

RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE IN POST-APARTHEID SCHOOLS: ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AS MUTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Nuraan Davids

Stellenbosch University

Email: nur@sun.ac.za

Yusef Waghid

Stellenbosch University

Email: yw@sun.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Schools in post-apartheid South Africa appear to be under siege by violence. In turn, school leaders find themselves in the unenviable position of not only having to deal with inadequate educator professionalism and learner underachievement – particularly in previously disadvantaged schools – but are under pressure to find ways to counteract the violence, and to restore schools as safe sites. Among the biggest challenges facing school leaders is that they have not necessarily acquired sufficient training to deal with violent encounters, and often have responded in equally violent and violating ways, which, to some extent, has enhanced the expulsion and alienation of learners. In drawing on our own project work at five high schools in the Western Cape, we explore the challenges school leaders experience in responding to school violence. In questioning the often equally violent responses of school leaders, we contend that they ought to adopt practices of becoming. That is, school leaders should engage in intimate encounters with the other; not based on a desire to change the other, but rather for the purpose of mutually engaging with the other in an effort to inhabit practices of coming into presence that are humane and just.

Keywords: school leadership, violence in schools, mutual engagement



Education as Change
www.educationaschange.co.za
Volume 20 | Number 1 | 2016
pp. 28–42



DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/1947-9417/2016/557>
Print ISSN 1682-3206 | Online 1947-9417
© 2016 The Authors

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of issues that continue to plague and raise serious questions about any conception of quality education in South African schools. Among these are overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources and learning materials, poor educator professionalism and learner underachievement – most notably within previously disadvantaged schools. Inasmuch as the aforementioned issues present ongoing challenges to educational authorities, school leaders, educators, learners and parent communities, they appear to be easier to address than the numerous encounters of violence that have, to a certain extent, always disrupted previously disadvantaged schools. Nowadays, school leaders in post-apartheid schools encounter bullying, teen suicides, sex scandals, various forms of discrimination on the basis of ‘race’, sexuality, religion, ethnicity and ability, as well as unprofessional educator conduct, ranging from unpreparedness to teach to questionable relationships with learners.

School principals, in barely coping with ensuring that learners acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to move on to the next grade or to access higher education, are not necessarily and sufficiently trained to deal with such encounters. And, while the South African educational authorities have introduced many policies and safety programmes in an effort to quell the climate of violence that has, in many instances, paralysed education at previously disadvantaged schools, or at schools located in communities with a high incidence of violence, principals have often found themselves at a loss in knowing how to respond to, or to confront, encounters with violence. To this end, their incapacity has not only been inappropriate, but also has served to further mistreat and exclude learners. Given the reality that principals are clearly not in a position to deal with violent encounters easily, it is within their captured responses that we might better understand why attempts at intervention have struggled to make a difference. In confronting these responses, which often have been couched in equal levels of violence through the continued use of corporal punishment, or the isolation and humiliation of learners, we argue that principals ought to adopt ‘practices of becoming’. Such practices entail engaging in intimate encounters with the other, not based on a desire to change the other, but for the purpose of mutually engaging with the other in an effort to inhabit practices of coming into presence that are humane and just.

ENCOUNTERS WITH VIOLENCE IN POST-APARTHEID SCHOOLS

Children, says Burton (2008), are more likely to experience violence in South African schools than in their homes. Common reports of bullying and playground tiffs are rapidly being replaced by incidents of drug abuse, drug dealing, stabbings, sexual assault and, to a large extent, gang-related activities, with up to 30% of educators reporting that they do not feel safe at school (Burton & Leoschut 2013). Reports

on violence in schools – such as the South African Council for Educators (SACE) ‘School-based violence report: An overview of school-based violence in South Africa’ (2011), and ‘The dynamics of violence in South African schools: Report’ (Mncube & Harber 2013) – are in agreement that the various types of violence are influenced by both social and gender dynamics, and that, while there are more obvious forms of violence, such as corporal punishment or bullying, there are more subtle forms of violence, such as spreading malicious rumours, cyber-bullying, threats, sexual harassment, or hazing and initiation. These, according to Burton (2008:2), are more prevalent in private and well-established schools than in poorer or township schools. Moreover, violence occurs from learner to learner (between or across genders), from educator to learner, and from learner to educator (Burton 2008; Burton & Leoschut 2013; Mncube & Harber 2013).

