Violence as an impediment to a culture of teaching and learning in some South African schools

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School violence in South Africa has a long history. Despite the introduction of a new democratic political dispensation in 1994, it appears that violence in schools has not abated. School violence unfortunately impacts negatively on a culture of learning and teaching. In this project, the nature and extent of violence in schools among a sample of learners was investigated. It was found *inter alia* that school violence has indeed remained a serious problem among these learners and has impacted deleteriously on the culture of teaching and learning in their schools. Two solutions for the eradication of the problem are suggested.

Introduction: violence in South African schools

Violence is the exertion of physical force to injure or destroy, accompanied by anger and hostility (Daniels, Marshall & Ochberg, 1970:59). It can also be defined as the immoderate use of physical force exerted for the purpose of abusing, damaging and violating another person, property or oneself (Bybee & Gee, 1982:119). It is any act where there is a deliberate attempt to inflict physical harm (Breakwell, 1989:8). All forms of violence are disruptive and the impact of violence contradicts commonly held values of personal, family and societal well-being (McKendrick & Hoffman, 1990:24-30).

Violence can take the form of natural violence or of man-made violence (McKendrick & Hoffman, 1990:12). *School violence* can be regarded as willful and illegitimate acts of man-made violence. Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1988:123) describe school violence as any behaviour of learners, educators, administrators or non-school persons, who attempt to inflict physical injury on another person or to damage school property.

Schools in South Africa have in the past frequently been disrupted by violence and unrest, chiefly in reaction to the political situation in the country. However, school violence and learner activism started in acute form some 25 years ago when thousands of students and learners took to the streets of Soweto in protest to, amongst others, the imposition of Afrikaans as medium of instruction. From 1976 onwards, education became an instrument of political reform (Le Roux, 1992:597-607). Since this date, students and learners have been active in demonstrating, often violently, also in the form of burning down schools. According to Ngcongo (1995:18), the manner in which the government handled education for blacks at the time encouraged conflict and violence. Although the black people took pains to state what they would regard as acceptable education (Marais, 1985:150), very little was done to address the problem. This attitude on the part of the government of the day contributed significantly to the eruption of violence in the schools (Sonn, 1986:128).

Partly as a result of the disruption of education in the black communities, apartheid (education) came to an end. A new social-democratic political dispensation was introduced in South Africa in 1994, creating expectations among parents and communities that rest and calm would be returned to education. However, the problem of violence and disruption in the schools has not disappeared. According to De Villiers (1997:76), the same political factors that played a role in dismantling apartheid have also played a major role in undermining the creation of a culture of teaching and learning in schools since 1994. School violence and disruption remain realities, and are even gaining momentum in certain areas. It seems as if, as a result of the historical culture of violence and disruption in South African education, children have become socialised to deal with their problems in aggressive and violent ways. The problem has been exacerbated by the conflict between the different political parties, especially in black communities (Ngcongo, 1995:18).

Schools have become highly volatile and unpredictable places. Violence has become a part of every-day life in (some) schools. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1999:5) lists a number of incidents where educators in the Gauteng Province of South Africa were murdered between January and July 1999. Sewsunker (1999:6) lists a number of incidences of violent actions that took place in KwaZulu-Natal schools. These incidents include murder, armed robbery, damage to, and destruction of school property, brawling, stone throwing, name calling, knife attacks and stabbings, beatings-up of educators by learners, hostage taking, sexual harassment, arson, physical assault, caching of weapons, drugs and stolen cellular phones.

According to Hlophe (1999:1), racial tension between black and Indian learners in the KwaZulu-Natal Province is one of the factors threatening to turn schools into war zones. Racial clashes in this province are common in and out of schools. Unrest and violence in the schools can also be ascribed to, for instance, the unequal treatment of learners in some of the predominantly English schools where the learners are separated according to their home languages on the grounds that black learners are slower learners and should be taught separately. According to Hlophe, such treatment causes and promotes misunderstanding and mistrust among learners. This, in turn, results in violent flare-ups.

