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Discipline in the parental home and at school: Instead of the "blame game", a caring community

Abstract

This is an educational-philosophical, more particularly, a societal-theoretical reflection on the "blame game" that is occasionally played between the parental home and the school with respect to the behaviour displayed by children in these societal relationships. After consulting the literature regarding this issue, and the findings of recent empirical studies in South Africa for purposes of describing the "blame game", the interpretivist-constructivist method was employed for exploring an alternative approach to the discipline problem in homes and schools, namely the creation of a social compact, and of a caring school community based thereon. The discipline practised in the parental home differs from that at school because home and school are essentially different societal relationships, each with unique foundation and destination functions; hence with respective sphere sovereignty. Their interests and activities are, at the same time, also interlaced in that they share the same child as a member. It is due to this interlacement (enkapsis) that unacceptable behaviour at home might impact detrimentally on discipline in the school, and vice versa. To counteract this reciprocal display of unruly behaviour, it is suggested that the parents and the school attended by their children could consider entering into a social compact or covenant so that they are as one in guiding the young people towards disciplined behaviour, that is, socially acceptable behaviour. The actions of such a new community should be guided by several moral codes, the most important of which are the ethic of community, and of loving, caring and compassion.

Keywords: disciplinary problems, parental home, school, school community, social contract, unacceptable learner behaviour

1. Introduction

In a recent South African survey among teachers, 24 percent of them stated that they suffered from stress brought about by the weak discipline displayed by their learners. Ten percent of all those interviewed also ascribed the stress that they experienced in their workplace to their interactions with the learners' parents (Solidariteit Skoleondersteuningsentrum, 2019-2020: 20; also cf. De Beer, 2023: 14). In a 2012 National School Violence Study involving 12 794 learners, Burton and Leoschut (2013: 54ff, 60ff) discovered that more

than 15 percent of learners at primary and secondary schools had suffered some form of violence at school. One in three secondary school learners knew classmates who had been drunk at school, and more than half of them knew learners who smoked dagga at school. Osman (2017) also enumerates a number of unacceptable behaviours by learners in schools: loitering, gambling, drug usage, racial issues. It is in view of all these forms of unacceptable behaviour that Daniel (2018) writes about "a recent spate of violence that has rocked schools in South Africa". To date, the situation has not improved (De Klerk-Luttig, 2023: 21).

2. Problem statement: The "blame game"

One of the most obvious ways to deal with the problem of unruly behaviour and a lack of discipline (i.e. a lack of socially acceptable behaviour) at school is to blame the parental home/ the parents of the learner. Burton and Leoschut (2013) mention a wide variety of factors leading to violence in schools, but a part of their report is devoted to the issue of a lack of discipline in the home environment and in the community (Burton & Leoschut, 2013: 54). According to these authors, school violence is undergirded by a myriad of individual, school, family and broader community-level risk factors that coalesce to create vulnerability for violence. For this reason, any attempt to curb violence occurring in schools needs to extend beyond the school itself. Much of the rise in the levels of violence occurring at schools was attributed to the lack of discipline that children receive at home (37.8%), resulting in children being perceived as more mischievous (35.6%) by principals (Burton & Leoschut, 2013: xiii, 24). "The findings of the study clearly demonstrate that many learners are at risk of violence as a result of the family settings they are raised in" (Burton & Leoschut, 2013: 60; cf. 60-66 for a detailed discussion of this issue). Dhlamini (2018) reports that the Federation of School Governing Bodies (FEDSAS) also cast the blame for the violent behaviour displayed by learners on their parents. This organisation opines that the parents do not take responsibility for the upbringing of their children. Dhlamini concludes, "In by far the majority of cases that (FEDSAS) has ever dealt with, the bad behaviour of a child can be directly linked to problems at home." An African National Congress spokesman added his voice in this regard by stating that bad behaviour is a societal issue "that calls for parents and communities to play a central role in instilling a sense of right and wrong in our children" (Daniel, 2018).

