

ABSTRACT

Inside the black box: A qualitative case study of the ecology of school violence

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Violence has become part of Jamaica's culture and the norm for dispute resolution. Accordingly, the island has earned the unenviable reputation of being the murder capital of the world, one of the most violent countries in the world, and having the world's sixth highest homicide rate. This has not left schools unaffected; the ability of violence to thwart the mission of schools is well documented.

This study sought to explore the school context, to ascertain its role, if any, in the antisocial behavioural tendencies of participants. Specifically, I sought to understand the aetiology of school violence through a deep inquiry into the perspectives of participants.

Leapoint High School, besieged by violence was purposively selected for this explanatory single case study (Yin, 2003). Through qualitative methodology, I examined the social and behavioural patterns of participants to facilitate meaning in context and offer answers to the main research question: *What are the factors that contribute to or perpetuate violence?* Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, conversations, documentary analysis, and journals; and they were analysed using the constant comparative method of data analysis.

The findings offer empirical evidence that the context matters - the school provides space and the opportunity for its personnel to exhibit antisocial behaviour. Using the lenses of the ecological systems theory, social learning, social information processing, cognitive neo-association and symbolic interactionism I concluded that participants' actions influenced the behavioural response of others, thereby, contributing to and or perpetuating violence. Also, sexual impropriety, weak social capital and emotional literacy, gender inequalities, and the normalization of violence were among the factors that created the context for the susceptibilities to and burgeoning of violence.

Recommendations for school leadership and management, students' attainment and progress, and teacher education, and implications for further research are identified and discussed.

Keywords: Dosseth Edwards-Watson; school violence; antisocial behaviour; school climate; aggression; student behaviour/attitude; teacher quality.