The effects of violence on the culture of teaching and learning

According to Smith (1996:4) and Pacheco (1996:48-49), the term culture of teaching and learning refers to the attitude of educators and learners towards teaching and learning, and the spirit of dedication and commitment in a school which arises through the joint effort of school management, the input of educators, the personal characteristics of learners, factors in the family life of learners, school-related factors as well as societal factors. The term attitude towards teaching and learning refers to the disposition of educators and learners towards, or the interest they show in the teaching and learning activities in the school. This 'attitude', in other words, refers to the teaching and learning climate in the school. It also points to the 'mood', 'aura', 'commitment' or 'dedication' with regard to the teaching and learning task. In the light of the above, the term a culture of teaching and learning can be circumscribed as the teaching and learning climate, attitude and commitment towards learning in a school which promotes or facilitates teaching and learning (Thirion, 1989:386-391; Smith, 1996:4).

Parents send their children to school in the hope of securing quality education for them in a safe and secure environment. They expect the school to be a safe and peaceful working and learning environment in which the learners can be educated and become

responsible adults. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (1999:4) considers a school safe when it is a place where:

- learners can learn, develop and enjoy themselves and where teachers (educators) can teach free from threats of violence and crime;
- human rights are respected and a culture of teaching and learning is developed;
- parents are welcome for the exchange of ideas about learning and development; and
- the community can be involved in supporting and taking joint responsibility in interaction with teachers and school governing bodies.

Unfortunately, as has been outlined above, these expectations have not been met in a number of schools in South Africa during the last three decades.

According to Van den Aardweg (1987:175), school violence has a deleterious effect on the morale of both learners and educators as it destroys the proper teaching and learning environment. The conflict generated by school violence affects learner-learner, educator-educator and learner-educator relationships (Ngcongo, 1995:18), and is, therefore, pedagogically unacceptable. Because of the incidents mentioned above, learners, educators and principals feel that fear and insecurity prevent them from meeting their responsibilities of creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools (Zulu, 1999:125). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many black secondary schools are still well-known for, *inter alia*, the following: low pass rates, unsustained school attendance, dropping-out due to pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, and gang activities (Christie, 1991:47). Nxumalo (1993:57) adds the following list of aspects that impact negatively on the creation of a sound culture of teaching and learning: overcrowded class-rooms, high early drop-out rates, learners coming from disadvantaged backgrounds affected by poverty, overcrowding, unemployment, lack of recreational facilities and violence.

Statement of the research problem

A project was undertaken to seek an answer to the following question: Does school violence influence the culture of teaching and learning in a selected group of schools? According to the literature, school violence has a seriously deleterious effect on the culture of teaching and learning, as has been outlined above. The nature and extent of the influence of school violence on the culture of teaching and learning in a selected group of schools had to be determined in order to place those in responsible positions in a position to take effective counter-measures.

Research design
Literature survey

A survey of literature was required for two purposes: (a) to understand the nature and extent of school violence as well as the factors that may give rise to school violence, and their impact on a culture of teaching and learning in schools, and (b) for the construction of a questionnaire on school violence and its impact on a culture of teaching and learning in a school. Literature studies were done on the terms 'violence', 'school violence' and 'a culture of teaching and learning' (see the first two sections of this article), as well as on phenomena that might lead to school violence. The following subjects were covered in the survey:

- Deficiency of family relationships
- Socio-economic factors (such as acculturation, poverty, unemployment)
- Psychological factors (such as disruptive factors in the learner's psychic life, learning difficulties of the learner)
- School factors (such as school governance, educators, principals, learners, peers)
- Authorities and the community
- Other factors (such as drug and alcohol abuse, alienation, conflict, the role of the media, discipline, racism)
- Violence and impeded relationships (including learners' experi-