Mphelo (2018) also blames the violence perpetrated by learners at school on the parents not playing their part in the education of the children. In his opinion, the parents must shoulder the blame for the unacceptable behaviour of their children because they see schools as "dumping sites" for unruly children. Some parents use schools as drop-off centres where they can leave their children in the morning and fetch them in the afternoon. These attitudes on the part of parents have turned schools into unsafe environments. In a letter on 12 September 2022 to the parents of her school's learners, the Principal of John Ross College in Richard's Bay, Janienne King, in similar vein wrote to parents, stating that if they could not control their children at home, it should remain a problem for the parents, and should not be passed on to the school. Teachers are not babysitters; their work is to teach (Brits, 2022a: 1). Dr Carla Bezuidenhout, an educational psychologist, concurs with this principal, stating that parents seem to be unable to instil a healthy value system in their children because of a lack of time and an inability to set a good example (Brits, 2022b: 9).

Still in the same vein, Ncube (as reported in Daniel, 2018: n.p.) points at a disconnect between active parenting and discipline by stating,

> I doubt if parents even know where they (their children) are or what they get up to. Until there's a shooting or a stabbing at school, by which time parenting has failed … Our kids have become criminals. It's a reflection on us as a country.

Ncube's view is in line with that of Harris (2017) who contends that problems of discipline at school can be related directly to problems at home. Issues and stresses at home are a major reason for students to act out in class. If students are neglected at home, their anger can boil over and lead them to unruly behaviour in school. Students who come from homes where the parents are divorcing or have divorced are also under duress, according to him, and can act out in school as a way of dealing with their fears and frustration. All these opinions are in line with the empirical findings of Ngwokabuenui (2015: 70), namely that unhealthy home conditions could lead to ill-discipline by learners at school. His research revealed that 81% of Cameroonian students demonstrating unruly behaviour were experiencing unsatisfactory conditions at home; 87% of them regarded their parents as over-protective, and 46% even felt rejected by their parents. A hefty 86% of them were exposed to a poor value system both at home and in the community.

The outline so far may lead one to think that much, if not most, of the weak discipline displayed in the school can be traced back to inadequate parenting and care, to unfavourable parental home and community conditions, and also inadequate parental involvement in school activities (Thebenyane & Zulu, 2019: 85). Not all commentators agree with this diagnosis of the problem, however. Osman (2017), for instance, sees the leadership of schools as partly to blame. She finds it worrying that "you can see clearly that the school leadership itself … is not sowing the values that are absolutely essential for a well-functioning school". In her opinion, many of the teachers are unable to provide good leadership, and display a lack of accountability. It should be noted, however, that she does not discount the fact that many of the problems with discipline in the school have been exacerbated by shortcomings in the community, by the absence of adults behaving responsibly, by socio-economic problems in society, unemployment, and other issues. In doing so, she achieves a better balance between the various factors that might be at play whenever ill-discipline is displayed. Rossouw and Oosthuizen (2021: 40-41) also strive for balance in concluding that, globally speaking, there seems to be a multitude of factors underlying learner misconduct. As mentioned above, Burton and Leoschut (2013) also underscore the fact that many factors, in addition to home and community conditions, play a role in the display of misconduct by learners at school.

A recent empirical investigation (in the process of being published) that we conducted in 2021 among 402 parents of learners in two South African provinces (North-West and Mpumalanga) seems to countermand some of the positions outlined in the previous paragraphs. It revealed that, on the one hand, the participating parents tended to have a relatively positive image of their own upbringing of their children, and on the other, also of their involvement in their children's schools. Most parents (96% of the respondents) never or very seldom allow their child to annoy someone else; most of them (89%) are always concerned about what their child did, and most of them (94%) do not allow their child to interrupt others when they are speaking. Interestingly, a lower percentage of the parents (65%) stated that they scolded their child when he or she acted against the parent's wishes. According to these responses, parents tend not to tolerate indiscipline or misbehaviour in their children. This conclusion is in line with the fact that by far most of the respondents (95%) fully or partially agreed with the statement: "I insist on good discipline at home."

Some of the items in the questionnaire focused on the parents' relationship with their children's schools. Most of the respondents (84%) either fully or partially agreed that they kept themselves informed about issues of discipline in their children's schools. Nearly the same percentage (82%) also either fully or partially agreed that their child's school involved the parents in learners' matters of discipline. These two results seem to point to a reasonably positive attitude on the part of the respondents towards their children's schools. Other items in the questionnaire seem to support this view. While only 46% of the respondents stated that they had participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of their child, 95% of those who participated affirmed that their participation in the disciplinary procedures had improved the child's behaviour at school.

