Perspective

School violence, mafiarisation and curriculum trajectories: A need for a pedagogy of disarmament

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"We owe our children – the most vulnerable citizens in society – a life free from violence and fear." Nelson Mandela

ABSTRACT

This perspective problematises violence and so-called mafiarisation, which is fast becoming a characteristic of many South African schools. Mafiarisation interrupts sustainable learning environments, as schools become unsafe sites for teaching and learning. While there is appreciation for various efforts that address school violence, it is essential to address this problem from all possible angles. This paper proposes that the problem can be addressed more effectively at a pedagogical level as a counter-hegemonic strategy to combat school violence, through an infusion of pedagogy of disarmament in the school curriculum. Pedagogy of disarmament comprises four elements that can be infused into the curriculum, which are a moral imperative, peace-building, knowledge of the law and individualised counselling services. I earth arguments in decoloniality theory, which is a theory that unmasks and challenges various oppressive elements that can impel school violence. This paper concludes by arguing that South African schools require pedagogy such as disarmament to address school indiscipline and violence to create an environment conducive to teaching and learning, and that is devoid of fear and mafiarisation.

Keywords: pedagogy of disarmament, mafiarisation, decoloniality, school violence, sustainable learning environment

INTRODUCTION

June 16, 1976 marked the start of a new era for the South African education system. Learners at Naledi High School in Soweto took to the streets to denounce the apartheid system and the enforced use of the Afrikaans language as a medium of instruction (Ndlovu, 2002). The learners used all means possible to indicate their opposition, including violence. During the apartheid years, violence was used as a tool of oppression, but it also served as a tool of resistance (Power, 2017). From this date on, increasing numbers of learners joined the liberation struggle, until political independence was attained in 1994. The first decade post 1994 was a honeymoon period, during which educationists and politicians arguably took for granted and assumed that issues relating to race, marginalisation and segregation (which had sparked resistance through violent means) no longer existed. This assumption was devoid of the understanding that political independence for South Africa did not mean the end of colonialism, which continued to manifest itself through informal apartheid. In addition, the new education system, after 1994, did not have mechanisms to disarm the protesting learners on their return to class from the liberation struggle.

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Many research studies have been done on school violence in South Africa (Lazarus, Khan & Johnson, 2012; Moen & Steyn, 2016; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2012; Ngqela & Lewis, 2012; Van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2009), but a close interrogation of these research studies shows that their focus was on the causes of violence at schools. They fail to divulge much about how day-to-day curriculum activities can address school violence head-on. Given the intensity of school violence, research that has arguably romanticised school violence by only interrogating the causes of violence, without proposing activities and approaches to eradicate the violence, is not particularly useful.

I use the term pedagogy of disarmament in this paper, which is conceptualised, in the words of Kadayifci-Orellana (2003), as seeking to "promote peace and nonviolence, common humanity, encourage coexistence and negation of use of weapons in resolving school difference" (p. 32). The term pedagogy of disarmament seems to be fit for post-militant societies, and unfit for educational discourses, but it is time that South Africa acknowledges that the extent to which schools have become armed environments pose a serious problem to sustainable learning environments. It is shocking that even young learners bear arms – learners are armed from primary school to tertiary levels. There is, generally, a notion in some South African communities that every social pressure or challenge has to be addressed through violent means, which includes the use of weapons. I attempt to demystify the notion that argues that a pedagogy of disarmament is unfit for educational purposes, because, as long ago as the 1980s, countries such Albania, England and Cambodia have attempted to achieve peace and disarmament through education (Albanian Peace and Disarmament Education Manual, 2006; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1980).

