Corene de Wet

Strategies for preventing learner vandalism

First submission: April 2004

School vandalism is a serious problem as it places a heavy burden on education budgets and can cause teaching and learning to collapse. Learners have the right to be taught in neat, clean school buildings and grounds, to play and to develop their full potential. It is therefore important to find ways of preventing school vandalism. Against the background of a literature study, this article reports on the nature and extent of school vandalism, as well as on the strategies of a group of educators on preventing learner vandalism at schools. The literature study and the content analysis indicate that a combination of factors involving learners, educators, schools, parents, communities and the law cause learner vandalism. Prevention strategies should thus concentrate on all these aspects, otherwise they will be merely cosmetic and probably short-lived.

Strategieë vir die voorkoming van leerdervandalisme

Skoolvandalisme is 'n ernstige probleem, want dit plaas 'n swaar las op onderwysbegrotings en dit kan tot die ineenstorting van onderrig en leer lei. Leerders het die reg om in netjiese, skoon skoolgeboue en -terreine onderrig te ontvang, te speel en tot hulle volle potensiaal te ontwikkel. Dit is dus belangrik dat weë gevind moet word om skoolvandalisme te voorkom. Die doel van hierdie artikel is om teen die agtergrond van 'n literatuurstudie verslag te doen oor die aard en omvang van leerdervandalisme, asook verslag te doen van 'n groep opvoeders se strategieë oor hoe om leerdervandalisme te voorkom. Uit die literatuurstudie en inhoudanalise het dit geblyk dat 'n vervlegting van leerder-, opvoeder-, skool-, ouer-, gemeenskaps- en regsverwante faktore tot leerdervandalisme aanleiding gee. Voorkomingstrategieë moet dus op al die genoemde aspekte konsentreer, anders sal dit bloot kosmeties en waarskynlik tydelik van aard te wees.

Prof N C de Wet, Dept of Comparative Education and Education Management, University of the Free State, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein 9300; E-mail: dewetnc. hum@mail.uovs.ac.za

In global terms, learner vandalism places a heavy burden on education budgets.[1] It can also lead to the collapse of teaching and learning as school programmes must often be interrupted to repair vandalised structures (Strang 2002: 2; Perry 2001: 1). According to the previous Minister of Education (Asmal 1999: 3), crimes such as learner vandalism lead to a feeling of powerlessness, uncertainty and fear among both educators and learners. According to him, this leads to the destruction of "the basis of a learning community". Well-cared for school facilities, furniture, equipment, and clean toilets create a healthy teaching and learning environment (Dept of Education 1998: 6). Money earmarked for building new schools has to be regularly used to repair and/or replace vandalised buildings and equipment. This makes the backlog in South African education impossible to deal with (Mtshali 2001: 1-2). Because learners have the right to be taught in tidy, clean school buildings and grounds, to play and to develop to their full potential, it is important to find ways to prevent learner vandalism. Against this background, the aim of this article is to answer the following questions:

- What is the nature and extent of learner vandalism?
- How can learner vandalism at schools be prevented?

1. Definition of terms

The Vandals were a Germanic nation that invaded Gaul (present-day France), Italy, Spain and North Africa between 400 and 500 AD. They wreaked havoc and destroyed many forms of material culture. In 1774, in view of the Vandals' destruction and damaging of objects of aesthetic value, The Parisian Abbé Gregoire created the term "vandalism" to describe behaviour aimed at causing damage and destruction without any significant benefit to the perpetrators (Theron 1991: 47; Welch 1991: 99).

Sanders (1982: 138) defines vandalism as the purposeful damaging, disfigurement, defacement, or destruction of public or private property by persons who are not its direct owners. In criminal law, the term for vandalism is "injury to property" (Geason & Wilson 2000: 1). According to Snyman (1999: 550), the classic definition for injury to property in

---

1   Cf Stout 2002: 2; Strang 2002: 1; Perry 2001: 1; Trevas & Deeley 1999: 1.

South African law was given by Judge Innes in Mashanga 1924 AD 11 12: "All that is necessary in our law to constitute the crime is an intentional wrongful injury to the property of another".

Learner vandalism is neither a new nor a typically South African phenomenon. The literature study reveals that vandals target schools in Australasia, Britain, the Netherlands, the USA, Canada and France, among other countries.[2] Schools are vandalised particularly during holidays, over weekends and at night, when the grounds and buildings are not occupied (Geason & Wilson 2000: 1).

According to Black (2002: 2), as well as Griffiths & Shapland (1979: 17), there is no such thing as a typical learner-vandal. On the basis of various types of vandalism, they identify the following categories of learner-vandals:

- vindictive children with a grudge against an educator or other staff member;
- malevolent children who take pleasure in causing trouble;
- children driven by an ideology who wish to draw attention to a specific problem or issue;
- bored children who commit vandalism in a search for excitement, and
- frustrated, angry children who feel that the school and the community are hostile to them.

2. Literature review

2.1 The nature and extent of learner vandalism

It is practically impossible to establish the extent of vandalism at schools since numerous offences committed against property remain unreported to the police and those reported are usually not deemed important enough to warrant further investigation (Theron 1991: 48). According to Smith & Laycock (1985: 11), less than 10% of all acts of vandalism in America are reported to the police. In South Africa less than half of the crimes committed are reported (Peltzer 1999: 10). Ne-

---

2   Cf Black 2002: 1; Stout 2002: 1-6 Strang 2002: 1-2; Geason & Wilson 2000: 1; Trevas & Deeley 1999: 1.

vertheless, it would appear that many young people are involved in crime, as approximately 50% of all reported crimes in South Africa involve perpetrators aged between 14 and 18 (Finsterlin 1999: 1). Furthermore, the description of the nature of acts of vandalism is often so vague that it is not clear whether it can be classified as vandalism (Theron 1991: 48). Yet school vandalism seems to be a relatively general phenomenon. According to Theron (1991: 48), vandalism is, after shoplifting, the most reported infringement committed by young people. De Wet's (2003: 16-18) investigation reveals that Free State educators consider vandalism, along with the use of alcohol, the most common offence perpetrated by learners.

