do not understand why they have been disciplined. Students tend to blame others and not themselves for their actions"



***2) Students feel unjustly treated when they compare their transgressions to other students:***

“If two students make the same mistake, it does not mean that we should ‘punish’/discipline them in the same way. Different students have different personalities and situations. One student may straighten up with disciplinary action whereas another student may be harmed by it. However, students do not understand why we discipline one student this way and the other that way. They take it personally and react to disciplinary action. Their age and knowledge prohibit them from understanding the different treatment”

“Discretion is a major virtue, the greatest of all virtues”<sup>17</sup>. One needs to apply discretion in different situations but discretion is not always understood or taken well by third parties”

“Disciplinary action may reinforce disruptive behaviour when students feel that you treat them differently from other students. The other day I had a situation in class where a student (who normally creates trouble in class) was playing with his cell phone. I reprimanded him three times, the third time being very harsh, and told him that if he didn’t put his cell phone away I would refer him. While he was putting his cell phone away, another student (who never creates problems in class) did the same thing. I just reprimanded her without the threat for a referral. The other student who had just been reprimanded started yelling that I did not treat his classmate in the same way as him and that I was being biased etc. He could not understand that the girl was treated differently because she does not create problems overall. The thing is that students who are generally disruptive feel that teachers reject and pick on them, they feel stigmatized and this makes the situation worse”

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<sup>17</sup> The teacher used an ancient Greek expression that was translated in the text by the researcher.

**3) Disciplinary action is inconsistent (this issue has also been mentioned earlier in this chapter in a different context):**

“Disciplinary practices are not enforced the way they should and inconsistency causes students to misbehave”

“If you do not discipline the student when you are supposed to, the student will repeat the same or worse misbehaviour. In general, impunity and inconsistency create a circle of violence”

“If you are too loose/inconsistent with disciplinary action, students take advantage of the situation and in this way you reinforce the student’s disruptive behaviour. Students realize that they can get away with what they did. Why not repeat the same or worse behaviour?”

**4) Disciplinary action is trivial or inconsequential (this issue has also been mentioned earlier in this chapter in a different context):**

“When the student realizes that he/she will not have to deal with any consequences, then of course he/she will misbehave again. Neither suspension nor the downgrading of a student’s conduct will have any effect to the student’s disruptive behaviour but rather reinforce it”

“Disruptive behaviour is reinforced by disciplinary action. It is reasonable that this happens because the student does not care about suspension or the downgrading of his/her conduct. The student thinks ‘So what will happen if I receive suspension?’ *Students do not understand consequences because there are no consequences.* This is why they will keep repeating their misbehaviour again and again and again”

***5) Parents reinforce their children's maladaptive behaviour by supporting or justifying their misconducts (this issue has also been mentioned earlier in this chapter in a different context):***

"If parents do not discipline their children and do not put boundaries to them, then students do not accept boundaries when they come to school. They misbehave and their parents back them up instead of explaining to them that what they did was wrong. Therefore, if students have this kind of support by their parents they do not understand disciplinary action and their disruptive behaviour is reinforced because it is essentially accepted by their parents"

**7.2.5 Educators' suggestions on the issue of discipline and disciplinary practices:**

The final category of the interview protocol inquired about the suggestions that both teachers and vice-principals had to offer with regard to the matter of discipline and the disciplinary practices in secondary public schools in Cyprus. The largest part of the suggestions that the interviewees proposed, were naturally linked to the reasons they held responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline and the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices, which were reported and analyzed earlier in this chapter. The common themes that resulted from their suggestions are the following:

***a) Create smaller schools and classes:***

The largest part of the interviewees thought that large schools and classes create several problems and contribute substantially to the increase of the indiscipline levels. Therefore, they proposed the creation of smaller schools and classes, where teachers will be able to get to know their students, connect and communicate with them much easier. Communication, as mentioned earlier, was regarded as key to



forming better teacher-student relations and preventing indiscipline. As the interviewees claimed:

“I always thought that we should have smaller schools. In smaller schools you can prevent and deter the kind of delinquency that needs to be treated/handled with the use of tough disciplinary measures”

“No matter how many rules and regulations are created, they will have no meaning or bearing, if there are no relations between people, and in this case between teachers and students. Therefore, the creation of smaller schools and classes is my suggestion to cure indiscipline. If you know the person, you respect the person much more and you can also help him/her much easier. Anonymity should be eliminated from schools”

In addition to the creation of smaller schools and classes, some of the respondents also highlighted the importance of creating a school environment that is more humane and more enjoyable to students, and in this framework proposed the establishment of other places/areas in the school, where the student will be able to relax, entertain him/herself and/or study. As some of the interviewees put it:

“We should create more humane conditions for students. We should have other places besides the ordinary class, the lab, and the gym where the student learns and exercises. There should be a place in the school where the student feels that he/she is entertained”

“The school should be a more pleasant and more welcoming place for the student. It should be a place, where the student can do what he/she loves the most. The school’s environment should be such that the student feels at home with. If he/she feels that, then indiscipline and disruption could reduce or disappear”

***b) Establish and adhere to common disciplinary practices and policies:***

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the lack of a common policy is considered one of the main reasons for the rising levels of indiscipline in schools and for the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices. Therefore, the respondents emphasized the importance of establishing and following a common policy on issues of discipline, in order to avoid the creation of inconsistency, which leads to indiscipline and renders the disciplinary practices used ineffective. In the words of teachers and vice-principals:

“The school needs to be clearer with regard to its rules and regulations, so that students know what the limits are. Thus, we should all follow a common policy that we set from the beginning of the school year and not violate this policy for this or that reason”

“We should have a common policy. We cannot have two kinds of teachers and vice-principals, the ones who adhere to the existing policies and the ones who don’t. Students receive mixed messages and confusion creates chaos. We should all follow the same line”

Adding on to the subject of enforcing and following a common policy, the interviewees also emphasized the *principal’s role* in establishing and maintaining the school’s policies and discipline levels. The interviewees agreed that the school’s principal should be an appropriately selected person who is a strong leader, that is not influenced and not willing to bow to external pressure from the Ministry of Education and Culture. As they put it:

“If the principal of the school is not a strong leader, then the school cannot function properly. But if the principal can guide his/her administrative team and distribute the job appropriately then we can have the desired results”

“The school’s principal should be selected in the appropriate way. Not everyone is fit to be a principal. Just because you reach a certain point in your career does not mean that you can run a school. The school’s principal should be a strong and serious leader and be able to control students. The principal should have also his/her own opinion and accept no pressure from the Ministry”

***c) Enhance the educational role of secondary technical and vocational schools:***

As mentioned earlier by the interviewees, the lyceum cycle cannot serve the needs of all students, because it is essentially oriented towards the students who are interested in attending Universities and Colleges and pursuing careers that require higher education diplomas or degrees, such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, economists, businessmen, engineers etc. As such, students who may not be interested in pursuing a University or College degree, but still have notable skills and interests in other fields, such as sports, music, crafts, or handiwork (e.g. plumbers, electricians etc), may feel somewhat neglected in the lyceum cycle and exhibit their frustration through acts of indiscipline and misbehaviour. To deal with this situation, many of the interviewees suggested that more types of schools should be created to serve students’ different needs and skills. They also suggested the introduction of some specific requirements for entering the lyceum cycle. One such requirement they proposed is setting a minimum yearly grade average, which students should meet in order to enter the lyceum cycle. Those failing to satisfy the prescribed benchmark should be directed to another type of school like the technical and vocational school. In this framework, many interviewees suggested that the Ministry of Education and Culture should take the appropriate measures to rejuvenate and reinforce the existing technical and vocational schools, so that they can regain their reputation and public respect and make students who attend this type of schools feel appreciated and useful by society. As some interviewees explained:



"The Ministry of Education and Culture should understand that not all students can graduate from the lyceum cycle and thus refrain from pressuring the school to graduate students who are totally unqualified. The Ministry should, instead, *create other types of schools* in which the student can be taught valuable skills and graduate with a degree in some kind of handcraft/handiwork. There are of course the secondary technical and vocational schools that a student can attend, but they function in the wrong way and for this reason they have created a bad reputation for themselves. As such, they are not appreciated by society at large. The students who attend these schools are looked down on and they are made feel useless. The Ministry should provide disruptive students or the students who are not fit for the lyceum cycle with descent alternatives. Not all students can graduate from a school that prepares students for Universities. As you probably know, disruption is linked to a student's educational performance"

"I think you (the interviewer) have understood my suggestion from the beginning of this interview. My suggestion is that students should attend the type of school that serves their needs. Not all students should attend the lyceum cycle. They should attend music schools, athletic schools, or the technical and vocational school that we also have. If they (Ministry of Education and Culture) merge the lyceum cycle with the technical and vocational school, as they say that they will do, they will totally destroy what is left from the secondary school (meaning the lyceum cycle). Some students cannot take too much (learning) pressure. Each student has his/her own skills and talents. Why should they find themselves in a physics' class when they have no interest in this subject?"

***d) Harmonize mixed ability classes:***

In addition to providing weak students with alternative schools, teachers and vice-principals also suggested the harmonization of mixed ability classes. As was mentioned by the interviewees previously, the current school system provides for the creation of many classes, which are composed of students that enjoy quite

uneven educational levels. This situation results in feelings of lower self-esteem for weak students in particular, which, in turn, lead to higher levels of indiscipline, as the students who feel unappreciated and neglected are more inclined to misbehave. To deal with this problem, educators suggested that schools should change the selection process used for placing students in a class, in order to ensure that the classes they create are composed of students whose educational levels are not so disparate. As one of the interviewees said:

“By having so many uneven educational levels in a class, you basically harm the student who is eager to learn but is obstructed in his/her learning by the student who has no idea about what it is that we are talking about. Therefore, what is right to do is to be careful to select students who are more even educationally and can follow the subject with ease”

***e) Minimize external pressure:***

As the interviewees mentioned earlier, the Ministry of Education and Culture does not abide by its own rules and regulations and most of the times, instead of supporting the school about its decisions, it exerts pressure on the school to annul its decisions and follow the Ministry's mandates. The interviewees contested this practice and suggested that the Ministry of Education and Culture should respect and conform to its own rules and allow the school the self-governance that is legitimately allowed. As some of the respondents said:

“The Ministry should support the school and respect its decisions. It is the Ministry's rules that we follow, after all, and they annul their own rules. This is not right and they should realize that”

“The Ministry of Education and Culture should not constrain the school's principal and vice-principals with their decisions. Their mandates place both the principal and vice-principals of a school in an extremely difficult position where all

educational stakeholders, including the students and their parents, blame the school for its decisions. If discipline is to reign then the Ministry should abide by its own rules”

“As you must already know, the school’s internal rules should abide by the Ministry’s general rules. Therefore, you understand that the school is not self-governed and is very much restrained by the Ministry. I believe that things would be much different and better, if the school could form its own rules that will suit and serve its own purposes and needs”

***f) Reevaluate and enforce disciplinary practices that are consequential:***

The issue of enforcing disciplinary practices that have no consequences for students and are therefore not taken seriously by them, was also reported earlier by the participants of this study as a reason for increasing disruptive behaviour and for the ineffective use of disciplinary practices. The interviewees underlined that indiscipline is an outcome of the meaningless and trivial practices that are currently used and stressed that disciplinary practices should be reevaluated and reformed in order to have real consequences and acquire a meaning for students. This is the only way for students to know that any violation of the school rules will be faced by consequences. Moreover, some of the interviewees suggested having disruptive students, who often violate the school’s rules, carry out social work. In the words of one interviewee:

“We should create disciplinary practices that have some meaning, because right now our disciplinary practices are inconsequential and ineffective. There are so many different types of disciplinary practices that we can enforce i.e. social work: Have a student work for five days in a home for elder people, to clean and take care of them, or have the student clean a street, or the school’s yard. Give them something to learn from. We tolerate too many things. We just want to handle things in a hasty, typical, and superficial way”



***g) Appoint psychologists on a permanent basis in schools:***

While teachers and vice-principals felt that the role and involvement of psychologists (and career guidance counselors) in the decision making process on disciplinary matters is an important factor contributing to the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices currently used – since they tend to influence the educational staff's decisions regarding disciplinary matters of disruptive students – the majority of the interviewees argued that students who are very disruptive and face many problems need professional guidance, which only a psychologist can offer. Therefore, even though teachers and vice-principals disagreed with the role and the involvement that psychologists currently have in disciplinary matters in schools, they acknowledged that these professionals are needed in schools in order to deal specifically with students who have many problems and are repeatedly disruptive. In this framework, the interviewees supported the appointment of psychologists on a permanent basis in all schools. As they explained:

“Schools should be equipped with specialized personnel, psychologists. When a student exemplifies very disruptive behaviour, a psychologist should intervene to examine this student's mental world and understand why he/she is being disruptive”

“There should be psychologists on a permanent basis in schools so that they have the time to deal with the children's real problems. The students who are very disruptive have usually no one at home to talk to about their problems and they may find the courage to confide in a teacher they really trust. How can you help a student who has severe problems? You know, we have students who are depressed, who deal with eating disorders, who are suicidal, who come from very abusive families. We are not experts and we cannot help them out. Any advice we may give them can be wrong and we may harm them instead of helping them. Therefore, it is better to have people who know how to tackle such problems”

***h) Eliminate exams and private tutoring – Utilize students' School Leaving Certificate to enter tertiary education institutions:***

The issue of private tutoring is a theme that was reported earlier in this chapter in conjunction with the issue of having an exams-based educational system, and they were both linked with disruptive behaviour and the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices. As explained before, University entrance exams and competition create a lot of pressure both to the teachers and the students. Teachers always hurry to deliver the examination syllabus and prepare students for the exams, and students, who want to pursue higher education, receive private tutoring after school hours to enhance their chances of success. Besides the growing competition, however, which constitutes an important reason as to why students choose private tutoring, there is also the issue of having to deal with students who are not interested in pursuing higher education and who frequently disrupt normal class procedures, thus making teaching and delivering the examination syllabus much more strenuous and difficult for teachers, and learning and preparing for exams much more arduous for any student wishing to pursue higher education studies. To tackle the issue of private tutoring and the exams-based system, the interviewees suggested that the Ministry of Education and Culture should eliminate final written exams in the last year of the lyceum cycle and require students to enter higher institutions with the use of their School Leaving Certificate, as this is also a practice followed by other European countries. Respondents argued that if the School Leaving Certificate is made important for admission to Colleges and Universities, then students will certainly pay more attention in all school subjects as well as their class teacher, since they will be pressured to be focused and engaged continuously on all subjects. As teachers and vice-principals stated:

“Private tutoring (substitute teaching) should be stopped. Our educational system is based on exams and students are examined on plain knowledge, a considerable amount of knowledge. This creates pressure on students who may react by demonstrating disruptive behaviour”

“Exams are a form of constant pressure that does not let students enjoy their youth/teenage years. We subject students to this pressure from high school all the way to lyceum. And this practice can only have negative results. Accumulated pressure can come out in the form of violence. As you know the majority of students receive private tutoring after school as well. This is just a lot for teenagers to bear. They have no time to enjoy themselves and do something they like. So in order for private tutoring to stop, exams should be wiped out as well”

“Private tutoring substituted the school and this has created a plethora of problems...too much stress, disruption, violence. We should find a way to replace exams or make other things matter more. For instance, instead of having to pass exams, students should use their School Leaving Certificate to enter higher institutions. In this way, they will pay more attention in class and they will show more interest to all school subjects and not just the ones that are tested by exams”

While the most frequently reported suggestions of the interviewees were presented above, there are, some other suggestions, which, although not frequently reported, merit mentioning due to their importance and validity. In particular, some of the participants thought that the Ministry of Education and Culture should grant the teacher-mentor more hours so that the mentor can establish a closer relation with students and be able to communicate with them. Another issue that was brought up was the school-parent relationship. Some of the interviewees supported that the school should find ways to cooperate with parents and bring them closer to the school, in order to include parents in the making of the school's practices and policies so that they can later respect them. In addition, they thought that parents should be informed more frequently about their children's progress and behaviour and also be involved in seminars that talk about behavioural issues or about how families should tackle teenage problems and disruptive behaviour.



### **7.3 Conclusion:**

This chapter presented the results of both the student survey, as well as the interviews that were conducted with a number of teachers and vice-principals to fulfill the purposes of this study.

As mentioned earlier, the student-participants of this study were requested to answer a questionnaire, which consisted of nine sections and basically answered to two out of the three main questions that were specifically set for this study. In answering the first main question, which invited students to evaluate the effectiveness of their school's disciplinary practices, data analysis showed that students find the disciplinary practices used by their school, namely suspension and suspension followed by a downgrading of a student's conduct, mostly unfair, strict and inconsistent and mostly responsible for causing a negative student reaction. The practices were also deemed, by students, as largely ineffective, in that they cannot solve a student's behavioural problems but rather increase them.

The second main question consisted of four sub-questions and looked at the effects that disciplinary practices may have on students. More particularly, data analysis found that students' social relations with their peers do not get affected by disciplinary practices and that disciplined students do not feel isolated in their school environment. Results were inconclusive as to whether students' relationship with their parents is affected by disciplinary action, but on the contrary were very conclusive as to how disciplinary action can affect the relationship of students with their teachers and vice-principal. Moreover, disciplinary action was found 'guilty' of causing feelings of anger and retaliation to disciplined students, who want to obtain revenge predominantly against their teachers for referring them and to a lesser degree their vice-principals who enforce the action. The data analysis regarding disciplined students' academic performance showed that in-class suspension as well as suspension with a further downgrading of a student's conduct may affect the student's overall class concentration and participation, as well as future aspirations.

Finally, data showed that the existing and currently used disciplinary practices may enhance rather than discourage a student's disruptive behaviour.

The second part of this study consisted of interviews, which were conducted with a number of teachers and vice-principals. Participants were invited to answer questions, which comprised five categories in the interview protocol and aimed in answering all three main questions that the researcher set for this study.

The first category of the interview-protocol consisted of general questions (name, specialty, years of teaching experience and years of work experience at the particular school where the interview was conducted), which intended to gather general information about the sample and establish good rapport with the interviewees. The categories that followed were concerned with school discipline levels and the effectiveness of disciplinary practices (suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct), students' reaction/response towards disciplinary practices, the general effects/consequences of disciplinary practices on students and on their disruptive behaviour and finally the participants' suggestions on the issue of discipline and the disciplinary practices currently used.

The majority of the interviewees observed that discipline levels have greatly changed over the last decade or so and admitted that indiscipline has risen to alarming levels. In describing the situation, they frequently used terms such as *slackness in discipline, impunity, permissiveness, rule flexibility, leniency and tolerance*. In explaining the reasons they hold mostly responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus and for the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices used, the interviewees pointed out to a number of reasons that concerned the following: a) Lack of a common policy and the subsequent inconsistent use of disciplinary practices, b) Change that occurred in the teacher's role in the last few years, c) Change that occurred in the way that the school and its educational staff is perceived and treated by society (students, parents and the Ministry of Education and Culture), d) Use of unclear and loose policies by the

Ministry of Education and Culture, e) Lack of strong leadership, f) Lack of meaningful relationships and communication between teachers and students, g) Mixed ability classes and School type and h) Weak or nonexistent family bonds.

In evaluating the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used, namely suspension and suspension followed by a downgrading of a student's conduct, all of the interviewees, without exception, found the existing disciplinary practices ineffective and incapable of handling or resolving students' disruptive behaviour, except in the case of students who do not normally exhibit disruptive behaviour but might once, every now and then, misbehave. In discussing the reasons they held responsible for the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices used, respondents directly linked these reasons to the ones that they deemed accountable for the rising levels of indiscipline, as mentioned above, and further attributed this ineffectiveness to three more reasons, namely: 1) The role of career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists in school disciplinary matters, 2) The inconsequential character of disciplinary practices and 3) The negative parental support.

Regarding the matter of students' reaction/response towards disciplinary practices, participants formed and talked about the reaction of three categories of students: 1) The students who take disciplinary action seriously and react when they are disciplined because they feel offended by it and remorseful, 2) The students who take disciplinary action seriously and react to it only when it poses a 'risk' to them (i.e. grade retention) and 3) The students who do not take disciplinary action seriously at all because they do not care about school or its practices in general. This last category contains the students whose behaviour is very disruptive and who will continue on being disruptive no matter what sort of disciplinary action they receive.

In talking about the general effects that disciplinary practices may have on students, the interviewees emphasized that disciplinary practices may aggravate students, influence and deteriorate the school's relationship and communication with them



and even foster feelings of revenge and retaliation. In addition, all of the respondents agreed that disciplinary practices do affect and may reinforce a student's disruptive behaviour to a great degree. They explained that this can happen for a number of different reasons and specifically when: a) Students do not understand or are not convinced of the reason it caused their 'punishment', b) Students feel unjustly treated when they compare their wrongdoings to other students c) Disciplinary action is inconsistent, d) Disciplinary action is trivial or inconsequential, and, finally, e) Parents reinforce their children's maladaptive behaviour by supporting or justifying their misconducts.

The last section of the interview protocol inquired about the suggestions that teachers and vice-principals have in relation to the matter of discipline and the disciplinary practices used. The common themes that emerged from their suggestions concerned the following: a) Creation of smaller schools and classes, b) Establishment and adherence to common disciplinary practices and policies, c) Enhancement of secondary technical and vocational schools, d) Harmonization of mixed ability classes, e) Minimization of external pressure, f) Reevaluation and enforcement of disciplinary practices that are meaningful to students, g) Appointment of psychologists on a permanent basis in schools, and h) Elimination of exams and private tutoring and utilization of students' School Leaving Certificate to enter tertiary education institutions.

In the chapter that follows the researcher will discuss the aforementioned results of both the questionnaires and the interviews.

## Chapter 8

### Discussion

#### Introduction:

Disciplinary practices and actions are considered a significant part of school life, as they are responsible for maintaining and promoting orderly school environments that are conducive to learning. They are also considered important because their misuse or overuse can sometimes cause students (which they primarily aim to help) more harm than good. Therefore, the frequent examination of disciplinary policies and practices is both vital and necessary because it involves human beings in whose lives disciplinary policies intervene (Chalmers, 2003).