ence, life-world, their relationships with the physical self, social self, material self, psychic self, parents, peers, educators, principals, community, objects and ideas, moral and religious values). It was concluded, on the basis of this review, that disturbances in the home and home atmosphere, the presence of negative socio-economic and psychological factors, a negative school atmosphere, unwise actions taken by authorities and the influence of unsympathetic communities can all potentially give rise to violence in schools. Unhealthy relationships can also lead to violence. It was also concluded that, if violence were allowed to spill over into the school, it could have a seriously detrimental effect on the culture of teaching and learning in the school. Since a culture of teaching and learning has a definite influence on the performance of the learners, a negative culture of teaching and learning can inhibit learner performance (Pacheco, 1996:56). The culture of teaching and learning is related to educator and learner morale. A plummeting morale amongst educators and learners can erode the culture of teaching and learning, and thus result in poor examination results (Meintjies, 1992:48; Pillay, 1995: 37; Coetzee, 1994:1-3).

The questionnaire

A questionnaire was constructed on the basis of the literature review. Section 1 of the questionnaire consisted of 8 items for the purpose of obtaining biographical information (gender, age, grade, size of parents' house, number of inhabitants of house, people a learner are living with [mother and father, single parent], marital status of parents, employment status of parents). Section 2 consisted of 33 items, each consisting of a statement to which the respondent had to indicate whether he or she agreed, disagreed or was uncertain. Items like the following probed whether violence was a reality in the (parental) home: I am self-confident (1), I enjoy life (2), I feel accepted by my educators (3), I feel safe at home (4), I like action films/movies (5), I spend a lot of time watching television (6), My parents give me most things I ask for (28), Members of my family help me to do my homework (29).

The following items probed whether violence was a reality in the school: I trust my peers (7), My peers have a sense of *ubuntu* (humanity) (8), I trust my teachers (9), I participate in religious activities in my school (10), I have witnessed my educators being attacked physically (11), I have witnessed my fellow learners being attacked physically (12), I trust my class-mates (13), Learners bring drugs to school (14), I have witnessed my educators being verbally assaulted by learners (15), Learners respect the religious principles of their fellow learners (18), Learners bring weapons to school (19), Verbal conflicts between learners are common (20), Learners bring alcohol to school (21), Vandalism of school property is a problem (22), Some learners steal from their classmates (23), Some learners use racist words (24), Our educators apply corporal punishment (25), Educators treat learners equally irrespective of their race (26), Educators treat learners equally according to their ages (27), I feel safe in my school (3), My educators have a sense of *ubuntu* (humanity) (31), Our school is well equipped with laboratories (32), I enjoy my schooling (33).

The following items probed whether a positive culture of teaching and learning existed in the school: Learners in my school are well-disciplined (16), Learners in my school are committed to work hard (17). An open item at the end of the questionnaire afforded respondents with an opportunity to expand on any response.

The initial questionnaire was submitted to a small number of respondents (ten learners from a school in the KwaMashu district) in a pilot study. These learners did not participate in the final survey. Certain items were rephrased on the basis of this study (*cf.* Dane, 1990:42; De Vaus, 1990:105).

Sampling

Although, as has been indicated earlier, violence is a nation-wide problem in South Africa, it was decided to restrict the empirical investigation to the 16 high schools in the KwaMashu circuit in the North Durban region (KwaZulu-Natal). The population of respondents in the

selected geographical area was 14 4000, of which a random sample of 2% (288) was drawn.

Processing of data

The questionnaires were delivered to the principals of the schools, and collected after completion. The assistance of the principals ensured a 100% response rate. The high rate of response can also be contributed to the fact that the researchers visited the schools in personal capacity and requested all questionnaires back. The answer sheets were subsequently encoded for computer processing. Descriptive statistics were used to describe and summarise the findings, which implies that the findings are valid for the sample of students investigated. They can, however, be regarded as indicative or symptomatic of the situation among other learners and schools elsewhere. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by means of the pilot study as well as a complete retest at one of the schools to determine whether the responses remained consistent. Intersubjective cross-checking by the researchers, most of whom were not involved in the field-work, improved the construct validity of the research instrument.

