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DOES CARING ABOUT THOSE WE TEACH MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS? IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The violence that continues to paralyse too many South African schools on a daily basis often has its origins in highly complex and dysfunctional communities. To this end, traditional punitive measures, as well as various disciplinary-based policies have not always provided an adequate response to violence in schools. In searching for alternative ways of dealing with disruption and violence in schools, the article explores the practices of four high school principals. Following on these particular practices – couched as ‘listening to learners’ – the article considers, firstly, whether caring relations between principals (by extension, educators) and learners can make a difference to disruptive and violent behaviour among learners. Secondly, in drawing on care ethics, the article considers how the practice of ‘listening to learners’ might contribute towards the cultivation of democratic citizenship.

Keywords: care ethics, listening, re-storying; violence, democratic citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

South African schools – and particularly those located in historically disadvantaged communities – continue to contend with unprecedented levels of violence, that have in many instances, forced schools to redefine the way in which they function, and indeed, if they function at all. While school-based violence assumes numerous and complex forms – from assault and sexual harassment to cyber-bullying – violence cuts across gender, from learner to educator, and educator to learner. The rate and intensity of violence in schools is such, state Zulu, Urbani and Van der Merwe (2004: 170), that generation upon generation of learners have become socialised into violence, thereby contributing to an increasingly violent society (Leoschut & Bonora, 2007: 107).

In response, the national department of education has countered with a range of policies and strategies in attempts to (re)store schools as safe places of learning. These responses, however - as this article alludes to - have not always worked, mostly because school-based responses often discount the fact that while learners might come together to constitute what is perceivably a

single school community, schools are comprised of multiple and complex communities. In considering alternative ways of responding to violence in schools, and in taking into account the complexity of learner identity in relation to violence, the article explores the particular practices of four principals - couched as ‘listening to learners’ – as they attempt to respond to, and manage ‘learners at risk’. To this end, the primary questions considered by this article, are: Firstly, how might ‘listening to learners’ remediate problematic or violent behaviour? Secondly, how might ‘listening to learners’ be used to re-story the lives of ‘learners at risk’? And, thirdly, how might ‘listening to learners’ contribute towards the cultivation of democratic citizenship?

Background: Violence in South African schools: Children, says Burton (2008), are more likely to experience violence in South African schools than in their homes. Common reports of playground bullying are being replaced by incidents of drug abuse, 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 ‘School-based violence report: An overview of school-

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based violence in South Africa' (SACE, 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. While there are more obvious forms of violence, such as corporal punishment or bullying, there are also more subtle forms of violence, such as spreading malicious rumours, cyber-bullying, threats, sexual harassment, or hazing and initiation. 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).

On the one hand, Mncube and Harber (2013) report that the most common internal violence perpetrated by schools against learners is corporal punishment. Although 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. Mncube and Harber (2013: 1) report 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.

On the other hand, an important finding of the 'School-based Violence Report' (SACE, 2011) is the increase in reports of learners violently attacking educators, with schools reporting on verbal abuse, threats, physical violence and sexual violence against educators. Burton and Leoschut (2013) report that while school leaders generally felt that their schools were places of safety, educators 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. While one of the educator unions, the National Professional Educators' 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' (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.

Jefthas 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 (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). 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. Reasons for the perpetuation of sexual harassment and violence in schools, say Mncube and Harber (2013: 12), include the unchallenged acceptance of traditional gender stereotypes; and the authoritarian, closed nature of schooling. In arguing that gender violence in schools cuts across race and class, Bhana (2013: 41) cautions against constructing gender violence along the binarisms of male/ female and black/white divides, or along heterosexual norms which render those children outside of it vulnerable to violence (Bhana, 2013: 41). Following on this, she reports that educators are accused of contributing to homophobia by disregarding everyday complaints and instances of homophobic harassment (Bhana, 2012: 309 – 310).

In attempts to cultivate safer school environments, the South African Schools Act (DoBE, 1996) has prohibited corporal punishment. Additional strategies to cope with poor learner discipline, as well as to manage the conduct of educators, have included 'Alternatives to Corporal Punishment' (DoBE, 2000), 'Signposts for Safe Schools' (South African Police Service and the Department of Education, 2002); 'Code for Professional Ethics' (South African Council for Educators, 2002); as well as the Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) Safe Schools Project (WCED, 2003); Specific policy documents have included the 'Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy' (DoBE, 2002); and 'Building a Culture of Responsibility and Humanity in Our Schools: A Guide for Educators' (DoBE, 2010).