Hence, the pedagogy of disarmament is not a new phenomenon and involves attempts to reconstruct the school milieu, so that it contributes to sustainable development. The pedagogy of disarmament is, therefore, different from other forms of disarmament (usually used in post-militant communities), because it contextualises school violence; in this case, the pedagogy responds directly to the needs and challenges of the South African context. It may even be possible to transfer the pedagogy to countries that have similar circumstances as South Africa. Contextualising school violence within the pedagogy of disarmament is informed by the approach to decoloniality that frames this paper, which seeks to shift biographies of knowledge, from Euro-Global North and neo-liberal spaces to local milieus, to address the lived realities of South African learners (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). It is a theory that works "toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ", which often leads to resistance and violence (Mignolo, 2007).

In this paper, I refer to mafiarisation, a term I have used in reference to the group of criminals known as the Mafia, which is known, in particular, for using drugs and dangerous weapons to commit various crimes (Garzon, 2008; Paoli, 2007; Paoli, 2008). Used in this paper, mafiarisation refers to the systematic use of weapons by learners to inflict pain on other learners, which it appears the schooling system is failing to deal with at present. To illustrate this failure with statistical data, Burton and Leoschut (2013) report that a total of 2 445 756 high school learners were affected by the use of arms in 2012 nationwide. It is argued that most schools in South Africa have become highly volatile and unpredictable places (Zulu, Urbani, Van der Merwe, & Van der Walt, 2004). As Hazler (2000) points out, this type of atmosphere is characterised by a culture of insults, threats, harassment, frustration, resentment, use of weapons, and anger. Thus, it is in this regard that there is a need for a pedagogy that dismantles school violence. In short, school mafiarisation, in this paper, refers to an unsafe school environment characterised by the use of weapons, which the education department is struggling to eliminate and to create an environment conducive to learning.

Against this background, it is imperative for curriculum innovation to consider the pedagogy of disarmament across the schooling system. This pedagogy is one that emphasises peace, conflict resolution, democracy, peaceful coexistence and individualised counselling. It acts as a counter-hegemonic strategy against the mafiarisation of schools. Eurocentric narratives have created a colonial mentality that suggests

that Africans can only solve their problems through violent means, thereby, ultimately, negating attempts to create a sustainable learning environment.

The paper is theoretically framed around decoloniality, followed by an explanation and conceptualisation of the pedagogy of disarmament, its rationale in the South African context and, finally, its four pillars, which can mitigate the use of weapons by learners.

THEORETICAL FRAMING: DECOLONIALITY

Decoloniality is not a single, theoretical school of thought (though it is grounded in the earlier works of Enrique Dussel and Anibal Quijano), but a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as being the fundamental problem of the modern age (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Decoloniality refers to a commitment to challenging and reformulating the communicational scientific discourse, from a criticism of the mediating power of Anglo-American hegemonic thinking to a native cultural paradigm (Huerfano, Caballero, & Rojas, 2016). The theory rejects modernity, which is located in the oppressed and exploited side of the colonial difference, in favour of a Decolonial liberation struggle to achieve a world beyond Eurocentric modernity (Ramon, 2011).

Decoloniality should not be confused with decolonisation. The latter refers to political liberation from colonisers, whereas the former deals with the aftermath of colonisation, where the thrust is to challenge colonial systems that have remained in place long after the apartheid or colonial rulership had been "displaced" (Muchie & Gumede, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

In the context of school violence, I argue that learners are trapped in a colonial mind-set that suggests, amongst others, that every conflict can be solved through violent means, from the foundation phase to the tertiary level. The apartheid system taught and forced learners to engage in violence in an attempt to end the system; once the apartheid system had been dismantled, the education system failed to disarm learners and create safe learning environments. In light of this, a decoloniality approach is needed to redress the damage caused by coloniality (Boaten, 2010). Coloniality is defined by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) as an invisible power structure that sustains colonial relations of exploitation and domination, long after colonisation.