Findings

1. According to section 1 of the questionnaire, the sample of respondents consisted of 288 learners, of which 139 were male and 149 female.
2. The sample consisted of 42 respondents between the ages of 14 and 15, 73 between the ages of 16 and 17, 104 between the ages of 18 to 20, and 69 were over-age for the high school.
3. More than 80% of the learners in the sample have not repeated grades. None of those who have repeated, have repeated a grade more than once.
4. 14 learners in the sample lived in one room houses, 56 in two room, 38 in three room, 104 in four room, and 76 in more than four room houses.
5. 10 respondents lived in a house with two people, 35 in a house with 3 to 4, 35 in a house with 5 to 6, and 208 in a house with 7 or more people. There was, in other words, overcrowding in the houses where 72% of the respondents lived.
6. 73 learners in the sample lived with both mother and father, 125 with their mother only, 14 with their father only, 22 with a grandparent, and 54 with relatives and others. In other words, only 25% of the respondents lived with both their parents.
7. 115 of the respondents' parents were married, those of 49 were divorced, and those of 124 were not married. In other words, 40% of the respondents' parents were (still) married.
8. 60% of the respondents' parents or guardians were unemployed.
9. According to section 2 of the questionnaire, 65% of the respondents indicated that they enjoyed watching films (item 2.5), whereas only 36% indicated that they enjoyed watching television (2.6).
10. 67% of the respondents indicated that they were self-confident, i.e. viewed themselves positively (2.1). 64% indicated that they enjoyed life (2.2), and schooling (2.3).
11. Only 30% of the respondents indicated that they trusted their fellow learners (2.13). In fact, 87% of them suspected that their class-mates stole from others (2.23). There is a discrepancy, however, since 50% of the respondents also indicated that they trusted their peers (2.7). (There is a possibility that the word 'peers' was not understood by all the respondents.) 56% of them indicated that their peers had a sense of *ubuntu* (humanity)(2.8).
12. 62% of the respondents indicated that they felt accepted by their educators (2.3). This tallied with 65% of them indicating that they trusted their educators (2.9). 60% felt that their educators displayed a sense of *ubuntu* (humanity) (2.31).
13. Only 42% of the respondents indicated that they participated in religious activities in their school (2.10), and a mere 28% indicated that they felt that learners respected the religious principles of their fellow-learners (2.18).

14. 67% of the respondents indicated that their educators applied corporal punishment (2.25). 20% disagreed, and 13% were uncertain.
15. 58% of the respondents indicated that they enjoyed support from their parents while 42% disagreed (2.28). Only 46% of the respondents indicated that they were assisted by family members to do their homework (2.29). Only 46% of the respondents felt safe at home (2.4).
16. 74% of the respondents agreed that verbal conflicts occurred between learners (2.20). 36% of the respondents indicated that learners used racist names in schools (2.24). Only 24% felt that their educators treated learners equally irrespective of their race (2.26), while only 29% felt that educators treated learners fairly according to their ages (2.27).
17. As many as 76% of the respondents had witnessed a physical attack on a fellow learner (2.12). 38% of them had indeed witnessed such attacks on an educator (2.11). 46% had witnessed verbal attacks on educators by learners (2.15).
18. 75% of the respondents indicated that they felt the school to be an unsafe place (2.30).
19. A significant percentage of learners (48%, 64%, and 64%, respectively) indicated that learners brought drugs (2.14), weapons (2.19) and alcohol (2.21) to school.
20. 75% agreed that school vandalism was a problem (2.22). (This item could, however, have been misinterpreted as 'a problem in general', not necessarily in the respondent's own school.)
21. 51% of the learners disagreed with the statement that learners were committed to hard work in school (2.17). 67% felt that learners were ill disciplined (2.16). This indicated that a considerable number of youths were prone to inadequate academic performance.
22. 49% of the respondents felt that their schools were not well equipped in terms of laboratories (2.32).