The results presented in this research are 'unique' for the educational scene in Cyprus since there is no other study to date that specifically examines the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as used in public secondary schools in Cyprus, as well as the school related factors that may influence their effectiveness. In fact, there is not a lot of research that assesses the effectiveness of disciplinary practices empirically (Costenbader & Markson, 1998), or which looks into the school related factors that may influence the effectiveness of disciplinary practices (Payne, Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 2006; see also Cameron, 2006). The majority of research on disciplinary practices focuses on the relation of different disciplinary methods/practices (such as suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment) with specific student outcomes (i.e. dropout rates, absenteeism, underachievement, low self esteem etc) (Diem 1988; Fine, 1986; Uchitelle, Bartz & Hillman, 1989; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

As we have seen, this research study examined the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as currently used in public secondary schools in Cyprus and the effects that these may have on students': a) social relations, b) emotional feelings and

reactions towards disciplinary practices, c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour. Furthermore, the study looked into school related factors that can influence the effectiveness or the quality implementation of disciplinary practices.

To address the aforementioned research issues the study adopted a mixed methods research design by combining quantitative (survey/students) and qualitative (interviews/school faculty) research, in order to triangulate the data and provide this study with more valid and comprehensive results. This chapter will discuss the major results for each research issue/theme, as these have emerged from both the quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) research design, and attempt to explain/clarify why these occurred.

### **8.1 Part A: Student Survey Questionnaire:**

In the 'main' quantitative part of this study 576 students participated of which 54.5 percent (314) were girls and 45.5 percent (262) were boys. The questionnaire that the students had to answer was divided in three parts to include three groups of students: a) the students who had never received any kind of disciplinary action, b) the students who received in-school suspension one or more times and c) the students who received both in-school suspension and a downgrading of their conduct. The details of the student body that participated in this study is important to be recalled before the discussion of the quantitative results, so that one can understand the gravity of students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their school's disciplinary practices, which seem to be mostly irrelevant to their disciplinary record.

To assess/evaluate the effectiveness of the practices of in-school suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct, the researcher set two parameters both in the questionnaires and the interviews that examined: a) The direct effects of disciplinary practices on students (Is any of the aforementioned disciplinary



practices effective in halting undesirable behaviour and preventing future misbehaviour?) and b) The indirect effects of disciplinary practices on students (What are the effects of each of these disciplinary practices on students' social, emotional and academic life?).

## **8.2 Direct Effects of Disciplinary Practices on Students:**

In relation to the direct effects of disciplinary practices on students, the research findings revealed that the large majority of students do not think that their school's disciplinary practices are effective in solving a student's problematic behaviour. To the contrary, the dominant perception amongst students is that disciplinary practices are mostly capable of increasing rather than decreasing problematic behaviour. More specifically, 70.7 percent of students find in-school suspension not useful in dealing with disruptive behaviour, while another 62 percent thought that this practice cannot deter such behaviour. An almost identical percentage of students have the same opinion about the practice of downgrading a student's conduct. From the aforementioned percentages, it is possible to estimate that out of the 23,083 students that attended secondary public schools in Cyprus in the year 2008-2009 that this study was conducted, 16,319 and 14,311 students respectively may be of the opinion that the disciplinary practices that their school uses are not effective in dealing with or deterring a student's problematic behaviour.

The fact that the student participants of this study do not find their schools' disciplinary practices an effective disciplinary tool in dealing with disruptive behaviour is consistent with the research findings of Diem (1988), Costenbader and Markson (1998) and Tobin and Sugai (1996). The only difference of their findings with the present study is that the aforementioned researchers examined solely the opinion or discipline records of suspended students, whereas this study examined the opinion of all students, disciplined and not, on the effectiveness of disciplinary practices. Obtaining information on this specific issue by all students was considered critical in this study, as the sole opinion of suspended/disciplined

students could be deemed as too biased or too subjective for the evaluation of the public school's disciplinary practices.

Moreover, it is well recognized that disciplinary practices affect both the students who receive disciplinary action and those who don't (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; 1994; Cameron, 2006.)

In determining the effectiveness of disciplinary practices, the researcher also took into account students' feelings about four elements that could be used, among others, to evaluate practices/interventions. Those elements are: a) Fairness, b) Strictness, c) Consistency and d) Necessity. As research shows, these elements can define the way in which students accept or reject their school's disciplinary practices, as well as the way in which they may react towards them.

With regard to the element of fairness, the study found that only 9 percent of students consider their school's disciplinary practices as fair. Coupled with the finding that more than half of the students would continue misbehaving if they considered that the disciplinary action applied to them is unfair, the findings of this study on the issue of 'fairness' are consistent with previous research in the domain of procedural and distributive justice. This research indicates that when people believe/perceive that a practice and mainly its procedures are fair, they are more likely to comply with rules and decisions made, whereas if they consider the practice and its procedures unfair, they may undermine authority and display deviant behaviour, anger and frustration (Murphy & Tyler, 2008; Chory-Assad, 2002).

When examined for possible gender-specific differences, the study found that more boys than girls would react in a disruptive way if they believed that the disciplinary practice they received was unfair. This means that boys, due to their increased reaction towards the disciplinary action they receive, are more susceptible in engaging in disruptive behaviour which in turn usually leads to further disciplinary

action taken against them. The fact that boys are disciplined more than girls, however, does not necessarily mean that disciplinary practices are biased against boys, as some research suggests (Gregory, 1995; Costenbader & Markson, 1998). It may just mean that boys receive more disciplinary action because their actions cause more reaction. Further research is needed to define the exact causes of what may appear as gender bias in disciplinary practices.

Further statistical analysis revealed a difference between boys themselves, with more disciplined than non-disciplined boys being inclined to continue their misbehaviour, if they considered the enforced disciplinary action as unfair. This result is particularly important, especially for the case of disciplined boys, since it demonstrates that disciplinary practices are not capable of achieving their purpose, which is to cease misbehaviour and deter future occurrence. When disciplined boys do not mind receiving more disciplinary action and find themselves being disciplined over and over again, then disciplinary practices cannot be thought of as an effective tool in dealing with misbehaviour and in attempting to help disciplined students cope with their problems.

Students had the same view about the element of strictness with regard to their school's disciplinary practices, with only a very small number reporting that these practices are not strict. To the contrary, all other students reported some degree of strictness while a large number of them claimed that they would react disruptively if they considered the disciplinary action used against them as strict. These results do support previous research, which suggests that students will react to any rule or practice that they perceive as strict or oppressive by exhibiting rule-breaking behaviour (O' Moore, 2010; Raby & Domitrek, 2007).

The results of the study on the strictness of disciplinary practices closely resemble the results on the issue of fairness. Just as gender is directly related to the way that students would behave if they found the disciplinary action enforced on them as unfair, the element of strictness follows the exact same pattern, with boys being



more inclined than girls to continue misbehaving if they considered the disciplinary practice/action to be strict. This result adds a further degree of validity to the relation between gender and the way that students would behave if they found the disciplinary action enforced on them as unfair, and further elucidates the point that boys are in general more reactive than girls.

When examining for variations within gender, however, the study found similar patterns amongst disciplined and non-disciplined boys and disciplined and non-disciplined girls who felt that the disciplinary action taken against them was strict. In other words, when it comes to strictness, disciplined boys and disciplined girls have more in common than with their non-disciplined counterparts, since both disciplined boys and disciplined girls would keep on misbehaving and oppose strict 'punishment'/action if they judged that the disciplinary action taken against them was strict. This result validates up to a point the previous finding that more disciplined than non-disciplined boys would continue their misbehaviour if they considered the enforced disciplinary action as unfair. At the same time, though, the result comes at odds with the fact that no distinction was noticed amongst disciplined and non-disciplined girls who view the enforced disciplinary action as unfair. This result creates some confusion as to the reasons why disciplined girls would react to a strict disciplinary action but not to an 'unfair' one. A reason that could possibly be offered as an explanation, is that for disciplined girls the notion of 'strictness' is much more severe or intense than the notion of 'fairness'.

In examining the notion of consistency in the application of disciplinary practices, the vast majority of student participants highlighted that this is the most important element in the evaluation of the effectiveness of disciplinary practices currently used in secondary public schools in Cyprus. Approximately seven out of ten student participants characterized their school's disciplinary practices as inconsistent, while almost two out of three participants considered inconsistency as the most important enhancer of disruptive behaviour. The results of this study are in line with the international literature on the issue of consistency, which is widely considered as an

important characteristic that should describe the application of disciplinary practices (O' Moore, 2010). For, according to this literature, inconsistency can create a lot of tension and dissatisfaction among students as well as among school staff while it can further promote a student's disruptive behaviour (Alderman 2000; Cullingford, 1988; Leung & Lee, 2005; Merrett & Jones, 1994; Straughan, 1988; 1982; Thomson & Holland, 2002). Students are very quick to understand what applies and when, as well as grasp the opportunity to use any precedents related to inconsistency to their advantage, in order to 'help' their case or alleviate their position. It is therefore vital for the school to apply and follow the same procedures so that students feel that they are treated fairly and that there are no double standards. Procedures about rule enforcement should be very clear to all educational stakeholders so that everyone knows what to expect or do in a given situation.

Regrettably, despite the established literature and the fact that consistency in rule application is a very important element in the quality implementation of disciplinary practices, and it is acknowledged as such by both students and school staff, in practice educators completely fail to adhere to a consistent application of rules and regulations. The main reason for this failure, as it will be discussed later in this chapter, is that educators tend to intermix the notion of consistency with discretion, something which, in essence, reinforces and/or justifies students' feelings about unfairness and inconsistency in the application of school rules and regulations. As a consequence, students react to this unjust and selective use of disciplinary practices and externalize their feelings by becoming more disruptive and engaging in further actions of indiscipline.

The last but certainly not the least element in evaluating the disciplinary practices that are currently used is 'necessity'. Most people would think that if students could eliminate all of their school's rules and practices, they would do so without hesitation. However, as earlier work showed, and as this study confirms, a large number of students believe that disciplinary practices are necessary and should



exist in a school in order to maintain control and order (Cullingford, 1988; O' Moore, 2010; Raby & Domitrek, 2007; Thornberg, 2008b). Nonetheless, if students believe that disciplinary action is unnecessary, or useless they may react to the sanction and treat it with contempt (Goodman 2006).

The aforementioned results of this study send a clear message that the current disciplinary practices used in Cyprus are ineffective tools in tackling disruptive behaviour. Most of the students, in fact, believe that the current disciplinary practices achieve exactly the opposite result, since they do not only fail to solve, deal with or prevent a student's disruptive behaviour but they actually reinforce and enhance it. This argument is further supported by the fact that disciplinary practices are found to be unfair, strict and inconsistently used.

While this study aimed primarily to determine whether the disciplinary practices used in secondary public schools in Cyprus are effective, it also sought to solicit, in a structured manner, students' suggestions on what practices could work in reducing a student's disruptive behaviour. To do so, the researcher provided students with a number of alternative practices that could presumably reduce a student's disruptive behaviour and asked students to rank them according to their order of preference. More than half of the respondents pointed to the need of having someone at school they can trust to speak about their problems. By ranking the suggestion "Have someone at school, on a regular basis, to whom you can talk to about your problems" as excellent, students indirectly made three valid points: a) That they need to communicate their problems and be in contact with someone who can help them in school, b) That their real problems are not solved with their school's disciplinary practices and c) That the Ministry of Education and Culture should listen to students' views on this subject more carefully, if it is interested in assisting students to cope with their problems. Therefore, the Ministry should appoint permanent professional personnel at each school or cooperate with them in order to help students tackle or solve their problems. This finding is consistent with existing research, which indicates that students benefit from receiving some form of



counseling or therapy as part of their school's suspension program (Hochman & Worner, 1987; Miller, 1986).

When invited later to suggest their own alternative to their school's disciplinary practices, one that they think could work better in deterring disruptive behaviour, students again expressed the need for more communication between them and the school and in particular called for a better teacher-student relationship and communication. When coupled with their demand to have someone at school to talk to about their problems, this finding demonstrates that disruptive behaviour may also be a result of student disenchantment with their school environment, which comes as a consequence of students feeling that they have no one to turn to in order to discuss their problems. In this framework, students' answers reveal how much they are in need to communicate with adults and form meaningful relationships with their teachers, which they view as a way to deal effectively with students who display disruptive behaviour. This result is in line with existing research indicating that students can benefit from their interactions with adults and minimize their misbehaviour (Calabrese, 1985; Carey, 1980). It also comes in agreement with the research regarding the teacher-student relationship, in particular, which suggests that such a relationship can prove very beneficial to students, as strong bonds with teachers may reduce or prevent students externalizing behaviours (Kuperminc, Leadbeater & Blatt, 2001; see also Loukas & Murphy, 2007; Loukas & Robinson, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004).

In addition to providing the researcher with students' views on what alternative practices could be used to reduce a student's disruptive behaviour, the answers to this question were also revealing in that students ranked the lowest the suggestions which provided for actual consequences on students who exhibited disruptive behaviour. For instance, almost nine out of ten students rejected the suggestion to have students who display disruptive behaviour attend mandatory Saturday school ("Have mandatory Saturday school for students who display disruptive behaviour"), while almost three out of four students did the same for the suggestion "Have the

downgrading of a student's conduct appear on the School Leaving Certificate and be taken into consideration by higher education institutions". These results show quite clearly that students are fully aware and completely recognize what a bad consequence for disruptive behaviour could look like. They know that mandatory Saturday school would take away their valuable free time and impact their personal life, while they are also fully conscious of the harmful ramifications that the appearance of a downgrading of their conduct on the School Leaving Certificate may have on their future aspirations and objectives whether that is entering a University or College or obtaining a job. As such, the results stemming from this question point to the fact that in order to be effective, disciplinary practices should entail consequences that are recognized by students as having a direct impact on them. Of course, these consequences should not be sending the message that schools are out to revenge students for their misbehaviour. On the contrary, the purpose should be to make students realize that there are consequences when they violate the school's law, just as there will be consequences when they break society's laws. For, if students understand no consequences from disciplinary practices, then what is the purpose of having them and what do they aim in achieving after all?

The inconsequential nature of the currently used disciplinary practices was a predominant theme in educators' interviews, as it will be discussed later on in this chapter. For now, however, the researcher will only point to the fact that knowledge of students' likes and dislikes with regard to disciplinary practices, is a piece of information that could help educators and in particular the Ministry of Education and Culture, as the competent educational authority, to reevaluate and reconstruct their practices so as to ascribe some meaning and most importantly some respect to them.

### **8.3 Indirect Effects of Disciplinary Practices on Students:**

The second parameter set in the survey-questionnaire phase of this study, dealt with the indirect effects that disciplinary practices may have on students' social,

emotional and academic life. While the emotional and academic effects were examined solely in the case of students who received disciplinary action, since these effects are more personal and subjective, the social effects took into consideration the views of non-disciplined students, as well. The researcher deemed that the opinion of these students for the particular effects is vital in reaching a more objective and reliable overall result. And this because the emotional state of disciplined students may affect their judgement regarding how their teachers and vice-principals treat them after disciplinary action is enforced and thus influence their responses.

### **8.3.1 Social effects of disciplinary practices on disciplined students:**

In agreement with previous studies (Babad, Bernieri & Rosenthal, 1989; Decker et al. 2007; Ron & Roberts, 2000), the findings of this research indicate that students believe that disciplinary action does affect the relationship between teachers and disciplined students. The absence of any statistically significant correlation made by disciplinary status and gender revealed that this is the universal view of all students, disciplined and not, boys and girls. The irrelevance of disciplinary status and gender, provides this result further validity, as it demonstrates that it is not affected by the negative emotions that disciplined students may develop towards their teachers. In addition, this result also indicates that all students tend to believe that teachers seem to interact differently or even negatively with disciplined students. Such an interaction, according to Babad, Bernieri and Rosenthal (1989), may in turn cause other problems, such as the reinforcement of the 'deviant identity' of the student and students' apprehensive or angry reaction.

The negative influence that disciplinary action has on the relationship between teachers and disciplined students, was also raised, albeit in a different context, by a number of teachers, who admitted, during their interviews, to having a tendency to react differently with students who are repeat offenders. As Decker et al. (2007) maintain, this tendency is rather reasonable if one considers that there are other



students in the class as well, whose class and learning time is minimized by the repeated commotion of some. In treating repeat offenders differently, teachers are simply reacting just as any other human being would, if he/she was repeatedly disturbed by someone. Teachers are also unaware of the consequences that their tendency may have.

Besides the adverse consequences that disciplinary action seems to have between teachers and disruptive students, however, disciplinary action seems to also affect the relationship of the disciplined student with his/her appointed vice-principal as the overwhelming majority of students participating in this study reported. Although disciplined students' negative relationship with their appointed vice-principals is to be expected, since vice-principals have the role of the enforcer of the disciplinary action, this result should not be neglected. Research shows that vice-principals and principals have the power to deter or cease students' misbehaviour by getting to know them better, and by showing that they care about them (Klonsky, 2002). As such, this relationship can have beneficial effects and schools should search for ways to use this relationship to their advantage and thus decrease the levels of misbehaviour.

In contrast to the findings on the adverse effects that disciplinary action has on disciplined students relationships with their teachers and vice-principals, students' relationship with their peers does not seem to be affected by disciplinary action. In line with existing research, the result is not considered surprising, since even though 'repeat offenders' may not be liked for their acts, they enjoy a certain degree of popularity in school and they are well known among their peers (De Bruyn, Cillessen & Wissink, 2010). Furthermore and contrary to what some research implies (McEvoy, 2005), this study's findings showed that neither suspended nor students who further received a downgrading of their conduct are isolated in their school environment, at least by their peers. However, and in agreement with previous research, this study found that there is a tendency among disciplined

students to hang out with other students who exhibit disruptive behaviours (Morrison & Skiba 2001).

The study found inconclusive results on whether disciplinary action affects the relationship of disciplined students with their parents. The inconclusive results may be interpreted as a reflection of the varied discipline styles of parents and the degree to which different parents are involved with their children's education. As research shows, parents who are involved with their children's schooling can influence their psychological and social outcomes (Semke, Garbacz, Kwon, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010) and can further prevent their children's behavioural problems (Domina, 2005). Therefore, students who reported that disciplinary action can affect their relationship with their parents, must more likely be students whose parents are involved with their learning and behaviour and care about their school outcomes in such a way that any disciplinary action can cause disappointment and friction in their relationship. By the same token, students who reported that disciplinary action does not impact their relationship with their parents must probably have parents who are not that much involved in their children's educational and behavioural outcomes and/or who believe that their children have done nothing that deserves disciplinary action, therefore supporting them despite their misdemeanors.

As it is evident, the social effects that disciplinary practices have on disciplined students are mostly related to their relationships with the person who refers them (teacher) and the person who enforces the disciplinary action (vice-principal). Although, one would naturally think that the relationship of disciplined students with their teachers and vice-principals will be negatively affected from disciplinary action, since it could be argued that there is a 'conflict of interest' in this relationship, the educational staff, including the principal should not resort in accepting this natural development. On the contrary, the school should thoroughly comprehend the social consequences that disciplinary action can have on students and the fact that the school's irked, indifferent or hasty approach towards the

student, however justified, can only push the 'problematic' student further away, cause his/her 'fight or flight response' and/or enhance the student's 'deviant identity'.

As mentioned before, the study examined the emotional and academic effects that disciplinary practices have only on students who received disciplinary action. Before discussing these effects, however, is noteworthy to refer to the primary cause that disciplined students reported as responsible for their "punishment", which was the violation of the rule pertaining to school uniform. The issue of the 'dress code' was also verified by educators in their interviews as a very common cause of friction between the educational staff and students.

This finding is indicative of two specific issues supported by research. The first issue regards 'rule clarity'. As research supports, if school rules and regulations are not clear to students and the educational staff, they cause confusion, which in turn leads teachers and administrators to be inconsistent in the application of rules, and students to interpret the rules as they wish in order to serve their own needs and purposes (Schimmel 2007;1997). This is exactly the case of the violation of the rule pertaining to school uniform in public secondary schools in Cyprus since, as many teachers and vice-principals reported, not only does the Ministry of Education and Culture not have clear guidelines on this issue, it also amends whatever rules they exist every year and sometimes even in the middle of the academic year by issuing new mandates. As expected, this situation undermines the legitimacy of school rules and leads to more confusion and turmoil in the school environment.

The second issue regards the "acceptance of rules". As mentioned earlier in chapter 3, the studies by Nucci (1981) and Raby and Domitrek (2007) pointed out that students do not accept "across the board" all of their school's rules and regulations, especially the ones that "affect" their "personal domain" (such as dressing). Therefore, when students breach a rule that concerns mainly the aforementioned domain, they tend to react to the disciplinary action that the school enforces on



them, as they believe that they should not be “punished” for such a rule violation. This study, as will be discussed later in this chapter, revealed that in order for students to accept disciplinary action without resistance, they should be convinced by their appointed vice-principals who enforce the action of its necessity. As the vice-principals of this study admitted, dissuaded students continue to create trouble. More research is needed, however, to investigate the relationship between specific rule violations and disciplinary action resistance.

### **8.3.2 Emotional effects of disciplinary practices on disciplined students:**

In examining the emotional effects that disciplinary practices may have on suspended students and students who further received a downgrading of their conduct, the study showed clearly that none of these students considered the disciplinary practice applied in their case as fair and appropriate. In fact, seven out of ten students who received suspension and almost eight out of ten students who further received a downgrading of their conduct felt that the disciplinary action they received was unfair and inappropriate. As mentioned earlier, the way that an individual perceives fairness is related to how that person feels and reacts to the outcome of a procedure, in this case, disciplinary action. It is logical, therefore, that an action which is perceived as unfair and inappropriate will probably irritate, anger and stir undesirable reactions on the part of the ‘victim’, while it will also lead to the creation of negative feelings towards the person considered responsible for the unfairness.