However, violence in schools has not abated, and so the problem persists with increasingly horrific consequences. Principals, like the four, under discussion in this article, have realised that traditional punitive measures of disciplining learners are not working,

Instead, they have opted for an alternative way of responding to, and managing learners, who they consider to be at risk. This alternative way takes the form of listening to the stories of learners, which, for the purposes of this article, is explored and discussed in relation to an ethics of care.

Research Context: In terms of the socio-economic contexts of the schools, three are located on the Cape Flats, while one is located in a historically privileged area. The three schools on the Cape Flats serve fairly similar communities in terms of high rates of unemployment; a high incidence of gang-related activities and violence; poor communal recreational facilities; and poor parental involvement. School A has 1213 learners and 36 educators, of which two are employed by the SGB. The school serves as a melting pot of learners from its surrounding community. According to the principal, 'If kids can't get into a school they will come here'. School B is a no-fees school, and has 1070 learners and 32 educators. According to the principal, the school serves severely impoverished communities, with an 80% unemployment rate among parents. The school runs a feeding programme, which ensures that learners receive two meals per day, which, in the opinion of the principal, is one of the main reasons for learners attending school. School C has 680 learners and 19 educators. The school serves learners from its immediate vicinity, as well as two nearby townships. The majority of parents are struggling fishermen, with 80% being dependent on social grants. School D, a former Model C school, has 752 learners and 42 educators, of which 19 are employed by the WCED, and 23 by the SGB. Due to its proximity to a railway line, and a major bus terminus, the school draws its learners from a diverse range of communities. Notably, School D is the only school among the four, which has a full-time social worker – paid for by the SGB.

Firstly and ironically, despite the different contexts, the four schools are all quintile five schools. Largely for the purposes of financial resources and allocation, all South African public ordinary schools are categorised into five groups, ranging from the 'poorest' to the 'least poorest' quintile. Schools, like A and C are, therefore, considered to be in the same category as School D – that is, 'poorest'. Secondly, notwithstanding the wide discrepancies in infrastructure, and economic contexts, the four schools appear to face the same types of challenges in relation to incidents of violence and

disruptive behaviour, which often compromise and undermine teaching and learning.

Research methodology: The ensuing discussion is based on research data, drawn from a two-year qualitative study that focused specifically on how principals respond to violence in their schools. The researcher had approached a district office to inquire about any 'good practices' that schools or principals might be using to manage violence. The district office responded by identifying the four principals under discussion here. The objective of the research study was to ascertain whether these 'good practices' – and specifically, the practice of 'listening to learners' – might counter violent behaviour, and, in turn, how this practice might contribute to cultivating democratic citizenship. The four schools, therefore, were specifically approached, because of their identification by district officials as having significantly reduced the number of incidents of violence, and for maintaining a reasonable measure of discipline. Unknown at the outset of the research project, and unknown to one another, was that the four principals had inadvertently embarked on a similar practice of what they interchangeably referred to as 'listening to learners'; 'listening to learners' stories'; and 'making time for learners at risk' – that is, learners who were at risk of being expelled, or dropping out from school because of poor behaviour.

Because the research was primarily concerned with exploring the daily practices of the principal vis-à-vis their management of violence at their respective schools, the decision to use a case study research method facilitated the use of multiple sources of evidence. These included semi-structured interviews with the principals; observations of interactions between the principals and problematic learners; examination of disciplinary policies and procedures; and an examination of intervention programmes, such as pastoral programmes, and learner-led initiatives, involving mediator and peer-counselling groups.

Once this common measure of dealing with 'learners at risk' had been identified, the focus of the case study shifted to an exploration of this phenomenon of 'listening' within the context of the respective schools. This allowed the research study to interpret and analyse the type of interaction between the listener (the principal) and the one being listened to (the learner). Of particular interest to the study was the evolving relationship between the principal and the learner, as

well as the monitoring of the learner's conduct in relation to 'being listened to'. To this end, the case study method facilitated a process whereby a real-life context of engagement between a principal and learner could be observed, while the researcher could simultaneously continue to question the principal, and get feedback from educators on the conduct of the learner.