Jeffthas and Artz (2007:38) clarify that boys and girls are exposed to different types of violence. While girls are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment and rape – perpetrated by boys, educators or principals – boys are more likely to be victims of fighting, stabbing or shooting. This does not mean, however, that boys are never victims of sexual violence, or that girls do not experience or perpetrate acts of physical violence. There are two main reasons for the perpetuation of sexual harassment and violence in schools, say Mncube and Harber (2013:12). The first is that traditional gender stereotypes and unequal power relationships within the broader society are not challenged, but rather reproduced by the school. Secondly, the authoritarian, closed nature of schooling in general, meshed with patriarchal values and behaviours, provides a fertile context for the patterns of sexual harassment described above.

According to Mncube and Harber (2013), the most common internal violence perpetrated by schools against learners is corporal punishment. While illegal since the inception of the *South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996)*, it remains institutionally sanctioned at many schools, with Mncube and Harber (2013:14) explaining that, while some children might never have encountered physical punishment in their homes, they might be exposed to it for the first time at their schools – making corporal punishment ‘a form of violence internal to schools both in the sense that it exists at school and that the people who experience it there don’t necessarily experience it outside’. Aggression displayed by male educators appears to be especially problematic. They state that reports include the rape of a 13-year-old primary school learner; physical assault involving being grabbed by the neck and pushed down the stairs; and an educator attempting to drown a learner in a fishpond, requiring a police officer to rescue the learner (Mncube & Harber 2013:1). In another incident, related by Raubenheimer (in Mncube and Harber 2013), a learner attempted to commit suicide after his physical assault by an educator became public knowledge.

Inasmuch, however, as educators inflict violence on learners, whether through corporal punishment or derogatory language, learners inflict violence on educators. An important finding of the SACE ‘School-based Violence Report’ (2011) was the

increase in reports of learners violently attacking educators, with schools reporting on verbal abuse, threats, physical violence and sexual violence against educators. Discussing the findings of the '2012 National School Violence Study', Burton and Leoschut (2013) report that school leaders generally felt that their schools were places of safety for both their educators and learners. Educators, however, were less likely to express this view, with only 70% of educators reporting that they felt safe when teaching, and 73.4% thought learners felt safe while on school premises. Reports from the Western Cape Education Department confirm that seven learners in 2011 and five in 2012 were expelled for physical assault or threatening behaviour. While one of the educator unions, the National Professional Teachers' Union of South Africa (NAPTOSA), acknowledges that educator abuse is as rife as learner abuse, educators are reluctant to report abusive attacks for fear of losing face in the classroom, or of further intimidation. The 'School-based violence report: An overview of school-based violence in South Africa' (SACE 2011:19) states that, while attacks on educators are under-reported, they highlight the vulnerability of educators in South African schools, as well as the problem of reports of school-based violence that construct educators as the sole perpetrators.

SAFETY IN SCHOOLS: AN APPROACH IN POLICY

That schools are generally still seen as sites for the cultivation and enhancement of those values necessary for a thriving and morally based citizenship and society, is evident in several policy texts, such as the Department of Basic Education's (DoBE's) 'Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy' (DoBE 2002), or the recently produced 'Building a Culture of Responsibility and Humanity in Our Schools: A Guide for Educators' (DoBE, 2011). Official strategies by the DoBE to reduce violence in schools have included the prohibition of corporal punishment (Republic of South Africa 1996b), as stipulated in the *South African Schools Act (1996)*. With regard to discipline, the *SA Schools Act* (Section 8) empowers school governing bodies (SGBs) to adopt a learners' code of conduct after consulting educators, learners and parents. This is intended to establish a disciplined and purposeful school environment. Furthermore, in terms of the South African Council for Educators (2002), educators are expected to comply with a 'Code of Professional Ethics'.