It is evident from the literature that vandals primarily break windows, draw graffiti, and cause damage to classrooms, bathrooms, furniture and books as well as to sports apparatus and fields.[3] Learners sometimes deface and/or destroy their schools to such an extent that teaching and learning collapse, and learners and educators are even exposed to health risks (Matavire 1999: 1). Learners have the right to be taught in neat, clean school buildings and grounds, to play and to develop to their full potential. It is therefore important to find ways to prevent learner vandalism.

2.2 Strategies for preventing learner vandalism

Because various factors give rise to vandalism, a prevention strategy directed at a single sphere of influence, for instance the family, the school or the community, will not succeed. Prevention strategies should be directed at the life-world of young people (Catalano *et al* 1999: 1).

2.2.1   The school

According to Mayer (1999: 2) and Gottfredson (1998: 1), schools should play a key role in combating crime. Educators not only have access to learners during their important, formative years, but are also often the only conservative factor in the lives of those growing up in homes/ neighbourhoods in which crime is rampant. The modern community often demands that schools accept responsibility for educational demands which mainly belong to the parental home. Furthermore, ac-

---

3   Cf Cummins 2003: 1-2; Perry 2001: 1-2; Bloemhoff 1990: 3.

cording to Gottfredson (1998: 1), educators are paid "to help youth develop as healthy, happy, productive citizens". Lastly, many of the causes of vandalism are school-related, and school intervention is thus desirable (Mayer 1999: 2; Gottfredson 1998: 1).

As vandalism and academic failure often go hand-in-hand, it is recommended that curricula be structured so that the majority of learners will succeed academically.[4] The curriculum should provide for the individual needs of learners. Tygart (1988: 109) writes in this regard:

> ... youth who reject school or do poorly in school have more time to spend with youth who have similar attitudes and lack of school success. Youth interacting with other such youth increase the probability of delinquent behavior.

According to Trevas & Deeley (1999: 3), as well as the *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (Catalano *et al* 1999: 1) positive learner-educator relationships and mutual respect counteract school vandalism. It is therefore important to establish a healthy school environment and a feeling of security. Learners should feel that educators care for them.

Hood (1994: 5) warns that over-emphasising learner rights can result in a *laissez-faire* attitude towards vandals on the part of educators and principals. Referring to the situation in the USA, he writes: "Extending civil rights protection to unruly students has created an unworkable, and sometimes absurd, situation in public schools". According to him, there is a direct link between lack of discipline and vandalism at schools. It is thus important that schools have codes of conduct which clearly state what types of learner behaviour are acceptable and what are not. The South African Department of Education (1998: 11) considers vandalism a serious learner transgression, since "harmful graffiti" and "vandalism, or destroying or defacing school property" are listed as learner transgressions which can result in suspension. Furthermore, its guidelines mention that "serious misconduct which may include offences according to the law, must be investigated by the police and referred to the Court if necessary" (Dept of Education 1998: 14). It is, however, important that there should be a balance between the right of the learners to education and the right of the transgressors to treatment.

4   Black (2002: 3), Catalano *et al* (1999:2), Mayer (1999: 7), NICHCY (1999: 3), and Hope (1980: 232).

Mayer (1999: 4) emphasises that educators should co-operate as a team in interpreting and applying discipline. In so doing, provision should be made, without discrimination, for individual differences among learners (Mayer 1999: 6). Teevan & Dryburgh (2000: 88) found that the mere threat of punishment does not deter prospective vandals, as there is only a slight chance of their being caught. Punitive measures, threats, blame and criticism have only a short-term influence on the behaviour of transgressors.[5] Educators should act pro-actively and attempt to change learner behaviour. If it is decided to punish vandals, an attempt should be made to catch and punish them as soon as possible. It is important to punish individual transgressors and not learners as a group, which is counterproductive and can result in further vandalism because "students may see it as a way to balance the scales of justice" (Locher *et al* 1999: 1). According to Welch (1991: 100), one of the most effective, but possibly most difficult ways of preventing vandalism is silence, since "vandals are encouraged by publicity and may feel impelled to take up the challenge". Furthermore, Welch (1991: 100) holds that too much attention to acts of vandalism can lead to imitative vandalism.

It is important that learners be actively involved in organised extracurricular activities. If they are not, their desire for adventure may lead them to embark on destructive adventures which bring them into conflict with the community and later with the law.[6] Locher *et al* (1991: 1) point out that extracurricular activities are pointless if they do not take place under adult (preferably educator) supervision. It is also important that structured play takes place, under supervision, on the school grounds during school hours (Catalano *et al* 1999: 2). Grounds service is thus essential.

The literature emphasises changes in disposition by means of education,[7] including the following: a feeling of respect for school property should be inculcated in learners; learners should be educated to consider school property as their own and to accept responsibility for it, and they should be schooled in crime prevention workshops to play

---

5   Cf Catalano *et al* 1999: 2; Mayer 1999: 3; NICHCY 1999: 3.
6   Cf Catalano *et al* 1999: 7; Locher *et al* 1999: 1; Pasques 1982: 57.
7   Cf Catalano *et al* 1999: 2; Douglas & McCart 1999: 6; Bloemhoff 1990: 6.

an active role in preventing vandalism (Geason & Wilson 2000: 11; Catalano *et al* 1999: 2).

Learners attached to schools which are exposed to vandalism should receive therapy (Stout 2002: 5). Not only the victims, but also the transgressors should, according to Mayer (1999: 7), receive therapy so that they can learn to get rid of their frustrations/anger in a positive manner. In the American town of Ravenna, where schools suffer from vandalism, a social worker is appointed to provide emotional support for transgressors and victims. According to a superintendent of education (as reported in Locher *et al* 1999: 2), "she walked through many doors that would be slammed in our face".