The empirical study on bullying in school done by Kitching, Van Rooyen and McDonald (2019: 42-43) in a semi-urban area in the Western Cape (South Africa) differs from our findings in that it reveals that parent-teacher disagreements and reciprocal blaming as the cause of discipline problems seem to be symptomatic of "an absence of a shared understanding regarding ways to resolve conflicts. Instead of collaborating to solve the problems, they [teachers and parents] assert power in a dysfunctional manner by blaming one another for children's misbehaviour".

It is clear from all the research reported above regarding discipline in the parental home and the school that a condition of ill-behaviour cannot be rectified by the teachers simply blaming the parents for neglecting their pedagogical duty or, conversely, for the parents to blame the school and the teachers when children behave badly at home. While our own investigation among parents in the two South African provinces revealed no evidence of the "blame game" being played by either parents or teachers, it also did not provide any evidence of the presence of a strong collaborative parental home-school structure for supporting discipline both at school and at home.

The stark reality in this complex situation is that it is one and the same child that might display socially unacceptable behaviour in either or both of these societal contexts – the parental home, and the school. Despite the fundamental societal-theoretical difference between the two contexts, at the same time, they are closely intertwined through having the same child as a member. Another solution to the problem should be sought rather than simply apportioning blame, as reported in some instances, or for the parental home and the school to be only in casual contact. Closer contact and cooperation between the parental home and school can be achieved through the establishment of a collaborative structure between these two institutions.

Our aim in the remainder of this article is to highlight suggestions made in the past about the creation of such a collaborative and coordinated structure that embraces parents, teachers, learners and other societal elements, but also to go somewhat further by suggesting that the proposed new interactive structure between home and school be based on a social contract or covenant, and guided by several ethics (moral codes). The term 'ethics' as it is used in the following discussion denotes the outlook and attitudes of individuals and organisations regarding their moral values, how they act and see themselves. Ethics in this sense pertain to moral values, and hence to individuals and organisations' actions, duties and obligations (Grayling, 2019: xvii).

3. Method of investigation

This is a conceptual-theoretical, more accurately, an educational-philosophical and ethical reflection on discipline in the parental home (home of origin) of school learners, and about the connection between parental discipline and the discipline expected to be displayed in the teaching-learning situation in the school. To substantiate the topicality of the issue under investigation, we initially made use of insights gleaned from literature, and of the findings of recent empirical studies. The first sections of this article contain the insights that we drew from that study of the literature.

The interpretivist-constructivist method was subsequently used in the conceptual-theoretical, philosophical-ethical-principled part of this article that unfolds in the following sections. Entire articles could be written about each of the elements of the interpretivist-constructivist method. Suffice it to say that interpretivism is a method of creating knowledge, insight and understanding regarding a particular situation by examining a wide range of source material, including literature and empirical findings. Interpretivism, as Vigil (2008: 211) observes, is always somehow framed by the investigators' assumptive values. Tarnas (2010: 36) concurs in stating that the human being observes reality as a stranger, and has to make imaginative guesses about its structures and workings. He or she cannot approach the world without bold conjectures in the background, for every fact that is laid bare presupposes an interpretive focus. In the constructivist phase of our project, we used insights gleaned from our interpretations of the literature study and of the empirical studies mentioned above to build a somewhat new approach to the discipline problems experienced at home by parents and at school by teachers (Runciman, 2022: 189). We suggest that the following approach be instituted to circumvent the "blame game" discussed so far.

4. Towards a new school community based on a social contract and driven by various ethics (moral codes)

4.1 The unique origins and functions of home and school as societal relationships

The parental home and the school are regarded as societal collectivities or relationships on the basis of the fact that they both display the two characteristic features of such entities, namely that each has a unique, unitary character, and a durable relation of super- and subordination, in other words, each possesses a permanent authority structure (Strauss, 2009a: 505-506). A societal relationship or institution; hence also the parental home and the school, is characterised by inner structural principles that govern their activities. This idea has become known as the principle of "sphere sovereignty" (Strauss, 2009a: 533). The sphere sovereignty of a societal relationship is determined by its foundational and destination functions. When the principle of sphere sovereignty is accepted, every sphere (societal relationship) in a differentiated society receives its proper social space, without being subsumed to any other societal sphere (Strauss, 2009b: 779).