Discussion

1. Finding #2 that a significant percentage of the learners were over-age for the high school is a cause for concern. These learners are already adults. There is, therefore, a distinct possibility that they would tend to resort to 'adult measures' to 'discipline' younger learners — for instance in the form of physical punishment or abuse. According to Zulu (1999:126), over-aged learners can contribute to the breaking down of a culture of teaching and learning.
2. Finding #5 indicated that a large percentage of the learners lived in over-crowded conditions at home. Such conditions can have a number of serious negative effects on the culture of teaching and learning in the school. Firstly, the personality of a child cannot develop optimally in conditions where there is no privacy. Secondly, the socialisation of a child can be rather negative in conditions where a number of people have to share the same facilities. Thirdly, if there is no personal space for a learner to do homework in peace and quiet, the school work will suffer. Large numbers of people in a house can also lead to abject poverty and abnormal competition for whatever resources come to hand. This competition can deteriorate into physical violence, which can spill over into the schools. This finding supports Le Roux's (1994:99) observation that overcrowding and inadequate housing are some of the conditions that can lead to aggressive, violent and destructive behaviour in children.
3. Approximately three-quarters of the respondents did not live in homes with both a mother and father (findings # 6 and #7). The problems outlined in the second section of this article are exacerbated in single parent homes. Insufficient income leads to greater competition and even violence. A lack of parental supervision can lead to higher levels of violence. This finding tallies with Le Roux's (1994:99) view that family break-ups can have a negative effect on the learning of a child and can manifest in undesirable

behaviour patterns and attitudes.

4. The high level of unemployment (finding #8) unavoidably leads to a scarcity of money and resources. In conditions of poverty, the interest and attention of both parents and children can be drawn away from the school; the whole existence of the family can become dedicated to survival. Abject poverty can lead to unhealthy competition for whatever resources become available. This finding agrees with Gama's (1990:53) view that unemployment creates stress which can result in violence. Unemployment of the parents can hamper the education of the learners, who then in frustration may join peer groups in perpetrating crimes of violence (Abhilak, 1992:63).

5. According to finding #9, a significant percentage of learners enjoyed watching films. Violence is frequently depicted in films as a way of settling differences and and meting out punishment. The behaviour of film heroes can be emulated by learners in their efforts at settling their own differences with others at home and at school (Miller, 1996:56-57). The fact that fewer learners enjoyed watching television is a cause for concern. Violence is not often portrayed in television in South Africa in the same graphic detail as in film theatres. By not watching television, learners also miss the opportunity of seeing educational programmes, or programmes that portray sound principles and values. On the other hand, according to Van den Aardweg (1987:180) time spent on television watching is one of the factors that can lessen a child's attention span, impair his ability of verbal communication and learning.

6. The fact that learners did not trust their peers, and suspected them of being thieves (finding #11) is a cause for concern. Distrust and a lack of comradeship in a school can easily deteriorate into violence, especially in the face of a scarcity of resources (finding #22).

7. Finding #13 indicated a lack of mutual respect among learners, also in terms of religious commitment and differences. This can also be a cause of school violence. Despite the fact that these respondents did not seem to trust their peers, the peer group remains an important part of the lives and world of adolescents (Gills, 1994:26). Despite the discordant sounds made about peers, young people depend on their peers. In some cases, however, peer groups can become breeding grounds for anti-social behaviour (Van den Aardweg, 1987:179; Zulu, 1999:29).

8. The persistent presence of corporal punishment in schools (finding #14) can be a cause of violence. (The application of corporal punishment was banned in 1996, *cf.* The South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996, section 10). Corporal punishment is an act of inter-personal violence, and when administered by persons in authority, like educators, can serve as an example for learners for settling their differences (Ngcongo, 1995:18-19).

9. Finding #15 shows that the support of the parental home was inadequate, and that many of the learners indeed felt unsafe at home. The lack of trust and support of the home and the unsafe conditions of the home can be transferred to the school, resulting in violence at school (Le Roux, 1994:46-49; Pretorius, 1990: 211).