It is clear from the above that the school should play a key role in combating school vandalism. *CEFPI e-news* (2002: 4) writes in this respect: "The most important step you can take to control vandalism is making certain your school's house is in order". However, programmes for crime prevention and changes in disposition, the application of discipline, curricular adjustments, the establishment of a healthy school environment and the development of extracurricular activities are not in themselves sufficient to prevent school vandalism. Target hardening is essential.

The literature mentions the following practical arrangements for the safety of schools: burglar alarms, safety gates, safety fencing, intercom systems, hidden cameras, alarm systems, safety lighting, and the use of security guards to patrol the school grounds and implement access control.[8] Valuable items should be stored in a safe place. Thorough record should be kept of where acts of vandalism take place on the school grounds, to facilitate target hardening (Harber 2001: 267). The fear of being caught can lead to a reduction in vandalism. Supervision will also help to combat it. Together with supervision, the limitation of opportunities for vandalism may help to reduce it. Because vandalism is not usually the result of pre-planned behaviour, one must guard against creating opportunities for it (Stout 2002: 3; Theron 1991: 53).

---

8   Cf Cummins 2003: 2; Brand, 2002: 3, 5; Stout 2002: 3-4; Strang 2002: 3; Harber 2001: 266-267; Independent Project Trust 1999: 22; Bloemhoff 1990: 6.

The school grounds and buildings should be thoroughly planned and maintained. Isolated areas should either be made inaccessible or brightly lit.[9] In designing school buildings and apparatus, it must be borne in mind that some learners are unusually robust, so that strong, unbreakable structures and apparatus are thus ideal (Geason & Wilson 2000: 8). Poorly designed apparatus, which breaks easily, sends a message of neglect and this can generate vandalism (Burall 1979: 7). It is important to repair and paint over any signs of vandalism, for instance broken windows and graffiti, as soon as possible. Vandals see a neglected and/or vandalised school building as an invitation to further vandalism.[10]

The school should play a key role in combating school vandalism, but the fight is futile without the help of parents, the community and the police.

2.2.2   Parents

To Cummins (2003: 2), the key to combating vandalism lies with parents:

> When [parents] care what their children are doing, when they care about their rising school taxes, when they care to support school efforts to reduce crime, school vandalism will be reduced.

In addition, Bloemhoff (1990: 6) mentions that parents should educate their children in community responsibility. According to Douglas and McCart (1999: 6), parents often either rationalise or approve or minimalise their children's acts of vandalism, or act in an over-protective manner towards transgressor(s). A family therapist (as quoted by Douglas & McCart 1999: 6) warns: "If there are no values in the family, then kids will follow anywhere or anyone". It is the responsibility not only of the school but also of the parents to establish positive values in learners.

---

9   Cf Geason & Wilson 2000: 8-11; DES 1987: 13-38 and Allen & Greenberger 1978: 318-321 for detailed and illustrated discussions of the influence of architectural and grounds planning on vandalism.

10 Cf Stout 2002: 2; Geason & Wilson 2000: 6; Locher *et al* 1999: 3; Smith & Laycock 1985: 11.

2.2.3 The community

Some causes of vandalism can be found in the community, therefore the community as a whole should be mobilised in order to address the problem (Bloemhoff 1990: 2; Smith & Laycock 1985: 11). The use of school facilities for community recreation activates two factors. First, adults are present in what would otherwise be abandoned buildings. Secondly, when both learners and adults use school facilities for the purposes of recreation, they tend to view the school as their own and act in such a way as to protect the facilities.[11] A target for vandals is thus converted into a valuable community resource. Catalano *et al* (1999: 6) write that the establishment of mentorship programmes, during which adults serve as mentors and role models for the youth, can play a significant role in reducing problem behaviour.

Robinson-Young (1992: 55) points out that despite the presentation of various programmes by churches and youth organisations, among others, to keep the youth constructively busy after school hours, at week-ends and during holidays, there are still lonely, frustrated youths idling about. She recommends that recreational programmes for the youth must emphasise adventure, exciting relationship opportunities, parental skills, communication skills, drug awareness, employment support, crisis intervention, sculpture workshops and other forms of life-skills development. The Houston Challenge (2003:1) recommends that programmes, especially those attended by young adolescents, must be age-specific. These children are often "too old for child care and too young for self-care". Theron (1991: 53) writes that programmes should not be moralistic, as the rationalisations presented by the peer group can neutralise the moralistic aspect. People refrain from vandalism when they believe it to be wrong.

2.2.4 The role of the police and the legal system

Co-operation between schools and the police is important in combating vandalism. The police should regularly patrol schools and adjoining neighbourhoods. Visible policing is essential in order to combat crimes such as vandalism. The police should also be involved in open days,

---

11 Cf Locher *et al* 1999: 1-2; Division for Building Technology, CSIR & ISS 1997: 2; Bloemhoff 1990: 2.

and even help to coach sports teams (Harber 2001: 267; Catalano *et al* 1999: 7). As preventive measures are no guarantee against vandalism, Stout (2002: 5) recommends that the police be summoned immediately if serious vandalism occurs at a school. Catalano *et al* (1999: 7) are of the opinion that the police should be supported by laws which, among other things, criminalise the use of alcohol by the youth, and the abuse of narcotics. This may be viewed as an important prevention strategy, since according to researchers (Finn & Frone 2003: 46-48; Fagan & Wilkinson 1998: 74) there is sufficient proof of the link between drug abuse and juvenile crime.

Stang (2002: 1-3) recommends that learner-vandals be treated in accordance with the principles of restorative justice. Restorative justice can be defined as "a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offence come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future" (Stang 2002: 4). Despite criticism (cf Retzinger & Scheff 2000: 1-13), Stang (2002: 4) is convinced that this approach has a place in the combating of school vandalism. According to him (2002: 5), the victim's reaction to the acts of vandalism will fill the learner-vandal with shame and remorse and move him/her to apologise to the victim. The victim and the transgressor must decide together how the vandal will pay for the damage. According to Stang (2002: 7), many vandals do not realise the extent or consequences of their vandalism. It is therefore important that they accept responsibility for their action.