Joubert (2008:1) explains that, in 1999, the DoBE (then known as the Department of Education) announced the Tirisano Plan for enabling the development of a fully functioning education and training system in South Africa. Joubert says that, with an increasing emphasis on the protection of basic human rights and the need to protect children against harsh and cruel treatment, attitudes towards discipline and punishment have changed considerably in the past ten years. Inevitably, increasing attention has been paid, leading to various detailed official policies, documents and publications applicable to many facets of the management of public schools that

show the government's commitment to establishing safe and effective teaching and learning environments. Some of these publications are the 'Alternatives to Corporal Punishment' (SACE 2000), and 'Signposts for Safe Schools' (South African Police Service and the Department of Education 2002), as well as safety programmes, such as 'adopt a cop', 'Captain crime stop', and 'Bambanani' (Joubert 2008: 12). While it is assumed, says Joubert (2008:13), that developing and publishing policies and regulations on school safety will create a safe learning environment, departmental officials and educational leaders do not always foresee potentially problematic situations, do not demonstrate knowledge and skills when applying basic legal principles, and as a result may act negligently.

It also remains true that, for many people, schools not only offer a haven away from communities riddled by gangsterism, drugs and their related ills, but to some, particularly parents, they might be the only space of order, discipline and hope for their children. Schools, therefore, fulfil more than just the role of preparing learners for the society that they already constitute. They are often expected, occasionally compelled, to fulfil surrogacy roles of parenting and security, physically and emotionally. It therefore is disconcerting and disturbing to realise that, despite the criticality of schools and schooling, both primary (including pre-schools) and high schools, and both public and private (including faith-based) schools are not immune to violence or its ramifications. As Burton (2008:1) explains, schools are important environments in which children not only gain knowledge, but also learn about themselves. They learn about themselves from the way they behave with others, they learn to interact, and they learn how to resolve conflict. But, if they are in an environment of violence – either through experiencing or witnessing it – then this behaviour will be emulated too. So, inasmuch as schools can be a positive space of engagement and deliberation, they also hold the potential for disengagement and violence. Leoschut and Bonora (2007:107) contend that the increased exposure and reinforcement of aggression and violence serve to normalise violence, contributing to an increasingly violent society. This means that, for many children, violence has become such a part of their daily lives that it is no longer considered abnormal or problematic. Schools, therefore for children, are safe zones, regardless of the high levels of violence learners might experience or witness.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The five high schools that served as the research sites for our project work on violence, citizenship and the responses of principals are all located on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape¹. Of the five schools, one is a former Department of Education

1 Cape Flats – also described as the 'dumping ground of apartheid'. The term refers to a large area in the Cape Town metropole that essentially appears to be flat when viewed from a distance. Historically, the Cape Flats was deemed to comprise what were predominantly previously disadvantaged communities – primarily due to forced removals (The Cape Flats Website).

and Training (DET) (black African learners only) school, and the other four are former House of Representatives (HOR) (coloured learners only) schools. The post-apartheid desegregation of schools has done little to alter the historical demography of these schools, with the former DET school still catering only for black learners, and the former HOR schools catering predominantly for coloured learners, and small groups of black learners. While two of the schools draw the majority of their learners from their surrounding communities, the other three schools draw the majority of their learners from outside the school's immediate vicinity. Commonly, learners depend on public transport, bus and taxi, to commute to school. The fact that high percentages of learners do not live in proximity to their respective schools has serious implications for each of the five schools in terms of offering any extra-mural activities. Consequently, other than athletics programmes, which are run during school time, learners are not exposed to any other sporting codes.