In the case of the parental home, the foundational function is biotic (the child is the offspring of its parents) (Stone, 1981: 26), and its destination function is loving-caring (everything that the parents do for and with the child is [or should be] determined by an ethic of love and caring for the child). The foundational function of the school, on the other hand, is cultural-historical in that it was created, established, instituted and organised at a particular point in

time, and for a specific purpose, namely teaching-learning of the learners entrusted to it. The destination function of the school is logical-analytical in that it concentrates on the transfer (teaching-learning) of systematic knowledge about reality (Stone, 1981: 29). The difference in foundational and destination functions indicate a difference in the calling of parents and teachers with respect to the upbringing of children and young people (Wolterstorff, 2002: 141).

The parental home (home of origin) and the school are essentially (i.e. ontologically) two different societal relationships, each with its own, sovereign sphere of competence (and hence sphere sovereignty). Although the parents, the church (mosque, temple, synagogue), the state and the school are all intimately involved in the education of a child, it is the parent as the life-giver to the child who is primarily responsible for its education, and therefore the primary educator. As primary educators, parents have the moral responsibility to determine the life-conceptual character of their child's education (Wolterstorff, 2002: 214). It is the parents who must ultimately answer for the upbringing of their children (to whomever they feel responsible and accountable; for Christians it is the God of the Bible) (cf. De Jong, 2003: 125).

4.2 The inextricable interlacement of home and school (enkapsis; sphere universality)

In due course, the parents may enlist the support of others (including other societal relationships or institutions such as the school and the church) to assist them – as secondary educators – in this task, but the parents always retain the primary charge and authority for this responsibility (Edlin, 1999: 103). We do not agree with De Jong (2003: 127) that the school is an extension of the parental home, and that it possesses authority because the parental home has delegated particular functions and duties to it. We do agree with Edlin, however, when he states that just as the parents entrust the medical treatment of a child to a doctor, they may choose to entrust some of the specialised, technological training and guiding that the child might need to the school. This, as Edlin (1999: 103) remarks, is legitimate and necessary, but entrusting some of the pedagogical functions in this particular sense to other institutions or individuals does not remove parental responsibility. Entrusting others with some of the pedagogical duties also does not mean that the teachers have to become or be seen as almost "puppet-like extensions of the home" who may be called to task by the parents, or that the school becomes an extension of the parental home. It also does not mean that the parents are entitled to involvement in the actual daily, professional programme of the school (Edlin, 1999: 107). Put differently, the school – like the parental home – enjoys sphere sovereignty. Parents who send their children to school recognise the expertise and the authority of the teachers, but they may not surrender their personal responsibility for their children's education. For Christian parents, this responsibility is a charge from God, and hence not theirs to give up (Edlin, 1999: 110-111). By bringing their child to school, the parents recognise the sovereign independence of the school and the authority of the teaching staff, but – as explained below – they and their child then enter into a new social contract or compact, and in doing so, into a new school community.

The fact that the parental home and the school are in essence, i.e. ontically, different, independent, each with its own sovereign sphere of competence and authority, implies that they each have a unique and sovereign approach to discipline in their respective spheres. Discipline in the parental home is guided by a biotically determined ethical/loving-caring orientation, whereas discipline in the school context is guided by the destination function of the school, namely logico-analytical unfolding in the form of teaching and learning. Despite

their distinctly different ontic statuses, the parental home and the school are inextricably linked in that the same child is a member or participator in both (cf. Verburg, 2015: 281-282). The quite different orientations of the parental home and the school with regard to the discipline of one and the same child have to be reckoned with in the context and in the activities of the new school community that is created when the child goes to school for the first time, and in the choice of ethic (moral code) that guides such activities.

5. The religious and life-conceptual interlacement of home and school, and discipline

In ideal circumstances, the parental home and the school are spiritually, religiously, and life-conceptually united in their aspirations regarding the upbringing of the children, each in its own unique way. However, as De Jong (2003: 120-130) convincingly argues, there has been a long-standing controversy about the relationship between the school and the state and the church, respectively, as well as about the need for parental (private) schools, state schools and church (parochial) schools. In the end, most education systems have opted for a pluralistic system consisting of mainly state schools and a mixture of other school types. The principle that should be kept in mind and adhered to as far as possible, whatever the religious and life-conceptual orientation of the school, is that the parents and school ideally should be on the same religious and concomitant life-conceptual wavelength with respect to the teaching and learning occurring in the school. This principle also applies to the maintenance of discipline. Put differently, the social compact and the school community based thereon ideally should be based on a shared religious and life-conceptual orientation and commitment.