2.2.5   The media

Catalano *et al* (1999: 8) mention that the media can be approached to provide the community and other teaching parties with more awareness of the factors that give rise to, as well as the negative consequences of destructive learner behaviour. Smith & Laycock (1985: 11), on the other hand, are of the opinion that there is little proof that anti-vandalism media campaigns help in the fight against vandalism.

The literature study reveals that various role players, among others educators, learners, curriculum experts, architects, therapists, parents, the community, the police, jurists and the media should become involved in the fight against learner vandalism at schools. The prevention strategies of a group of educators will now be noted.

3. Empirical research

3.1 Research instrument

A three-part questionnaire based on an extensive literature study was designed as a means of answering the research questions. In section A biographical information was obtained. In section B the respondents were asked to give their opinion on the extent of vandalism in the neighbourhoods/areas of their respective schools, as well as at the schools themselves (Table 1). The respondents were then asked to indicate to what extent their respective schools were exposed to certain types of vandalism, using a scale (Table 2). Their perceptions on related issues were also obtained (paragraph 3.5.1). An attempt was made to establish the age-group of the vandals involved (Table 4). In section C information was obtained on strategies for preventing vandalism in schools. The respondents were asked to indicate whether their respective schools implemented certain prevention strategies (Table 3). The following open-ended question was also asked: What measures would you recommend to schools having problems with learner vandalism?

3.2 The test sample

The universum consisted of educators attached to Eastern Cape and Free State schools. A test sample of 250 educators was drawn in accordance with the principle of convenience. These 250 participants were available at the time of their BEd Hons studies at the Queenstown, Aliwal North, Qwaqwa and Ladybrand satellite campuses of the University of the Free State. Of the 250 questionnaires distributed, 218 were suitable for processing. The high percentage (87.2%) can be ascribed to the fact that the questionnaires were distributed and completed while the respondents were attending lectures.

3.3 Validity

The content validity of the questionnaire was determined by means of a literature study and the intensive interview method (Cohen & Manion 1994: 100-101; Belson 1986: 35-38). After interviews with four educators, some changes were made to the content and structure of the questionnaire.

3.4 Data processing

To achieve the objectives of this study, mathematical calculations and content analysis were employed. Content analysis, which may be defined as a methodology by which the researcher seeks to determine the manifest content of written, spoken, or published communication by systematic, objective analysis (Zito 1975: 27), was used to analyse the respondents' answers to the open-ended question. Altheide (1996: 22-44) identifies the following twelve steps in the process of content analysis:

3.4.1   The problem and unit of analysis

- Step 1: Pursue a specific problem to be investigated.
- Step 2: Become familiar with the process and context of the information source.
- Step 3: Become familiar with several (6 to 10) examples of relevant documents.

3.4.2   Constructing a protocol

- Step 4: List several items or categories (variables) to guide data collection and draft a protocol (data collection sheet).
- Step 5: Test the protocol by collecting data from several documents.
- Step 6: Revise the protocol and select several additional cases to further refine the protocol.
- Step 7: Arrive at a sampling rationale and strategy.

3.4.3   Collecting the data

- Step 8: Collect the data, using preset codes, if appropriate, and many descriptive examples.

3.4.4   Data analysis

- Step 9: Perform data analysis, including conceptual refinement and data coding.
- Step 10: Compare and contrast "extreme" and "key differences" within each category of items; make textual notes; write brief summaries of data for each category (variable).

- Step 11: Combine the brief summaries with an example of the typical case as well as the extremes; illustrate with materials from the protocol(s) for each case.

- Step 12: Integrate the findings with interpretation and key concepts in another draft.

While some respondents mentioned only a single strategy, others mentioned several. Thus the references to the number of respondents who suggested strategies must not be viewed as quantifying the data.

3.5 Results

3.5.1 The nature and extent of learner vandalism

In order to establish respondents' perceptions on the extent of vandalism, they were asked to assess the extent of vandalism at their respective schools and in neighbouring areas on a 5-point scale. Their perceptions are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' perceptions on the extent of vandalism at their schools and in surrounding neighbourhoods

	None or almost none		A little		Some		Fairly much		Very much	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The extent of vandalism in the neighbourhood surrounding the respondents' schools	16	7.34	42	19.26	47	21.56	49	22.48	64	29.36
The extent of vandalism at the respondents' schools	21	9.63	46	21.10	54	24.77	49	22.48	48	22.02

From the responses (Table 1) it appears that 51.84% and 44.50% of the respondents were of the opinion that "fairly much" and "very much" vandalism occurs in their schools and environs. Asked whether the staff at their schools viewed vandalism as a problem, 138 respondents (63.30%) answered yes and 44 (20.18%) no; 36 (16.52%) were uncertain. Asked whether their colleagues admit that vandalism occurs at their schools, 164 respondents (75.23%) answered yes and 29 (13.30%) no; 24 (15.52%) were uncertain.

Respondents' perceptions on the extent to which certain types of vandalism occurred at their schools are listed in Table 2. It appears that vandalising learner bathrooms and/or toilets, breaking windows, and other forms of internal vandalism occur most generally. Because all learners have the right to be taught in tidy, clean school buildings and grounds, attention will now be paid to the respondents' strategies for preventing learner vandalism.

3.5.2   Respondents' prevention strategies

• School

It is clear from the content analysis that the school should play a crucial role in the prevention of learner vandalism. Respondents mentioned that learners should be informed by means of information sessions (18) and seminars/workshops on changing dispositions (21) and on the disadvantages of vandalism, and that they should be schooled in combating it. One of the respondents suggested the following: "Visit other schools with students, especially those schools without vandalism, for them to see and witness tidiness and the good looking [*sic*] of the school". Respondents (4) suggest that learners be trained in dealing with conflict. Counselling by school counsellors (3), social workers (5) and psychologists (4), among others, is viewed as an important prevention strategy.