Spanning a period of two years, the project looked at common incidents of violence, typical responses from principals, and the implications for the school, and indeed for the learners, as citizens of a post-apartheid society. All five schools are characterised by communities with high incidents of unemployment, gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse, excessive crime and vandalism and, in the case of one of the schools, abalone poaching. Similarly, the functionality of all five schools is compromised by big classes – up to 48 learners per class at three of the schools, poor infrastructure, a serious shortage of books and educational materials, inadequate sporting facilities, and poor parental involvement and support. The aforementioned notwithstanding, the five principals shared that they enjoyed particularly high levels of support from pockets of parents, who not only held the school in high regard and saw it as an avenue for a better life for their children, but also wished to contribute to the school. The latter generally took the form of parent volunteers controlling access to the school, maintaining flower and vegetable gardens, and assisting with a soup kitchen.

The research depended largely on three strands of data: structured interviews with the principals; examination of policies and procedures related to discipline and classroom management; and observations of learner conduct in the classroom and on the playground. The five principals were expected to undergo two sets of interviews. While the first attempted to gain a coherent understanding of the typical types of incidents of violence at the school, the second set of interviews delved into the specific ways principals responded to the violence, and the challenges they encountered in attempting to counter violence. The examination of the policies and procedures related to school discipline was analysed in relation to the responses provided by the principal during the second set of interviews, namely, how he responded to violence. Likewise, the observations of learner conduct in the classroom and on the playground were analysed in relation to the answers provided by the principals in the first set of interview questions, namely, typical incidents of violence at the school.

The findings under discussion in this article focus specifically on the data garnered from the second set of interviews, namely, how principals responded to incidents of violence.

EXPLORING PRINCIPALS' RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE AT FIVE SCHOOLS: MAIN FINDINGS

The five schools seemed to follow a particular pattern of disciplinary challenges on a daily basis. Mondays and Fridays appeared to be most problematic in terms of arriving late for school, by both learners and educators. Typical problematic, disruptive and violent behaviour by learners involved theft, smoking, carrying dangerous weapons, bullying, vandalism and assault. At three of the schools, principals said that it was a common occurrence for certain learners to subject their educators, especially women, to verbal abuse and profanity. On six separate occasions (two each at three of the schools) during the two-year research period, we observed the arrival of police officers to conduct random drug searches. While the five schools enjoyed periods of relative calm, it was evident from the interviews with the principals, as well as from the observations of educators, that the schools were under intense pressure and stress to be alert not only to incidents happening on the school premises, but also to violence coming from the outside in the form of gang violence. Common responses to disruptive and violent behaviour included detention; writing out of lines during break time; isolating the learner; sandpapering desks; scrubbing of walls; asking parents or guardians to fetch the learner from school in extreme cases of threatening behaviour, or when the learner is found to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol; suspension; and corporal punishment (at three of the schools).

Observations of other disciplinary practices included isolating learners by making them sit in the foyer of the school; and announcing the names of disruptive learners and calling them to stand in front during the school assembly. Particularly surprising at all five schools was the frequency with which learners were sent to the principal's office. Although this impacted dramatically on the principal's time and his other responsibilities, the general feeling of all five principals was that they understood why certain educators simply could not deal with unruly learners, and that they needed to focus on the other learners in their class. Equally apparent was that disciplinary procedures did not adhere to the recommendations stipulated in the codes of conduct of the five respective schools. The only procedure that appeared to match the offence related to the sandpapering of desks, or scrubbing of walls in the case of vandalism. Detention appeared to be applied to any offence – from smoking and swearing at a learner or educator, to bullying and threatening another learner, and even when two learners were caught engaging in a sexual act. Parents were only called upon in extreme cases, and then, only if the offence had been repeated. Four of the principals explained that they only contacted parents as a last resort,

since most of them either refused to come to the school, or responded violently towards the child when they did come. Although the five principals shared that they felt reasonably comfortable in dealing with acts of violence – since it is what they have always had to do – they experienced extreme discomfort in dealing with acts or offences of a sexual nature. Three of the principals reported that they have had to deal with sexually explicit cellphone videos being shared among learners, often involving learners from the school. In cases like these, two of the principals reported that they had confiscated the cellphones, while the other reported that he had simply not dealt with the matter and instead asked the Life Orientation educators to discuss it in their lessons.