Key findings: On listening to the stories of learners:

While Principals A and C arranged slots to regularly meet with learners during teaching time, since these learners considered any time at school beyond school hours as 'punishment', Principals B and D met with disruptive learners after school hours. The decision to listen to learners' stories was based on the realisation that firstly, the number of disruptive learners was limited to a minimum, yet demanded attention on a daily basis. Secondly, that the principals and educators in fact had little understanding of the backgrounds of learners, yet continued to punish and humiliate them. And thirdly, that the same learners were causing the same problems at various levels of intensity. The principal of School A provided the following description: 'Today he threatens a learner and takes her lunch; tomorrow he shoves her to the ground for her lunch – even when she willingly gives it to him'. Furthermore, the principals' willingness to listen to learners' stories was driven by a nagging concern, that if their behaviour is not remediated, they would most likely end up in prison. Other than attending various workshops on effective communication, and recognising the importance of understanding the other's perspective, none of the principals had any prior experience in what they considered to be the 'only thing left to do', which was to take the time in order to make 'sense of why learners act badly'.

One of the stories shared by Principal A involved the confiscation of a knife from a grade 10 boy, who had used it to threaten another learner. The boy had revealed that he had been bringing the knife to school on a daily basis since grade 8. He explained that he needed it for protection against being mugged or assaulted. His explanation that his brother had given him the knife, and that all the boys in his community carried knives in order to protect themselves, served to explain his realm of human affairs. Most distressing to the boy was not that he was in trouble for threatening another learner, but that the principal did not plan to return his knife. To the boy, the loss of his knife would create problems on two fronts: firstly, he would be vulnerable to assaults,

and secondly, his brother would be angry with him for no longer having the knife. The 'web of human relationships' – described by Arendt (1958: 183-184) as coming into existence wherever people live together – that necessitated him to carry a knife, prevented him from understanding that the carrying of a knife is in itself problematic.

At School C learners are recruited by criminal syndicates that poach abalone. During the night, these students are taken by boat from the local harbour to Robben Island, where the abalone is poached. Thereafter they are expected to carry the bags of abalone up a nearby mountain, where it is stashed until sold. They are paid R30 for every kilogram that they carry up the mountain. These syndicates, according to the principal, specifically target under-age school children because they cannot be detained in the event of being arrested. Parents and guardians are aware of their children's dangerous nightly activities, but are reluctant to put a stop to it, since it is often the only source of income. These learners struggle to function in the two worlds of structured schooling, comprised of an expected set of behaviours, and the world of poaching, where rules were being broken and where they were treated not as schoolchildren, but as abalone mules. That the parents and guardians did not discourage this activity meant that the practice of poaching was acceptable. In this sense, the learners' moral spaces, cannot be understood without taking into account their family and childhood home (that is, their social spaces) (Taylor, 1989: 28). To therefore simply label this activity as abnormal, when it had been normalised within the community, would not present a solution to the problem of poaching – a realisation that Principal C became aware of when he tried to speak to the learners and their parents about the 'criminality' of their actions.

At school B, the principal had been dealing with a particularly aggressive grade 10 girl, who, when not playing truant from school, regularly swore at her educators, and often threatened other girls in her class. Upon engaging with her, the principal learnt that she regularly prostituted herself over the weekends so that she could earn money for her family. Her mother would accompany her to a particular street, and wait for her return. The principal shared that he found it particularly distressful to listen to her story, as he did when he listened to other stories of sexual and drug abuse. The girl, while uncomfortable about her weekend activities,

did not consider her actions as wrong or 'immoral'. In fact, what motivated her was being viewed as a 'good girl' by her mother for caring for the family. The point being made here is that the learners' disruptive behaviour has to be understood in terms of Arendt's (1958) web of human relationships and in terms of Taylor's (1989) social spaces, which have come to define their moral spaces. Their stories have to be understood in terms of what it means for a learner to carry a knife as a means of protection, or what it means for a poaching learner to have the responsibility of providing for his family. In both of these examples, the learners concerned were not the initiators of their seemingly disruptive behaviour. These learners, or these 'agents' - to use Arendt's (1958) description - are not the authors or producers of their own stories. The stories are already in production by the time the learner is inserted into them, and becomes part of an existing web of human relationships.