The desired unity in vision and mission between parental home and school does not seem to be achievable in a secular environment (such as in the current liberal democracy prevailing in South Africa – despite the then Minister of Education Kader Asmal's claim in 2003 (DoE, 2003: Introduction) that South Africa is not a secular state. It might be worthwhile to examine the possibility that some of the disciplinary problems in South African schools could be ascribed to the current religious and life-conceptual divide between most parental homes and the schools attended by children from these homes. (Also see remarks in connection with an ethic of community towards the end of this article.)

6. The need for a new social compact (contract; covenant) – and for a new school community

As explained, all societal relationships or institutions, including the parental home and the school, have their own unique pedagogical tasks and vocations; each has a primary task in life (that we referred to above as its "destination function") and also a secondary task: its unique pedagogical or formational task. Their combined pedagogical task within the frame of the social compact discussed below, and hence within the framework of the school community is to form young people to become optimally functioning adults in their respective communities. The formation of the young person, the individual who is at the same time child of his or her parents and learner in school is therefore the joint task of the parental home and the school.

On the day that the parents enrol their child at a school, they and the school tacitly engage in a social compact or a new covenant, and thereby for all intents and purposes, all parents and the school form a new entity, a new collective unit (cf. Runciman, 2022: 22) that can be referred

to as a school community. Although the primary task of the school is to educate the students in the sense of teaching and learning, it can also provide educational leadership in such a school community (Wolterstorff, 2002:142). However, the formation of a school community is not a straightforward process, particularly in a moral sense. The formation and structure of the school community are complicated because the various participants (parents, teachers in various capacities) belong to widely different social groups. Some of the groups may overlap, and some are concentric (such as a neighbourhood in a city). As Lahti and Weinstein (2005: 59) correctly observe, the actual formation of the school community will depend on the various participants and their priorities, and in particular, their willingness to cooperate and coordinate their activities. A school community is also a complex phenomenon, as Plotnitsky (2006: 52) indicates, because it is in essence a heterogeneous, yet interactive space of relationships where differences, similarities and interactions are all dynamically present.

The notion that all of those somehow involved in the schooling of a child unavoidably engage in a school community is not new. Thebenyane and Zulu (2019: 86), for instance, suggested a few years ago already that a school community be formed to attend to the behaviour of learners. It should in their opinion include all the stakeholders such as parents, teachers, guidance teachers, principals, community members and even school secretaries, cleaners and the maintenance staff. All of them should be "actively involved in managing discipline of learners in their respective schools". Kitching *et al*. (2019: 44) also propose the formation of such a school community. Van der Bijl and Gaffoor (2021: 118) similarly mention a complexity of interrelated school community factors to be taken into account when dealing with discipline: finances, friendships, family life, self-perceptions, interests and personal goals. Wolhuter and Van der Walt (2021: 146) and Thambe and De Beer (2021: 180) expand this list by stating that factors relating to the mores of the communities of origin of the learners, the cultural systems in the catchment area of the schools, and even the interests of government should be taken into consideration.

In contrast to societal relationships or collectivities such as the parental home, the school, the church or the state, which are characterised by two features, durable organisation and a relation of super- and subordination, the school community is a structure in which parental membership and involvement last only as long as the parents have a child as learner in the school. It is not a permanent structure as far as a particular parent is concerned. A school community also does not possess a permanent super- and subordination (authority) structure. At best, it is a co-ordinational relationship, and concerns the interaction between all the parties involved in the activities surrounding the school, including policy making, particularly also regarding the maintenance of learner discipline, i.e. how to ensure that learners display socially acceptable behaviour at home, in school and elsewhere. Although parents become *de facto* members of this school community structure when enrolling their child at a school, they retain their freedom of association and choice. They remain free to choose not to participate in any of the activities of the school community, or in only those that they regard as important for the education of their child (Strauss, 2009a: 505). We think that it is important for parents to involve themselves actively in the activities of the community, thereby gaining not only insight into how discipline is managed in the school but also – via the school governing body – having an impact on school policy-making with respect to learner discipline. As we argue in the next section, the nature and the quality of the school community's impact on the school's policy-making regarding learner discipline should be based on pertinent ethics (moral codes).