While policy documents at all the schools mention the prohibition of corporal punishment, verbal abuse and humiliation of learners, these types of punitive measures were prevalent in all the schools, with corporal punishment being implemented at three of the schools. And, while two of the schools had policies related to demerit systems for learners and referral systems for counselling, these policies were not put into practice. Moreover, the principals appeared to pay little attention to the levels of offences, so that threatening a learner and smoking provoked the same type of punitive measure, namely detention. Concomitantly, learners were often suspended from school for a fixed period without any involvement by the school governing body (SGB) or consultation with the parents.

Reasons provided by the principals for not adhering to their own policies included that, given the prevalence of violence and disruptive behaviour, they did not have the time to deal with every learner. Instead, they simply responded to the offence and hoped that a punitive measure would remedy the disruptive behaviour. Moreover, the inconsistency and unwillingness of educators in following disciplinary procedures often fuelled the misbehaviour of particular learners. When asked why the SGB was not involved in dealing with serious offences, such as threatening with a dangerous weapon, selling of dagga or assault, four of the principals offered the same two responses. Firstly, that convening a meeting with the SGB was very difficult, given the fact that parents lived outside the school community and did not have transport to come to the school during the evenings, which was the only time a meeting could be held. Secondly, even if a meeting could be arranged, the principals were of the opinion that the SGB parents were not in a position to offer much input, given their own limited education and equally limited understanding of school policies.

CHALLENGES IN DEALING WITH VIOLENCE: MAIN FINDINGS

A major obstacle experienced by all five principals in adequately responding to violence at their schools related to the lack of support from education officials and parents or guardians. They reported that not only did they experience difficulty in

receiving adequate support from education officials, but the response time in dealing with sexual misconduct or learners at risk was so delayed that they often regarded it as futile to try to involve the department at all. Principals considered the support available to them as existing only in terms of policy, and not in practice. Exacerbating the sense of aloneness in dealing with incidents of violence was what principals considered to be a lack of interest and support from many parents. At one of the schools, the principal reported that, when he tried to enforce the wearing of the school uniform, a group of parents reported the matter to the local community newspaper, which created the impression that the principal resorted to autocratic practices and demanded that poor parents spend money on unnecessary school uniforms. School principals were not only expected to deal with incidents of violence at school, but often were drawn into violence in the home – when mothers turn to the school to discipline their children, especially where there are no father figures. At another school, the principal was often expected to bail out his learners from jail after they had been arrested for abalone poaching. Trying to get parents to assist in stopping their children from being involved in poaching is a fruitless exercise, since it is often the only source of household income.

All five principals reported being exhausted by a continuous onslaught of educationally unrelated tasks, from negotiating with gang leaders not to recruit learners, to ensuring that learners are placed in places of safety due to abusive home situations. While all the principals reported excellent support from most of their respective educators in ensuring a safe schooling environment, they also conceded a high staff turnover, often related to educator exhaustion, stress and disillusionment. Moreover, while all the principals shared that they were doing the best they could and were enjoying success in small measures, they were often demotivated by the day-to-day occurrence of violence, which they believed was getting worse, and that whatever they were doing was not enough. They also shared that, while they respected the prohibition of corporal punishment, they often wished they could use it, and in some instances did in fact use it, since they often were at a loss in how to deal with rude and threatening learners. While three of the principals regularly suspended learners from school, the other two principals were sceptical of suspension as a disciplinary measure, since this was exactly what the unruly learners wanted and they often returned, exhibiting worse behaviour than before because they know that there is nothing else the principal can do.

Not only are levels of violence at some South African schools disturbingly high, but whatever policies are in place, and whatever code of ethics principals and educators are expected to adhere to, they are inadequate to deal with this scourge. Principals in particular have had to deal with the inadequacy of policies and strategies. They are expected to deal with incidents of violence, yet they are neither equipped to do so, nor do they always enjoy the necessary support from the provincial educational departments in their efforts in dealing, for example, with unprofessional educators or

unruly learners. The principals acknowledged that they had not necessarily acquired sufficient training to deal with violent encounters and often responded with equal violence, harshness and humiliation. They reported feeling ashamed or embarrassed after dealing with learners in a particularly harsh manner, but they did not believe they had any other recourse. The aforementioned notwithstanding, and given the problematic communities that the five schools serve – as exemplified by the barbed wire that imprisons each of these schools – the principals need to be commended for their willingness and belief that they can make a difference at their respective schools.