In response to stories like these, the four principals have decided to listen before they act. Ordinarily, these learners would simply be punished with detention, or temporarily excluded via suspension. For the principals, listening involves making time to meet with the learner, and asking about his/her home, family, models, friends, and what dreams he/she has for him/herself. The principals acknowledged that, in some instances, this involved a limited number of meetings, but in most cases it took regular meetings with certain learners to ensure that they stayed out of trouble.

By listening to the stories of learners, the principals are managing two simultaneous processes. Firstly, by listening to the story of the 'who', they begin to see beyond the 'what', and they insert themselves into the web of human relationships that shape the life world of the learner. The principals' listening reveals a level of empathy that makes it known that it is safe for the learner to reveal the 'who' behind the action of the 'what'. Empathy, states Slote (2007: 14-15), is a critical factor in determining whether someone will act altruistically towards someone in distress. And where someone, like a principal, feels empathetic distress in response to a learner's distress, the principal often acts to relieve the learner's distress.

Secondly, by showing interest, the principal is helping the learner to find his/her own voice, and to make meaning of his/her actions. As such, the stories of both the principal and the learner have the opportunity for

change, and to be re-storied. While the learner might realise that his/her story does not have to be a continuation of the story into which he/she has been inserted, the principal learns that disruptive or violent learners are more than their acts, and what they do. To this end, Fay (1996: 186) explains that no life can be a story 'in itself', because the stories of lives are not self-contained - meaning that new stories can and will emerge from that life. The importance of relating and listening to stories is not so much about the sharing of experiences as it is about the capacity it holds for helping us to understand ourselves in relation to those who shape our relationships. Both processes - of listening, and guiding the learners to re-story their stories - reveal genuine acts of caring, which, according to Noddings (1984), comprise a motivational sensitivity to the particular vulnerabilities of others.

And yet, as Smeyers (1999: 245-246) notes, while care offers a powerful way to move towards a more just and humane society, care will always create moral dilemmas, which arise out of particular contexts. Principal C, for example, recognises that while poaching might be immoral, he needs to weigh his response against that of a community, who, instead, views poaching as a matter of survival. At times, the principals have found the stories - especially those involving sexual and drug abuse - particularly distressing. Principal A and B reported often being left at a loss of what to do next. Yet, they were unanimous in their view that listening to learners' stories was 'the right thing to do'. They therefore consider their role as attentive listeners as a moral obligation, which, they hope, would serve to change the problematic behaviour of learners.

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

Listening to learners as an ethics of care: Based largely on the socially and culturally constructed experiences of women, care ethics, states Tronto (2005), are shaped by the four ethical dimensions of attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness. Every human life, says Noddings (2012: 771), starts in relation, which facilitates the emergence of an individual. As such, care ethics understands individuals to having varying degrees of dependence and interdependence on the other. Regardless of the unequal relationship between the educator (or principal) and learner, explains Noddings (2012: 772), it is possible for both parties to contribute to the cultivation of caring. In her role as an attentive, competent and responsible

educator, she has to be able to discern between the assumed needs of the learner – often driven by the curriculum – and the expressed needs – which will only become apparent when the learner is listened to by the educator, that is, when the learner feels cared-for. Upon listening and reflecting, it becomes imperative for the educator to respond. And if she cannot respond positively, then she has to respond in a way that will maintain the caring relation (Noddings, 2012: 772). This role of the educator is different to that of the learner, who completes the caring relation by merely receiving the caring, and thereby continues to share with the educator. In the absence of such a response from the learner, clarifies Noddings (2012: 773), there is no caring relation.

While one might agree that care ethics is important for the cultivation of healthy social co-existence, one also has to ask whether educators have to care about their learners. The everyday sense of caring, which is focused on the assumed needs of learners, states Noddings (2012: 773), should not be confused with the establishment and cultivation of relational caring that emanates from the educator as carer, and learners as cared-for. What matters to Noddings is the relational aspect of the human condition, which lends itself not only to encountering the other, but in seeing oneself in relation to the other, so that the overall wellbeing of the individual is taken into account. The caring referred to by Noddings arises out of natural caring, in which caring for the other is understood as a moral consequence of ethical behavior – that is, the ‘capacity to be moved by the affective condition of the other that educators try to develop in students as part of their moral education’.