Pride in the school (5) and a healthy school environment (6) are mentioned by some of the respondents as central elements in combating school vandalism. One respondent wrote: "Tell them that they are loved and that they are the most important people in the school". Another respondent wrote that counsellors should inculcate positive values in learners and encourage them to air their frustrations. Ten respondents pointed out that it is important to keep learners constructively busy after hours. They proposed membership of youth clubs and participation in sport and projects.

Twelve respondents considered it important for learners to be given more responsibilities. Two respondents mentioned that learners should be involved in the school's decision-making processes. They should, according to ten respondents, be the eyes and ears of the school. Some verbalised this as follows: "Learners must report anything they hear from the public about someone who may be the culprit, because silence

Table 2: Respondents' perceptions on the frequency with which certain types of vandalism occur at their schools

RO*	MR**	Types of vandalism	Very often		Often		Not sure		Seldom		Never		Does not apply***	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	3.238	Vandalising bathrooms and/or toilets used by learners	55	25.23	42	19.27	12	5.50	44	20.18	32	14.68	33	15.14
2	3.077	Breaking windows	47	21.56	47	21.56	15	6.88	73	33.48	26	11.93	10	4.59
3	3.074	Diverse indoor vandalism (eg breaking doors)	49	22.48	47	21.56	11	5.04	62	28.44	34	15.60	15	6.88
4	3.064	Graffiti (eg on desks and walls)	45	20.64	51	23.39	15	6.88	56	25.69	36	16.52	15	6.88
5	2.919	Diverse outdoor vandalism (eg uprooting plants)	36	16.51	40	18.35	23	10.55	47	21.56	40	18.35	32	14.68
6	2.595	Vandalising sport equipment and fields	16	7.34	41	18.81	23	10.55	78	35.78	37	16.97	23	10.55
7	2.736	Vandalising bathrooms and/or toilets used by educators	38	17.43	22	10.09	25	11.47	34	15.60	55	25.23	44	20.18
	2.960													

will destroy the school" and "All learners should be spies and vigilantes of their own schools". Three respondents suggested that learners be made security guards. Another three mentioned that learners should be involved in the prevention of vandalism in general.

The tightening-up of discipline at schools was important to respondents (15) in the fight against vandalism. Twenty respondents mentioned that schools should have codes of conduct. While 15 of these respondents felt that codes of conduct should specify that vandalism is unacceptable, six of them wrote that the codes should contain procedures on how to proceed against learner-vandals. Furthermore, according to three respondents, it is important that learners be cognisant of the school rules. Without specifying the punishments, 13 of the respondents mentioned that learner-vandals should be severely punished, while others suggested punishments, namely suspension (8), criminal charges (5) or being held financially responsible for damage caused (2). One of the respondents suggested that on a first offence, the vandal should pay for the damage, but on a second offence, he should be suspended. One of the respondents, whose school, according to him/her, has a serious problem with vandalism, wrote on his/her school's apparently successful disciplinary policy: "We have a merit and demerit system, and the children usually split and tell who the guilty parties are". One respondent mentioned that everything should be done to identify transgressors. Along with the tightening-up of discipline, improvement in school management was important to some respondents. Table 3 indicates whether the respondents' respective schools implemented certain prevention strategies, as initially identified in the literature study.

If one compares the respondents' prevention strategies with the data in Table 3, it appears that the codes of conducts of the majority of schools mention vandalism (item 1), learners are informed on vandalism (item 2); they are encouraged to publicise acts of vandalism (item 7), and there are procedures on how to act against vandals (item 3). Fewer than half the respondents felt that these procedures were implemented (item 4). Despite the fact that the majority of respondents indicated that their schools implemented the prevention strategies, vandalism seemed to be a problem in most of their schools (Table 1).

One respondent was of the opinion that older learners (19-25 years) must be held responsible for vandalism and recommended the appli-

Table 3: Respondents' schools implementation of selected strategies to
prevent school vandalism

Item		Yes		No		Unsure	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Are there rules in your school pertaining to vandalism?	130	59.64	44	20.18	44	20.18
2	Are topics such as vandalism discussed with learners?	147	67.43	46	21.10	25	11.47
3	Are there agreed procedures for dealing with vandalism in your school?	133	61.01	51	23.39	34	15.60
4	Are the abovementioned procedures followed?	104	47.71	79	36.23	35	16.05
5	Does the school inform parents of incidents of vandalism?	159	72.94	39	17.89	20	9.17
6	Does the school inform the police of incidents of vandalism?	132	60.55	63	28.90	23	10.55
7	Are learners encouraged to "tell" if they have witnessed acts of vandalism?	170	77.98	29	13.30	19	8.72

cation of school age limits: "The big ones must not attend school;
they must have special schools of their age". That this suggestion has
merit is apparent from the respondents' perceptions on the age-group
responsible for school vandalism. The realities of South African educa-
tion are emphasised by the fact that 20 (9.17%) of the respondents
were of the opinion that learners aged 20 and above must be held res-
ponsible (Table 4).

According to 25 respondents, educators play a key role in the pre-
vention of school vandalism. According to 11 respondents, they should
initiate prevention strategies. Six respondents indicated that educators
should investigate the reasons why learners commit vandalism. One
respondent wrote:

> Go home and have first insight into the situation. There might be
> socio-economic problems at home.

Table 4: Respondents' perceptions on the most important age range of learners who commit acts of vandalism

	N	%
8-10 years	9	4.13
11-13 years	26	11.93
14-16 years	81	37.16
17-19 years	82	37.61
20-25 years	20	9.17
Total	218	100

Another respondent wrote:

> In our school most of our kids do not live with their parents because they are migrant labourers. Some parents are also without jobs and most of the time children go to school on empty stomachs. According to me, some of these learners commit acts of violence and vandalism to get money to provide for their needs.