What, then, can school principals do in adequately dealing with incidents of violence so that they deal with the violence in a responsive and humane fashion, and so that they too feel a sense of empowerment and honour, rather than shame and embarrassment? Building on the premise that schools ought to be places of safety and hope, where both learners and educators might begin to contribute to an equally safe and hopeful society, we contend that principals ought to adopt practices of becoming, whereby they engage in intimate encounters with the other, not based on a desire to change the other's imperfections and humanity, but for the purpose of mutually engaging with the other in an effort to inhabit practices of coming into presence that are humane and just – that is, a matter of becoming that asks for respect and friendship, based on what Burke and Greteman (2013:163) refer to as practices based 'on mutual fondness and attraction to given practices and ways of being'.

TOWARDS A LANGUAGE OF MUTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Violence is a particular type of language – destructive and long-lasting – and one that needs to be understood before it can be addressed and remedied. Current responses to school-based violence have been inadequate in that they invariably have dealt with the symptomatic manifestations of violent behaviour, rather than engaging with the language of violence itself. What this means is that, when learners have displayed anti-social behaviour through bullying or aggression, the predominant responses from principals tend to emerge from a continuum of measures ranging from isolation (instructing the learner to stand in the corner, or ordering the learner to leave the classroom) and punitive (often in the form of physical or verbal abuse), to suspension and expulsion. While school leaders often lack the necessary training and support to deal adequately with the challenges presented by certain learners, they can, however, acquire a language through which to re-stitch the social fabric necessary for a non-violent and socially just society.

One such language is set out in James Alison's (2003:xi) *On being liked*. Alison makes the argument that in order to like someone (we would argue to care for someone) requires the other person to come into being. Unlike caring, liking is less well regarded in education, as it gets tied up with notions of popularity, as

school leaders and educators often imagine themselves beyond the fray of popularity and argue that they are not concerned with what learners think of them (Burke & Greteman 2013:164). Caring for the other involves the other person having to come into presence, that is, in order for one to care for the other one has to do so not on the basis of what one wants the other to become. To consider the other as coming into presence also requires, first of all, that one acknowledges the humanity of the other's existence (Butler 2010:1). A learner, for example, who is subjected to corporal punishment for assaulting another learner might not feel particularly cared for or liked. Likewise, we cannot imagine that a principal who administers corporal punishment would feel that s/he has demonstrated care. In other words, the acknowledgement of either the learner or the principal's humanity would be lost to the other, and the self. This is so because the language that both have used is equally couched in a language of violence. To this end, it is our contention that violence can never be justified as being 'in the best interests of the child'; it therefore can never be condoned.

When principals choose to humiliate learners as a means of discipline, then the experience of the learner is a reduced sense of being, so that the potential to become is not only debilitated, but possibly based on a skewed premise of becoming. The only language that the learner therefore has been exposed to is the same language that led to him/her being 'disciplined' in the first place. They would not have been directed towards another language; instead, their own language of violence is legitimised in the violence of the principal. What this means is that, when learners learn that dismissal, humiliation and corporal punishment are the only responses to violent behaviour, their compliance is based on a fear of retribution, rather than on an understanding of the potential breach of violence. They neither un-learn a language of violence, nor do they (re)learn a language couched in care and compassion, which might be more reconcilable with a socially just society. To care for the other (including those learners who violate others) is not based on a desire to change the other, such as the educator wanting the learner to conform based on corporal punishment or threats. One cares for the other for the purpose of mutually engaging with the other, that is, one comes into presence with the other not for whom the other is (an obedient and compliant learner), but rather for how one relates to the other without a search for mastery, meaning that the learner cannot always be expected to display compliant behaviour, and that the educator will not always understand challenging behaviour (Burke & Greteman 2013:167). As such, one of the particularities of violence is that its potential is always there; it cannot be wished away.