7. The social compact, and the activities of the school community to be based on various ethics (moral codes)

Although the notion of creating a school community is not new, our effort in the sub-divisions of this section is to proffer a rationale for such a social compact, for the school community based thereon, and for the activities of such a community. By presenting a rationale of this kind in terms of various ethical orientations (moral codes) we strive to give new or added impetus and meaning to the management of learner discipline at home and school. What we are in fact attempting to do in this section is to engage in a process of framing; that is, attempting to be clear about the principles to be adhered to in, and by all engaged in a school community, among others to be able to help ground the participants when faced with an unexpectedly difficult situation such as a possible serious contravention of school rules. By framing, the school community signals to the world on what moral principles it operates, how it works and what it expects from all involved (Liautaud, 2021: 58, 86).

Without actually having to state it in so many words, the implicit understanding among all involved is that the social contract or the covenant on which the school community is founded in an agreement about the tasks, duties and responsibilities of each partner, in this case, the parental home and the school. Without a shared morality, without a shared understanding of the common good, there can be no school community (Sacks, 2021: 17-18). Pinker (2019: 28) advances the idea of a social compact and school community in very practical terms when asserting that "it is wiser to negotiate a social contract that puts us in a positive-sum-game: neither gets to harm the other, and both are encouraged to help the other". The moral sense that people have been equipped with sanctifies, according to Pinker (2012: xxiv), a set of norms that govern the interactions among people in a culture, in this case, the school community, in order to decrease the possibility of antisocial behaviour, and to advance the possibility of widely acceptable social behaviour. The end purpose of a school community and its members is to redirect all stimuli towards the self-discipline of the children wherever they find themselves (Azcona, 2021: 2). Ethical rules or moral codes flow from the basic social contract. The members of the new community agree, tacitly or explicitly, to abide by the rules, including those with respect to learner discipline. These rules limit what the participants are able to do in order to benefit the new community as a whole, and to allow every participant a measure of freedom and security (Thompson, 2018: 162, 168, 192). The following sub-sections contain descriptions of some of the notable ethics or moral codes in this regard.

7.1 An ethic of community

The school community is not in the first place about promoting or advancing the foundational task of the parental home (loving and caring for own offspring) or of the school (teaching-learning of learners/students) but about the wellbeing of the children (learners) wherever and in whatever situation they might find themselves. Its primary purpose is educational (pedagogical) in the widest sense of the word (not the restricted sense of instruction or teaching-learning). In this wide sense, the word "education" refers to a group of manual and intellectual skills and habits that are accomplished, and the moral qualities that a young person will need to be a successful individual later in adult life (Azcona, 2021: 2). To educate in this widest sense of the word entails the socialisation of the children, introduction to property and promises, forbearances and cooperations, conventions and norms, and "the millions of little capacities that eventually fit them for their lives as grownups". This is an "agonising" task, according to Blackburn (2009: 24), one to which not more attention can be given in this article.

A school community is primarily rooted in an ethic of community and hence of deep care, connectedness, and mutuality (cf. Baggini, 2020: 17). An ethic of community sees all those involved in the parental home and the school as a collective or a coalition, and equates morality with duty, respect, loyalty and interdependence (Pinker, 2012: 755), and the best interests of the community and its members (Baijnath, 2017: 202). Membership of the school makes coordinated action possible since it binds its members into other individuals and groups that are not family. It is hard to see, according to Paley (2021: 42), why such a structure will not be beneficial to all concerned, also the management of learner discipline in all social and societal contexts.

An ethic of community regards the best interests of the members of the community as the fundamental principle in decision-making, namely the question: What best serves the interests of the community? In order to answer this question, all the members of the school community should agree about the assumptive values that form the foundational structure of the school community. Problems with the management of learner discipline at home and school will persist when the parent members of the school community differ from the teaching members thereof with respect to the basic values to follow and to adhere both to the school and the parental home. Such problems tend to arise with respect to what could be regarded as acceptable behaviour on the part of learners, and what sanctions to follow in cases of deviation from these norms (also cf. De Jong, 2003: 121). This orientation implies that an ethic or moral code of responsibility also has to be brought into play (Sacks, 2011: 37).

7.2 An ethic of non-judgement

The activities and decisions of the school community are also rooted in an ethic of non-judgement: an attitude of refusing to blame any other party for the misbehaviour of a learner, but rather a resolve to keep the focus on own duties, tasks, goodness, caring and relationships (Baggini, 2020: 117), and on dealing with the problem at hand, in the best interests of all parties involved in the school community. According to this ethic, blaming other parties for ill-behaviour among learners would be unacceptable. Other avenues should be sought to address the issue.