10. Unfair treatment by teachers, verbal abuse among learners, incidences of racism and discrimination can erupt into school violence (finding #16). According to Herbert (1995:12-13) individuals can suffer from low-esteem feelings as a result of racist and discriminatory attitudes to which they are exposed in the school environment. Because of these feelings and frustration, individuals sometimes resort to aggressive, violent and destructive behaviour. That this is indeed the case, can be seen in the verbal and physical attacks on learners, on teachers by learners, or third parties (finding #17). It is no wonder, then, that a significant percentage of the learners regarded the school as an unsafe place (finding #18). This is supported by finding #19 with regards to the presence of drugs, weapons and alcohol in the schools. The same applies for school vandalism (finding #20) (*cf.* Savage, 1991:207). The use of drugs can lead to loss of concentration for long periods, to erratic and deteriorating school performance, lying, cheating, dishonesty and theft of money or articles to sell to obtain drugs (Gills, 1994:109). According to Zulu (1999:125), adverse conditions such as these can lead to feelings of fear and insecurity and prevent educators and learners from creating a culture of teaching and learning (also *cf.* Miller, 1996:14; Chetty, 1998:197).

11. Finding #22 is symptomatic of a serious problem. Without the necessary resources, whether supplied by the home or the school, education is significantly impaired (Zulu, 1999:115). Apart from the dearth of well-equipped laboratories, there is also a shortage of textbooks, desks, windows, electricity, toilets, equipment, libraries, buildings, sports facilities. Nxumalo (1993:55) regards these shortages as one of the reasons for disruptions occurring in the schools. This is especially the case in historically black schools (Ngcongo, 1995:20).

12. Finding #21 is important in view of the problem that was investigated in this research project. A significant percentage felt that there was no real commitment to the teaching and learning task of the school, and that a large percentage of the learners were ill-disciplined. Zulu (1999:113) complains, for instance, that learners fail to come to school on time in the morning, and that they come late for other classes. Some do not even attend classes, and some leave school early. Some walk in and out of school at any time. Some bring weapons to classes. Some use drugs and alcohol during school time. According to Zulu, educators find it extremely difficult to inculcate a culture of teaching of learning in these conditions, and appear themselves to assume a negative attitude towards education. The indiscipline characterising many schools and the presence of violence and other forms of anti-social behaviour prevent the establishment of a culture of teaching and learning. Such learners are restrained in becoming responsible adults (Vorster & Van der Spuy, 1995:62). Their approach towards their schoolwork is negative, incoherent and undisciplined, resulting in chronic underachievement, truancy and an inclination to destroy school property. According to Mlambo (1993:82) political violence also contributes towards the disruption of education resulting in learners exhibiting disinterest in learning and consequently feel burdened and discouraged.

The terms *school violence* and *a culture of teaching and learning* refer to constructs. Constructs are complex phenomena that cannot be directly observed, measured or assessed; they can only be described in terms of a number of indicators (GION, 1998:22). The validity of the description (i.e. construct validity) depends on the degree to which measuring instruments can deduce (define/denote) the nature and features of the construct from those behaviour patterns that can indeed be observed and measured (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:98, 99).

The construct validity of this project lies in the fact that it revealed several indicators of (potential) violence in the schools that were investigated: over-crowding, over-age learners, broken homes and families, lack of home and parental support, poverty and the competition for limited resources, influence of violence in films, distrust of peers, suspicion of theft, lack of respect for differences and values, lack of the necessary support structures, perceptions about unsafe homes and schools, verbal conflicts, racism, unfair treatment, physical attacks and abuse (corporal punishment), drugs, weapons, alcohol, vandalism, ill-discipline, a lack of commitment to the task of the school and a lack of resources. Any combination of these indicators can lead to a flare-up of school violence.

There are also a number of indicators of the negative impact of (potential) school violence on the culture of teaching and learning in these schools: over-crowding, the presence of over-age learners, the lack of home and parental support for the task of the school, poverty and the lack of resources, the lack of respect, distrust, the perceived unsafe conditions in schools, conflict, abuse and attacks, the presence

of drugs, weapons and so forth, and the lack of resources all unavoidably lead to a lack of discipline, of dedication and commitment in schools. According to the circumscription of a culture of teaching and learning given above, there should be 'a spirit of dedication and commitment in a school which arises through the joint effort of school management, the input of educators, the personal characteristics of learners, factors in the family life of learners, school-related factors as well as societal factors'. All these indicators of the presence of a positive culture of learning are, sadly, absent in the case of the 15 schools investigated in this project. (It has to be emphasized that the findings and conclusions above have been based on the perceptions of the respondents included in the sample. These perceptions should, ideally, be cross-checked with questionnaires submitted to, for instance, school managers, teachers and parents, and by means of qualitative research methods.)

