CHAPTER 5

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DISCIPLINE IN SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION

Chapter C11

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> An eye for an eye would make the whole world blind
> Mohandas Gandhi

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa in general, and South African education in particular, envisions and strives towards a society and an education system that is socially just in nature. At the root of teaching, education for social justice is seen as the rock upon which democracy can be successfully built (Ayers et al., 2009: Preface). Various South African policies, legislation and practices are thus infused by, and geared towards the promotion of social justice in formal educational spaces. For example, sections 24, 28 and 29 of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa of 1996, extends to all South African citizens a right to education in a protective environment – and more particularly, in an environment that promotes understanding and tolerance in contexts of racial, religious and ethnic diversity (Squelch, 2001). The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (DoE, 1996) (SASA) gives effect to this agenda, confirming the national education department's commitment to preserving children's constitutional rights, particularly in school spaces.

In addition to what legislation and policies prescribe, promoting social justice in and through education assumes that education practices be infused, as well, with principles of social justice – particularly concerning the disciplining of schoolchildren. Infusing educational practises with the principles of social justice is important, as education is also primarily about developing in schoolchildren the dispositions of democratic and good citizenship – that is, developing in them a sense of responsibility towards others, empathy for others and a propensity towards justice in general and social justice in particular. An interrelationship between policy and practice is therefore particularly important in undoing both historical and existent injustices located within the formal schooling system. In this vein, Barry (2005:15) argues that "the working parts of the injustice machine, are different patterns or dimensions of injustice, each of which has many causes . . . none of the patterns or dimensions of injustice can be reversed if it is tackled in isolation from the others". The implication of which is that all the components of education could potentially contribute towards injustice. As a result, social injustices in society might not be fully addressed unless disciplinary policies, procedures and practises in schools, just as any other aspect of education, are also infused with social justice imperatives (DeMatthews, 2018; Gregory et al., 2016; Mncube, 2008). With this in mind, our premise is that discipline in education should be about more than justice; rather, it should also be about social justice.

Accordingly, in this chapter, we try to put forward an understanding of social justice; this will serve as the lens, and overarching framework, for subsequent chapters. We first explore notions of justice, after which we look at social justice. Having done this, we make a case for social justice in education – that is, the implementation of social justice in education and the value of promoting social justice in schooling spaces. We will illustrate the impact of social justice on learner discipline by considering two scenarios that play-out daily in many South Africa schools. We conclude this chapter with some implications of social justice for discipline in South African schools.

2. IDEAS ON JUSTICE

Various scholars who have attempted to define social justice agree that the concept does not have a single essential meaning; rather, as DeMatthews (2018:546) aptly describes, it is a "widely contested and regularly used catchphrase to describe a broad range of principles, emphases, and purposes of education and teaching and leadership practises". Therefore, to understand what social justice is, and what its possible impact on discipline in schools could be, we deem it important first to examine the concept "justice" – which on its own, seems difficult to pin down as well. This is because conceptions of justice shift, change and vary temporarily, geographically, culturally as well as over time, place, politics and pedagogical principles (DeMatthews, 2018; Hart, 2012:2; Mapel, 1989:2; Quinn, 2009:110). This results in the concept being entirely a matter of opinion and social convention. Sen (2009:4) also suggests that justice is not a matter of reason, but being appropriately sensitive and having the right nose for injustice.

The somewhat problematic nature of the concept could easily create the impression that "justice" is a misnomer and a concept devoid of any definite meaning. It is therefore little wonder that throughout the history of humankind, philosophers seemed to have grappled with the meaning of the concept "justice". For example, confusion over its meaning prompted Aristotle to identify the constituent parts thereof (Boyles et al., 2009:31) and to uncover what it is when one talks about justice, and what the conditions are for an act to be regarded just or an act of justice.