In supporting this theory, the study found that the overwhelming majority of both suspended students and students who further received a downgrading of their conduct, feel irritated/annoyed when they receive the aforementioned sanctions. Moreover, in line with the study by Costenbader and Markson (1998), this research also found that anger, primarily, and to a lesser extent, feelings of retaliation, are the most prominent feelings that suspension and suspension with a further downgrading of a student’s conduct may generate to students. The principal target

of both feelings by students was the teacher who referred the student and, to a lesser degree, the vice-principal who applied the sanction. In particular, 74.9 percent of students felt angry with the teachers that referred them, while that ratio dropped to 58.7 percent when it considered feelings of anger towards the vice-principal who administered the sanction. In the case of feelings of retaliation, both percentages were lower, with 45.8 percent of students reporting such a feeling towards the teacher who referred them and 34 percent of students claiming to harbor such feelings for vice-principals. The difference found in the feelings of students towards teachers and vice-principals can best be attributed to the following reasons: 1) Students interact with their teachers on a daily basis and thus take it personally when their teachers refer them, as many of them feel that their teachers target them, 2) The teacher is held more responsible for the sanction than the vice-principal because if the teacher does not refer the student, the student will not be punished by the vice-principal and 3) Students know that the vice-principal's role is to enforce the school rules and regulations and apply the sanction. Thus, students may feel that the vice-principal's hands are essentially tied once they appear in front of him/her and that he/she may not have other alternative but to discipline them.

In agreement with the above results, students who received suspension with a further downgrading of their conduct also reported feelings of anger and retaliation towards the school's educational board/staff. In both cases, the overwhelming majority of these students claimed that the unanimous decision of the school's educational board/staff to downgrade their conduct stirred feelings of anger and retaliation towards it.

In addition to becoming irritated/annoyed and developing feelings of anger and retaliation, the majority of disciplined students also reported, therefore reinforcing previous relevant research (Bacon, 1990; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; 1994; Maag, 2001; Safer et al. 1981; Tobin & Sugai, 1986), that both disciplinary practices make them feel inclined to repeat their misbehaviour. This finding, coupled with the

increased feelings of retaliation and anger demonstrated by disciplined students against teachers, vice-principals and the educational board/staff, provides another blow to the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used by secondary public schools in Cyprus, as it highlights once again that the main purpose of any disciplinary practice, which is to prevent, reduce and ultimately eliminate disruptive behaviour by making the disruptive student understand his/her transgressions, is completely defeated. In fact, this result shows yet again that the disciplinary practices used have the exact opposite effects from the ones that any disciplinary practice should have. In their interviews, as we will see later on, educators verified this point that disciplinary practices are able and can certainly evoke an aggressive reaction from students.

In trying to flesh out any other “self-directed emotions” that disciplinary practices may have on students, the study also enquired about three other specific emotional feelings, namely rejection, shame and stigmatization. Stigmatization was by far the most dominant feeling, amongst the three, reported by students, as more than half of the respondents who received suspension and more than three out of four students who received suspension with a further downgrading of their conduct claimed that they felt stigmatized by the two disciplinary practices.

In contrast to stigmatization and irritation/annoyance however, disciplined students mostly discarded the idea that the disciplinary practices used caused any feelings of shame to them. In particular, 66.4 percent of disciplined students reported they have no feelings of shame about their suspension, while 47.4 percent of the respondents claimed that they do not feel any shame when receiving a downgrading of their conduct. This finding indicates that the disciplinary practices used, and especially suspension, do not incite any feelings of shame and/or remorse in the disciplined student, feelings that a disciplined individual should naturally exhibit when receiving ‘punishment’ for his/her wrongdoing. According to Goodman (2006), for ‘punishment’ to be effective, feelings of remorse and shame should be felt by the offender. Otherwise, there will be no “rebalancing of the moral scales and



[no] reaffirmation of the standard that was violated" (p. 222).

Goodman's theory is further strengthened by the finding of this study that more than half of the disciplined students who only received suspension, also reported having no feelings of rejection by this disciplinary practice, as opposed to less than one in three students, who claimed that they felt rejected by suspension. While, however, the results on the feelings of rejection exhibited by suspended students were clear, the findings of the study on the same feelings demonstrated by students who further received a downgrading of their conduct were more mixed. In the case of these students, the numbers reporting feelings of rejection were very similar to the numbers claiming no feelings of rejection by this practice.

Irrespective of this last finding, the study was able to determine/identify a specific pattern when it came to the feelings that the two disciplinary practices brought about to disciplined students. The pattern that emerged is that no matter what feelings the two disciplinary practices may cause to disciplined students, on almost every single occasion the disciplinary practice of suspension with a further downgrading of a student's conduct causes more grief to disciplined students than the disciplinary practice of suspension alone. Feelings of annoyance/irritation, rejection, shame, anger, retaliation, stigmatization and inclination to misbehave, were always more powerfully felt by the students who received suspension with a downgrading of their conduct, when compared to students who only received suspension.

This pattern may partially be explained by the fact that the downgrading of a student's conduct is considered a very serious disciplinary measure by the school, which is used rarely and for extreme acts of misbehaviour or for repeated misbehaviours. As such and even though this sanction does not have the same

consequences on students as in the past<sup>18</sup>, it still bears a very different, mostly psychological meaning for students, which affects the way they view it, feel about it and react to it. This psychological element essentially comes from that fact that in contrast to suspension, which is a sanction administered only by one individual, that being the vice-principal, the downgrading of a student's conduct is a measure that needs the unanimous vote of all the educational staff of the school in order to be applied. This means that the student is judged for his/her behaviour and character by the entire educational staff and not by just one person (the vice-principal). By having the whole faculty vote against a student and unanimously decide on his/her sanctioning with this specific measure, the school in essence labels the student collectively as a 'troublemaker' or as a 'deviant'. This labeling element of the sanction is in most cases particularly worrisome for the student, as it accompanies him/her not only for the remaining of the school year, but also for the rest of his/her school life until graduation and sometimes even beyond that. A student's academic and behavioural report is registered in the school's annual record book and can be revisited at any time either by the school that the student currently attends, by the new school that he/she may decide to go to or be sent to (expelled) or by the University or College that he/she would like to apply for entrance after graduation.

Despite this pattern, however, which showed that the disciplinary practice of suspension with a further downgrading of a student's conduct causes more grief to disciplined students than the disciplinary practice of suspension alone, the fact remains that the negative emotional effects that the two disciplinary practices currently used produce, are indicative of their ineffectiveness, since they do not only fail to tackle disruptive behaviour but, on the contrary, generate the exact opposite effects from the ones that any disciplinary practice should have. In addition, it could also be argued that the negative emotional feelings that both disciplinary practices

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<sup>18</sup> A decade or so ago, a student's behavioural record appeared on the 'School Leaving Certificate' and was there for anyone to see, thus having the capacity/ability to affect a student's future aspirations. Even though the behavioral record does not appear anymore on the 'School Leaving Certificate', higher education institutions can still obtain, if they wish, a student behavioural report by requesting either from the school or the student him/herself.

stir to disciplined students, actually place them in the sphere of 'psychological maltreatment', as described by Hart and Brassard (1986).

The aforementioned results of this section should call the attention of the educational stakeholders and in particular of the Ministry of Education and Culture, as the competent authority on education matters in Cyprus, since it needs to thoroughly evaluate the situation and take appropriate action to minimize the negative emotional effects that the disciplinary practices used have on students. In evaluating the situation, however, the Ministry of Education and Culture should take into consideration the fact that the students' emotional upheaval and disruptive behaviour will not be resolved unless the root cause of the students' problems, whether that is found within the 'personal domain' or the 'school domain', is located and treated.

### **8.3.3 Academic effects of disciplinary practices on disciplined students:**

Besides the emotional effects that disciplinary practices have on disciplined students, the study also looked into the possible academic effects that these practices may cause on students who receive suspension and suspension with a further downgrading of their conduct.

It is recalled that when one talks about suspension today, he/she essentially refers to in-school suspension (ISS), which was developed back in the 1970's as an alternative to out-of-school suspension (OSS) (Silvey, 1995; Sullivan, 1989; Mizell, 1978). As was explained in chapter 2, ISS was originally invented to defeat, mostly, the academic and other downfalls of OSS. Building on the repeated finding that there is a strong correlation between academic performance and disciplinary record, a finding that this study reinforced ( $\chi^2 = 59.2$ , 4df,  $p < .001$ ), the ISS program was designed to help the suspended student 'stay in touch' with his/her academic work within the school's structured environment and prevent troubled students from dropping out of school (Fine, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1987).



The original planning of ISS entailed that students who receive suspension should be transferred to a designated room in the school, where they have to work on assigned schoolwork under the supervision of a member of the school faculty. In this way, students would continue to remain engaged academically despite their suspension and would thus avoid more disciplinary problems. Despite its intentions, however, research has shown that the ISS program, for various reasons, such as the lack of fiscal resources, planning, available personnel, time etc, has not produced the expected results and has not served the purpose for which it was designed, since academically failing students who spent their suspension time in school and were assigned school work during their suspension did not really benefit in solving their academic problems and avoiding trouble in the future.

This study found that the ISS program in Cyprus is also ineffective in helping suspended students academically, even though the specific program, as mentioned in chapter 5, is implemented somewhat differently in secondary public schools in Cyprus. It is recalled that in secondary public schools in Cyprus suspended students not only remain in school, but are also required to stay in class during suspension time, in order to be part of the normal class procedures. The reasoning behind this practice is similar to the one used for the ISS program, in that it aspires to academically benefit disciplined students by specifically allowing them to stay in class and thus stay in touch with the class environment and the taught curriculum even though they are suspended. By staying in class, the thinking goes, students avoid the creation of any gaps that will have to be filled up later by the students themselves.

Despite the intentions and goals of the ISS program as it is implemented in Cyprus, however, the study found that in-class suspension fails to produce the desired results, since the large majority of disciplined students reported low levels of concentration and participation during their in-class suspension time. It has to be recalled here that this research did not look into the concentration and participation levels of these students before receiving suspension, so as to be able to compare the

before and after effects of the disciplinary action on disciplined students. For this reason, the study cannot establish that disciplinary practices are directly responsible for disciplined students' reduced academic involvement. Despite the inability to determine a causal relationship however, the result of this study is still indicative of the ineffectiveness of this disciplinary practice since, even if one argues that the ISS program is producing positive results, those must be extremely minimal at best, as the number of students reporting low levels of concentration and participation when suspended in-class is quite large. By reporting low levels of concentration and participation, the majority of disciplined students essentially send the message that they do not feel part of the normal class procedures and are unwilling to exert any effort while in class.

In reinforcing the finding pertaining to the ineffective nature of suspension and in demonstrating that this particular disciplinary practice has negative academic repercussions on disciplined students, the study also found that the vast majority of suspended students feel that repeated suspension harms their academic achievement. More than half of the respondents also claimed that it has a negative effect on their future aspirations.

In agreeing with this latter point, an almost identical number of respondents felt that the disciplinary practice of downgrading a student's conduct has a negative bearing on their future plans and aspirations. In addition, almost half of them also believed that this specific disciplinary action has negative repercussions for their academic achievement, compared to only one out of four respondents who did not thought this to be the case. Lastly, the results on whether the disciplinary practice of downgrading a student's conduct affected disciplined students' will to participate in any school activities, were effectively inconclusive, as the number of students who believed that it did and the number of students who rejected this notion was almost identical.

Given the aforementioned, it is evident that the two disciplinary practices used in Cyprus, namely suspension and suspension with a further downgrading of a student's conduct, do not have a positive impact on disciplined students' academic achievement and life. This result, however, should not come as a surprise for a number of reasons.

As it was discussed earlier, the vast majority of suspended students and students who further received a downgrading of their conduct, consider the disciplinary practice applied in their case as unfair and inappropriate and develop feelings of annoyance/irritation, rejection, shame, anger, retaliation and stigmatization, while at the same time they report an inclination to misbehave again after they receive disciplinary action. Such an attitude creates essentially a vicious cycle, where students receive repeated disciplinary action for their misbehaviours and for their reactions to them. This vicious cycle becomes even more apparent and problematic, when the "unfairly" suspended student has to spend his/her suspension time in-class, as is the case in Cyprus. In these cases, many students tend to exhibit their displeasure to what they perceive as an unjust suspension by causing more disruption during their in-class suspension time (Chory-Assad, 2002), a disruption which can even be further augmented when these students have to spend part of their in-class suspension time with the teacher who actually referred them. Teachers, in turn, take their own part in the creation and maintenance of the vicious circle, by responding to the new disruptions of the already disciplined students with more referrals, which usually lead to even more disciplinary action. Given the strong correlation which exists between academic performance and disciplinary record, a correlation which was also reinforced by this study, it is no wonder that a heavy disciplinary record, that can be produced as a result of repeated suspensions, will adversely affect both academic achievement and the future aspirations and plans of a student.

In addition to the aforementioned reason, the two disciplinary practices currently used in secondary public schools in Cyprus do not have a positive impact on the



academic achievement and future aspirations of disciplined students for a few other reasons as well. One of these reasons is related to the fact that suspended students, as was previously explained, receive a justified absence for each hour of their suspension time while they are in class. Instead of taking advantage of the situation, however, these students use their justified absence to excuse themselves or withdraw altogether from their class' normal procedures, as this study showed, or at worse to react by disturbing the class.

One should also take into consideration, though, that even if these disciplined students were able to concentrate or participate in class while suspended, the academic deficiencies of most of them are many times so extensive that cannot be dealt within the ordinary classroom environment. It is recalled that out of the 271 students that reported having a disciplinary record, 169 found themselves in the lowest academic performance categories, namely, poor, satisfactory and good. Therefore, while the purpose of in-class suspension might be noble, this practice is not in a position to fulfill its intentions when it comes to students who have many gaps and/or who are not interested in school. These students require specialized personal attention that cannot be accorded in classrooms that consist of students with extremely uneven academic abilities, such as the ones found in secondary public schools in Cyprus. As explained earlier, when these students cannot follow the curriculum or are not interested in school, they resort to exhibiting their frustration by disrupting normal class proceedings, thus creating more problems for themselves and further contributing to the vicious cycle mentioned above. As such, instead of helping students keep up with their class and the curriculum, even when suspended, and assisting them in correcting their disruptive behaviour, the disciplinary practices used seem to achieve the exact opposite result, as they essentially instigate more disruptive behaviour on the part of students with all the negative repercussions that such behaviour ultimately has for their academic performance.

Further to their academic deficiencies, repeat offenders, as was reported extensively by teachers and vice-principals in chapter 7, also face more complex and multidimensional problems, which cannot be dealt within the framework of the existing disciplinary practices. One essential shortcoming of the disciplinary practices currently used is that both practices focus only on the “punitive” component of disciplinary action, while they totally neglect the ‘diagnostic’ and ‘therapeutic’ components, which are essential in dealing with these type of students (Morrison & Skiba, 2001; see also Hochman & Worner, 1987; Miller, 1986). The failure of the existing practices to diagnose the root causes of the problems that these students face, essentially leaves their problems untreated and no disciplinary practice taken will ever be effective in dealing with the disruptive behaviour exhibited by these students, unless the school identifies their problems and assists students in dealing effectively with them.

This chapter will now turn in reviewing and discussing the most prominent findings of the interview phase of this study.

#### **8.4 Interviews with educators:**

As mentioned in the Results’ Chapter, 30 teachers and 10 vice-principals (20 male and 20 female) of different specialties and years of experience and from different schools agreed to be interviewed by the researcher regarding the issue of discipline and disciplinary practices used in their schools. The interviews generated passionate and fervent discussions, with many interviewees expressing strong views on the matter of discipline in schools and on the situation that has unfolded in secondary public schools in Cyprus in the last decade or so regarding this issue.

##### **8.4.1 School discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices:**

The overwhelming majority of teachers and vice-principals that participated in this study concurred that indiscipline is currently sky-high in secondary public schools

in Cyprus and that students are becoming highly unmanageable 'year after year'. In comparing the discipline levels of the present to the past, the interviewees pointed out that the type of indiscipline that one immediately observes in secondary public schools, today, is very different in nature. Whereas the misconducts of students of previous decades were more occasional but serious and/or disgraceful, at least for the norms of that time, the transgressions of students of the present day are mostly continuous, especially the non-violent acts (such as smoking, disobedience, dress code violations, verbal threats, fights, disturbing class, lack of respect etc), while the violent acts that were considered severe in the past, are not viewed as such anymore. Even though Mellard and Seyberd (1996) explain this phenomenon by reasoning that the *repeated occurrence* of violent acts becomes normalized over time and loses its shocking effect/value, it has to be clarified that the normalization of repeated violent acts does not also mean that violent acts are not outrageous and/or condemned. They are still disapproved and heavily criticized, while they also puzzle the school regarding their appropriate handling. The interviewees admitted, however, that non-violent acts are 'the trend of the day' and that their effects on the wider school climate are extensive and deleterious.

Besides the fact that the interviewees observed the difference that exists between past and present student indiscipline, they also discerned and acknowledged that disorderliness is not only related to students' personalities and/or personal problems, but also to specific school related factors that can cause, enhance or sustain disruptive behaviour. Teachers and vice-principals identified the most prominent school-related factors that they believe have led to the rising levels of indiscipline observed in secondary public schools in Cyprus today and underlined that if these school related factors, which are constant in a student's life, are not taken into account and are not viewed as part and parcel of student indiscipline, then student misbehaviour will continue and no matter what disciplinary practice or intervention program the Ministry of Education and Culture or individual schools adopt, or invent, nothing will be able to work effectively, and produce positive outcomes.



In this respect, all of the interviewees, with no exception, concurred and agreed with the large majority of students, that the current disciplinary practices used are largely ineffective and unable to resolve a student's behavioural issues, since they do not take into consideration the school-related factors that lead to indiscipline. As such, teachers and vice-principals established a direct linkage between these factors and the reasons that they hold responsible for the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used. By establishing this connection, however, teachers and vice-principals further reinforced new research, which examines the aforementioned relationship (Payne, Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 2006).

In identifying the most prominent school related factors that can foster indiscipline and make the use of disciplinary practices unsuccessful, interviewees referred to the following:

#### **8.4.1.1 The lack of a common policy:**

"It is a well accepted premise of organizational theory that no organization can be any better than the degree to which common goal commitments exist"

(Burns, 1985, p.3)

Despite the aforementioned basic principle, existing research supports that lack of a common policy is among the most prominent characteristics of poor disciplined schools (Burns, 1985). In line with previous studies on this matter (Gottfredson, 1989; Mukuria, 2003; Munn, Johnstone & Chalmers, 1992), this study showed that the existence of a common policy is very important in creating an orderly school environment and that the lack of uniformity can generate a series of problems such as: a) The inconsistent application of rules and disciplinary action, as educators are in a position to interpret rules and regulations as they wish and see fit, therefore leading to an inconsistent handling of disciplinary problems, b) The display of more disruptive behaviours, since students take advantage of the exhibited confusion and inconsistency by trying to test their school's limits and c) The feelings of

dissatisfaction and tension, both among teachers who feel frustrated with the situation and students, who not only feel unjustly treated but also believe that schools impose double standards by the inconsistent rule application and disciplinary action enforcement.

As reported by the large majority of the participants of this study, the lack of a common policy in disciplinary practices is among the most evident characteristics of secondary public schools in Cyprus. This is a characteristic that, as we have seen, was also particularly highlighted by students who considered inconsistency in the application of disciplinary practices as very prevalent and as an important enhancer of disruptive behaviour in schools today. Despite, however, the clear presence of this problem in secondary public schools in Cyprus and the particularly adverse effects it has on indiscipline levels and the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices used, its solution is not easily attainable, as it is hampered by the following three factors: (a) The issue of discretion, (b) Lack of strong leadership, (c) External pressure.

#### 1a) The issue of discretion:

The issue of discretion emerged through the interviews/discussions with teachers and vice-principals. While the researcher noticed the prevalence of this issue when conducting the interviews, it wasn't until all the common themes from the interviews were put together and analyzed that she realized how significant and indeed critical this issue is in matters of school discipline. In fact, the issue of discretion seems to be at the heart of many problems that school discipline faces today, since all educational stakeholders that take part in the decision making process regarding disciplinary matters, make such great use of discretion, that they basically interfere with each other's decision making and authority.

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1994) defines discretion as "1: the quality of being discreet...2: ability to make responsible decisions 3a: individual choice or

judgment...b: power of free decision or latitude of choice within certain legal bounds...4: the result of separating or distinguishing" (p.332). In essence, discretion gives decision-makers the opportunity to choose a course of action that they themselves consider appropriate, just or right. However, according to Heilmann (2006), discretion "often occurs outside of established rules and procedures" (p. 9).

This study illustrated that discretion is being widely used in secondary public schools in Cyprus. While the overwhelming majority of student participants, through their responses that disciplinary practices are inconsistently used, indirectly but disapprovingly pointed to the fact that the element of discretion is prevalent in the decision making process in schools, teachers and administrators directly spoke of the existence of discretion, arguing, in fact, that its use is necessary when examining indiscipline and subsequent disciplinary action for problematic student cases. In advocating for the necessity of discretion, however, teachers and administrators fail to realize that such a course largely contradicts their position on the need to have and apply a common policy in schools that will ensure the consistent, equal and uniform treatment of all students irrespective of their individual circumstances. They also fail to realize that the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as the educational psychologists and career guidance counselors that they held responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline and the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices are just using discretion the same way that they do when examining each student's individual circumstances.

The fact that all educational stakeholders in Cyprus are so commonly using discretion, calls of course into question the reasons as to why this practice is so widely used. According to Heilmann (2006), discretion is anticipated in cases or situations where the deciding authority deems the existing rules or policies as unclear or inadequate to handle a problem. In line with Heilmann's assessment, all of the interviewees in this study, without exception, confirmed that they consider both in-school suspension and the downgrading of a student's conduct as inadequate and ineffective in dealing with repeated disruptive student behaviour,



something which evidently explains their keenness and readiness to use discretion so much.