What can be done to restore a culture of teaching and learning in these schools?

School violence and its negative impact on a culture of teaching and learning in a school is symptomatic of deeper seated problems, *viz.* a lack of respect for others, a lack of vision for a better future, and a lack of commitment in ensuring that such a future be made into reality. The problem of school violence and of its impact on a culture of teaching and learning can, therefore, not be combated by the imposition of draconian measures, which could be violent in themselves. The cure for the problem should be sought in a two-pronged strategy addressing the roots of the problem.

The lack of respect for fellow human beings

This problem can be eradicated by the introduction of *ubuntu* (humanity) in the schools, possibly even as an examinable subject. Learners' lack of respect for themselves, their peers, their parents, school property and the authorities is symptomatic of a lack of sense of *ubuntu. Ubuntu* depends on the cultural continuum between the parental home and the school. It instils a sense of belonging and respect in learners since it keeps alive and fosters the tradition of the people. It also promotes and supports worthy indigenous customs and cultures. It equips learners with a sense of belonging and nationhood as well as service to fellow human beings, the country and the nation. It helps learners understand the significance and role of education in the building of a nation and of their own role in the nation. It helps to develop learners' concepts of themselves, as well as to honour and cherish their parentage as the ideal of adulthood. *Ubuntu* entails equipping learners with loyalty and honesty, respect for others and property, respect for human dignity, tolerance of differences, sensitivity towards the needs and requirements of others; it instils compassion and enthusiasm for life. *Ubuntu* also concentrates on the establishment of relationships among different persons and groups. In brief, then, *ubuntu*, which centres the unity of thought and attitude among Africans, can be used as a programme with which to combat the sad lack of respect for others in schools plagued by violence (*cf.* Zulu, 2001:154 ff).

A lack of vision for the future

Measures like the introduction of a code of conduct and of psychological services in schools riddled by violence and the resultant lack of a culture of teaching and learning, might go some distance towards the eradication of the problem discussed in this article. However, measures such as these will not be sufficient since they do not address the core of the problem, *viz.* a lack of vision for the future in learners. Especially since 1976, learners in South Africa have become used to the notion of sacrificing themselves, their education, their relationships as well as their future for political purposes. A culture of politically inspired violence has replaced the cultures of *ubuntu* and of teaching and learning in the schools. Despite exhortations to the contrary by the government and education authorities since 1994, learners have not yet developed a vision for their own personal future in the new democracy

in South Africa. Learners in South Africa have been caught in a vicious spiral: a culture of violence and disrespect breeding a new culture of the same. Learners have not yet realised the futility of placing their own futures, their own education, their own relationships, and their own happiness on the altar of violence.

President Mbeki's plan for the rejuvenation of Africa has set the table for a change of vision and attitude for all South Africans. According to this plan, Africa will become united under the banner of the 'African Union'. In October 2001, the plan was renamed as: the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The advent of the Union will, according to Mbeki and three of his fellow presidents, end conflict on the continent, announce the beginning of the economic rejuvenation of Africa, and eradicate infectious diseases (Editor, 2001:2). Mbeki's State of the Nation Address entitled Unity in Action for Change, delivered on 9 February 2001, laid the foundation for a new vision for all the people of South Africa. On this foundation, other documents have been based, notably the Ministry of Education's Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (2001), and the National Strategy for Mathematics, Science and Technology (2001) under the leadership of Michael Kahn (South Africa, 2001). The laudable ideals outlined in plans and publications such as these have yet to penetrate to each home and school in South Africa. Every South African has to become imbued with the ideal of leaving behind the violent past of the country, and to get on with the task of creating a better future, for each individual, and for all collectively — in the spirit of *ubuntu.*

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