2.1 Justice as (in)equality

Aristotle concluded that justice was proportionality or balance (Barusch, 2005:5) and that it amounted to a just and equal distribution of resources amongst two people (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2002:502–504), where it serves as the midway between unjust distributions that favour one or the other. For Aristotle, this meant treating equals equally and unequals unequally (Clark, 2006; Von Leyden, 1985). In practice, this translated into the fair distribution and allocation of burdens and benefits in society of which the latter does not only include material goods, but rather also social goods like the inclusion of a member into particular processes as well. The concept "justice" ought therefore not to be limited within the distributive concept of material justice, because such conceptualisations prevent those marginalised socially and culturally from challenging structural violence (Tyson and Park, 2008:30). Hence, we find that the concept of justice is also commonly associated with meanings and connotations such as "the common good", "equality", "impartiality, choice and reciprocity". For Mills (in Riley, 1998:45) justice resembles a name for certain moral requirements, which, "regarded collectively, stand higher in the scale of social utility, and are therefore of more paramount obligation, than any others". Seen in this way, justice is fundamental to the pursuit of human self-interest (Vincent, 1998).

Uncovering what we refer to or what we talk about when referring to "an injustice" could also shed light on the meaning and understanding of the idea "justice". In this regard, Wormer (in Barusch, 2005:5) associates "injustice" with inequality and oppression. For Stein and de Oliveira Andreotti (2016:234) "injustice" refers to "tangible material harm that creates a moral demand for efforts to minimise that harm". So, although it appears context-specific, associations with particular terms do indeed illuminate the meaning of the concept of justice and dispel suggestions that it is vague in meaning. Explaining further what justice is all about, Rawls (1971) formulated a theory, which today is regarded as the most common theory of justice. What follows is a brief exposition of Rawl's view on justice.

2.2 Justice as fairness

In his work *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls provides a conceptualisation of justice which today is commonly used as a standard theory to explain what justice is, what it means to act justly and how to achieve justice. For Rawls, justice is about fairness (Rawls, 1971). Justice as "fairness" informs the equal distribution of goods or symbolic forms of recognition (Kiwan, 2016:4). One may then question what is fairness? Although the concept "fairness" could have different interpretations, for Sen (2009:54) fairness is primarily about the avoidance of being bias – thus it is about being impartial. Impartiality assumes a demand to avoid bias in our evaluation of situations and actions, taking note of the interest and concerns of others as well; and in particular, the need to avoid being influenced by our respective own interests, or by our personal priorities or prejudices. Rawls grounds his ideas on justice on two principles, which not only includes the fair distribution of economic goods, but also calls for the distribution of "social goods such as opportunity, power and self-respect (Barusch, 2005:13). For Rawls, it is important that citizens be equitably provided with basic materials and goods to correct inequalities in life opportunities. It is therefore about a fair distribution of primary goods that will secure and make possible the creation of equal opportunities. These primary goods include rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, and adequate income and wealth as well as the conditions for self-respect.

Rawls's first principle demands an absolute equitable distribution of basic and or primary liberties and rights. These rights could include the right to be heard, the right to be treated with respect, the right to be given a fair chance, the right not to be discriminated against. However, in his second principle, Rawls outlines the rules for socio-economic justice. Inequalities in society are subsequently permitted only if they are to everybody's advantage and are tied to positions and offices that are open to everyone. With this principle, Rawls (1971) suggests that the basic goods one needs in order to live a full life be distributed in a way that would benefit the least advantaged: the oppressed or the discriminated and marginalised. Within his second principle, Rawls (1971) makes provision for correcting imbalances in society and realising equity. Embedded in this principle is therefore the potential for inequality, on condition that inequality or unequal treatment should be to the benefit of the underprivileged. From this perspective, it would be fair, under certain circumstances, to treat people differently. It is the understanding of justice as fairness, which also informs our conceptualisation of social justice as explored further below.

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3. SOCIAL JUSTICE

Vast and diverse theories and literature exist on what social justice entails. Subsequently, a multiplicity of understandings, definitions and ideas on the meaning and definition of social justice is found in the literature. The logical outflow, from the myriad of definitions and literature, is a concept that is rather relative in nature (Furman, 2012:193) and, subsequently, is both complex and contested (Cramme and Diamond, 2009:3), without any unified or static meaning (Ayers et al., 2009:1). These attributes result in social justice taking up different meanings in different historical, political, national and geographical contexts (DeMatthews, 2018; Furman, 2012:193). To this effect, social justice becomes an ambiguous and ideologically loaded term, fraught with the potential for abuse (Villegas, 2007:372). The danger, of course, of having a concept that is difficult to define, is vague in meaning and relative in nature, is that everyone could therefore claim that what they are doing is geared towards social justice, whilst in fact their actions might actually promote social injustices (DeMatthews, 2018).