In applying discretion whenever they think is appropriate and see fit, however, all educational stakeholders create a situation where: a) no disciplinary action is effective, since the decisions of one actor can be overturned, annulled or completely disregarded by the decisions of the other and b) disrespect and injustices are profound and highly felt by all educational stakeholders, including students. In his evaluation of the use of discretion in the justice system, Davis (1969) warned of the consequences that can come about from the use of this practice by saying that:

I think the greatest and most frequent injustices occur at the discretion end of the scale, where rules and principles provide little or no guidance, where emotions of deciding officers may affect what they do, where political or other favouritism may influence decisions and where the imperfections of human nature are often reflected in the choices made (p. v)

Translated into the school organization, the lack of common policy on disciplinary matters, which was reported by educators, provides minimal or no guidance at all for deciding officers, who often take disciplinary decisions based on their personal assessment of situations, the feelings and emotions that they harbour for individual students and other considerations or favouritisms that they have in mind. Leaving these decisions to the “imperfect human nature” of individuals, has obviously resulted in the worsening of the level of school discipline year after year, in students’ repeated misbehaviour and in the frustration that the school faculty feels due to the disrespect they receive from students, their parents and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

### 1b) The lack of strong leadership:

The second factor that hampers the existence of a common policy is the lack of strong leadership, which was also cited by the interviewees as a factor in its own right that affects both student misbehaviour and the effectiveness of disciplinary practices.

In line with the Montgomerie, McIntosh and Mattson study (1988) as well as the one by Giannangelo and Malone (1987), this research indicates that the 'disciplinary role' of the principal is highly regarded and valued among teachers. On the contrary, the inability of a principal to lead his/her school within specifically defined and clear parameters on disciplinary matters and be a rule setter and enforcer can cause great upheaval and dissatisfaction, since his/her inadequacy is easily evident both amongst educators and students and leads to the creation of problems. As the large majority of teachers and vice-principals reported, a common policy that ensures the consistent use of rules and practices and can lead to an orderly and controlled environment cannot be attained if the school leader is: 1) unfit to be a principal, since he/she does not possess the managerial and leadership skills that a principal should have to be effective and successful, 2) unsupportive of his/her faculty with disciplinary matters, 3) unable to enforce or sustain the use of a common policy, and 4) receptive to external pressure and influence.

From the aforementioned characteristics that teachers and vice-principals ascribed to ineffective principals, the first two are directly associated with an individual principal's personality, while the latter ones can also be ascribed to the effect that outside forces and external pressure can have on them. By referring to unfit principals, the participants were alluding to the established system of promotion in the educational system in Cyprus, which essentially bases promotions to two main elements/criteria: i) the years of teaching experience that an educator has, and ii) the evaluation points that educators accumulate (regarding their performance on the subject matter that they teach), from the evaluation reports that visiting

educational inspectors prepare for each teacher and then submit to the Educational Service Commission. While these elements/criteria are important for the teaching attributes of an educator, they completely ignore the managerial, leadership and administrative skills that an effective leader should possess. Therefore, the established system of promotion in Cyprus does not have the ability to determine the leadership attributes and characteristics of an individual, thus leading to the appointment of principals who, although "excellent" in teaching their subject, may totally lack the capacity to effectively and successfully lead a school.

Being unsupportive of their staff concerning disciplinary matters was the second characteristic that teachers and vice-principals assigned to ineffective principals, which is directly associated with an individual principal's personality. The large majority of the participants, mainly teachers, talked about how unaccommodating their school's principal and/or administrative team was in dealing with disruptive behaviour and how this directly affected the way they worked and handled problematic students. In line with the research by Blasé and Anderson (1995), this study also found that a number of teachers, and to a lesser degree some vice-principals, tend to totally ignore student misbehaviour or resort to absurd deals with students in order to be able to carry on with their jobs uninterrupted, when they feel that the support that their school or the higher authority provides on disciplinary issues is low. These educators felt that it was essentially futile to spend their time quarrelling with students and referring them when the school leadership would simply turn a blind eye to their disruptive behaviour and reject/refuse to take disciplinary action. Besides frustrating their educational staff, however, this study also showed that the unsupportive attitude of principals and their administrative team, as well as the 'excessive tolerance' they demonstrate towards disciplinary matters, can further lead to the enhancement of students' problematic behaviour.

The last two characteristics that teachers and vice-principals ascribed to ineffective principals may also be related, in addition to the personal traits of an individual



principal, to the effects produced by external pressure and influence. In particular, while a principal's failure to enforce or sustain the use of a common policy might be related to his/her personality, outside forces such as pressure by the Ministry of Education and Culture and/or parents might not provide a principal the ability to stay the course and implement consistency in his/her decision-making process. The same argument applies for the case of a principal's receptiveness to external pressure and influence, since although a principal's personality per se might not be amenable, he/she might be forced by outside forces to follow a particular course of action even though he/she may personally disagree with it.

#### 1c) External pressure: i) Ministry of Education and Culture, ii) Parents

Besides being linked to the ineffectiveness of principals, the external pressure, involvement and influence of the Ministry of Education and Culture and of students' parents in discipline related matters, is also considered, as mentioned above, the third factor responsible for the lack of a common policy, while it is also a reason in its own right that affects student misbehaviour and the effectiveness of disciplinary practices.

##### i) *Ministry of Education and Culture:*

As was mentioned in Chapter 7, the overwhelming majority of educators complained that the Ministry of Education and Culture mingles in school affairs, especially when it concerns disciplinary matters, and stressed repeatedly, throughout their interviews, that the Ministry exerts so much power and pressure on secondary public schools that *affect or overturn its rules, policies and decisions*. This assessment by teachers and vice-principals is in agreement with existing literature on this issue, which challenges the notion of the empowered school leader and very accurately argues that principals can only be as effective in their leadership, as external influences permit them to be (Debevoise, 1982). For, while in theory a principal has the capacity to reject any interference in his/her school

affairs, in practice a principal is either stripped of any power to do so or, for various reasons, or will rarely go against the wishes of the higher authority, in our case the Ministry of Education and Culture, thus yielding to its pressure and influence.

Educators' assessment regarding the power and influence of the Ministry of Education and Culture on secondary public schools in Cyprus, is also supportive of the view by Short and Greer (1997) in that the Ministry seems to be treating principals, as well as their administrative teams, as "middle managers" whose duty is to run the school according to the instructions and mandates of the competent authority.

By stripping the principal and the school of any power, the Ministry sends all educational stakeholders the message that it is itself the only authority that should be regarded and respected, and that the schools' attempts to implement rules, policies and decisions should be ignored, as they do not really matter or count at the end of the day. The Ministry's attitude, however, causes a lot of "unintended" consequences that heavily affect schools and educators, since it naturally leads to a situation where the principal and the school are unable to enforce or sustain a common policy, therefore resulting in an inconsistent application of disciplinary practices. This inconsistency, in turn, leads to further enhancement of disruptive behaviour and to the inability of the existing disciplinary practices to work effectively.

It has to be recalled here, that interviews were conducted with a number of teachers and vice-principals that worked in different public schools in Cyprus. If one takes into consideration that educators serve in a number of public schools throughout their career, their opinions on how the educational system works and how much pressure secondary public schools accept from external forces, should be regarded as quite objective and very representative of the educational realities in Cyprus.

ii) *Parents:*

In agreement with previous research (Males, 2001; Richards, 2003), this study also found that a great number of educators consider parents another great source of external pressure laid on schools, since their interference with the school's normal proceedings prohibit schools from implementing a common policy, hinder the appropriate and quality implementation of the school's disciplinary practices and reinforce misbehaviour. Educators held parents responsible for not spending too much time with their children, mainly due to their heavy work schedules, not establishing boundaries that cannot be crossed, not teaching them that along with rights come obligations and that when rules are breached, consequences will be faced. To the contrary, teachers and vice-principals felt that for whatever of the above reasons, parents support and justify their children's misbehaviour, while they also use every lawful or unlawful mean they have to absolve them from their responsibilities and annul or cancel any imminent or already taken disciplinary action.

The tendency of parents to disrespect the school's decisions, would of course not have been possible without the assistance of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which not only provides students and parents with the necessary means to overrule a school's decision on discipline issues, but it also engages itself, as was explained above, in applying pressure to schools by disputing decisions and more often than not supporting students and their parents. Such attitudes exemplified by parents, along with the fact that parents are given the means and are allowed to interfere in schools' disciplinary decisions and invalidate them, unfortunately send students a clear message that they can actually get away with anything. They also give them the right to fully disrespect their teachers and vice-principals, as well as their decisions, since students believe that they have the power to determine the course of action whenever they are in trouble.



While the negative effects of external pressure on discipline levels and the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used were evident by the responses of the participants, an underlying and particularly important theme that also emerged from their answers and attitudes, was that outside forces leave a deep mark on the school faculties' *morale*, which appeared to be incredibly low. The majority of the participants reported that both parental pressure as well as the Ministry's controlling and unsupportive attitude, especially regarding disciplinary matters, makes them feel disrespected, ignored, powerless and dissatisfied with their jobs.

As much research shows, these negative feelings that external school forces (in this case, the Ministry of Education and Culture and parents) can have on the school faculty, are causes of 'teacher burnout', which as we have seen in the literature review, is an undesirable outcome that can have grave consequences both for educators and their students (Friesen & Williams, 1985; Smylie, 1999; Travers & Coopers, 1996; Wanberg, 1982). Just like students, teachers also need to feel that they are supported, respected for what they do, recognized and rewarded for their efforts (Kyriacou, 2000). They also need to have the power to influence or, at least, have a say in any policy that can impact their job satisfaction and/or their relationship with students and their parents. Therefore, policy makers should not only take into consideration students' feelings and needs when deciding on policy planning and implementation, but also, and equally importantly, understand the implications and complications that their unclear, inconsistent, unsupportive and controlling practices can have on schools and educators' feelings, as well as on the dignity and image of secondary public schools themselves. It will be interesting, however, to conduct a research on teacher-burnout in Cyprus and find out to what degree burnout exists in the educational community.

#### **8.4.1.2 Lack of meaningful relationships and communication between educators and students:**

There was a wide agreement among the interviewees that student indiscipline and consequently one of the reasons why disciplinary practices are largely ineffective, is associated with the lack of meaningful relationships and communication between teachers and students. As the participants of this research reported, and as the literature on this subject shows, the creation of meaningful relationships and the existence of good communication have the power to detect and prevent student misbehaviour (Vitto, 2003). Moreover, it is also believed that if students feel bonded with their school and experience positive and nurturing relations with their administrative staff, teachers and peers, they will also experience a sense of belonging, which is vital for individuals' well being and can discourage them from engaging in norm breaking activities (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The formation of meaningful relationships, however, and the establishment of good communication between students and educators can be prevented by the existence of: a) large size schools, and the b) curriculum and exam-based system.

##### **2a) Large size schools:**

In support of existing literature (Bakioglu & Geyin, 2009; Klonsky, 2002; Wasley & Lear, 2001), all educator-participants of this study emphasized the issue of large schools and how they prohibit both the creation of more humane relationships as well as the constructive communication between teachers and students for which both parties are in desperate need. The interviewees praised the creation of smaller schools and smaller communities, because in such an environment educators can come closer to their students, form relationships of trust and respect, attend to their emotional and academic needs and thus detect and prevent problematic student

behaviour while working with them in smaller teams. As the participants<sup>19</sup> of this study argued, and as research confirms, smaller schools do not experience as many problems with violence as larger schools (Kennedy, 2003; Klonsky, 2002). They further noted that the impersonal relationships that characterize larger schools disengage a lot of students from their school environment and create problems (Wasley & Lear, 2001). Whereas, in smaller schools where the teacher-student ratio is smaller and educators know their students, the impersonal factor is eliminated and students feel that they have an identity and that they are cared for. As Vitto (2003) sustains, “ Students who experience caring and [supporting] relationships develop the belief, I am cared for and [therefore] worthwhile” (p.11).

In strengthening the argument favouring the creation of smaller schools, some studies empirically showed that students, who exhibited problematic behaviours in larger schools, eliminated that sort of behaviour and became more successful, after enrolling in smaller schools (Nathan & Febey, 2001; Howley, Strange & Bickel, 2000). The call therefore of educators in Cyprus to create smaller schools should be considered important in dealing with disruptive behaviour, since this course of action has been successfully tested in practice in some cases. While, however, this desire is well known to the competent authorities for a number of years, many educators believe that the creation of smaller schools goes against the intentions of the Ministry of Education and Culture to reduce the education budget, an intention that is demonstrated not only by the creation of larger size schools, but also by the indirect promotion of Greek-based private schools<sup>20</sup> in the last 10-15 years.

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<sup>19</sup> The large majority of the participants of this study have a first-hand experience of smaller schools, either because during their teaching career they are posted in rural areas for a minimum of two years or because they have themselves attended such schools, since 15-20 years ago even urban schools were much smaller in comparison to today's schools.

<sup>20</sup> The only private schools that existed in Cyprus in the last century were the English-based private schools. The public schools were all Greek-based and the Ministry of Education and Culture was not authorizing the creation of Greek-based private schools. In the last 10-15 years, however, the Ministry started allowing the creation of these schools in order to make the market competitive and raise standards or, as many believe, to save the State a respectable amount of funding, since each student costs the State approximately 5000 Euros per year (Aristidou, 2003).



## 2b) Curriculum & Exam-Based System:

A large number of the interviewees considered the existing curriculum as well as the pressure that the examination-based system of the lyceum cycle lays both on students and teachers, among the reasons that create and maintain indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus. More specifically, the existing curriculum was blamed for placing excessive emphasis on examined subjects and for promoting only the cognitive-intellectual skills. Students who have other than the cognitive-intellectual skills and abilities or who may not be interested in following tertiary education, are neglected in the current system and are made feel “less able” or “less bright”.

As Hargreaves (1982) and Broadfoot (1979) believe, and as the educators of this research verify, students are fully aware of the “ability labels” that the educational system ascribes to them, as well as the connotations that these labels carry for their own personal assessment and moral worth. These ‘less able’ students are essentially the ones who may eventually feel disaffected by the entire school system, and they may be pushed in manifesting their disaffection by polarizing themselves both from their school’s value system and from their successful classmates and by forming their own counter-cultures where they feel secure, respected and valued.

In agreement with Cuff and Payne (1985), Hargreaves et al. (1996) and Cawelti (2006), the interviewees also complained that because of the exam-based system and the pressure to concentrate in delivering the examination syllabus, they have no time to develop closer relationships and communicate with students outside the exams’ framework/context. In this respect, students miss out on communication and guidance from their educators, while a large number of teachers and vice-principals feel bad for being unable to help students who need more attention and assistance.

Besides the restricting effect that the final year exams have on teachers' quality time with their students, however, exams also create a situation, which is specific to the Cypriot secondary education reality and that relates to 'private tutoring'. Due to increased competition, the large number of students that occupy public school classes, and the ever rising indiscipline levels, a great number of students turn to private tutoring (something that signifies the major weaknesses of the public system) in order to fulfill their academic needs and increase their opportunities to enter higher education institutions. Consequently, many students acquire the examination syllabus, most of the times even before the start of the new academic year, while teachers have to cater to the needs of the students who have already been taught the syllabus, are acquiring the syllabus for the first time, or who are not interested in taking exams. In the latter category of students, however, one has to take into consideration that there are also students who may proclaim that they are not interested in taking exams but in reality cannot really catch up with the pace or the competence level of the examination syllabus (a subject that is discussed right ahead). With so many tasks at hand, the educator becomes frustrated and enervated, confusion is created and communication is hindered.

The considerable use of private tutoring in Cyprus has caused many heated and long lasting discussions between all educational stakeholders. A large number of educators understand and justify its existence while the Ministry of Education and Culture desperately and unsuccessfully tries to minimize its use by executing all the wrong actions and by missing the real point, of course. Private tutoring in Cyprus denotes all the major weaknesses of the public school system that hinder its normal functioning and inhibit the creation of more efficient educational environments that help each student reach his/her full capabilities.

The creation of large schools, the excessive pressure that the curriculum and exams-based system lays on teachers and students, the highly uneven mixed ability classes, the elevated indiscipline levels and the external pressure that the Ministry exerts on the public school find themselves among the most prominent weaknesses that

characterize the public educational system. Instead of targeting these weaknesses, however, and working on combating them, the Ministry of Education and Culture is more interested in targeting the educators who work illegally<sup>21</sup> as private tutors and establishing the unreasonable 'legal private tutoring' in school grounds, to give the educators who are public servants, and whom they are 'chasing after', the opportunity to win extra 'legal money', after school hours. The extra 'illegal money' that educators make, then, seems to be the Ministry's main issue of concern and not the real problems that the educational system is experiencing!

#### **8.4.1.3 Mixed ability classes and school-type:**

One of the main issues that emerged from the interviews as an extremely important factor responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus, today, and the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices used, is the issue of mixed ability classes and by extension the type of school that students attend.

It has to be recalled here that all students in Cyprus, both in primary and secondary schools, are organized in mixed ability classes. Mixed ability classes entail grouping together students of different abilities and different performance levels (Angelides & Gipps, 2007). Such a varied class environment obviously creates many challenges for teachers, who in order to transmit the syllabus they have to employ a wide range of teaching practices so that they provide all students, irrespective of their academic and ability levels, equal and meaningful access to high quality curriculum and material resources (Rubin & Noguera, 2004). Although the idea behind the development and establishment of mixed ability classes and their intended goals are noble and laudable, there are certain factors that prohibit their proper functioning and may make the use of mixed ability teaching cause more harm to students than good (Gamoran, 2009).

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<sup>21</sup> The educators who work in public schools in Cyprus are hired by the Government and are considered public servants. Public servants are not allowed to have side business and gain extra money.



In the case of the lyceum cycle in secondary public schools in Cyprus in particular, this study showed that educators felt that mixed ability classes are an important source of many school problems and especially indiscipline, as these classes contain students of so '*widely different performance levels*' that essentially prohibit teachers from carrying out their job effectively. In essence, classes in secondary public schools in Cyprus are composed of five distinct categories of students, namely a) Students who have excellent performance levels and are interested, b) Students who have already been taught the curriculum by private tutors and may not be interested on what the teacher has to say, c) Students who have good or medium performance levels, d) Students who lack basic skills and have great difficulty in keeping up with the new material and e) Students who are not interested in school in general.

Besides the first category, all other groups of students, because they already know or may not be able to follow the curriculum, may feel uninterested in the subject matter, or may not be interested in pursuing higher education, usually get quickly bored and/or frustrated in class and resort in exemplifying their boredom and/or frustration with disruptive behaviour.

The last two categories of students are, of course, of particular importance, since they involve students who are weak and uninterested in education. These are the students who are mostly susceptible to disruptive behaviour to begin with and being in a mixed ability class only compounds their predisposition to misbehave, as they are made feel worthless, neglected and unappreciated in a system that does not practically help the weak student and which only values cognitive-intellectual knowledge and no other skills. It is well attested in the literature, after all, that feelings of boredom, neglect and frustration may lead to disruptive behaviour (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Hinshaw, 1992; Skiba & Peterson, 2003; Raby & Domitrek, 2007).

The issue of the malfunctioning of mixed ability classes in Cyprus has been well known to the Ministry of Education and Culture for some time now and especially since the publication of the "UNESCO Appraisal Study on the Cyprus Educational System" (1997), which examined the operation of mixed ability classes in primary schools in Cyprus. That study concluded that mixed ability classes in primary schools are not functioning properly, since they are organized "with no clear policy about internal grouping, [and] no policy on differentiation in curriculum, methodology or resource utilization" (as cited in Angelides & Gipps, 2007, p. 59).

Even though through their responses, the participants of this research also spoke of the malfunctioning of mixed ability classes in Cyprus, the unique aspect of this study is that it highlighted the adverse consequences that mixed ability classes have for the levels of discipline and the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used.

In offering what they think is the best available solution to this matter, educators argued that performance benchmarks based on the yearly grade average of students should be established for the lyceum cycle and students failing to meet these benchmarks should instead attend secondary technical and vocational schools. In contrast to the lyceum cycle, whose primary aim is to cater to the needs of students interested in tertiary education and prepare them for entry into Universities and Colleges, technical and vocational schools are geared primarily towards providing students with technical skills and capabilities and thus preparing them to be ready to get a job right after they graduate from school. The majority of the teachers and vice-principals strongly believed that this is the best available solution to the problem of mixed ability classes and a way to eliminate, or at least minimize, one of the important factors leading to indiscipline and the ineffectiveness of the existing disciplinary practices.

However, even though in theory the educators' recommendation might seem easy to implement, in practice such an undertaking is certainly much more difficult, since

although technical and vocational schools in Cyprus constitute a fairly good alternative for students who are more inclined to practical or handier professions and have technical skills and capabilities, the reputation they have (i.e. attracting the students who are more disruptive or “less able”) have turned them into a secondary educational choice that is largely avoided or looked down upon by society at large.

Therefore, in order for the educators’ suggestion to be realistic and have any chances of successful implementation, technical and vocational schools have to be face-lifted and improved so that their status and role is upgraded and enhanced not only on paper but also in the eyes of the wider society. Only in this way, parents and students will view the technical and vocational schools as a decent alternative to the lyceum cycle. Otherwise, students with low educational levels or whose needs and interests are not met by what the lyceum cycle has to offer, will continue to find themselves in the wrong type of school and manifest their frustration by exhibiting disruptive behaviour.

The findings of this study are in line with previous research on mixed ability classes or detracking literature, which emphasizes that by just putting students with different levels of ability and preparation together “is a beginning not an end in itself”. For mixed ability classes to actually serve those whom they were intended to benefit, schools need to put more resources into measures that support both students and teachers. This may include ensuring that mixed ability classes are smaller, more academically balanced and consequently more able to provide students with the personalized support they need (Rubin & Noguera, 2004). In smaller and more academically balanced classes, teachers will not struggle with teaching students of a wide range of academic skills, will have the opportunity to know their students better and form relationships of trust and support which, as we have already seen, can prevent students from engaging in disruptive behaviours.