7.3 An ethic of justice

The activities of the school community are also rooted in an ethic of justice. In terms of this ethic, ethical dilemmas such as bad learner behaviour (wherever it occurs) are resolved by principles such as fairness, equity, and justice, not by blaming any other party or agent. Decisions about how to deal with the unruly behaviour of a child (as learner) are guided by agreements, rules, policies and procedures. Baijnath (2017: 200-201) takes a radical line in this regard by stating that the ethic of justice is non-consequentialist. In other words, in his opinion, parents and teacher leaders should not consider the consequences of their decisions about the negative behaviour of the child, but make decisions based on predetermined rules and policies of the new school community.

7.4 An ethic of care and compassion

The impact of the non-consequentialism implied by practising an ethic of justice as proposed by Baijnath can be softened through invoking an ethic of care and compassion. This is an ethic that is compassion oriented, concerned with (about) virtues such as empathy, understanding and trust (Bazalgette, 2017: 1,6, 24, 64, 66; also cf. Nussbaum, 2012: 25, 28,

96, 146). Empathy, in the sense of sympathetic concern, prompts a person to feel the pain of the other, and to align their interests with his or her own (Pinker, 2012: xxiv). In essence, says Stoker (1967: 251), an ethic of loving, caring and compassion can be described as caring and being passionate about the interests of the other (person). By following this ethic, one could soften the blow after application of an ethic of justice. It would probably not be wise to summarily follow the following advice of Pinker (2019: 417): "… any deontological principle whose consequences are harmful … can be tossed out the window". A possible alternative to this action is suggested below.

A group of children such as siblings at home or learners in a class tend to "reveal bodies that engage in different assemblages … that constantly cross and inter-connect (the educators' – parents and teachers') emotional responses to various events and activities" (Zembylas, 2007: 32). A pedagogical practice that embraces an ethic of care and compassion can allow educators (parents and teachers) to make use of the many opportunities with children that arise (at home and in school) to enact passionate forms of interaction. Mulcahy (2012: 11) makes the interesting point that affect and emotion should not only be seen as an inner psychological state of the human being, but also as "the embodied practices of assembly, human or otherwise" that can be used "to refer to intensities or energies that produce new affective and embodied connections" among, in this case, parents and children/teachers and learners. The combination of an ethic of community with an ethic of loving and caring will ideally, and hopefully, lead to the building of a caring community that could contribute to lasting peace and prosperity in society.

7.5 Consequentialism and an ethic of responsibility

The impact of an ethic of justice can also be softened by practising an ethic of responsibility, which means that one should be willing to live with the consequences of decisions and actions, including the possibility of unintended consequences (Runciman, 2022: 152, 154). Of course, as Pinker (2012: 611) correctly points out, one should be intent on weighing the consequences before taking a decision or a course of action. The moral sense that people have been equipped with embodies a distinctive mode of thinking about an action, not just the avoidance of an action or a knee-jerk response to a situation (Pinker, 2012: 753). In the end, Baggini (2020: 160) advises, one has to depend on reason (common sense) when turning morals into principles to be adhered to, when applying the principles, and when trying to foresee the consequences of the application of moral principles. Painful unforeseen consequences could arise if the members of the school community disregard the proper order and responsibilities of love and compassion (Naugle, 2012: 52). It is also important to keep in mind, as Sacks (2011: 123) warns, that there are certain things that the school community may not do, whatever the consequences. In the final analysis, the members of the school community remain morally responsible agents (Sacks, 2011: 289).

8. Concluding remarks

Socially unacceptable learner behaviour seems to be a constant problem in parental homes and schools, and there seems to be a tendency on the part of both these institutions to occasionally blame the other, at least in South Africa. In the past, educationists have pointed out that blaming other parties for unsociable behaviour on the part of children/learners have up to now not helped to get rid of the problem. We agree with those who suggest that the problem be addressed in the context of a school community that embraces the parents, the

teaching staff, and all others concerned with the schooling of children. We not only support the active participation of parents, teachers and all other parties concerned in such a school community; we also contribute two relatively new ideas to the concept of a school community, namely that it should be rooted in a social compact between parental home and school, and that its activities be guided by several moral codes or ethics. It is our contention that many of the current learner discipline problems experienced both at home and school could be eradicated by addressing them within the framework of a school community, and guided in its actions by the ethics that we described.

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