Many scholars in education and educators claim that what they are doing is either oriented or geared towards social justice, or informed by principles of social justice. However, when asked what social justice is all about or what it entails, you rarely get a straight answer (DeMatthews, 2018). Due to its nature, it is more acceptable to regard the concept *social justice* as being an "umbrella term" (Furman, 2012:193) and "plural in nature" (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2002:499). As an umbrella term, it encompasses various principles such as equity, equality, inequality, equal opportunity, affirmative action, diversity, with which the concept could be associated. Furthermore, it is informed by ethical values, care and respect, solidarity, human rights and human dignity (Barry, 2005:7; Zajda et al., 2006:9). Coupled with this, is the idea that social justice supposes that there are certain things like not only civil rights, but also economic rights and basic welfare provision that one is entitled to merely because of being a member of society (Boucher and Kelly, 1998:1). All of which suggests that social justice is a rather layered and nuanced concept.

Looking at the various values and principles informing social justice, one detects a primary concern with the human condition (that which is concerned with being human) and human well-being (the state of being happy, healthy, prosperous, etc.). It is however also concerned with values such as equity and difference and practices such as discrimination and other forms of oppression (Carr, 2008:3) that variously impact on the human condition and on human well-being. Mills (in Cramme and Diamond, 2009:5) is equally concerned with the human condition, and thus proposes that social justice is not only about the distribution of income and wealth, but it also involves a richer appreciation of human well-being. Social justice may therefore be defined in terms of the ability and right to make personal decisions without being forced to do so, self-regard and self-respect as well as the ability to open up life opportunities and make use of them.

Of course, conceptualisations of social justice would be incomplete without taking into consideration issues of fairness, equity and equality. Riddell (2016:548) regards equality as the most important principle or component of social justice. Similarly, Zajda et al. (2006:1) regard the idea of fairness and equity as central to any understanding and conceptualisation of social justice. Embedded in the concepts of fairness, justice, and thus also in conceptualisations of social justice, is the idea of differential treatment, to the extent that any understanding of social justice should not exclude differential treatment. On the contrary, although social justice requires equal and fair treatment, it demands too that people be treated differently according to their diverse needs (Cramme and Diamond, 2009:8) and circumstances. This is important, for the danger of merely treating people or learners equally, without considering equity, could inevitably and unconsciously result in, or perpetuate, existing inequalities and injustices.

For example, in administering discipline in schools by way of standardised disciplinary practises, differential treatment ought not to be disregarded under the pretext of "fairness". Rather, in social justice, fairness requires that unique conditions of learners be acknowledged and factored into decision-making during disciplinary procedures and practices and that learners be treated – albeit differently – in accordance with their unique needs and circumstances. Thus, in principle, social justice regulates our engagement and interaction with one another; it lays down guidelines as to how we should treat one another.

In addition, Bell (1997) perceives social justice to be a goal and a process. As a goal, it aims at the "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (Bell, 1997:1). This society is seen as one where the distribution of resources is equitable and fair, and all members of the society are physically and psychologically safe and secure. As a goal, social justice should also be focused on citizenship, learner empowerment, and developing social responsibility through dialogue and an analysis of power (Carr, 2008:3; Hackman, 2005:104). As a process, social justice should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change (Bell, 1997:2). From this perspective, social justice is a continuous project, aimed at addressing any form of inequality or injustice.

In learner discipline, it is about a continuous awareness of – and deliberate attempts to – address injustices that arise from disciplinary practices, processes or procedures that are embedded in learner codes of conduct applied in South African schools. Such sensitivity and awareness are important since education and schooling is primarily political in nature and could potentially use discipline practices to promote and sustain social injustices and oppression. It is for this reason that social justice involves a disposition towards recognising and eradicating all forms of oppression and differential treatment existent in the practices and policies of, for example, schools. It is a commitment to participation in a democratic process as a means of action (Murrell Jr, 2006:81).

4. IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

Barry (2005), Furman and Gruenewald (2004:49) and Hart (2012:8) refer to the significance of education (and schools) in realising social justice. Correspondingly, we acknowledge that social justice is a common educational theme that is widely used in South Africa among educators and education specialists, who believe that they are transforming schools and society, and who aim at realising a more democratic society through education and through their classroom practices. The central place of social justice in education is justified, as schools should serve as sites for social enrichment, in which social justice as an ideal of democracy is practised and promoted (Adams et al., 2007). However, despite its common use and centrality in education and education reform, and despite perceptions that it provides a template on which to build a democratic society (Rawls in Nieuwenhuis, 2010), we recognise further that social justice, in education, is not well conceptualised (Furman, 2012:193). Nonetheless, there seems to be consensus that social justice in education, "can and does encompass a wide range of educational objectives, procedures and outcomes" (Stein and de Oliveira Andreotti, 2016).

Over the years, social justice in education has been promoted and advanced through various educational approaches such as culturally relevant education, critical pedagogy, multicultural education, democratic education and human rights education (Dover, 2013:5; Storms, 2013:5). Through their concern with social justice, these education approaches highlighted important educational values and principles such as equality of opportunity, inclusion, representation, processes, content and outcomes (Carr, 2008:2). In addition, they also broadened the scope of social justice in education to the extent that, in education, understandings of social justice take up a much broader meaning as is assumed. Keiser (2016:28) lists several principles, which help us to understand what social justice in education could really be about. These are caring and compassion for others, respect for other peoples' viewpoints and argumentation, public participation and co-operation, and adherence to the acceptance of diversity as well as equitable distribution of opportunities to all people regardless of who they are, where they come from or what their social or economic status is. All of which are focused on those groups that are most often not heard, underrepresented, and that face various forms of oppression and marginalisation in schools (Furman, 2012:193–194).

It follows that discipline infused with principles of social justice assumes the identification and undoing of oppressive, humiliating, divisive, exclusionary, and unjust practices and replacing them with more equitable, fair and just practice. As a result, more humane, democratic and inclusive disciplinary practices need to be established in schools. School disciplinary practices should therefore reflect and bear testimony to an authentic disposition towards social justice and the principles that inform social justice in education. It might therefore not be enough to simply declare the values and principles of social justice in school policies or to claim that the school embraces social justices. Rather, a learner who finds himself or herself on the wrong side of the school's code of conduct, must be confident that the social justice values and principles which the school claims to be embracing, will also be reflected in and during his or her disciplinary hearing and in the decisions taken during that process (cf. Chapters 6 and 9).

In addition, applying social justice in schools (and specifically in learner discipline) also requires from educators a sound knowledge of the school's cultural community and learner demographics – that is educators should know who their learners are, where they come from and what experiences, knowledge and values they have (cf. Chapters 4 and 10). Limited knowledge about these aspects of the learner population of a school could result in a deficit perspective that limits the development of close relationships with learners (Cimillo, 2011:9).

The deficit theory implies that learners who differ from the "norm" (for example those labelled as problematic or as having disciplinary problems), should be regarded as lacking "something" (for example manners, respect, values, etc.) and that educational processes (for example discipline) must at all cost "correct the deficiency". Other ways of showing respect or values are thus disregarded because it is not "complying with the norm" (cf. Chapter 6).

Furthermore, social justice in education not only requires educators to consider the context of specific situations and to make decisions accordingly, but it is also calling on them to care for and nurture all children. Additionally, social justice in education also requires us to find ways to understand each child's actions and views of situations or tasks in the context of their particular culture (Cimillo, 2011:14). Apart from this, a propensity towards social justice in education should further develop in learner's self-respect, and respect for others, and a sense of responsibility for self, and the community, and to take an active role in their own education, whilst supporting educators to in create educational environments that are empowering, democratic and critical (Hackman, 2005:103). Schools and educators that embrace social justice would also hold high expectations for all learners, develop reciprocal community relationships and involve a system-wide approach (Hytten and Bettez, 2011:12) to discipline.