#### **8.4.1.4 The inconsequential character of suspension and the downgrading of a student's conduct:**

Another reason that teachers and vice-principals held predominantly responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus, as well as for the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices, is the inconsequential nature of the existing practices.

It is recalled that in the case of suspension, the only essential consequence that this disciplinary practice has is that it counts towards the admittedly enormous number of justified absences that a student is allowed to have during the school year, which, if exceeded, can result in grade retention. However, due to the lack of a common implementation of school policies, the use of discretion and inconsistent practices, the role of educational psychologists and career guidance counselors in influencing school decisions on disciplinary matters, the tendency of the Ministry to generally pass to the next grade the vast majority of students irrespective of their academic performance and disciplinary record and the mingling of the Ministry and of parents in school affairs, especially regarding disciplinary matters, educators strongly believed that even this minimal consequence of suspension is rendered irrelevant and invalid, since students are fully aware that even if they reach the maximum number of absences that they are allowed to have, they still have extremely high chances to pass to the next grade and not have to face the one and only consequence of suspension. As such, students know that they can continue exhibiting disruptive behaviour without having to worry about any adverse effects.

In adding insult to injury, this disciplinary action is rendered even more insignificant by the practice implemented by the majority of secondary public schools in Cyprus of not removing suspended students from the classroom environment, but on the contrary allowing them to spend their suspension time in the usual classroom so that they do not waste 'valuable curriculum time'. While this practice might be effective for the minority of students who have very good

performance levels, but exhibit, out of character, disruptive behaviour for which they are later remorseful, the majority of the students who are suspended become very provoked and irritated by the fact that they are forced to spend their suspension time in class (many times in the class of the teacher that referred them) and exhibit their frustration by becoming more disruptive. This situation leads to a vicious cycle that is detrimental to both the school and the students, since suspension is met with disruptive behaviour, which is, in turn, met with more suspension that is answered with even more acts of indiscipline etc.

Consequences are also virtually non-existent in the case of the disciplinary practice of downgrading a student's conduct, since the assessment of a student's character or behaviour does not appear any more on the 'School Leaving Certificate' that students receive when they graduate, as it was the practice in the past. Nowadays, students' behavioural records are only available upon request, and students can simply hide an unfavourable school assessment of their character and behaviour by avoiding any engagement with anyone who asks such a record, like Universities and Colleges or prospective employers. Given this situation, receiving a downgrading of their conduct also seems to bear no meaning to students anymore.

The fact that students "fear" no consequences from the existing disciplinary practices and that they will keep repeating or enhancing their maladaptive behaviours and completely disregard their schools' practices, was not only predominantly evident in the responses of teachers and vice-principals but was also obvious in students' answers to the questionnaires as the vast majority of students claimed that suspension and the downgrading of a student's conduct do not deter them from misbehaving again.

No matter what the actual reasons are that may be responsible for the inconsequential character of the existing disciplinary practices, students are in fact receiving a clear message that their violations are trivial and that transgressions, whatever these might be, will not be met with any consequences or, even if they are,

those consequences will, at the end of the day, mean nothing and result in no penalties.

The findings of this study on the inconsequential nature of the existing disciplinary practices are particularly alarming for the secondary public school system in Cyprus, as they go against the existing literature on what constitutes an effective disciplinary policy. According to Morrison and Skiba (2001), disciplinary practices should have consequences and all educational stakeholders should treat them with outmost respect if they want to teach students something or if they are to prevent future misbehaviour. The use of consequences for students' transgressions should not be viewed, of course, as a way to retaliate against students, but instead as an opportunity to teach them of societal realities, of values and principles. Students should know and consequently experience that, just as in society laws and societal norms are protected by sanctions (that increase in severity according to the violation) and have a "moral imprimatur", school laws and norms are also existent and any infringement will be punished accordingly.

Besides, the "punitive element" however, disciplinary practices should also be equipped with the "diagnostic" and "therapeutic" elements, so that the real causes of student misbehaviour can be detected and treated accordingly. If educators feel, as this study showed, that the existing disciplinary practices are not capable of solving a student's problems, which may lead him/her to disruptive behaviour, then they take the situation in their own hands by trying to handle each problematic case with discretion and inconsistent policies. Instead of helping, however, educators end up creating more problems both for the school and for students. On the contrary, if disciplinary practices also contain a "diagnostic" and a "therapeutic" element, whereby a specialized professional, such as a psychologist, will deal with diagnosing the causes of student's misbehaviour and propose possible remedies to those causes, then educators may be able to stop preoccupying themselves with the reasons that lead to misbehaviour and concentrate on actually enforcing the punitive aspect of the disciplinary practice in a common and consistent way. In this



way, students will receive the clear message that misbehaviour has consequences and that procedures are uniformly and consistently applied irrespective of an individual's situation. At the same time they will know that their school cares for them and their problems, since a psychologist will be available to discuss their problems and work with them in identifying possible solutions.

Regrettably, the disciplinary practices used in secondary public schools in Cyprus, today, not only fail to include the “diagnostic” and “therapeutic” components, they also omit the “punitive” component, which is an essential reason for their existence. In fact, in the last few years, the Ministry of Education and Culture completely eliminated the “punitive” connotation that existed in the title “Disciplinary Practices” by replacing the entire title with the more appealing sounding name “Pedagogical Measures”. With this change, the Ministry basically aimed to pass the message that disciplinary practices should be more pedagogic, admittedly a very good point, and that they should teach students something. A number of interviewees, mainly vice-principals, referred to this issue and accused the Ministry of being more interested in superficial issues and how things are read rather than concentrate on what they actually mean. For, even though the title has changed, the levels of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus continue to rise and the only real effect that this change has had over the last few years, according to educators, was to signify even greater measures of lenience for undisciplined students and enhance the notion that disciplinary practices are inconsequential.

The alarming situation that exists on disciplinary matters in secondary public schools today is also evident of the fact that Cyprus has reached the other end of disciplinary practices, which is not of course the also problematic ‘zero-tolerance approach’<sup>22</sup>, but on the contrary what could be described as the “all-about leniency” approach. Consequences in secondary public schools in Cyprus have taken on what

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<sup>22</sup> An approach that finds itself in the other end of disciplinary measures and which as research shows has its own problems (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; 1999)

Mizzell (1978) portrays as “a connotation of opprobrium that is an embarrassment to schools, rather than to students” (p. 213).

Moreover, the situation in Cyprus seems to be in line with the common belief of the 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogy that students should not be “punished” for their transgressions but instead be listened to and supported because their misconducts signify that they are in some sort of need or help. Despite the fact that the philosophy behind this new notion of pedagogy is morally sound, its unconditional endorsement would be tremendously detrimental, since it would send the message that students can violate repeatedly the schools’ rules and regulations and not have to worry about any possible consequences, as they can always use their real or perceived personal and other problems as “passports to immunity”. Therefore, consequences should not be viewed as anathema, but on the contrary as a way to keep order and avoid anarchy. This, of course, does not mean that consequences should only entail the element of punishment. As was mentioned earlier, consequences should also include the provision of assistance to the offender. In other words, at the same time that an offender receives the appropriate sanction for his/her violation, the school should also examine the ways in which the student can be supported or helped so that the reasons for his/her misbehaviour are identified and eliminated or, at least, minimized.

#### **8.4.1.5 Career guidance counselors, educational psychologists and their role in disciplinary matters:**

Career guidance counselors and educational psychologists were also largely blamed for the rising levels of indiscipline and the ineffectiveness of disciplinary practices, as teachers and vice-principals linked their involvement in school disciplinary matters to the inconsistent application of disciplinary practices that prohibits the formation of a common policy. It is recalled that career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists are involved in the decision making process regarding a student’s disciplinary action by participating in the educational staff assembly,

which convenes at the end of each trimester to examine, *inter alia*, all cases of students who have behavioural or passing-failing issues. During this assembly, career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists offer their own professional assessment of the situation of each individual student and his/her case before a disciplinary decision is reached. Due to the nature of their job, which is to recognize students' problems and find ways to help and guide students out of their trouble and difficulties, career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists are blamed by many educators for assuming the role of the "deus ex machina" for students who exhibit disruptive behaviours, by painting a dire student picture where "punishment" will only add to the student's problems and misbehaving conduct. As such, career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists essentially inject the element of compassion into the decision making process, which ultimately leads to the use of discretion and the inconsistent application of disciplinary practices.

This situation, however, creates enormous problems for the functioning of the school, since career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists essentially issue a "passport to immunity" to students who have heavy records of indiscipline and are repeat offenders, since these students are over and over again excused for their disruptive behaviour and misconducts, due to their individual circumstances and personal problems. As such, a climate of complete impunity is produced, where students know that whatever they do will be pardoned based on the "passport" issued by the career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists.

While, however, the role and involvement of career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists is easy to be blamed and held responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline and the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used, one should look deeper into whether that role and involvement is something that these professionals should assume or be left to assume and thus whether it is their fault that this situation is created.



The primary role of career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists is to help and guide students on a more personal level, identify their problems as well as their strengths and weaknesses, communicate their needs to educators and, with the collaboration of all educational stakeholders, find/or create a solution that serves their own individual circumstances. However, that role is very much restricted by the enormous amount of students they have to serve. Career guidance counselors, for instance, even though in the majority of cases are appointed in one and only school, they still have to accommodate the needs of a great number of students, usually averaging between 600-1,200 students, according to the size of the school they serve. In the case of educational psychologists the situation is even more dramatic, since the limited number of them that currently works on a permanent basis in secondary public schools in Cyprus, is usually responsible for a number of schools, which means that each one of them has to cater to the needs of as many as 3,500 students.

Given this situation, the work of career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists is confined into accumulating and listing each student's individual circumstances and/or problems, a job which is mostly bureaucratic in nature, and does not allow these specialists to spend more time with students to work out their problems and help them build "effective problem-solving skills" (Hochman & Worner, 1987, p.93). Consequently, what actually happens in secondary public schools in Cyprus is that the students' gathered personal information is not used accordingly to help the student deal with his/her problems, but is instead used as an alibi to the student's disruptive behaviour and exploited to influence the decision-making process regarding a student's exhibited misbehaviour.

This is not of course the purpose of this information and career guidance counselors and educational psychologists should not be allowed to bring into consideration the personal circumstances of each individual student, since, as it was mentioned above, this information evokes educators' feelings of compassion and thus influences the objectivity of the educational staff's decisions.

Of course, career guidance counselors and/or psychologists would not have assumed or been left to assume the role of the protector of disruptive students if the school environment was not accordingly accommodating. By lacking clear and common rules and regulations, allowing discretion and the inconsistent use of disciplinary practices and by not having in place other support systems that do not rely on correcting a student's misbehaviour with disciplinary action only, schools provide an ideal setting for career guidance counselors and/or educational psychologists to assume a central role and influence the educational faculty's decisions, while it also essentially renders as a necessity the assembly of the school faculty at the end of each trimester to discuss and review disciplinary and other matters on a case-by-case basis.

From the moment, however, that the educational staff of a school assembles to examine each case individually, it unwittingly makes a number of mistakes: 1) Tailors disciplinary action to a student's personal circumstances and problems, in that it allows the student's private information to be used in his/her favour in order to alleviate the severity of the school's imminent disciplinary decision, 2) Allows the educational staff to be influenced or even forced to take decisions that are based on compassion and not on the student's actions, 3) Creates injustices with the excessive use of discretion, 4) Absolves students from their responsibilities and sends them the message that they can take advantage of their personal circumstances to get away with anything and 5) Absolves the school itself, as well as the Ministry of Education and Culture from their own responsibilities to find better alternatives to help the student who exhibits disruptive behaviour.

While one may argue that compassion is a great virtue and that schools should be allowed to show compassion and discretion for some student cases, there are many constructive and educating ways to demonstrate real sympathy and concern for a troubled student, without risking the school's procedural or distributive justice system and without sending students the wrong messages. By detecting students' real problems and finding ways to help students handle their difficulties with

dignity and respect for themselves and others, the school can provide students with long lasting tools, and problem-solving skills and abilities that can guide them throughout their lives. On the contrary, by allowing them to take advantage of their personal circumstances and of people and manipulate situations to their favour, the school contributes significantly in forming irresponsible students and citizens, who always look for ways to avoid consequences, when in trouble, and are unable to understand their own obligations and responsibilities in society. Just as a judge will not or should not release a culprit because of his/her life misfortunes, so schools should apply the appropriate sanctions when students violate the law, and not absolve them from their responsibilities. Sanctions, as was mentioned earlier, are necessary to protect the laws and prevent the creation of disorder and chaos, while at the same time they signify that there was a violation of the norms that should not be repeated. By sanctioning the offender, as Goodman (2006) argues, "a rebalancing of the moral scales and [a] reaffirmation of the standard that was violated [should follow]"(p.222). In the case of schools, sanctioning students sends the message that there are rules and regulations that are protected by sanctions and that student transgressions will be handled accordingly, no matter what.

#### **8.4.2 Students' reaction to disciplinary practices:**

In examining the perceptions of educators concerning the reactions of students to disciplinary practices, this study found that the existing disciplinary practices, namely suspension and the downgrading of a student's conduct, are taken seriously and seem to deter the misbehaviour only of students who are generally well behaved and do not normally break the rules. For all other students, and in particular for repeat offenders, the study demonstrated that the existing disciplinary practices are not effective in discouraging maladaptive behaviours or, at the very minimum, become somewhat effective when disciplinary action poses a serious risk to them, such as grade retention.



The perception of the educators that the disciplinary practices that are currently used are ineffective tools in dealing with disruptive behaviour and fail to prevent future student misconduct, is further strengthened, as we have seen, by the findings of the students' questionnaire, which indicated that neither suspension nor suspension with a further downgrading of a student's conduct are able to discourage the vast majority of students from continuing with their misbehaviour. It is recalled that more than seven out of ten student respondents felt that neither practice is capable of deterring students who display disruptive behaviour from misbehaving again in the future.

If one takes into consideration the aforementioned student assessment and the fact that the category of students who take disciplinary action seriously, are offended by it and feel remorseful, represents only a small percentage of the student population in secondary public schools in Cyprus, the finding of this study comes in stark contrast to existing research, which suggests that suspension is effective in that it can discourage the maladaptive behaviour of 95% of the student population and can produce positive results, by becoming exceedingly persistent and harsh, with the remaining 5% of the student body that continues to exhibit disruptive behaviours (Maag, 2001; Billings & Enger 1995; Morrison & D'Incau 1997; Morrison & Skiba, 2001).

While this perception was quite evident and overwhelmingly reported by interviewees, a few vice-principals in particular, admitted that disciplinary practices may in fact work with more disruptive students, when they (vice-principals) take the time to communicate with these students on a more personal basis and '*convince*' them that their misbehaviour was wrong and incongruent with the school's rules and regulations. These vice-principals believe that if students are treated with respect and they receive the message that what is being 'punished' is not 'them' as 'personalities' but their actions, they tend to take disciplinary action much better and in many cases accept it without protest. This communicative and

explanatory procedure, they argued, leads to the creation of a closer relationship with the student, which in time can help deter more problematic behaviour.

This finding reinforces the literature, which supports the view that both principals and administrators are capable of actually discouraging the exhibition of students' problematic behaviour, if they take the time to know their students and engage with them (Calabrese, 1985; Kadel & Follman, 1993). This assessment also shows that educators acknowledge the need reported by students in this study for more communication between students and educators or adults who can help them deal with their problems. Future research could focus on examining specific school principal and administrator practices, which are believed to help in the prevention of problematic student behaviour, and attest their validity.

The way that disciplinary action is taken by students indicates a few facts about disciplinary practices themselves that simply reinforce the findings of this study, as mentioned above. It also contains a number of policy implications, since the manner in which students react when receiving disciplinary action may actually assist policy makers, as well as schools, to better understand the functioning and implementation of these practices. The majority of students do not take disciplinary action seriously due to the fact that:

a) Disciplinary practices are inconsequential and inconsistently applied, thus failing to deter students from repeating their disruptive behaviour. Therefore, if policy makers and, in particular, the Ministry of Education and Culture, wish to make disciplinary practices successful and effective in dealing with disruptive behaviour, they have to reinvent them in such a way so as to make them matter to students. Making disciplinary practices more meaningful and consequential, however, entails their consistent and uniform application (no exceptions made). If students continue to receive the message that they are able and in a position to change or cancel disciplinary decisions and escape consequences, then disciplinary practices will continue to be of no use and educators will still be frustrated by their ineffectiveness

and will not even bother applying them. As an educator very aptly put it “To be taken seriously, you have to take yourself seriously first”.

b) Students have other more complex problems to deal with than the disciplinary action they will receive for an act of misbehaviour. Therefore, if disciplinary practices are incapable of diagnosing a student’s real reasons for misbehaviour and assist him/her in finding possible solutions, a student’s problems and consequently his/her misbehaviour will continue. As such, policy makers should consider implementing other support programs that diagnose students’ problems and provide them with the necessary problem-solving skills and abilities, which can help them deal with their individual situations and circumstances. The school itself has to work on and eliminate its own factors (as mentioned above) that create and maintain student indiscipline.

#### **8.4.3 General effects/consequences of disciplinary practices on students and on students’ disruptive behaviour:**

In examining educators’ perceptions regarding the effects/consequences that disciplinary practices can have on students, the study found that both suspension and the practice of downgrading a student’s conduct, may result, *inter alia*, in the deterioration of the teacher-student relationship and their communication, and in the creation of negative feelings, such as anger, and feelings of revenge against the teachers and vice-principals they held responsible for the disciplinary action they received.

When asked specifically about the effects that existing disciplinary practices can have on students’ disruptive behaviour, educator participants of this study unanimously concurred that students’ disruptive behaviour can be reinforced/enhanced by disciplinary action when: a) Students do not understand or are not convinced of the reason that caused their “punishment”, b) Students feel unjustly treated when they compare their transgressions to other students, c)



Disciplinary action is inconsistent, d) Disciplinary action is trivial or inconsequential, e) Parents reinforce their children's maladaptive behaviour by supporting or justifying their misconducts.

The answers of the respondents on this matter provide more strong evidence of the wider finding of this study that disruptive behaviour and the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used are directly linked to a number of school related factors, which, if not taken into consideration and treated, or at least minimized, have the capacity to spiral the situation out of control, as indiscipline will continue to increase and the existing disciplinary practices will continue to be completely useless in effectively dealing with disruptive behaviour. Even though the measures that need to be taken to deal with the situation are self-evident and are easily identified in this study, the Ministry of Education and Culture, as the competent authority, seems to keep on missing the point by focusing on measures that, although relevant to the issue of indiscipline, completely ignore the school related factors that create and enhance the problem, which also includes, as we have seen, the Ministry's own responsibilities.

In doing so, the Ministry allows the procrastination and the worsening of a situation that has detrimental consequences for both the school and students themselves. What the Ministry of Education and Culture should do is finally acknowledge that the existing disciplinary practices are ineffective in dealing with disruptive behaviour and reevaluate them based on the factors that lead to indiscipline and render them unsuccessful. This study has helped towards this direction by looking into the school related factors that are responsible for the rising levels of disruptive behaviour in secondary public schools in Cyprus, today, and which make the disciplinary practices currently used ineffective.

#### **8.4.4 Recommendations:**

In closing this study, the researcher asked participants to offer their recommendations regarding the issue of discipline and the effective use of disciplinary practices in secondary public schools in Cyprus. The recommendations, as one would logically expect, are directly related to the reasons that the participants held responsible for the rising levels of indiscipline in public schools and for the poor implementation or ineffective use of the existing disciplinary practices. The majority of the recommendations that the participants of this study advocated are heavily supported by existing international research. Among the most prominent recommendations were the following: 1) Creation of smaller schools and classes, 2) Establishment and adherence to common disciplinary practices and policies, which contain clear rules and meaningful practices, 3) Enhancement of the educational role of secondary technical and vocational schools, 4) Harmonization of mixed ability classes, 5) Minimization of external pressure, 6) Reevaluation and enforcement of disciplinary practices that are consequential, 7) Appointment of psychologists on a permanent basis in schools and 8) Modification of the final year exams, elimination of private tutoring and utilization of students' School Leaving Certificate to enter tertiary education institutions.

#### **8.5 Limitations of the study:**

As mentioned earlier in the Methodology section, the study is limited to upper secondary school students of the ages 15-18 and is specific to the educational realities of secondary public schools in Cyprus. It does not examine the effectiveness of disciplinary practices or the effects that these practices have on students of the ages 12-15. Another limitation of this study is that it was mainly conducted in one district, namely the district of Limassol and one could argue that the results cannot be generalized to the entire student population. The researcher, however, attempted

to eliminate this weakness by conducting the Homogeneity-Test<sup>23</sup>, which proved that the student population in Cyprus is as similar in its opinion about their school's disciplinary practices, as it is in its demographic and social background. One could also consider a limitation of this study the fact that in the examination of the academic effects of disciplinary practices on suspended students, the researcher did not consider the participation and concentration levels of suspended students prior to the application of the disciplinary action and thus the study cannot infer that suspended students are negatively affected in their class participation and concentration because of the disciplinary action applied on them. Another limitation of the study is that due to scheduling issues, the researcher had to review each school's timetable and approach teachers that had accommodating schedules. Obviously with this method, not all teachers and classrooms in each school had the exact same probability of being selected, since scheduling and timetabling issues and constraints would not allow for a completely randomly selected sample. However, notwithstanding this minor constraint, the researcher applied the randomly selected principle by approaching all available teachers and classrooms. Of course, this did not mean that all teachers who were approached and were invited to participate in the research with their classroom did so at the end, since some opted not to participate for their own reasons. This essentially meant that the teachers and classrooms who finally participated in the study were able to do so because of their schedule, time availability, the school circumstances and their interest in the study. Finally, since it was not in the scope of this study to gather the wider perspectives of other educational stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education and Culture, the educational psychologists and the career guidance counselors, to whom educators largely "laid the blame" for the situation created in public schools, future research could focus on examining these unexplored views. The views of the aforementioned educational stakeholders are equally important and could shed more light into the issue of the effectiveness of disciplinary practices and their effects on students.