It is clear from the content analysis that several respondents regarded target hardening as an important prevention measure. Twenty-three respondents identified a need for strict security measures for the prevention of school vandalism. Thirty respondents mentioned the need for the appointment of security guards at schools; six specified that these should be professionals. One respondent suggested that a staff member/security guard live on the school grounds. The following practical arrangements were also mentioned: the installation of alarm systems (20); fencing off schools (15) (three respondents specified electrified fencing); access control (3); burglar alarms (3); floodlighting grounds at night (5), and making store rooms secure (1). Only some of the respondents considered the financial implications of such security measures: six mentioned that the government should be responsible for the salaries of security guards, and two that control bodies should be set up.

- Parents

For 33 respondents, parents' involvement was an important preventative measure. One of the respondents found it important for parents to accept co-ownership of their children's schools and co-responsibility for their children's education:

> Involve parents in most of the school activities, e.g. sports, prize-giving ceremonies, cleaning campaigns. Invite them to parents' meetings and talk about vandalism; make them own the school. Let them do away with the idea that the school belongs to the state. They must know that it's their own property, for the future of their children.

Some of the respondents recommended that parents be involved in the neighbourhood watch system (2) and in community police forums (5). Parents should be informed at parents' evenings on the extent of vandalism at the school (3). Parents whose children were guilty of acts of school vandalism should be informed of such transgressions (4) (Table 3, item 5), and pay for the damage (36). Some respondents (3) found it important for parents to play an active role in disciplining learners. One respondent, who felt that the media should be held responsible for vandalism, wrote that parents should supervise their children's television viewing. According to one respondent, parents not only have an important role to fulfil in preventing vandalism, but should also contribute to the repair and/or cleaning up of vandalised structures:

> Recruit parents and youth who are not working and ask them to clean our school and toilets every day and then look for a person who will run that business and be paid by the department.

- The community

For 33 respondents, community involvement is essential in combating school vandalism. According to the respondents, members of the community can be employed (6) to supervise school buildings and grounds at night, over weekends and during holidays, or do so voluntarily (3). One respondent suggested that the community be made aware of the important role of the school in the community. It should not only be au fait with the incidence of school vandalism (6), but should also be encouraged to report acts of vandalism (2). One respondent wrote: "Have regular meetings with members of the community discussing the problem. Make them part of the problem. Share ideas with them."

One respondent wrote that regular "stakeholders meetings" should be held. Five respondents recommended that the help of community leaders be called in to advise schools on how to prevent vandalism. According to six respondents, the community should accept co-ownership of schools in their neighbourhoods. One respondent wrote:

> Make sure to teach everybody that the school is needed by everybody in the community. Make them (the community) aware that the school belongs to the community.

One respondent suggested that a school/community committee be called to co-ordinate co-operation. One respondent who mentioned that unemployed youngsters should be held responsible for vandalism at schools wrote that the community should initiate work-creation opportunities. Twelve respondents mentioned that schools should be community centres. One of them wrote:

> Open ABET-schools; let the community use the school facilities; use schools to serve communities during weekends.

It appears that some respondents wanted to do more than effect co-operation with law-abiding members of the community in combating vandalism. One respondent, who probably thought that gang members should be held responsible for vandalism at schools, wrote that a forum should be created, including gang members.

• Co-operation with the police and the role of the legal system in combating vandalism

Twenty-one respondents viewed school/police co-operation as essential for the prevention of school vandalism. Members of the police service could, according to six respondents, be invited to talk to learners on vandalism. Eight respondents referred to the role which community police forums could play in the prevention of vandalism. Six mentioned that educators should be part of such forums. Furthermore, three respondents suggested that schools should support the "adopt a cop" project. Police should patrol schools at night, over weekends and during holidays. Respondents (8) mentioned that all cases of vandalism should be reported to the police (Table 1, item 6). It is clear from the content analysis that it is important to act against learner-vandals. According to one respondent, the legal system is too lenient towards transgressors: "Perpetrators are arrested but get out on bail and then set free". This

implies that jurists should not hesitate to punish learner-vandals severely. The task of the police is thus not only to deter learner-vandals, but also to arrest perpetrators.

4. Discussion

Despite efforts by the majority of the respondents' schools to combat vandalism (Table 3), only 30.73% of them indicated that the extent of vandalism at their respective schools was "none or almost none" or "a little" (Table 1). The respondents also indicated that 63.30% of the staff members at their respective schools viewed vandalism as a problem. Concerted efforts should therefore be made to prevent learner vandalism.

According to Strang (2002: 3), there has been a change among academics since the 1980s on how to prevent vandalism. Earlier, the emphasis was on the suspension and punishment of vandals. Since then, less emphasis has been placed on the perpetrator but more on the prevention of crime. Furthermore, White (1979: 60) and Wilson (1979: 19) point out that formal attempts to prevent vandalism, for instance policing, did not succeed. Vandalism usually occurs at times and places where the chances of being caught are extremely slim. Furthermore, vandalism is often an impulsive act committed when the circumstances are right. Perry (2001: 2) points out that many learner-vandals are minors (Table 4) and they usually get off scot-free. This implies, however, that role players have a *laissez-faire* attitude. It is clear from the content analysis that although some respondents are in favour of target hardening and others advocate ruthless action by the police and jurists, there are those who view police intervention as only the last resource. If criminal charges are laid against learner-vandals under the age of 18, they will be tried in accordance with the principles of the Child Justice Bill (RSA 2002, Bill 49 of 2002: section 3). The aim of this Bill (section 2(a & b)) is "to protect the rights of children [and] promote *ubuntu* in the child justice system". However, *ubuntu* means, in terms of this law, "reinforcing children's respect for human rights and the fundamental freedom of others by holding children accountable for their actions and safeguarding the interests of citizens and the community". According to this Bill, there should be a balance between the rights of the learner-vandal and the interests of the community.