A school striving towards social justice will therefore have to move beyond mere policy rhetoric and demonstrate an authentic inclination towards social justice. This may be done by incorporating it into particular practices and procedures, so that social justice does not only remain a policy ideal, but that it becomes engrained in the culture and the ethos of the school, and lived out in all aspects of the school life – even in and probably more so in the discipline of learners.

This should not be difficult to do because since social justice governs the conduct of people in relation to each other (Nieuwenhuis, 2010:272), it also lays down guidelines with regards to the behaviour of learners towards each other and that of educators towards learners. In principle, these guidelines also inform and guide discipline in schools and how to deal with disciplinary challenges.

It is with the intention to promote fairness and infuse disciplinary actions in schools with principles of social justice, that educators should become advocates of social justice. Social justice advocates are people who respond to the needs of their learners. They hold high expectations for each learner and are able to critically analyse the ways in which inequality is reproduced through schools and schooling, so as to implement strategies that will create "just" classrooms and "just" education conditions for all learners, irrespective of their social standing in society (Gay, 2002; Mncube, 2008; Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Social justice advocates are also educators who are prepared and who are able to teach all learners well so that, as adults, all will be able to participate equally in the economic, political and social life of the country (Villegas, 2007:372). In addition, educators, as social justice advocates, build relationships with their learners and can develop learners' critical thinking skills. They are explicit about issues of power, privilege and oppression, build critical communities, and display an awareness of multi-cultural group dynamics (Hytten and Bettez, 2011:13) – all of which is geared towards engendering and advancing transformation in education, and impacting on the educational experience of learners as it relates to education in general and discipline in particular.

5. THE AIM OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

Having a transformative mission supposes that social justice is grounded in clear aims and objectives. In education, aims and objectives are supposed to inform education policy and to guide actions and practices. The aim of social justice is a society that is fair and just. Similarly, in education, the aim of social justice should be to bring about a fair and just education system through fair and just policies and practices. Realising this requires education policies that embrace and promote basic social justice values such as equity, fairness, equality, inclusion, human rights, as inherent and inalienable values of human well-being, as well as educational practices that are informed by these values. So is it incumbent, and in the interest of fairness, that social justice strives to develop in learners and educators an understanding of, and to get them to accept and embrace diversity in all its manifestations, in the class, society, and the world at large (Lewis in Tyson and Park, 2008:32). An understanding of the diverse nature of society will subsequently also contribute towards creating a more tolerant school environment and sensitivity towards those learners that are perceived to be 'different' and or 'difficult'. Social justice is subsequently also sensitive to and calls for action against, cultural and social inequalities such as racism, sexism, classism, poverty and disability. This can be achieved by involving actors who have a sense of their own agency, as well as a sense of responsibility towards and with others, their society and the broader world in which we live (Adams et al., 2007:1–2).
It is therefore significant for social justice in education to aim at ensuring that all learners:

- have their basic needs met;
- are physically and psychologically safe;
- can develop their full capacities;
- can interact with others in a safe and democratic space;

- can reach high levels of learning and
- are prepared for active and full participation in democratic citizenship.

Furthermore, it is fitting for social justice to aim at ensuring equal educational attainment and equal opportunity (Barry, 2005:47) for all learners, and to try to improve the education and the life chances of all children, through changes in the education system and in school (Furman and Gruenewald, 2004:51).

In the final analysis, social justice in education aims at restoring the dignity of those learners who have been discriminated against, who have been silenced and who have been marginalised. It could therefore be regarded as a form of education aiming to restore the dignity and the humanity of these learners. Gill and Niens (2014:3) talks of humanising education – one that is able to develop in learners a set of values and approaches that could potentially enable them to re-engage with the "other" and restore relationships. Applying principles of social justice in education, and more specifically in learner discipline, should primarily restore the dignity of learners.