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<sup>23</sup> See Table 6.1, pp. 147-149



## **8.6 Areas of future research:**

This study focused on examining the effectiveness of the disciplinary practices currently used in secondary public schools in Cyprus as well as the effects they may have on students. The study also explored the factors that can influence the quality implementation of these practices and render them ineffective. In examining the aforementioned research themes, the study came across a number of issues that are directly or indirectly related to the proper functioning of the existing practices and need more exploration. Among other things, future research could focus on investigating if the existing disciplinary practices could work more effectively with the addition of a 'diagnostic' and 'therapeutic' component in their design and actually deter disruptive behaviour from reoccurring. Working only with the 'punitive' component cannot help students overcome their problems and cease from being disruptive. Being helped and heard but also being taught to accept responsibility and face the consequences for breaching rules, could prove a much more efficient way to deal with disruptive behaviour and troubled youth. Since communication is key to better relations and prevention, one could also explore if, or which specific school principal and administrator practices can help reduce problematic student behaviour but also work towards building a communication's system that can bring both students and the educational staff closer so as to prevent or reduce the appearance of problematic behaviour. As known, consistency is key to the effectiveness of disciplinary practices and future research in this area could definitely explore if the consistent application of a school's disciplinary practices can have positive outcomes in reducing disruptive behaviour. Moreover, more research is needed to investigate the relationship between specific rule violations and disciplinary action resistance. In particular, one could examine which rules do students breach more easily and frequently and look into the factors/reasons that can cause this. Another interesting subject for research is to investigate if the 'gender bias' that has become an issue in the use of disciplinary practices is mostly

related to gender differences (how boys and girls react towards rules and disciplinary action) rather than actual gender bias differences. Another interesting research could compare the discipline levels between a mixed ability class, which contains students with highly uneven educational levels, and a mixed ability class which contains students whose educational levels are more balanced in order to find out whether particular student-setting/mixing can have different outcomes regarding student misbehaviour.

### **8.7 Conclusion:**

The previous chapter discussed in great detail the results of both the student survey, as well as the interviews that were conducted with a number of teachers and vice-principals to fulfill the purposes of this study.

In summing-up, the findings of this study indicate that the large majority of students find the existing disciplinary practices, namely in-school suspension and the downgrading of a student's conduct largely ineffective and incapable of dealing with disruptive behaviour and preventing students from misbehaving again.

In examining the effects that these practices can have on students' *social relations*, the study found that the teacher-student relationship and, to a lesser degree, the relationship between vice-principals and students can be negatively affected by disciplinary action. Students, however, reported that disciplinary practices have no effect regarding their relations with their peers, while their relationship with their parents may or may not be affected.

The study further indicated that instead of the remorseful and remedial effects that disciplinary practices should have on students, in order to be effective and deter future misbehaviour, in-school suspension and the downgrading of a student's conduct cause feelings of annoyance/irritation and anger, while they also make disciplined students feel more inclined to retaliate and seek revenge on the teacher

and/or vice-principal that they believe is responsible for the disciplinary action they received. At the same time, the majority of students reported that receiving these disciplinary practices does not make them feel ashamed or rejected but admitted that both practices make them feel stigmatized. It is important to note, at this point, that the study found that the disciplinary practice of suspension with a further downgrading of a student's conduct tends to cause more grief to disciplined students than the disciplinary practice of suspension alone. Feelings of annoyance/irritation, rejection, shame, anger, retaliation, stigmatization and inclination to misbehave, were always more powerfully felt by the students who received suspension with a downgrading of their conduct, when compared to students who only received suspension. As already explained, this finding has mostly to do with the negative and psychological connotations of this practice rather than with its actual ramifications.

In examining the effects that the disciplinary practices currently used have on students' academic performance and achievement, the study found that both practices are considered by disciplined students to have adverse effects on their academic achievement and future aspirations. This finding is of particular importance if one takes into consideration the fact that in Cyprus suspension takes place not only in school but also in class, and thus should have been able to produce positive results for disciplined students, at least academically, since, despite being suspended, students do not waste any valuable curriculum time and should be able to avoid the creation of any gaps. However, even though this is the intention and purpose of the implementation of the practice of in-class suspension, this study found that a large percentage of suspended students can neither concentrate nor participate in class, when they are forced to spend their suspension time in the classroom and be part of the normal class procedures. Even though this finding is important, however, it has to be mentioned that this study did not look into the concentration and participation levels of these students before they received suspension in order to compare the before and after effects of the disciplinary action. Because of this reason, as well as the fact that this study found a statistically



significant result which directly links lower levels of school performance and disciplinary record, the researcher is not in a position to establish a clear correlation concerning the effects that disciplinary action can actually have on students' academic performance.

Despite this inability, though, the result of this study is still indicative of the ineffectiveness of this disciplinary practice since, even if one argues that in-school suspension is producing positive academic results, those must be extremely minimal at best, as the number of students reporting low levels of concentration and participation when suspended in-class is quite large, thus signaling that these students do not feel part of the normal class procedures and are unwilling to exert any effort while in class.

As to the effects that the existing disciplinary practices can have on students' disruptive behaviour, students reported, throughout their questionnaire that their disruptive behaviour can only be enhanced and not discouraged by disciplinary action.

Interviewees, on their behalf, agreed with students that suspension and the practice of downgrading a student's conduct are largely ineffective and cannot handle or resolve students' maladaptive behaviours. In referring to the rising levels of indiscipline in secondary public schools in Cyprus, educators pointed out a number of school related factors that they believe are responsible not only for the creation and enhancement of indiscipline but also for the ineffectiveness of the existing disciplinary practices.

Among the most prominent reasons that educators highlighted were the following:

1) *Lack of a common policy*: The inability of schools to adhere and follow a common policy is hampered by three specific factors, namely the great use of discretion, the lack of strong leadership and the external pressure that is laid on schools by the

Ministry of Education and Culture and by students' parents. Besides the use of discretion which was a theme that emerged from the analysis of the interviews, the other two factors that are responsible for hindering the existence and implementation of a common policy, were also reported as factors in their own right that affect both student misbehaviour and the effectiveness of disciplinary practices.

2) *Lack of communication between educators and students:* Educators blamed this lack of communication to two main factors, namely the large size of schools and classes, and the curriculum and exam-based system of the lyceum cycle.

3) *Mixed ability classes and the type of school that students attend.*

4) *The inconsequential character of suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct.*

5) *The involvement and role of career guidance counselors and educational psychologists in the school's disciplinary matters.*

In examining the perceptions of educators concerning the reactions of students to disciplinary practices, the study found that the existing disciplinary practices are taken seriously and seem to deter the misbehaviour only of students who are generally well behaved and do not normally break the rules. For all other students, the existing disciplinary practices seem to be ineffective in halting or discouraging maladaptive behaviour.

In talking about the effects that suspension and the downgrading of a student's conduct can have on students, educators, in agreement with students, claimed that these practices can stir feelings of anger and revenge, while they also thought that they lead to the deterioration of the teacher-student relationship. Teachers and vice-principals highlighted, however, that the most important consequence that the existing disciplinary practices have is the reinforcement of a student's disruptive

behaviour, especially when: 1) Students do not understand or are not convinced of the reason that caused their “punishment”, 2) Students feel unjustly treated when they compare their transgressions to other students, 3) Disciplinary action is inconsistent, 4) Disciplinary action is trivial or inconsequential, 5) Parents reinforce their children’s maladaptive behaviour by supporting or justifying their misconducts.

To deal with the issue of the rising levels of indiscipline and the ineffectiveness of the disciplinary practices used, respondents emphasized that no measure will ever be successful unless it tackles the school related factors that lead to recurrent student misbehaviour. As such, the recommendations of teachers and vice-principals on how to reduce student indiscipline and turn the existing disciplinary practices into effective tools combating and deterring misbehaviour are, as one would expect, naturally linked to the reasons they hold responsible for the creation of maladaptive behaviours and for the failure of the disciplinary policies to deal with this issue. The recommendations of educators, as well as the wider results of this study, are important in that they could guide the Ministry of Education and Culture, as the competent educational authority in Cyprus, in reassessing disciplinary issues in secondary public schools in Cyprus and serve as a basis for relevant policy changes and initiatives. Based on the findings of this study, the implementation of these initiatives can be divided into two categories: a) *Immediate-Short term* and, b) *Medium-Long term*. Among the Immediate-Short term initiatives are:

**1) Establishment and adherence to common disciplinary practices and policies, which contain clear rules and meaningful practices:** Through this initiative, the Ministry will achieve the elimination of the use of discretion by all educational stakeholders, as well as the inconsistent application of disciplinary practices, which, as we have seen, causes several problems in the appropriate handling of students’ disciplinary problems. It is recalled that inconsistency was deemed by students to be the most important enhancer of disruptive behaviour. By eliminating the use of discretion and the inconsistency in the application of



disciplinary practices, students will have to face the consequences of their transgressions, irrespective of their individual circumstances, and will be constantly reminded that there are rules and regulations as well as a “moral authority” in place that should be respected. With the elimination of the use of discretion students will, in fact, feel more justly treated and a rebalancing of the school’s procedural and distributive justice system will be attained.

**2) Reevaluation and enforcement of disciplinary practices that are consequential but also help disruptive students deal with their problems:**

A common theme that emerged from this study is that besides the punitive aspect, disciplinary practices must also contain a diagnostic and a therapeutic component to be truly successful in dealing with disruptive behaviour. The existing disciplinary practices not only lack these two very important components but they also fail in the category of the punitive aspect, since disciplinary practices are virtually inconsequential. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Culture should reevaluate the existing policies and enforce practices that have consequences but also help disruptive students identify and tackle their problems. In particular, with the punitive component disciplinary practices will regain their meaning and have real consequences, while they will also make students understand and respect the rules and regulations of the school and consequently of the wider society. The diagnostic component will work towards identifying the root cause of the student’s problematic behaviour, while the therapeutic element will provide possible remedies to the student’s problems, thus contributing towards preventing future misbehaviour. Of course, both the diagnostic and therapeutic components need thorough planning and require the appointment of appropriate specialists who will compose the school’s support team.

**3) The minimization of external pressure:** The Ministry of Education and Culture should provide schools with clear policies and guidelines in which to operate and then allow schools to implement those policies accordingly. By continuously mingling in the internal affairs of each individual school, and especially on matters

of discipline, the Ministry not only inhibits the school's normal functioning, but it also undermines the school's as well as the educational staff's authority, as students realize that the only authority that matters and that should be respected, at the end of the day, is the Ministry. By becoming involved in disciplinary decisions and pressuring schools to change decisions, the Ministry is all of a sudden becoming part of the problem of inconsistency and the rising levels of disruptive behaviour, instead of being the source for the solution. Besides supporting and respecting schools and their disciplinary decisions, the Ministry should also stop providing parents with a framework in which they can interfere in the school's disciplinary decisions, which affect their children. Although parental involvement in education and school affairs should certainly be encouraged and welcomed, this participation should not be misinterpreted as interference and thus strict limits should be established as to how much involvement parents should have especially with regard to disciplinary matters. The school on its behalf should regularly inform parents of any problems that their children face and collaborate with them so as to detect the real cause(s) of misbehaviour.

**4) The harmonization of mixed ability classes:** By harmonizing and making mixed ability classes more academically even, the Ministry will help both the teacher who unsuccessfully struggles to serve all students' needs and the students of all academic levels, who, given the appropriate material, guidance and help they need, may even excel academically and reach their goals. More importantly for the purposes of this study, the harmonization of mixed ability classes will lead to the elimination of one important factor contributing to disruptive behaviour, since weak students and students who are not interested in pursuing higher education will not have to be part of a class preparing for University and College entrance. Therefore, their frustration, which can lead to disruptive behaviour will be avoided. Another important advantage of classes who are more academically balanced is that the teacher may be able to communicate better with students and form closer, more humane relationships, a development, which, as existing literature shows also discourages students' externalizing behaviours.



**5) The enhancement of the educational role and identity of technical and vocational schools:** Besides the issue of mixed ability classes, educators argued that one of the reasons leading to the rising levels of indiscipline is that many students, and particularly the weak students and the students not interested in pursuing higher education, find themselves in the wrong type of school. As such, the Ministry of Education and Culture might have to look deeper into the operation of the technical and vocational schools and examine ways of enhancing their educational role and identity in order to attract more students. To do that, technical and vocational schools will have to be face-lifted and improved so that their status and role is upgraded and enhanced not only on paper but also in the eyes of the wider society.

Among the Medium-Long term initiatives are the following:

**1) Appointment of psychologists on a permanent basis in schools:** This initiative should of course be linked in a way to the introduction of the diagnostic and therapeutic component in the disciplinary practices. However, even though the establishment of psychologists in each school is an important element in dealing with disruptive behaviour, in that students' problems will be able to be assessed and maybe even treated, their appointment should be escorted with a clearly established definition pertaining to the role they should have in schools, which should definitely not allow them to be involved in decision making processes regarding disciplinary matters, in ways that empower them to influence and essentially determine the school's disciplinary action against the student.

**2) The creation of smaller schools and classes:** The aim of this initiative is to foster communication and establish closer relationships between educators and students. Since the lack of communication between educators and students is considered an important reason that enhances indiscipline and renders the existing disciplinary practices ineffective, the elimination of the impersonal factor that characterizes large schools can certainly assist in the formation of more personal



and therefore supportive educator-student relationships, which, as this study showed, is a clear student demand. Moreover, the creation of smaller schools and classes can lead in the prompt detection and prevention of problematic behaviour that smaller communities are able to facilitate.

**3) The modification of final exams and/or the modification of the selection mechanisms so as to utilize students' School Leaving Certificate to enter tertiary education institutions:**

As this study showed, final exams are considered a significant root-cause of many of the problems that secondary public schools in Cyprus face today, including indiscipline, since they place too much emphasis on cognitive-intellectual knowledge and ignore other skills and abilities students may have. They also exert enormous pressure on teachers to deliver the examination syllabus and on students to get prepared for the final exams required for entry into higher institutions. This situation leads to the straining of the teacher-student relationship, as weak students or students who are not interested in pursuing higher education may feel unappreciated and worthless in the current system, and may resort to exhibiting their frustration through maladaptive behaviours. Teachers are forced to deal with these disruptive students and therefore waste valuable time to deliver the demanding curriculum. With increased competition to enter tertiary institutions and a situation where teachers spend much of their time dealing with disruptive behaviours and not preparing students to take University and College entry exams, the majority of students resort to private tutoring, which, in turn, compounds the problems that schools are already facing, as private tutoring can indirectly lead to higher levels of indiscipline.

All these problems could be avoided or eliminated if the Ministry of Education and Culture and all educational stakeholders could think of ways to modify their selection mechanisms. For instance, the students who are interested in entering Higher Institutions should follow a different curriculum and assessment plan from the ones that do not have such aspirations. Of course, the curriculum that each category of students will follow (academic or not), should be impartial and in

proportion to all students' needs so that every single student will be given the opportunity to succeed in the academic path that he/she chooses. It is imperative that "failure must be the individual's and not the school's fault" so that no student will feel neglected or undervalued by the school system (Broadfoot, 1979).

Another recommendation that educators proposed is that the Ministry of Education and Culture should make more use of the 'Student's School Leaving Certificate' so that students will be forced, in a way, to put emphasis on all academic subjects and not just the examined ones. If students know that their School Leaving Certificate will be used as their entrance to Higher Institutions and that all subjects matter at the end of the day, they will put more effort on all subjects (since the higher their grades in all subjects the better their chances to enter Colleges and Universities). But before choosing a different assessment plan, one, should be cautious, as Broadfoot (1986) advised, that "any alternative procedure has as much credibility in attesting competence, in providing some degree of control over what is to be taught, and most important, in regulating and legitimating the process of occupational selection and rejection" (p.58). One should also add to the above, that any alternative procedure to the established system, must be practical, implementable and satisfy to a great degree all educational stakeholders.

To achieve the aforementioned initiatives, all educational stakeholders, and in particular the Ministry of Education and Culture, as the competent educational authority, should acknowledge the profound problems facing secondary public schools, today, and work towards addressing the core of the problems in a sustained, committed and well-designed policy framework. Only in this way schools will be able to combat the rising levels of student indiscipline and turn the existing disciplinary practices or 'pedagogical measures' into meaningful tools, which can be successful and effective in dealing with students' maladaptive behaviours.

As Mizell (1978) supported: " (...) the quality of any given program is largely dependent upon the commitment of those who plan the program and the leadership

and energy they bring to its implementation" (p.225). More than 30 years later, this assessment is as valid as ever. The ball is now effectively in the court of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry should reassess the situation objectively and commit itself in leading the change with new and substantive policies and initiatives.

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# Appendices



## Appendix A

### LETTER OF INFORMATION AND REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SECONDARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN CYPRUS

To: Ministry of Education and Culture- Secondary School Division/School Principals

Subject: Permission to conduct research in secondary public schools.

My name is Christina Aristidou and I am a third year PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). My PhD involves research concerning the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as currently used in secondary public schools, the effects that these may have on students and the factors that may be influencing the quality implementation of these practices. This letter aims to provide you with information about my research study and request your formal permission to conduct this research in secondary public schools, as the views and perceptions of students, teachers and vice-principals form an integral part of my study. The data collected from my research will be analyzed and evaluated and the results will then be discussed in my thesis, which will be submitted towards the fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD Degree in Education. The study is approved by the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin and is supervised by Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore.

My study will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Through comprehensive questionnaires handed out to students and interviews conducted with teachers and vice-principals, I will attempt to answer the following research questions: 1) How effective do students and educators believe that the disciplinary practices currently used in their school are, 2) What are the effects of these disciplinary practices on students': a) social relations, b) emotional feelings and reactions towards disciplinary practices c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour 3) Are there any school related factors influencing the effectiveness or quality implementation of disciplinary practices.

I believe that it is important to receive answers to the abovementioned questions from students, teachers and vice-principals as such a triangulated and comprehensive approach will provide more validity to my research and to the results of this study.

The findings of this study will provide the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as the Government of the Republic of Cyprus with valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the existing disciplinary practices, the effects that these practices can have on students and the factors that can influence their effectiveness so that the relevant policies regarding disciplinary practices can be re-examined and re-evaluated, if needed, to benefit public schools. A summary of the findings of the study, if requested, can be made available to you after the completion of the study.

Please sign both attached pages (Permission Forms) to indicate that you consent to grant permission for this study and that you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this study. Return one copy to me and keep the other one for your records along with the letter of information.

If you have any questions about the study please do not hesitate to contact me at 99-665558 or email me at [aristidc@tcd.ie](mailto:aristidc@tcd.ie). You can also reach my supervisor Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore at 00353XXXXXXXXX or email her at [momoore@tcd.ie](mailto:momoore@tcd.ie).

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Kind Regards,

Christina Aristidou

## Research study on Disciplinary Practices

### Ministry of Education and Culture- Permission Form

I have read the information above and received a copy of the Permission Form for my files. I am fully aware of the purposes and objectives of this study and therefore:

I, \_\_\_\_\_(name), give permission for the participation of public secondary schools in the study 'Disciplinary Practices' being conducted by Christina Aristidou, a PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name), do not give permission for the participation of public secondary schools in the study 'Disciplinary Practices' being conducted by Christina Aristidou, a PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin.

Please circle the appropriate answer:

The Ministry of Education and Culture wishes to receive a summary of the findings of the study:

YES      NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about the study please do not hesitate to contact me at 99-665558 or email me at [aristidc@tcd.ie](mailto:aristidc@tcd.ie). You can also reach my supervisor Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore at 00353XXXXXXXXX or email her at [momoore@tcd.ie](mailto:momoore@tcd.ie).



## Appendix B

### LETTER OF INFORMATION TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS /CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE SURVEY

To: Students and Parents

Subject: Letter of Information-Participation in a Research Study

My name is Christina Aristidou and I am a third year PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). My PhD involves research concerning the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as currently used in secondary public schools, the effects that these may have on students and the factors that may be influencing the quality implementation of these practices. This letter aims to provide you with information about my research study and request your permission for the participation of your child in this research. The views and perceptions of your children about their school's disciplinary practices form an integral part of my study. The data collected from my research will be analyzed and evaluated and the results will then be discussed in my thesis, which will be submitted towards the fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD Degree in Education. The study is approved by the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin and is supervised by Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore. My research study has also received the formal permission of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examined and finally approved the questionnaire that will be handed out to your children.

My study will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Through comprehensive questionnaires handed out to students and interviews conducted with teachers and vice-principals, I will attempt to answer the following research questions: 1) How effective do students and educators believe that the disciplinary practices currently used in their school are, 2) What are the effects of these disciplinary practices on students': a) social relations, b) emotional feelings and reactions towards disciplinary practices c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour, 3) Are there any school related factors influencing the effectiveness or quality implementation of disciplinary practices.

I believe that it is important to receive answers to the aforementioned questions from students, teachers and vice-principals, as such a triangulated and comprehensive approach will provide more validity to my research and to the results of this study. In this respect, I

would like to request your permission for the participation of your child in the survey that will be conducted at your child's school by the researcher. The researcher asks the school principal's permission before proceeding to the selection of the classes that will participate in this research and before distributing the questionnaires. The questionnaires will be handed out in one of your child's classes at a particular day and time that will be scheduled in advance. The questionnaires are anonymous and none of the questions included insult your child in any way. Your child's participation is voluntary. If you do not want your child to participate in this study you do not have to give a reason for your refusal. You also have the right to request your child's withdrawal from the study at any time.

The findings of this study will provide the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as the Government of the Republic of Cyprus with valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the existing disciplinary practices, the effects that these practices can have on students and the factors that can influence their effectiveness so that the relevant policies regarding disciplinary practices can be re-examined and re-evaluated if needed, to benefit public schools. A summary of the findings of the study will be available to your child's school after the completion of the study and you may request a copy if you wish to view the findings of the study.