The preceding argument is buttressed further by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), who considers decoloniality as a "melee against invisible vampirism of imperialism technologies and colonial matrices of power that continue to exist in the minds, lives, languages, dreams, imaginations, and epistemologies of modern subjects in Africa and the entire global South" (p. 11). School violence is a new form of coloniality in South African schools and makes schools fearful sites that are ungovernable (Ngobeni, 2014). This coloniality needs to be confronted. In arguing for decoloniality, I concur with Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) that;

> What African [schools] must be vigilant against is the trap of ending up normalising and universalising [school violence] as a natural state of the world, however, it must be unmasked, resisted and destroyed because it produces a world order that can only be sustained through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies (p. 10).

School violence and mafiarisation should not be naturalised or romanticised, but rather exposed and challenged, because the possibility of it spilling over into the rest of South African society is real. Society has become so violent and is so characterised by arms, to the extent that scholars who desire peace are indebted with the burden of finding ways to arrest this problem. Recently, the South African Council of Churches described South Africa as moving towards becoming a "Mafia state" (Strydom, 2017). This

announcement was echoed by Cyril Ramaphosa, at the time the deputy president of South Africa (Stoddard, 2017).

EXPLAINING THE PEDAGOGY OF DISARMAMENT

The pedagogy of disarmament is a coinage through which I attempt, to quote Kadayifci-Orellana (2003), to "promote peace and nonviolence, common humanity, and encourage coexistence" (p. 32). It is premised on a philosophical underpinning that promotes the creation of learning places that are not only aesthetically pleasing (Lippman, 2010), but also safe, to ensure a sustainable learning environment. It is a pedagogy that, as Brown (2004) states, attempts to "create effective classroom management which utilises essential research-based pedagogical processes that respond appropriately to the emotional, social, ethnic, cultural and cognitive needs of students" (p. 268).

It is a pedagogy that seeks to address various issues among learners – issues that make violence, including all forms of abuse, the carrying of weapons, and violent approaches to resolving differences, prevalent in schools. This pedagogy should be part of curriculum activities; only then will South Africa be seen as being serious about addressing school violence before schools deteriorate into mafia states. The pedagogy includes research into all phases of schooling, including early childhood settings, primary schools and high schools, to improve theoretical and methodological foci and to enhance commitment to ending school violence (Bhana, 2013). The pedagogy of disarmament should be infused into the curriculum space and taught daily, if we are to have any hope of derailing the mafiarisation of schools and mitigating the use of weapons.

WHY IS A PEDAGOGY OF DISARMAMENT NEEDED IN SOUTH AFRICA?

South African society is immersed in violence, hence, redirecting efforts to address violence at school level presents opportunities to reframe the violent terrain, by cultivating the "arming" of learners with non-violent means of conflict resolution. This argument is necessitated by the fact that, despite measures that have been taken to eradicate bullying, whether through legislation or policy, school violence persists (Laas, 2012). In addition, Dube and Hlalele (2017) note that "school violence in South Africa frustrates the quest for sustainable learning ecologies because schools are war zones, street-fighting centres and, in some cases, murder scenes" (p. 5). Learners' aggression has the potential to create turmoil in schools and, ultimately, render schools ungovernable (Singh & Steyn, 2013).

School violence negates the observation by Burton (2008) that schools are generally seen as mechanisms to develop and reinforce positive citizens with pro-social attitudes, and as sites where individuals are prepared for the roles, they are to play in society at large. The goal of the pedagogy of disarmament is, among other goals, "to transform groups and societies through mechanisms and institutions that can channel the energy of conflict into constructive rather than destructive channels" (Abu-Nimer, Khoury, & Welty, 2007, p. 131).

As suggested by Jebungei (2013), the role of the school is not merely to help learners accumulate knowledge, but also to mould them into cultured citizens. Through this curriculum, learners will be empowered to challenge coloniality, which reinforces the legacy that Africans choose to use weapons for conflict resolution instead of other options they have at their disposal. It is essential that this Eurocentric notion is challenged. Given this context, the pedagogy is, as suggested by Singh and Steyn (2013), intended to manage learner aggression within the school system, to enhance academic performance and to achieve holistic development. In so doing, the pedagogy of disarmament opposes romanticising school violence. This opposition involves taking radical steps to end the coloniality challenge, namely, the use of weapons in schools. In light of the previous discussion, the pedagogy of disarmament intends cultivating deliberative

encounters during the education of young citizens as a means of alleviating the scourge of school violence (McDonald, 2013).