In attempting to remediate disruptive behaviour, teachers, principals and indeed educational policy makers ought to recognise that the pervading prevalence of a language of violence can only be countered with an equally pervading language of care and mutual engagement. In relating to the other through curiosity and in non-hierarchical ways, one becomes intimately involved with the other for the sake of

creating epistemological possibilities without necessarily domesticating the other's otherness (Burke & Greteman 2013:167–168). Thus, caring for the other relates to coming into presence of the other in order to nurture pedagogical relations based on trust. Nel Noddings (2005:102) makes the argument that pedagogical relations based on trust are constituted by friendship, in which 'friends wish the best to their friends for the friend's sake. A friend does not seek something for himself [herself] in wishing the best for his [her] friend'. In this way, we care for learners as we learn about them and ourselves through one another, that is, mutually engaging one another without having in mind some preconceived notion of what others should become, which involves reorienting ourselves towards one another without consuming the other. Such an engagement, based on care, friendship and mutual engagement, has profound implications not only for the interplay between what teachers teach and what learners learn, but also between *what* teachers teach and *how* they teach it.

The little that we understand about violence in schools, or elsewhere in society, is that it is not only unpredictable and misunderstood, but also complex and, to a large extent, under-theorised. Therefore, to expect principals to deal with violence adequately, even if they had the 'skills' to do so, or the 'best policies' to implement, is not to grasp the full impact of the multifarious nature of violence. Part of the obvious difficulty of dealing with violence is that schools are not just dealing with school-based violence; they are in fact dealing with forms of violence that emanate from complex communities and, as is the case with the five schools, communities with an excessively high incidence of violence and crime. Hence, it is noteworthy in itself that the five principals manage to maintain some level of functionality, coupled with pockets of academic excellence. Inasmuch, then, as these principals do what they know in managing that which cannot actually be known, they, too, recognise that their constant practices of punitive measures are in fact empty of any teaching or learning. They realised – certainly in the second set of interviews – that the pedagogical value of corporal punishment, humiliation and isolation of learners is not only non-existent, but only serves to teach learners that violence is an acceptable form of engagement.

If we understand that schooling is constructed in an epistemology of caring, which is concerned with instilling and cultivating awareness and measures to rupture inhumane acts, such as racism and bullying, then we can understand that the language of violence can be unravelled through a language that does not violate, humiliate or rupture. School leaders, therefore, have to express their leadership through a language other than the one of the violence by which they are being confronted. When a language of violence is answered with a language of violence, then society disintegrates under the weight of languages devoid of humane engagement and caring. Language is a way of being with oneself and with others. When one cares about oneself, then that same language needs to be used to engage with others – that caring for learners is articulated through 'relating to others and the self' (Burke &

Greteman 2013:164). What is needed, therefore, is what we refer to as a language of mutual engagement to contemplate the other (learners) in relation to the self so that care can be expressed. The mutual engagement that is extended is not to subject the learner to a preconceived conception of 'acceptable behaviour'. Rather, through expressing mutual engagement, the school leader contemplates the behaviour of the learner, why s/he uses threatening language, for example, and then tries to unravel it so that both the school leader and the learner come into the presence of each other for the purpose of mutual engagement. By contemplating before acting (that is, before humiliating the learner for undesirable behaviour), the school leader becomes involved with the learner for the purpose of creating epistemological possibilities, and extends care in order to nurture pedagogical relations based on trust.