At the end of this information letter, you will find attached a consent form. If you do not want your child to participate in this study, please sign the consent form and return it to your child to bring it back and hand it to his/her class mentor. Please note that if I do not receive the consent form that concerns your child's participation in this research study, within a week, I will consider that you agree to your child's participation in this research.

If you have any questions about the study please do not hesitate to contact me at 99-665558 or email me at [aristidc@tcd.ie](mailto:aristidc@tcd.ie). You can also reach my supervisor Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore at 00353XXXXXXXX or email her at [momoore@tcd.ie](mailto:momoore@tcd.ie).

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

Kind Regards,

Christina Aristidou

**Research study on Disciplinary Practices**

**Parent/Student Consent Form**

I have read the information above and I am fully aware of the purposes, objectives and conditions of this study. Therefore:

I, \_\_\_\_\_(name), consent to the participation of my child in the study 'Disciplinary Practices' being conducted by Christina Aristidou, a PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin.

I, \_\_\_\_\_(name), do not consent to the participation of my child in the study 'Disciplinary Practices' being conducted by Christina Aristidou, a PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin.

\_\_\_\_\_

Your signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

If you have any questions about the study please do not hesitate to contact me at 99-665558 or email me at [aristidc@tcd.ie](mailto:aristidc@tcd.ie). You can also reach my supervisor Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore at 00353XXXXXXXX or email her at [momoore@tcd.ie](mailto:momoore@tcd.ie).



## Appendix C

### LETTER OF INFORMATION TO VICE-PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS/ CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN AN INTERVIEW

To: Vice Principals, Teachers

Subject: Letter of Information- Participation in a Research Study

My name is Christina Aristidou and I am a third year PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). My PhD involves research concerning the effectiveness of disciplinary practices as currently used in secondary public schools, the effects that these may have on students and the factors that may be influencing the quality implementation of these practices. This letter aims to provide you with information about my research study and request your participation in this research, as the views and perceptions of students, teachers and vice principals form an integral part of my study. The data collected from my research will be analyzed and evaluated and the results will then be discussed in my thesis, which will be submitted towards the fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD Degree in Education. The study is approved by the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin and is supervised by Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore. The study is also approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

My study will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Through comprehensive questionnaires handed out to students and interviews conducted with teachers and vice-principals, I will attempt to answer the following research questions: 1) How effective do students and educators believe that the disciplinary practices currently used in their school are, 2) What are the effects of these disciplinary practices on students': a) social relations, b) emotional feelings and reactions towards disciplinary practices, c) academic performance and achievement and d) disruptive behaviour, 3) Are there any school related factors influencing the effectiveness or quality implementation of disciplinary practices.

I believe that it is important to receive answers to the aforementioned questions from students, teachers and vice-principals, as such a triangulated and comprehensive approach will provide more validity to my research and to the results of this study. In this respect, I would like to request your participation in the interview portion of this study.

Interviews are considered to be one of the best methods to collect data from key-informants who are directly involved, engaged and affected by the policies implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in a one 30 minute interview that will be conducted at any convenient time and place for you. During this interview, I will ask you questions regarding your perceptions about the effectiveness of disciplinary practices, the effects they can have on students and the factors that may be influencing their implementation. You are not obliged to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. Please note, however, that I am willing to take written notes if the tape recorder discomforts you. All records will be coded and your name will not appear on the transcripts. Tapes will be stored in a secure place that only I have access to it. Six months after the completion of the study all recordings will be deleted. All information is highly confidential and thus your name will not appear in any of the final reports of the study. However, you should be aware that because of the descriptive nature of a qualitative study I am unable to guarantee anonymity. This means that if someone reading the study knows you very well, they may be able to recognize your sayings.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you do not have to give a reason for your refusal. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The findings of this study will provide the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as the Government of the Republic of Cyprus with valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the existing disciplinary practices, the effects that these practices can have on students and the factors that can influence their effectiveness so that the relevant policies regarding disciplinary practices can be re-examined and re-evaluated if needed, to benefit public schools. A summary of the findings of the study will be available to the school that you work after the completion of the study and you may request a copy if you wish to view the findings.

Please sign both attached pages (Consent Forms) to indicate that you consent to participate in this study. Return one copy to me and keep the other one for your records along with the letter of information.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at 99-665558 or email me at [aristidc@tcd.ie](mailto:aristidc@tcd.ie). You can also reach my supervisor Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore at 00353XXXXXXXXX or email her at [momoore@tcd.ie](mailto:momoore@tcd.ie).

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

Kind Regards,

Christina Aristidou



**Research study on Disciplinary Practices**

**Vice-Principal/Teacher Consent Form**

I have read the information above and received a copy of the Consent Form for my files. I am fully aware of the purposes, objectives and conditions of this study and therefore:

I, \_\_\_\_\_(name), consent to participate in the study 'Disciplinary Practices' being conducted by Christina Aristidou, a PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin.

I, \_\_\_\_\_(name), do not consent to participate in the study 'Disciplinary Practices' being conducted by Christina Aristidou, a PhD student at the Department of Education at Trinity College Dublin.

Please circle the appropriate answer:

- 1) I agree to be recorded: YES    NO
- 2) I wish to receive a summary of the findings of the study: YES    NO

\_\_\_\_\_

Your signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

If you have any questions about the study please do not hesitate to contact me at 99-665558 or email me at [aristidc@tcd.ie](mailto:aristidc@tcd.ie). You can also reach my supervisor Professor Mona Astrid O' Moore at 00353XXXXXXXXX or email her at [momoore@tcd.ie](mailto:momoore@tcd.ie).

Appendix D

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

School \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ 2009

In this questionnaire, you will find questions that concern your school's disciplinary practices, namely suspension and downgrading of a student's conduct. This questionnaire aims to find out: a) Your perceptions about the disciplinary practices that your school uses, b) The effectiveness of these practices c) The emotional, social and academic effects that they can have on students and finally d) The effects that these disciplinary practices can have on students' disruptive behaviour.

We say that a pupil is being disruptive when he/she exhibits off-task and rule-breaking behaviour that interferes with the teacher's work, disrupts class procedures and impedes others from learning.

Do not put your name in this booklet. No one will know how you have personally answered these questions. But it is important that you answer carefully and sincerely about how you really feel. Sometimes it may be hard to decide what to answer. In such a case, please read the question once again carefully and select the answer that you feel is the most appropriate for you. If you have any questions, please raise your hand. Please make sure that you will: a) **Follow** the instructions before you answer b) **Read** all the options before you answer c) **Answer** all questions.

Most of the questions concern your school life since the beginning of the school year. So when you answer, think of how life has been over the past six months and not only of how it is just now. Usually, there are several answers next to each question. Each answer has a letter in front and you answer by circling one letter unless specifically asked to do otherwise.

## GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND ACADEMIC INFORMATION

1) First of all, how old are you? Please write your answer on the line: \_\_\_\_\_

For question 2, if you are a girl, circle the letter A. If you are a boy, circle the letter B.

2) Are you a girl or a boy?

A Girl

B Boy

Please proceed in the same way with the following question

3) Where do you live?

A City

B Village

C Suburbs

For question 4, circle the letter that stands in front of the description of how you feel about school. For example, if you like school very much, circle the letter A. If you do not like school at all circle the letter E etc

4) Do you like school?

A Yes, very much so

B Mostly

C Sometimes yes, sometimes no

D Not so much

E No, not at all

5) In which of the suggested categories do you find yourself academically?

A Excellent (19-20)

B Very Well (16-18)

C Good (13-15)

D Satisfactory (10-12)

E Poor (1-9)

6) Do you have any known learning difficulties?

A Yes

B No



If Yes, please explain what is your learning difficulty?

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- 7) Do you attend your school's literacy support program?      A Yes  
B No

- 8) Do you participate in other extracurricular activities in your school, such as the school's choir, sports, school's annual journal publication etc?
- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| A | Yes |
| B | No  |

## STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SCHOOL'S DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES AND RELATIONSHIP TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR

- [illegible]

- 10) Are you familiar with the Code and the disciplinary action that is enforced for each rule violation?
- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

- 11) Would you say that the disciplinary practices that your school uses are **fair**?
- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

- 12) Would you react in a disruptive way if you believed that the disciplinary practice taken against you is **unfair**?
- A No, not at all
- B Not so much
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Mostly
- E Yes, very much so

- 13) Would you say that the disciplinary practices that your school uses are **strict**?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so
- 14) Would you react in a disruptive way if you believed that the disciplinary practice taken against you is **strict**?
- A Yes, very much so
  - B Mostly
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Not so much
  - E No, not at all
- 15) Would you say that the application of disciplinary practices is **consistent** in applying the same sanction for similar acts of misbehaviour?
- A Yes, very much so
  - B Mostly
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Not so much
  - E No, not at all
- 16) Do you believe that inconsistency in the application of disciplinary practices gives disruptive students the opportunity to continue or repeat their misbehaviour?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so
- 17) Do you believe that disciplinary practices are necessary for keeping order in a school?
- A Yes, very much so
  - B Mostly
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Not so much
  - E No, not at all

## EFFECTIVENESS OF DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

18) Would you say that the disciplinary practices that your school uses are effective in solving a student's behavioural problems?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

19) Would you say that the disciplinary practices that your school uses reduce a student's behavioural problems?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

20) Would you say that the disciplinary practices that your school uses can worsen a student's behavioural problems?

- A No, not at all
- B Not so much
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Mostly
- E Yes, very much so

21) Would you say that suspension is an effective way of dealing with students who display disruptive behaviour?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

22) Would you say that suspension can deter students who display disruptive behaviour from misbehaving again?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 23) Would you say that downgrading a student's conduct is an effective way of dealing with students who display disruptive behaviour? | A Yes, very much so<br>B Mostly<br>C Sometimes yes, sometimes no<br>D Not so much<br>E No, not at all |
| 24) Would you say that downgrading a student's conduct can deter students who display disruptive behaviour from misbehaving again?    | A Yes, very much so<br>B Mostly<br>C Sometimes yes, sometimes no<br>D Not so much<br>E No, not at all |

For question 25 that follows, please place a number from 1-6 next to the letters A B C D E F in order to indicate which of the suggested practices you find most effective (in order of preference). Number 1 corresponds to the practice you find most effective, number 2 to the next practice you find most effective etc until number 6 which corresponds to the practice you find the least effective.

25) Which of the suggested practices do you believe could help reduce a student's disruptive behaviour?

- A - Have someone at school to whom you can talk about your problems
- B - Have conflict resolution classes at school
- C - Have a mandatory social work program for students who display disruptive behaviour (e.g. work at hospitals, special needs schools, NGOs etc)
- D - Have mandatory Saturday school for students who display disruptive behaviour
- E - Have the student who is suspended be transferred to another supervised class instead of spending suspension time in his/her normal class setting.
- F- Have the downgrading of a student's conduct show on a student's Leaving School Certificate and be taken into consideration by higher educational institutions.

26) Can you suggest or think of another disciplinary practice or measure that your school could enforce to deal effectively with students who display disruptive behaviour?

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## SOCIAL EFFECTS OF DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES ON STUDENTS

- 27) Would you say that disciplinary action adversely affects the relationship between the disciplined student and his/her teachers?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so
- 28) Would you say that disciplinary action adversely affects the relationship between the disciplined student and his/her vice-principals?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so
- 29) Would you say that disciplinary action adversely affects the relationship between the disciplined student and his/her classmates?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so
- 30) Would you say that disciplinary action adversely affects the relationship between the disciplined student and his/her parents?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so
- 31) Would you say that students who get frequently suspended are isolated in their school environment?
- A Yes, very much so
  - B Mostly
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Not so much
  - E No, not at all

- 32) Would you say that students who get frequently suspended tend to socialize with peers who also display disruptive behaviour?

A No, not at all

B Not so much

C Sometimes yes, sometimes no

D Mostly

E Yes, very much so
- 33) Would you say that the students who receive a downgrading of their conduct are isolated in their school environment?

A No, not at all

B Not so much

C Sometimes yes, sometimes no

D Mostly

E Yes, very much so

**DISCIPLINARY HISTORY AND REASONS OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR**

- 34) Have you been disciplined in the last 6 months?

A Yes

B No

**PLEASE NOTE:** If you answered **YES** please proceed with the rest of the questions. If you answered **NO** then please make sure that you have answered all questions from number **1** to **34** and **hand your questionnaire to your teacher. Thank you for your valuable participation in this research!**

- 35) How often have you been disciplined in the last 6 months?

A 1 time in the last 6 months

B 2 times in the last 6 months

C About 1 time a month

D About 2 times a month

E Every week

36) What was the reason for which you were disciplined the last time?



**PLEASE NOTICE HOW TO ANSWER QUESTION 37 THAT FOLLOWS:**

**A)** Students who have only been suspended should circle only answer A in question 37 and proceed with answering all questions from number **38 -53**.

**B)** Students who have been suspended and have further received a downgrading of their conduct should circle both answers A and B in question 37 and proceed with answering all questions from **38-66**.

37) What disciplinary action/s have you received  
during this academic school year?

- A Suspension
- B Downgrading of conduct

**EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES ON SUSPENDED STUDENTS**

38) Do you feel that suspension was the appropriate    A Yes  
action to be taken for your last offence?        B No

If not, what do you think that the school should have done regarding your case?

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39) Does suspension bother you?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

40) Does suspension make you feel rejected?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

41) Does suspension make you feel ashamed of yourself?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

42) Do you feel angry at the teacher who refers you?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

43) Do you feel angry at the vice-principal who suspends you?

- A Yes, very much so
- B Mostly
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Not so much
- E No, not at all

44) Do you feel inclined to retaliate the teacher who refers you?

- A No, not at all
- B Not so much
- C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
- D Mostly
- E Yes, very much so

45) Do you feel inclined to retaliate the vice-principal who suspends you?

A No, not at all  
B Not so much  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Mostly  
E Yes, very much so

46) Do you feel inclined to misbehave again after you receive suspension?

A No, not at all  
B Not so much  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Mostly  
E Yes, very much so

47) Does suspension make you feel stigmatized?

A No, not at all  
B Not so much  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Mostly  
E Yes, very much so

48) Is there anything else you would like to add about how you felt when you were suspended other than the feelings mentioned above?

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49) Has suspension been effective in helping you behave, so as not to be suspended again?

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#### ACADEMIC EFFECTS OF DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES ON SUSPENDED STUDENTS

- 50) Do you feel that you can concentrate in class when you are suspended?
- A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all
- 51) Do you feel that you can participate in class when you are suspended?
- A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all
- 52) Do you feel that repeated suspension might have a negative effect on your academic achievement?
- A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all
- 53) Do you feel that repeated suspension might have a negative effect on your future aspirations?
- A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all

#### EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES ON STUDENTS WHO HAVE RECEIVED A DOWNGRADING OF THEIR CONDUCT

- 54) Do you feel that the downgrading of your conduct was the appropriate and fair action to be taken for your case?
- A Yes  
B No

If not, what do you think that the school should have done about your case?

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- 55) Does receiving a downgrading of your conduct bother you?
- A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all

- 56) Does receiving a downgrading of your conduct make you feel ashamed of yourself?
- A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all

- 57) Does receiving a downgrading of your conduct make you feel rejected?
- A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all

- 58) Do you feel angry at any member of the educational staff who votes in favour of downgrading your conduct?
- A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all

59) Do you feel inclined to retaliate any member of the educational staff who votes in favour of downgrading your conduct?

A Yes, very much so  
B Mostly  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Not so much  
E No, not at all

60) Do you feel inclined to misbehave again after receiving a downgrading of your conduct?

A No, not at all  
B Not so much  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Mostly  
E Yes, very much so

61) Does receiving a downgrading of your conduct make you feel stigmatized?

A No, not at all  
B Not so much  
C Sometimes yes, sometimes no  
D Mostly  
E Yes, very much so

62) Is there anything else you would like to add about how you felt when you received a downgrading of your conduct, other than the feelings mentioned above?

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63) Has the practice of downgrading your conduct been effective in helping you behave, so as not to receive this disciplinary action again?

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**ACADEMIC EFFECTS OF DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES ON STUDENTS WHO HAVE RECEIVED A DOWNGRADING OF THEIR CONDUCT**

- 64) Do you feel like participating in any of your school's activities after receiving a downgrading of your conduct?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so
- 65) Do you feel that the downgrading of your conduct may have a negative effect on your academic achievement?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so
- 66) Do you feel that the downgrading of your conduct may have a negative effect on your future aspirations?
- A No, not at all
  - B Not so much
  - C Sometimes yes, sometimes no
  - D Mostly
  - E Yes, very much so

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND YOUR VALUABLE PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH**

## Appendix E

### Interview Protocol

#### A. General Information:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your subject specialty?
3. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher?
4. How long have you been working in this school?

#### B. School discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices

6. How would you evaluate the disciplinary level in public schools? Has anything changed in the last few years? If yes, what has changed?
7. What is your opinion on the disciplinary practices (suspension & downgrading of a student's conduct that the public school uses? Do you find these practices effective?
8. Are there any factors (in school or out of school) that can affect the implementation of the currently used disciplinary practices?

#### C. Students' reaction/response to disciplinary practices

9. How do students react to or take disciplinary action?

#### D. General effects/consequences of disciplinary practices on students and on students' disruptive behaviour

10. Do disciplinary practices affect students?
11. Do you believe that disciplinary practices can affect a student's disruptive behaviour (either reinforce or weaken it)?

#### E. Suggestions

12. What would you suggest in regards to the matter of discipline and the effective use of disciplinary practices in schools?

## Appendix F

### INTERVIEW SAMPLE

The interview presented below is only one example of how the interview protocol was carried out. According to the flow of the discussion, the researcher had to alter the sequence of the interview protocol to adjust it to the flow of the conversation or discussion, since, in many cases, while answering one question the respondents touched upon issues that fell within other protocol categories.

#### A. General Questions

R: Hello. How are you?

I: I am good thank you and yourself?

R: I am good thank you. Thank you for accepting to participate in this study.

I: My pleasure. I find your subject quite interesting and very contemporary.

R: Yes it is quite contemporary but you can enlighten me a bit more on the subject through our interview... So let us begin. What's your name and specialty and how long have you been working in this school?

P: My name is X, I am a science teacher and I have 12 years of experience in public schools. I have been working in this particular school for the last 3 years.

#### B. School discipline and effectiveness of disciplinary practices

R: How would you evaluate the disciplinary level in public schools? Has anything changed in the last few years? If yes, what has changed?



I: Things have definitely changed a lot since we were students. To be honest with you, there is no discipline in public schools anymore... Students are out of control and we cannot restrain them. Leniency above all (emphatically said).

R: Why is that? What do you mean by saying leniency above all?

I: I consider that the principal of the school plays a very significant role in retaining school discipline. He/she is the one who will implement discipline and then, of course the school's vice-principals and teachers will follow their principals' example. If vice-principals are lenient and they do not implement the school's rules and regulations where appropriate, if they do not "punish" the student for his/her school uniform violation, for instance, or for any other sort of misbehaviour that students exhibit, then the class teacher cannot maintain an appropriate level of discipline in his/her class or control students. The same happens with the school's principal. Therefore, the principal has to be firm and control school discipline, so that the rest of the school faculty can follow his example. If the principal of the school is indifferent or lenient towards student indiscipline then the school is malfunctioning. Another reason for the observed indiscipline is that the current disciplinary practices have no bearing on students because they are not really applied and they are totally inconsequential. In-school suspension or what I should really say is in-class suspension means nothing to the student who receives it. What will happen to the student if he/she receives suspension? Nothing at all. There are no consequences and the student feels no consequences. The same applies for the practice of downgrading a student's conduct. There is no meaning to this practice and the student does not even understand the consequences of this practice. The student will graduate after all his/her bad behaviour and will receive his/her School Leaving Certificate despite the downgrading of his/her conduct. As you will know, when students receive suspension they also accumulate absences. However, the school faculty will unlawfully erase the student's absences at the end of the school year by projecting that the student has psychological problems "The poor kid faces many problems at home, he/she is not feeling very well etc etc... so we should really

allow the student to pass to the next grade". Everybody passes to the next grade. This is the rule of the day! And if we don't unlawfully erase the students' absences, then the Ministry of Education and Culture will do that, by sending a mandate, or by forcing the principal and the school faculty to pass the student to the next grade or spare him/her from some imminent disciplinary action because of this or that reason. And let us not forget the parents. Parents have the right to object and finally overrule the school faculty's decisions and thus students get exactly what they want and do not even come close to understanding the consequences of their actions. Therefore, the slackness in discipline or the rising levels of indiscipline that one observes in public schools, today, have to do mainly with the fact that nobody is working in an appropriate manner since nobody applies the rules.

R: So what you are saying is that the school principal and his/her team plays a significant role in retaining student discipline and implementing the disciplinary practices. Right?

I: Definitely.

R: You have also mentioned that disciplinary practices are not really effective because they have no real consequences for students or they are not really applied.

I: Yes that's right.

R: Talk to me a bit more about the role of the Ministry of Education and Culture concerning disciplinary practices. Would you say that the Ministry of Education and Culture could be a factor influencing the implementation of the school's disciplinary practices?

I: Of course it is! As I have mentioned to you earlier, the Ministry can overrule the school's decisions if it so wishes, despite the fact that the school faculty's decisions should be respected...You see the school faculty is supposedly "the higher and competent authority to take decisions regarding disciplinary or pass/fail matters

concerning students". However, if parents do not like the school faculty's decision regarding their children they rush to the Ministry of Education and Culture and file their complaints...they do whatever they can to annul our decisions and they are always successful. The Ministry supports parents more than they have ever supported us. So you get the picture about what is going on...

R: So you are saying that parents are also a factor influencing the effectiveness of disciplinary practices?