PILLARS OF THE PEDAGOGY OF DISARMAMENT

The pedagogy of disarmament rests on four pillars, namely, moral imperative, peace-building, knowledge of the law and individualised counselling services. Because of the complexity of the problem of school violence in South Africa, there is a need for interdisciplinary collaboration between social and human scientists (Bailey, 2002; McDonald, 2013; Power, 2017; Ward, 2012). In the quest to create safe schools in South Africa the collaboration of actors who support non-violent means for achieving conflict resolution is crucial. These pillars are, according to Akinsola (2010), "open to further debate on how to engage minds in a critical manner to effectively deal with the issue of school violence in high schools in South Africa" (p. 658).

MORAL IMPERATIVE

The moral imperative includes religion (I refer only to the religious aspects that promote the respect of human rights, dignity, peaceful resolution of difference and social cohesion), and Ubuntu philosophy. Religion, despite being accused of being the cause of wars and conflict, has positive aspects, including enhancing morality among people (McKay & Whitehouse, 2015; Norenzayan, 2014; Nthontho, 2018). While the study by students of religion has been problematised, which warranted its removal from the curriculum, this removal has contributed to and arguably paved the way for the emergence of violence and various social ills (Cawood, 2018; Clarke & Woodhead, 2018; Dinama, 2010). Because religion often has however primarily been associated with tolerance, it is argued that once religion was removed from schools, the value of tolerance received less attention, contributing to the escalation of violence and conflict (Dube & Hlalele, 2017). The problems experienced today that of schools becoming armed, were, arguably, less severe when a religious discourse was present in schools, due to the emphasis on tolerance by religion.

Arguing from decolonial theory, the removal of religion from the mainstream curriculum practices, speak of knowledge contestation competing for recognition. Infact, as argued by Nkoane (2015), "dominant ideologies portray other ways of knowing and knowledge construction as deficient and non-rigorous" (p. 37). In addition, Nkoane (2015) says, "hegemonic dominance in circles of knowledge construction, is a political battle in which the discursive weapons of knowledge and power are used, and which determines what worthwhile knowledge for inclusion and exclusion is" (p. 39). While Preis and Russell (2006) argue that various religions, "convey a message of peace, justice and human solidarity" (pp. 15-16), which I believe must be exploited to address the problem of school violence. Thus, the relegation or negation of religious knowledge as non-rigorous for the holistic development of learners, especially in a context where schools are mafiarised, should be contested through the lens of decoloniality. To this end, I argue that, legitimatisation of knowledge should be depoliticised, and made natural (Suarez-Krabbe, 2009), by drawing from all perspectives as much as possible, to address pressing issues of the day, including school violence. In short, all forms of knowledge should be appreciated in the curriculum as long they can contribute to the end to school violence.

The morality imperative can also be acquired through infusing the values of Ubuntu in the school curriculum, first, as a base for African identity, and second, a strategy to resolve conflicts through non-threatening terms, such as engaging elders. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that offers a counter-hegemony strategy to unmask the coloniality hibernating through and in school violence. The philosophy is generally premised on humanness as a reciprocal mechanism to enhance social solidarity. This humanness is conferred on another person through solidarity with one another and care for each other's quality of life within the contexts of communal relationships and human dignity (Metz, 2011:559). Ubuntu, as an African

philosophy, is a powerful tool for strengthening a community; it promotes dignity, identity, mutualism, empathy, generosity, and community commitment (Tutu, 1999). Thus, when the curriculum engages learners and teachers to embrace Ubuntu in addressing social and academic difference, there is a likelihood that school violence will be reduced significantly in South African schools.