There are various co-incidences between the prevention strategies of experts as reflected in the literature review and those given by the respondents. The respondents, however, did not pay attention to specialised issues, among other things the effect of architecture and the curriculum on vandalism.

Respondents' references to poverty as a cause of vandalism and work creation as a strategy to counteract it are a proof of their familiarity with problems at the grassroots level. It is therefore important to note Catalano *et al*'s (1999: 9) recommendation on prevention strategies:

> Intervention [...] needs to focus on what works and more on determining what works for whom and under what circumstances and in what settings.

This implies that the uniqueness of the South African education situation should be taken into account in the development and implementation of strategies to prevent learner vandalism at schools. Combating vandalism at South African schools in general, and at township schools, in particular, will make high demands on role-players for various reasons. Schools in poor, disorganised, urban communities are exposed to higher levels of crime than other schools (Gottfredson 1998: 2). Secondly, the apartheid government's policy of establishing separate communities has led to the erection of schools in townships in inaccessible, often abandoned areas. These schools have been exposed to especially high levels of crime after hours (Harber 2001: 262; Division for Building Technology, CSIR & ISS 1997:2). Thirdly, the professional commitment of educators, who must play a key role in combating vandalism, is sometimes questioned (Ellis 2001: 16).

The literature study and content analysis indicate that conducting information sessions and seminars/workshops, as well as making school counsellors, social workers and psychologists available, may play an important role in preventing vandalism. It is also argued in the literature and by some of the respondents that the involvement of learners in organised extra-curricular activities will help to prevent vandalism. However, these strategies may be seen by some educationalists as luxuries in a country struggling to eradicate the backlogs with regard to the provision of education — for example, in 2001 the Northern Province had a shortage of 19 000 classrooms (Mtshali 2001: 1).

The literature study and the content analysis indicate that parents should fulfil an important role, among other things, inculcating positive values in their children and disciplining them if necessary. Furthermore, they can also act as security guards and repair damaged property. Harber (2001: 269) points out that many South African parents living in townships prefer to send their children to schools quite far from their homes. As a result, many schools serve two communities: the parent community living relatively far away and the local community. Transport problems, as well as real or perceived dangers, make it difficult for parents living in townships to become involved in school matters (Harber 2001: 270).

It is clear from the literature study and the content analysis that a combination of factors relating to learners, educators, schools, parents, communities and the law cause learner vandalism. Prevention strategies should thus concentrate on all these aspects, otherwise they will be merely cosmetic and probably temporary. As a complex combination of reasons is conducive to vandalism, it is dangerous to impose generalised strategies or instant solutions.

5. Conclusion

Learner vandalism is a serious threat to the establishment of a learning culture, positive values, democracy and economic progress for South Africa. If it is not dealt with, there is a danger of some learners starting to believe that vandalism is an acceptable way of expressing frustration, taking revenge or showing anger, or lending excitement to a dull existence, or drawing attention to a specific issue. Educators, learners, parents and members of the community can develop a *laissez-faire* attitude towards vandalism for fear of having vindictive learners vandalise their personal or school property. The contrary is also true: so much time is spent on disciplinary action and security measures that valuable teaching time is lost. It is thus important that role players must take hands in combating vandalism because "we must start [...] to build caring, supportive communities, with our schools as centres of learning and islands of hope" (Asmal 2001: 2).

Bibliography

ALLEN V L & D B GREENBERGER
1978. An aesthetic theory of vandalism. *Crime & Delinquency* 24(3): 309-21.

ALTHEIDE D L
1996. *Qualitative media analysis*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.

ASMAL K
1999. Call to action: mobilizing citizens to build a South African education and training system for the 21st century. <http//education.pwv.gov.za/Media/Speeches_1999/July99/call-to-action.html>

2001. Speech by Professor Kader Asmal, MP, Minister of Education at the launch of the Signposts for Safe Schools workbook. <http://education.pwv.gov.za/Media/Speeches_2001/June01/signposts.html>

BELSON W A
1986. *Validity in survey research: with special reference to the techniques of intensive interviewing and progressive modification of testing and constructing difficult or sensitive measures for use in survey research*. Aldershot: Gower Press.

BLACK S
2002. The roots of vandalism. *American School Board Journal* 189-(7). <http://www.asbj.com/2002/07/0702research.html>

BLOEMHOFF H J
1990. Skoolvandalisme, skoolhoofde en die aanwending van skoolfasiliteite vir gemeenskapsrekreasie. *Tydskrif vir Navorsing in Sport, Liggaamlike Opvoeding en Ontspanning* 13(2): 1-9.

BURALL P
1979. Introduction. Sykes (ed.) 1979: 7-10.

CATALANO R F, R LOEBER & K C MCKINNEY
1999. School and community interventions to prevent serious and violent offending. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washingron, DC: US Department of Justice.

CEFPI E-NEWS
2002. The roots of school vandalism. <http://www.cefpi.org/enews/july02_enews.html>

COHEN L & L MANION
1994. *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge.

CONRADIE H & M G T CLOETE (reds)
1982. *Jeugmisdaad in skoolverband*. Pretoria: HAUM.

CUMMINS C
2003. School vandalism not new, just more expensive. *Report Card on Education*. <http://www.educationreportcard.com/columns/2003-01-12. html>

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
1998. *Guidelines for the consideration of governing bodies in adopting a code of conduct for learners*. Pretoria: Government Gazette 395(189000).

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (DES)
1987. *Crime prevention in schools. Practical guidance*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

DE WET N C
2003. Is leerdermisdaad buite beheer? Vrystaatse opvoeders se persepsies oor die omvang van leerdermisdaad. Unpubl paper delivered at the South African Education Association conference, Education — Realities and Challenges. University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, 14-16 January 2003.