On Re-Storying the Story: While Noddings does not refer directly to violent school contexts, she does, however, maintain that the greater the degree of vulnerability, the greater the measure of care that ought to be extended. But, is caring enough to change and manage especially violent behaviour? While all four principals agreed that caring is a necessary part of being an educator, they also acknowledged that if the school is the only place where caring is encountered, then it might not be enough to change the story of the learner. This is a critical concern, not least because it raises foundational questions about the role and function of a school. Mindful of the capabilities of educators, Noddings (1984: 100-101) clarifies that the carer does not have to sacrifice herself; that caring is both self-serving and

other-serving. Although the educator cannot do everything, she is not indifferent to those she encounters, or yet to encounter. To this end, Noddings (2012: 777) maintains that if every educator is a moral educator, and social or moral issues are discussed in class, what will emerge is a climate of care and trust in which most people would want to do the right thing. But, the question remains, are caring relations enough to deal with the types of violence with which schools in South Africa are confronted? And more importantly, is a caring school climate sufficient to cultivate the type of citizenship necessary for a caring and socially just society?

The act of listening, says Noddings (2012: 773), sets in motion what happens next. To the principals, the objective is listening is to guide the learner towards self-understanding, and a recognition that the current story being enacted can be changed to another story – one which is not necessarily destructive. In this instance, the principal uses what the learner tells him to assist the learner to make certain changes, so that the story changes direction. Of interest is that none of the principals had given much thought to what they were doing, other than following their instinct, that this was helpful to the learner, and helpful to them in dealing with problematic learners. On the one hand, this reveals an interesting example of how meaning emanates from practice, and on the other hand, how educational leaders and those within the educational sphere are already practising what might not be known. On many levels, therefore, what I am doing in the ensuing discussion is attaching meaning to what is already being practised.

Danto (1962: 146) explains that ‘We re-story earlier experiences as we reflect on later experiences so the stories and their meanings shift and change over time’. This relation between the past and the present, and their interpretation, explains Fay (1996: 189), is not simple or unidirectional; instead it is dialectical. In offering themselves as listeners and participants in this dialectical engagement, principals are guiding learners towards particular self-understandings. Biesta (2010a:554) explains that guiding learners towards self-understandings is akin to summoning them to use their intelligence. He argues that what stultifies people is not a lack of instruction, but rather belief in the inferiority of their intelligence. He continues that to show learners that they can think for themselves, is to emancipate them. In this sense, the learners who are being invited to

share their stories are not only being emancipated from the inherited stories of violence, they are also being emancipated to embark upon their own, and yet-to-be scripted stories.

In turn, MacIntyre (1981: 201) cautions that, if we deprive children of stories, we 'leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words'. By telling their story, the learners have an opportunity to disrupt their current story, and to re-script it. By listening, the principal is able to offer a deconstructed reflection on what the learner has related, thereby disrupting taken-for-granted ways of being and acting. One of the more significant aspects of re-storying the stories of learners is its potentiality of the democratisation of opportunities. For the learner at risk, a re-scripted story holds the potentiality of a re-scripted life.

The educational implications of re-storying the story are of course, the real possibility that the learner might change his/her disruptive behaviour, and move towards a more positive story. In this respect, all four principals reported remarkable improvements in the behaviour of specific learners, and in cultivating a more respectful school environment. These sentiments were shared by various educators at each of the schools. While they were able to single out specific changes, such as a decrease in incidents of bullying, no reports of weapons being found on learners in the past year and fewer incidents of vandalism, they also noticed greater pride in terms of learners' dress, their conduct during assemblies, and a willingness among certain learners to report incidents of harassment - a situation described by Principal A as 'never before encountered in my 22 years at this school'. Changes in learner conduct and attitudes have had positive spinoffs in the classroom. Children were no longer being sent out of their classrooms for disruptive behaviour; and educators are able to focus on teaching. Principal A explains that the approach has assisted the school to shift 'from a rules-driven to a value-driven' space - with many educators following suit in adopting a more compassionate approach.