I advocate for the moral imperative pillar, informed by Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello and Koenig (2007), that claims that embracing morality as a key aspect of the curriculum could reduce feelings of loss of control and helplessness, provide a cognitive framework that can decrease suffering, and strengthen purpose, tolerance, coexistence and love among learners. Curriculum changes, premised on promoting morality among school stakeholders, should involve building a nonviolent organisation and a society of just peace (Moore, 2015). In short, a curriculum that negates morality in education is geared to produce immoral citizens, who disregard and endanger people who are different, and militate against the sustainable development of learners and other educational stakeholders (Dube & Hlalele, 2017).

PEACE-BUILDING INITIATIVES

The second pillar of the pedagogy of disarmament is peace education. Countries such as France, the Netherlands and Austria have experienced considerable peace and safety since embracing peace education in the curriculum (Wintersteiner, Spajić-Vrkaŝ, & Tuetsch, 2003). Peace education makes people refine their approach to conflict. It aims to confront and resist violence and to transform societies into cultures of peace (Kester, 2010). The pedagogy of disarmament evokes the need to "promote human good, provide basic human needs, guarantee protection of human rights and promote the integral development of the globe" (Ogbonnaya, 2012, p. 2).

It can be argued, then, that the pedagogy of disarmament falls within the realm of peace education pedagogies (Reardon & Cebezudo, 2001) that attempt to combat mafiarisation of schools by inculcating citizenship values that accept contestation as inevitable, and state that violence never offers a solution to contestation. Decoloniality is premised in peace education and aligned to the pedagogy of disarmament, and provides a framework and an environment in which people's fundamental rights, interests and wishes are respected (Navarro-Castro & Nario-Galace, 2010). In this vein, decoloniality is a struggle for recognition, respect, accommodation and appreciation of others, as a means of achieving a better future and education for learners.

A pedagogy of disarmament curriculum, "include[s] education for citizenship at an international level and address[es] the conditions necessary for the construction of peace, including conflict resolution, human rights, democracy, an end to racism, and the elimination of sexism" (Ardizzone, 2001, p. 18). It also includes managing anger, modifying behaviour, adopting a social perspective, developing morality, building social skills, solving social problems, and resolving conflicts (Lazarus et al., 2012). In addition, peace education, premised on the pedagogy of disarmament, emphasises political policies that are sensitive to the needs of the people, in order to avoid contestation that promotes violence. In support of the preceding observation, Gerson and Opotow (2004) warn that coexistence-enhancing peace education initiatives may be problematic when they are supported by the more powerful party in a conflict, or when they do not address political issues, resource and power disparities, and perceptions of injustice that underlie long-standing, deadly conflict.

LEGAL CONSCIENTISATION

The pedagogy of disarmament embraces legal conscientisation as one of the elements that can reduce mafiarisation of schools in South Africa. Incidents that happen in schools evoke and often necessitate legal or quasi-legal responses from teachers, learners and school administrators (Delaney, 2013). It may be that

learners engage in violent activities, such as shootings, because they are unaware of the legal implications of their actions. It is desirable and possible to educate learners, so that they become knowledgeable about and comfortable with the constitutional rights of learners and educators (Doctor, 2013). This knowledge enables learners and educators to be sensitive about actions that may stimulate school violence and its consequences.

The pedagogy of disarmament argues that part of the curriculum should make learners aware of the consequences of violence, in case they are convicted. In this regard, Doctor (2013) says, "If educators and learners fail to arm themselves with the knowledge and understanding of such laws, they too will find themselves among the four walls of a courtroom. Ignorance will not excuse a crime in the eyes of a judge" (p. 7). It is exposure to legal knowledge in the curriculum that will, in the lens of decoloniality, empower learners to confront the situation and conflicts from a legal space, and promote respect for human rights.

Again, the aim of informing learners about the consequences of violence is not to scare them, but to create a knowledge base, so that they understand that violent actions against another person represent a violation of the law. Such understanding has the impetus to contribute to the maintenance of social cohesion (Sárbu, Dimitrescu & Lacroix, 2015).