DIVISION FOR BUILDING TECHNOLOGY, COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH AND THE INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES
1997. Safer by design. Monograph No 16, November. <http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/Monographs/No16/EnvironmentalDesignInSA. html>

DOUGLAS D & S McCART
1999. Vandalism: everybody's crime. <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/generations/80sitex/80si4.html>

ELLIOT D S, B A HAMBURG & K R WILLIAMS (eds)
1998. *Violence in American schools*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ELLIS F R
2001. South Africa: the complex of problems, 2001. <http://www.goedgedacht.org.za/new/reports_pub/ellis.html>

FAGAN J & D L WILKINSON
1998. Social contexts and functions of adolescent violence. Elliot, Hamburg & Williams (eds) 1998: 55-93.

FINN K V & M R FRONE
2003. Predictors of aggression at school: The effects of school-related alcohol use. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin* 87(636): 38-54.

FINSTERLIN H V
1999. Crime and violence prevention in South African primary schools — analysis of a study in the Greater Cape Town area. Unpubl LLM-script. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

GEASON S & P R WILSON
2000. Preventing graffiti and vandalism. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/crimprev/graffiti/schools.htm>

GOTTFREDSON D C
1998. School-based crime prevention. Sherman *et al* (eds) 1998: 1-43.

GRIFFITHS R & J M SHAPLAND
1979. The vandal's perspective: meanings and motives. Sykes (ed) 1979: 11-8.

HARBER C
2001. Schooling and violence in South Africa: creating a safer school. *Intercultural Education* 12(3): 261-71.

HOOD J
1994. School violence. <wysiwyg://100/http://www.libertyhaven…/crimeandterrorism/schoolviolence.html>

HOPE T J
1980. Four approaches to the prevention of property crimes in schools. *Oxford Review of Education* 6(3): 231-40.

INDEPENDENT PROJECT TRUST
1999. *Protecting your school from violence and crime*. Durban: Independent Project Trust.

LOCHER P, S SHEA & H DEELEY
1999. Fighting back against vandalism. *Dix Newspapers* 13 October: 1. <http://www.the-daily-record.com/past_issues/10oct/991013dr2.html>

MATAVIRE M
1999. Boy held for vandalizing school, again! *Eastern Province Herald* 27 March: 1.

MAYER G R
1999. Changing contextual factors within the school to prevent anti-social behavior. <http://www.calstela.edu/academic/acmin_coun/docs/ 501/change. html>

MTSHALI T
2001. Vandals foil plans to build new schools. *Sunday Times*, 9 December: 1-2. <www.suntimes.co.za/2001/12/09/politics/po104.asp>

NATIONAL INFORMATION CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES (NICHCY)
1999. Intervention for chronic behavior problems. Research Brief 1. <http://www nichcy.org/pubs/research/rb1txt.html>

PASQUES L J
1982. Die moontlike oorsake van jeugmisdaad in die skool. Conradie & Cloete (reds) 1982: 37-59.

PELTZER K
1999. Perceived causes of non-reporting of crimes in the Northern Province of South Africa. *Acta Criminologica* 12(3): 10-4.

PERRY J L
2001. School vandalism beyond belief. NewsMax.com. <wysigwyg://113/http://www newsmax.com/archives/articles/2001/8/7/190918.sht.html>

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA (RSA)
2002. *Child Justice Bill. Bill 49 of 2002*. Cape Town: Creda Communications.

RETZINGER S M & T J SCHEFF
2000. Shame and shaming in restorative justice. *The Red Feather Journal of Postmodern Criminology*. <http://www.tryoung.com/journal-pomocrim/vol-8-shaming/scheff.html>

ROBINSON-YOUNG P J
1992. Recreation's role in gang intervention. *Parks and Recreation* 27(3): 54-6.

SANDERS W B
1981. Juvenile delinquency: causes, patterns and reactions. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

SHERMAN L W, D GOTTFREDSON, D MACKENZIE, J ECK, P REUTER, & S BUSHWAY (eds)
1998. Preventing crime: what works, what doesn't, what's promising. <http://www.ncjrs.org/works/chapter5.htm>

SMITH L J F & G LAYCOCK
1985. *Reducing crime: developing the role of crime prevention panels. Crime Prevention Unit: Paper 2*. London: Home Office.

SNYMAN C R
1999. *Strafreg*. Durban: Butterworths.

STOUT B
2002. Discouraging vandalism in your school habitat. 4-H Wildlife Stewards. <wysiwyg://141:http://wildlifestewards….edu/project%20management/vandalism.html>

STRANG H
2002. Crimes against schools: the potential for a restorative justice approach. <http://crj.anu.edu.au/pubs.hs.rise.doc>

SYKES J (ed)
1979. *Designing against vandalism*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

THE HOUSTON CHALLENGE
2003. Passport to success in after-school programmes. <http://www.houstonaplus.org/afsp.html>

TEEVAN J J & H B DRYBURGH
2000. First person accounts and sociological explanations of delinquency. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 37(1): 78-93.

TREVAS D & H DEELEY
1999. Reasons for vandalism varied, complex. *Dix Newspapers*, 11 October: 1-3. <http://www.the-dailyrecord.com/past_issues/10_oct/991011dr2.html>

THERON A
1991. Vandalisme in kriminologiese perspektief. *Acta Criminologica* 4(1): 47-54.

TYGART C E
1988. Strain theory and public school vandalism. *Youth & Society* 20(1): 106-18.

WELCH D
1991. *The management of urban parks*. London: Longman.

WHITE D
1979. Vandalism and theft in schools: how local authorities can defend themselves. Sykes (ed) 1979: 43-53.

WILSON S
1979. Observations on the nature of vandalism. Sykes (ed) 1979: 19-29.

ZITO GV
1975. *Methodology and meaning: varieties of sociological inquiry*. New York: Praeger.