Now, if listening to learners can be understood as extending a caring relation, and assisting learners in re-storying their stories (or lives), so that they potentially turn away from violence, there are, at least, two further questions that warrant attention. To which extent might the practice be generalised to other schools? And, how might the practice of listening assist in the cultivation of democratic citizenship?

On the importance of listening as a cultivation of democratic citizenship: The extent to which the practice of listening to learners' stories might be generalised to other schools depends, on whether principals and educators recognise it as a necessity or a responsibility. This being said, while it might be recognised as a necessity, it might not necessarily be considered as a responsibility. Principals and educators might be reluctant to support this practice due to an unwillingness to be drawn into the life-world of learners; not having the skills or time to manage these stories; or not considering it as their responsibility. And, of course, the more obvious concern, that listening to learners' stories does not necessarily offer the assurance of a positive response from the learner. The learner could very well repeat his/her acts of violence, regardless of the role and efforts of the principal. In the cases of the four principals, they have witnessed enough changes in learner conduct and attitude to believe that listening to a learner creates better and safer opportunities for the learner and the school. On the one hand, it could simply be the principals' perceptions that their efforts were yielding positive changes. On the other hand, it could also be argued that something - in this case, listening to learners' stories - is said to work if there is justification for it. The principals know that, while traditional punitive measures might have the immediate effect of neutralising disruptive behaviour, these measures do not offer the potential of disrupting the learner's story. In this instance, then, the justification exists for another means of countering the violence. In terms of the responses of the principals, this justification is premised on a positive response to violence - positive in the sense that a particular (violent) behaviour has been contested in a particular (listening) way. Moreover, this positive response does not dehumanise the learner in the way that could, and does happen when learners are rebuked or humiliated.

To Christie (2010: 695), it is unavoidable that school leadership necessarily entails ethical considerations, which are further complicated by the reality that school leadership is always embedded in broader social relationships, which '[i]nvariably involves normative judgements of right and wrong ...and it is not experienced in the same way by the different actors it brings together' (2010: 696). So it would appear that the argument of whether schools should take responsibility for the violence of learners is a misnomer. If schools

consider themselves as embedded in the societies, which they serve, then they have a fundamental responsibility to play in nurturing good citizens.

While education is often seen as a key instrument in the 'production' of good citizens, explains Biesta (2010b: 1), the emphasis is on the teaching of citizenship, when, in fact, it should be on the ways in which citizenship is actually learned in and through the practices that make up everyday lives of children. As such, argues Biesta (2010b: 2), citizenship requires an ongoing orientation towards the wider political values of justice, equality and freedom. He contends that the focus on learning democracy makes it possible to reveal the ways in which such learning is situated in the unfolding lives of young people and how these lives, in turn, are implicated in wider cultural, social, political and economic orders. This means, says Biesta that it is only by following young people as they participate in different settings, and by listening to their voices, that their learning can be adequately understood. Inasmuch as there is no guarantee that listening to learners' stories will change their behaviour, there is no guarantee, says Biesta (2010b: 14) that what young people learn is identical to what is being taught. Being a citizen, involves more than the acquisition of fixed core values; it involves participation, which is an inherently educative process, since it has to do with the transformation of the ways in which young people relate to their place and role in society (Biesta, 2010: 13-14).

Concluding remarks: When principals (or educators) are prepared to listen to the stories of learners, they are not only signalling a willingness to enter the learner's story, they are also enacting a particular form of democratic engagement, which speaks of belonging, participation, and equal opportunity. When particular constructions of social and moral spaces of young people have been inadequate in cultivating good citizens, then it shifts the burden of responsibility to other social and moral spaces (that is, the school). While one can debate the merits of this responsibility, the responsibility of good citizenship affects all, and not particular constructions of society. To this end, listening and re-storying learners' stories presents schools with the spaces necessary for the processes and practices of citizenship.

In conclusion, in considering alternative measures to managing disruptive and violent learners, I have offered insight into the practices of four high school principals,

who have tried to act humanely, rather than retributively. They have opted to practise, rather than teach what it means to be a democratic citizen, By recognising their responsibility to disruptive learners, their practice of listening and re-storying the story has acknowledged the rights of these learners to participate, belong, and attach renewed meaning to their lives. Their act of listening has inadvertently provided the most powerful space for what it means to be a democratic citizen, which is to be seen, and therefore heard.

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