For educators to act contemplatively is not tantamount to condoning violence. Rather, contemplating violence is a language of engagement one acquires in making oneself known to the other, such as imagining the vulnerabilities the other experiences (such as being subjected to violence) in order that one can connect more caringly with the other. And, when one acts more caringly *with* the other, one recognises the other in its otherness and the possibility that the other can come to speech. Put differently, the other has the capacity to see what is inherently wrong with violence and to detest it. This is quite different from telling someone that violence is wrong and that it has to be dealt with punitively, as intimated by the countless examples mentioned earlier. The point is, others have the capacity as human beings to rebuke violence without being ridiculed for its perpetration all the time. When learners are exposed to a language of mutual engagement, instead of corporal punishment or exclusion from the classroom, they will learn what it means to engage with the other in a language that is not necessarily constituted by disregard, ignorance and harm. They will also learn that both authority and trust are intimately intertwined with conceptions of compassion and mutual engagement, and therefore will be less inclined to act antagonistically towards those (such as educators and parents) who hold authority and trust.

When the possibility of a new way or language of dealing with violence was suggested to the five principals, they welcomed it, albeit reluctantly, because they realised that it would require a profound alteration of the 'way things have always been done'. But they also recognised that while violence would remain couched in a language of unpredictability and anarchy, the likelihood existed for their responses to be predictable, orderly and caring. One principal in particular managed to capture it best when he said that he was willing to try a language of mutual engagement, 'if only to make himself feel like a better human being'. What this statement reveals is that while the concern about violence tends to focus centrally on the effects on learners, little attention is given to the effect it has on those who are expected to manage it on a daily basis. It would appear, therefore, that inasmuch as a language

of mutual engagement is needed for its pedagogical value, it is equally required for its humane purpose.

In conclusion, we have shown that school leaders in post-apartheid schools are confronted with many different encounters with violence. To conceive that policies and safety programmes are sufficient to adequately confront encounters of violence is to undermine the complexity of the schooling environment. If school leaders wish to quell the language of violence of the learners and of themselves, then they need to adopt practices of becoming whereby they engage in intimate encounters with the other. These encounters should not be based on a desire to change the other, but rather to engage with the other's imperfections and humanity. As such, the purpose of mutually engaging with the other is to inhabit practices of coming into presence that are humane and just.

REFERENCES

- Alison, J. 2003. *On being liked*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Burke, K. & Greteman, A. 2013. Toward a theory of liking. *Educational Theory* 63(2):151–169.
- Burton, J. & Leoschut, L. 2013. *School violence in South Africa: Results of the 2012 National School Violence Study. Monograph Series no. 12*. Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention.
- Burton, P. 2008. *Dealing with school violence in South Africa. CJCP Issue Paper No. 4*. Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime.
- Butler, J. 2010. *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* New York: Verso.
- Cape Flats website. Available at <http://www.capeflats.co.za> (accessed 4 September 2013).
- Department of Basic Education. 1996. *South African Schools Act*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Basic Education. 2002. *Manifesto on values, education and democracy*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Basic Education. 2011. *Building a culture of responsibility and humanity in our schools: A guide for teachers*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Education. 2000a. *Implementation Plan for Tirisano 2000–2004*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Jefthas, D. & Artz, L. 2007. Youth violence: A gendered perspective. In Burton P (Ed.), *Someone stole my smile: An exploration into the causes of youth violence in South Africa*, 37–56. CJCP Monograph 3. Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention.
- Joubert, R. 2008. South Africa's approach to school safety: Can it succeed? University of Pretoria Institutional Repository. Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/10152> (accessed 17 August 2013).
- Leoschut, L. & Bonora, A. 2007. Offender perspectives on violent crime. In Burton P (Ed.), *Someone stole my smile: An exploration into the causes of youth violence in South Africa. CJCP Monograph Series 3*, 89–112. Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention.

- Mncube, V. & Harber C. 2013. *The dynamics of violence in South African schools: Report*. Pretoria: Unisa.
- Noddings, N. 2005. *Critical lessons: What our schools should teach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- South African Council for Educators. 2000. *Alternatives to corporal punishment*. Centurion: SACE.
- South African Council for Educators. 2002. *Handbook for the code of conduct of professional ethics*. Centurion: SACE.
- South African Council for Educators. 2011. *School-based violence report: An overview of school-based violence in South Africa*. Centurion: SACE.
- South African Police Service and the Department of Education. 2002. *Signposts for safe schools*. Braamfontein: CSV.