INDIVIDUALISED COUNSELLING

The fourth pillar of the pedagogy of disarmament, namely, individualised counselling, can help learners to deal with violent behavioural experiences and tendencies (Muribwathoho, 2015; Muribwathoho & Shumba, 2006). These studies indicate that there are situations that require individualised counselling for learners. I admit that, while individualised counselling is desirable, in most South African schools this will present a serious challenge, because of the high learner to teacher ratio. However, this complication does not eradicate the need and importance of individualised counselling, especially in cases where school violence is rampant.

As a way to implement individualised counselling in the contexts of South Africa, where most classes have many learners, educators can identify key influential learners with either disruptive or violent tendencies, and refer such learners for individualised counselling. In this case, individualised counselling would involve targeting individual learners who exhibit violent behaviour and involving them in a counselling process. When a learner escalates to violent behaviour, and all we say is, "we knew it was going there", the question is, thus, since you knew, what did you do to address the situation? Often, educators observe learners with disruptive behaviour and fail to find the best ways of dealing with such learners. In such circumstances, there is a need to refer complicated issues to trained counsellors (Western Cape Department of Education, 2007).

The type of counselling that is recommended by this paper involves educators being encouraged to form relationships and develop trust with learners to find the best ways of disarming them. For example, an educator can identify learners with disruptive behaviours, engage them, and eventually initiate conversations that can contribute to effective counselling, thus supporting an orientation to peaceful living, and talk to them about morality issues, such as tolerance.

Individualised counselling enables both learners and educators to refine their approach to and ways to strengthen disarmament (Bailes, Christiansen, Plesch, & Wood, n.d.). This pillar is often the last resort and is only considered when group strategies have not yielded desirable results in relation to the disarmament of learners. Its success depends on the provision of counsellors for every school, who conduct individual counselling, on a rotational basis, from different angles and perspectives. This approach also promotes among learners learning from experience, self-confidence and calmness in dealing with difficulties (Peres et al., 2007). This consequently creates a "charitable and sacrificial giving; respect for fellow humans and

other living beings; compassion and assistance for the poor and needy in society; the pursuit of equity and justice; and care for the natural environment" (Lunn, 2009, p. 938). The observation by Lunn (2009) has been one of the goals of interrogating (through individualised counselling) the inherent colonising character of the present state of world affairs, as well as to unmask/dismantle and decentre any tendencies that cause school violence (Dussel, 1996). In this way, decoloniality works to deconstruct violent tendencies that are manifest but often ignored, perhaps because educators are afraid of learners, or because they are helpless to confront violent symptoms.

CHALLENGES OF THE PEDAGOGY OF DISARMAMENT

While a pedagogy of disarmament is an alternative that, can mitigate school violence and mafiarisation, it will be uncritical to assume it will gain space within the mainstream curriculum practices. This expectation is realistic, because its implementation in schools requires expertise, which some educators may not have. It also requires time and, in the context of curriculum overload, it may be impractical. Furthermore, the pedagogy of disarmament requires buy-in from various stakeholders, including learners. Also, while the need for counsellors is inevitable for the success of a pedagogy of disarmament, the challenge is that not all schools possess the resources to have counsellors, let alone to cater for individual needs.

CONCLUSION

The paper argues for the need for curriculum change in schools, by engaging the pedagogy of disarmament as a means to confront and mitigate the challenges posed by school violence, which has rendered some schools ungovernable and consequently unfit for teaching and learning purposes. Decoloniality has been used to frame the study, because it opens an opportunity to deconstruct the school mafia matrix, which, when unearthed and unchallenged, promotes school violence. Again, decoloniality arms all school stakeholders to move towards the promotion of fairness and equality, as highlighted by the pillars of the pedagogy of disarmament. I conclude by calling on education offices, religious leaders and other stakeholders to buy into the pedagogy of disarmament as a means to address school violence.

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