I: (laughs ironically) The pressure they exert to both the school's principal and the Ministry of Education and Culture is just absurd...absurd! You see the basic problem for me (concerning student indiscipline and the ineffectiveness of disciplinary policies) has started from educational psychologists. There exists a remarkably erroneous perception that the student who has personal or other problems has the alibi to do whatever he/she wants. This perception, however, creates huge problems to society...what will become of this student when he/she enters the wider society of adults? He/she will steal and be excused. He/she will kill and be excused, *because he/she is a child of divorced parents or a child in a family of domestic abuse*. Students should understand that the school is there to support them, not to excuse them. They should know and feel that there is someone at school to help them deal with their problems, not to help them take advantage of their situation. Students with problems should be treated within the social team and not outside of it...disciplinary practices could definitely be effective if they had consequences and if we didn't consider that we are "harming" or "punishing" the student if we enforce the measure. Students should be aware that when they do something wrong they will face the consequences, despite their personal situations. That's just how society works... We can't just excuse students all the time and let students know that they can get away with anything...this is just so wrong!

D. General effects/consequences of disciplinary practices on students and on students' disruptive behaviour



R: So, what you are saying then, is that by not applying the consequence (disciplinary measure), the student can be reinforced in his/her maladaptive behaviour...

I: If disciplinary practices were appropriately implemented, then they wouldn't be able to reinforce a student's disruptive behaviour. But they are not...and the non-existence of limits can definitely reinforce a student's disruptive or problematic behaviour. If the student knows that he will not face real consequences for any violation of the school's rules and regulations, then he will repeat his misbehaviour and whether we use suspension or downgrading of a student's conduct, or any other measure that the school has, nothing will be achieved, but the reinforcement of the student's maladaptive behaviour, because these practices have no consequences anymore. Whether you apply them or not, it's the same thing.

R: Besides reinforcing their maladaptive behaviour would you say that disciplinary practices have any other effects on disciplined students, like social, emotional or academic effects?

I: I don't really think that their social life is influenced by disciplinary action. Their parents back them up for everything and their peers look up to them. So I don't believe that they have any social effects.

R: Could their relationship with their teachers or vice-principals be affected?

I: Well, if you had a student in your class who repeatedly disrupted your lesson and you had to refer this student all the time, wouldn't you be affected by it? If someone gets on your nerves all the time, of course you get affected and the relationships of teachers and vice-principals with students are certainly impacted from repeated disciplinary action. You have been a teacher and I believe you know what I mean.

R: Yes I understand what you are saying...What about emotionally and academically? Would you say that disciplinary action affects student's feelings or academic achievement?

I: Well, a lot of anger is certainly created on both sides...especially when students do not understand why you referred them or why they have been disciplined. Although they don't care per se about the penalty they receive, because as I already told you there are no real consequences and students are aware of this, disciplinary action bothers them because they think it is unfair. Students do not easily accept culpability and tend to blame others for their misconducts. Some teachers refrain from referring students just because they are afraid that students will retaliate one way or another.

R: What about any academic effects? Does disciplinary action affect these students' academic achievement?

I: Most of the students who are repeat offenders do not have the greatest academic performance. As you will probably know disruption is related to academic performance. Some of these students shouldn't even find themselves in the ordinary lyceum classroom because they do not even understand what we are talking about. They have many deficiencies...major deficiencies. There are many students in the lyceum cycle who do not even know how to read or write. I am sure you have observed that when you were teaching. So when you suspend this student and he must spend his suspension time in class, you give him one more reason to cause more disruption and pay no attention in class.

### C. Students' reaction/response to disciplinary practices

R: You have mentioned earlier that disciplinary action bothers students. So would you say that they take disciplinary action seriously?

I: As I told you earlier, it may bother them, because they think it is unfair, but they do not take it seriously. If they did take disciplinary practices seriously they wouldn't repeat their misbehaviour. But how can they take them seriously when we don't take them seriously? If you warn students or threaten them with suspension they just laugh at you or ignore you...it means nothing to them. It is a very small number of students that take disciplinary action seriously and those are the ones who don't really misbehave. I really don't think that the rest of the students care about disciplinary action and that's evident by their continuous misbehaviour.

### E. Suggestions

R: So what would you suggest in regards to the matter of discipline and the effective use of disciplinary practices in schools? How would you go about changing things so as to deal with student indiscipline and make the use of disciplinary practices effective?

I: First of all, the Ministry should understand that not all students should receive a Student Leaving Certificate if they do not deserve one. The Ministry should set some limits and adhere to them. Passing all students to the next grade, no matter what, or granting them their Student Leaving Certificate without really deserving one, is just wrong and it has to stop. There should be other type of schools for students who are not suitable to be in the lyceum cycle. There are of course the technical and vocational schools, but the way they operate is just wrong. Upon graduation, for instance, a student who attends the technical and vocational school should be fully qualified to enter the labour market. The Ministry of Education and Culture should give a respectable alternative to disruptive students or students who do not belong in general education. Not all students can graduate from the lyceum cycle, whose basic function is to prepare students for tertiary education. Also, the Ministry should do something about the bad reputation that the technical and vocational school has and convince both students and their parents that this type of school is a worthwhile alternative to the lyceum. The Ministry should further change its attitude towards the students who have personal, family or other problems. We just cannot allow a student who has any sort of problems take advantage of his/her



personal situation to avoid consequences. And by bending the disciplinary action or by enforcing actions which have no real consequences for students we do not solve a student's real problems or help them out. How do you really help students psychologically and what kind of message do you send these students when you allow them to pass the grade that under normal circumstances, that is, by following the school's rules and regulations, they would not have. What we are doing obviously is choosing the easy way out, which only superficially helps the student and the school. The student passes the grade despite his/her bad behaviour, bad academic performance or vast amount of absences, so the school and the Ministry consider that they have helped the student psychologically, but what they are or we are really doing is trying to get rid of the student as soon as possible. By staying in school, the disruptive student will only cause more problems, so it is better for everyone to get rid of the disruptive student as soon as possible (Pause)

R: Are there any other suggestions you would like to make?

I: I think my suggestions are clear enough from what I have mentioned throughout this interview. The principal of the school should be firm, control student indiscipline and apply the disciplinary measures. Vice-principals, on their behalf, should promptly and appropriately administer disciplinary action and have a common unified policy regarding disciplinary matters, so that teachers can also carry out their job in a sane, disciplined environment, which is conducive to learning. I emphasize again that disciplinary practices should be implemented and should have a meaning. That's about it.

R: Thank you so much for this interview and for your time

Appendix G

DETAILED TABLES OF FINDINGS-MAIN STUDY

**QUESTION 15: Consistency in the application of disciplinary action**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	11	1,9	1,9	1,9
Not so much	55	9,5	9,5	11,5
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	116	20,1	20,1	31,6
Mostly	156	27,1	27,1	58,7
Yes, very much so	238	41,3	41,3	100,0
Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 16: Inconsistency in disciplinary action promotes disruptive behaviour**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	12	2,1	2,1	2,1
Not so much	42	7,3	7,3	9,4
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	146	25,3	25,3	34,7
Mostly	186	32,3	32,3	67,0
Yes, very much so	190	33,0	33,0	100,0
Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 18: Disciplinary action helps solve problematic behaviours**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	156	27,1	27,1	27,1
Not so much	223	38,7	38,7	65,8
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	147	25,5	25,5	91,3
Mostly	40	6,9	6,9	98,3
Yes, very much so	10	1,7	1,7	100,0
Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 21: Effectiveness of suspension in dealing with disruptive behaviour**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	156	27,1	27,1	27,1
Not so much	251	43,6	43,6	70,7
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	135	23,4	23,4	94,1
Mostly	25	4,3	4,3	98,4
Yes, very much so	9	1,6	1,6	100,0
Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 23: Effectiveness of downgrading of a student's conduct in dealing with disruptive behaviour**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	201	34,9	34,9	34,9
Not so much	202	35,1	35,1	70,0
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	108	18,8	18,8	88,7
Mostly	45	7,8	7,8	96,5
Yes, very much so	20	3,5	3,5	100,0
Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 27: Effect of disciplinary action on teacher-student relationship**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	7	1,2	1,2	1,2
Not so much	19	3,3	3,3	4,5
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	98	17,0	17,0	21,5
Mostly	242	42,0	42,0	63,5
Yes, very much so	210	36,5	36,5	100,0
Total	576	100,0	100,0	



**QUESTION 28: Effect of disciplinary action on vice-principal-student relationship**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	7	1,2	1,2	1,2
	Not so much	38	6,6	6,6	7,8
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	138	24,0	24,0	31,8
	Mostly	221	38,4	38,4	70,1
	Yes, very much so	172	29,9	29,9	100,0
	Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 31: Suspended students and isolation at school**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	215	37,3	37,3	37,3
	Not so much	193	33,5	33,5	70,8
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	88	15,3	15,3	86,1
	Mostly	56	9,7	9,7	95,8
	Yes, very much so	24	4,2	4,2	100,0
	Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 32: Disciplined students socialize with other disciplined students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	42	7,3	7,3	7,3
	Not so much	65	11,3	11,3	18,6
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	151	26,2	26,2	44,8
	Mostly	190	33,0	33,0	77,8
	Yes, very much so	128	22,2	22,2	100,0
	Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 33: Students with downgrading of their conduct and isolation at school**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	232	40,3	40,3	40,3
Not so much	168	29,2	29,2	69,4
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	100	17,4	17,4	86,8
Mostly	53	9,2	9,2	96,0
Yes, very much so	23	4,0	4,0	100,0
Total	576	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 38: Fairness of disciplinary action**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No	191	33,2	70,5	70,5
Yes	80	13,9	29,5	100,0
Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing System	305	53,0		
Total	576	100,0		

**QUESTION 39: Suspension and feelings of irritation**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	19	3,3	7,0	7,0
Not so much	24	4,2	8,9	15,9
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	47	8,2	17,3	33,2
Mostly	66	11,5	24,4	57,6
Yes, very much so	115	20,0	42,4	100,0
Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing System	305	53,0		
Total	576	100,0		

**QUESTION 41: Suspension and feelings of shame**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	117	20,3	43,2	43,2
	Not so much	63	10,9	23,2	66,4
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	45	7,8	16,6	83,0
	Mostly	24	4,2	8,9	91,9
	Yes, very much so	22	3,8	8,1	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 42: Feelings of anger against the teacher who refers the student**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	5	, 9	1,8	1,8
	Not so much	22	3,8	8,1	10,0
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	41	7,1	15,1	25,1
	Mostly	74	12,8	27,3	52,4
	Yes, very much so	129	22,4	47,6	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 43: Feelings of anger against the vice-principal who enforces action**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	14	2,4	5,2	5,2
	Not so much	38	6,6	14,0	19,2
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	60	10,4	22,1	41,3
	Mostly	65	11,3	24,0	65,3
	Yes, very much so	94	16,3	34,7	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		



**QUESTION 44: Feelings of revenge against the teacher who refers the student**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	44	7,6	16,2	16,2
	Not so much	39	6,8	14,4	30,6
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	64	11,1	23,6	54,2
	Mostly	39	6,8	14,4	68,6
	Yes, very much so	85	14,8	31,4	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 45: Feelings of revenge against the vice-principal who enforces action**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	54	9,4	19,9	19,9
	Not so much	71	12,3	26,2	46,1
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	54	9,4	19,9	66,1
	Mostly	27	4,7	10,0	76,0
	Yes, very much so	65	11,3	24,0	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 46: Demonstrate problematic behaviour after suspension**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	22	3,8	8,1	8,1
	Not so much	29	5,0	10,7	18,8
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	78	13,5	28,8	47,6
	Mostly	79	13,7	29,2	76,8
	Yes, very much so	63	10,9	23,2	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 47: Feelings of stigmatization because of suspension**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	35	6,1	12,9	12,9
	Not so much	31	5,4	11,4	24,4
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	52	9,0	19,2	43,5
	Mostly	63	10,9	23,2	66,8
	Yes, very much so	90	15,6	33,2	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 49: Suspension helps not being suspended again**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	172	29,9	74,5	74,5
	Yes	38	6,6	16,5	90,9
	Feelings of revenge	1	, 2	, 4	91,3
	Sometimes	20	3,5	8,7	100,0
	Total	231	40,1	100,0	
Missing	System	345	59,9		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 50: Being concentrated in class while suspended**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	109	18,9	40,2	40,2
	Not so much	62	10,8	22,9	63,1
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	36	6,3	13,3	76,4
	Mostly	40	6,9	14,8	91,1
	Yes, very much so	24	4,2	8,9	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 51: Participation in class while suspended**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	111	19,3	41,0	41,0
	Not so much	62	10,8	22,9	63,8
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	43	7,5	15,9	79,7
	Mostly	35	6,1	12,9	92,6
	Yes, very much so	20	3,5	7,4	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 52: Repeated suspensions negatively influence school performance**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	13	2,3	4,8	4,8
	Not so much	19	3,3	7,0	11,8
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	26	4,5	9,6	21,4
	Mostly	80	13,9	29,5	50,9
	Yes, very much so	133	23,1	49,1	100,0
	Total	271	47,0	100,0	
Missing	System	305	53,0		
Total		576	100,0		



**QUESTION 54: Fairness of downgrading a student's conduct**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	30	5,2	78,9	78,9
	Yes	8	1,4	21,1	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 55: Downgrading of a student's conduct and feelings of irritation**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	1	,2	2,6	2,6
	Not so much	6	1,0	15,8	18,4
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	1	,2	2,6	21,1
	Mostly	9	1,6	23,7	44,7
	Yes, very much so	21	3,6	55,3	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 56: Downgrading of a student's conduct and feelings of shame**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	9	1,6	23,7	23,7
	Not so much	9	1,6	23,7	47,4
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	6	1,0	15,8	63,2
	Mostly	3	,5	7,9	71,1
	Yes, very much so	11	1,9	28,9	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 58: Feelings of anger against the educational staff who voted in favor of downgrading the student's conduct.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	1	,2	2,6	2,6
	Not so much	1	,2	2,6	5,3
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	4	,7	10,5	15,8
	Mostly	10	1,7	26,3	42,1
	Yes, very much so	22	3,8	57,9	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 59: Feelings of revenge against educational staff who votes in favor of downgrading the student's conduct**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	3	,5	7,9	7,9
	Not so much	2	,3	5,3	13,2
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	5	,9	13,2	26,3
	Mostly	7	1,2	18,4	44,7
	Yes, very much so	21	3,6	55,3	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 60: Demonstrate problematic behaviour after downgrading of conduct**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	4	,7	10,5	10,5
	Not so much	3	,5	7,9	18,4
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	9	1,6	23,7	42,1
	Mostly	12	2,1	31,6	73,7
	Yes, very much so	10	1,7	26,3	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 61: Feelings of stigmatization due to downgrading of conduct**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	1	,2	2,6	2,6
	Not so much	2	,3	5,3	7,9
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	6	1,0	15,8	23,7
	Mostly	7	1,2	18,4	42,1
	Yes, very much so	22	3,8	57,9	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 63: Downgrading of conduct helps not receiving another one**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	20	3,5	71,4	71,4
	Yes	8	1,4	28,6	100,0
	Total	28	4,9	100,0	
Missing	System	548	95,1		
Total		576	100,0		



**QUESTION 64: Participation in school activities after downgrading of conduct**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	9	1,6	23,7	23,7
	Not so much	5	,9	13,2	36,8
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	8	1,4	21,1	57,9
	Mostly	3	,5	7,9	65,8
	Yes, very much so	13	2,3	34,2	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

**QUESTION 65: Downgrading of conduct negatively influences school performance**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	6	1,0	15,8	15,8
	Not so much	4	,7	10,5	26,3
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	10	1,7	26,3	52,6
	Mostly	9	1,6	23,7	76,3
	Yes, very much so	9	1,6	23,7	100,0
	Total	38	6,6	100,0	
Missing	System	538	93,4		
Total		576	100,0		

Appendix H

DETAILED TABLES OF FINDINGS-HOMOGENEITY TEST

A) NICOSIA SAMPLE

QUESTION 16: Inconsistency in disciplinary action promotes disruptive behaviour

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	1	1,8	1,8	1,8
Not so much	3	5,3	5,3	7,0
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	13	22,8	22,8	29,8
Mostly	22	38,6	38,6	68,4
Yes, very much so	18	31,6	31,6	100,0
Total	57	100,0	100,0	

QUESTION 18: Disciplinary action helps solve problematic behaviours

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	16	28,1	28,1	28,1
Not so much	19	33,3	33,3	61,4
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	14	24,6	24,6	86,0
Mostly	6	10,5	10,5	96,5
Yes, very much so	2	3,5	3,5	100,0
Total	57	100,0	100,0	

QUESTION 21: Effectiveness of suspension in dealing with disruptive behaviour

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	15	26,3	26,3	26,3
Not so much	28	49,1	49,1	75,4
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	8	14,0	14,0	89,5
Mostly	6	10,5	10,5	100,0
Total	57	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 23: Effectiveness of downgrading of a student's conduct in dealing with disruptive behaviour**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	23	40,4	40,4	40,4
Not so much	15	26,3	26,3	66,7
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	12	21,1	21,1	87,7
Mostly	6	10,5	10,5	98,2
Yes, very much so	1	1,8	1,8	100,0
Total	57	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 27: Effect of disciplinary action on teacher-student relationship**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Not so much	2	3,5	3,5	3,5
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	12	21,1	21,1	24,6
Mostly	30	52,6	52,6	77,2
Yes, very much so	13	22,8	22,8	100,0
Total	57	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 42: Feelings of anger against the teacher who refers the student**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	1	1,8	3,1	3,1
Not so much	1	1,8	3,1	6,3
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	6	10,5	18,8	25,0
Mostly	11	19,3	34,4	59,4
Yes, very much so	13	22,8	40,6	100,0
Total	32	56,1	100,0	
Missing System	25	43,9		
Total	57	100,0		



**QUESTION 44: Feelings of revenge against the teacher who refers the student**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	4	7,0	12,5	12,5
	Not so much	6	10,5	18,8	31,3
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	5	8,8	15,6	46,9
	Mostly	7	12,3	21,9	68,8
	Yes, very much so	10	17,5	31,3	100,0
	Total	32	56,1	100,0	
Missing	System	25	43,9		
Total		57	100,0		

**QUESTION 49: Suspension helps not being suspended again**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	21	36,8	75,0	75,0
	Yes	2	3,5	7,1	82,1
	Sometimes	5	8,8	17,9	100,0
	Total	28	49,1	100,0	
Missing	System	29	50,9		
Total		57	100,0		

**QUESTION 51: Participation in class while suspended**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	9	15,8	28,1	28,1
	Not so much	10	17,5	31,3	59,4
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	4	7,0	12,5	71,9
	Mostly	6	10,5	18,8	90,6
	Yes, very much so	3	5,3	9,4	100,0
	Total	32	56,1	100,0	
Missing	System	25	43,9		
Total		57	100,0		

**QUESTION 60: Demonstrate problematic behaviour after downgrading of conduct**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Mostly	1	1,8	100,0	100,0
Missing System	56	98,2		
Total	57	100,0		

**QUESTION 61: Feelings of stigmatization due to downgrading of conduct**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Mostly	1	1,8	100,0	100,0
Missing System	56	98,2		
Total	57	100,0		

**QUESTION 64: Participation in school activities after downgrading of a conduct**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	1	1,8	100,0	100,0
Missing System	56	98,2		
Total	57	100,0		

B) LARNACA SAMPLE

**QUESTION 16: Inconsistency in disciplinary action promotes disruptive behaviour**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No, not at all	1	1,6	1,6	1,6
Not so much	3	4,8	4,8	6,5
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	17	27,4	27,4	33,9
Mostly	19	30,6	30,6	64,5
Yes, very much so	22	35,5	35,5	100,0
Total	62	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 18: Disciplinary action helps solve problematic behaviours**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	5	8,1	8,1	8,1
	Not so much	25	40,3	40,3	48,4
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	22	35,5	35,5	83,9
	Mostly	8	12,9	12,9	96,8
	Yes, very much so	2	3,2	3,2	100,0
	Total	62	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 21: Effectiveness of suspension in dealing with disruptive behaviour**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	15	24,2	24,2	24,2
	Not so much	22	35,5	35,5	59,7
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	14	22,6	22,6	82,3
	Mostly	7	11,3	11,3	93,5
	Yes, very much so	4	6,5	6,5	100,0
	Total	62	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 23: Effectiveness of downgrading of a student's conduct in dealing with a student's disruptive behaviour**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	19	30,6	30,6	30,6
	Not so much	18	29,0	29,0	59,7
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	10	16,1	16,1	75,8
	Mostly	7	11,3	11,3	87,1
	Yes, very much so	8	12,9	12,9	100,0
	Total	62	100,0	100,0	



**QUESTION 27: Effect of disciplinary action on teacher-student relationship**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not so much	2	3,2	3,2	3,2
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	10	16,1	16,1	19,4
	Mostly	22	35,5	35,5	54,8
	Yes, very much so	28	45,2	45,2	100,0
	Total	62	100,0	100,0	

**QUESTION 42: Feelings of anger against the teacher who refers the student**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	1	1,6	4,8	4,8
	Not so much	1	1,6	4,8	9,5
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	1	1,6	4,8	14,3
	Mostly	3	4,8	14,3	28,6
	Yes, very much so	15	24,2	71,4	100,0
	Total	21	33,9	100,0	
Missing	System	41	66,1		
Total		62	100,0		

**QUESTION 44: Feelings of revenge against the teacher who refers the student**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	1	1,6	4,8	4,8
	Not so much	2	3,2	9,5	14,3
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	3	4,8	14,3	28,6
	Mostly	3	4,8	14,3	42,9
	Yes, very much so	12	19,4	57,1	100,0
	Total	21	33,9	100,0	
Missing	System	41	66,1		
Total		62	100,0		

**QUESTION 49: Suspension helps not being suspended again**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	11	17,7	68,8	68,8
	Yes	2	3,2	12,5	81,3
	Sometimes	3	4,8	18,8	100,0
	Total	16	25,8	100,0	
Missing	System	46	74,2		
Total		62	100,0		

**QUESTION 51: Participation in class while suspended**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, not at all	9	14,5	42,9	42,9
	Not so much	7	11,3	33,3	76,2
	Sometimes yes, sometimes no	3	4,8	14,3	90,5
	Mostly	2	3,2	9,5	100,0
	Total	21	33,9	100,0	
Missing	System	41	66,1		
Total		62	100,0		