Restoring learner dignity during disciplinary and education practices, should invoke in us a predisposition towards the values of Ubuntu. Ubuntu encompasses values that commit us to treat people with justice and fairness (Letseka, 2012:48). These values include group solidarity, compassion, respect, human dignity, altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, concern for others, collective unity, mutual support, interconnectedness (Mokgoro, 1998:3; Sloth-Nielsen and Gallinetti, 2011:71). Against the backdrop of discipline in education, and in realising social justice as a moral theory (Menz, 2011:532), *ubuntu*, prompts us to be sensitive to the humanity of all learners – to not only treat all learners with dignity, but to also try and restore the dignity of those affected by ill-discipline.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR DISCIPLINE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

At a universal level, social justice in education is extended to children through article 26 of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). This treaty preserves a universal right for children to learn in a protective environment (Squelch, 2001) and, more particularly, to learn in an environment that promotes understanding and tolerance in contexts of racial, religious and ethnic diversity. As mentioned earlier (in the introduction of this chapter), in keeping with this agenda, social justice in education is extended to South African children through section 28 of the Bill of Rights, of the Constitution of South Africa (Squelch, 2001). Correspondingly, the South African education ministry's commitment to preserving these universal and national rights is enshrined in the SASA (Segalo and Rambuda, 2018).

The adoption of the SASA in early 1997 instantaneously saw the abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools (Segalo and Rambuda, 2018; Squelch, 2001). With corporal punishment no longer being an option, school managers and educators were tasked with finding non-violent ways to deal with learner indiscipline. As a result – and within the ambit of human rights principles variously entrenched in international and local legislation – educators were now obligated to uphold the human rights of schoolchildren by promoting social justice principles of "respect, tolerance and responsibility" in schools (Segalo and Rambuda, 2018:1). It also became mandatory for them to adopt a correctional and educative approach to discipline. Regrettably, these expectations were not well received, as the banning of corporal punishment induced in many educators feelings of hopelessness (Gregory et al., 2016) and vagueness about their roles and limitations in disciplining learners (Segalo and Rambuda, 2018). This resulted in many educators becoming indifferent towards enforcing discipline within their classrooms and schools.

In addition, it was alarmingly found that educators who tried to foster principles of social justice through non-confrontational forms of discipline, repeatedly fell victim to violent physical and verbal attacks from learners (Makhasane and Khanare, 2018; Segalo and Rambuda, 2018). As a result, in the decade following the banning of corporal punishment (SASA, 1996:s 10), South Africa saw many of its schools degenerating into ungovernable battlefields (Morrell et al., 2012) where murder, theft, gangsterism, drug trafficking and abuse in varying forms and magnitude were rife (Maphosa and Shumba, 2010). In self-preservation, many educators shifted the responsibility of dealing with transgressive learners to school managers and parents (Maphosa and Shumba, 2010). Unfortunately, though, it was soon realised that many children came from home environments where there was a decline in moral upbringing; so, in many cases, parents were either oblivious or altogether disinterested in knowing about their children's transgressions (Segalo and Rambuda, 2018).

In addition, in schools where a zero-tolerance approach was adopted, it was found to induce conflict and harm (Gregory et al., 2016; Morrison and Vaandering, 2012). This was the case not only for the victim, but also for the whole school community – including for the offender (who could potentially use physical violence to avenge their exclusion from school, whilst harming themselves further, in the process).

In essence, zero tolerance simply meant that transgressive children would be suspended or expelled from school, with little at all being done to address their wrongdoings and the factors underlying their behaviours (SASA, 1996:s 9; Maphosa and Shumba, 2010; Morrison and Vaandering, 2012). The scenario described below, adapted from a true story, illustrates the social injustices for school communities embedded in a zero-tolerance approach towards discipline. It also signals the dire need for a social justice approach towards learner discipline in schools.

Scenario A

A seventeen-year-old matric schoolboy, whose family spent nearly R40,000 on his matric ball, says his big night was ruined after the school denied him access to the venue because of his hairstyle. The boy's mother says she is tired of her child being victimised over his hair. His family made every effort to impress for his matric ball on Saturday, which included hiring a black and orange Ford Mustang GT and having a table for 100 people to celebrate his achievement. However, his dream of a perfect night out was dashed when security staff denied him entry to the matric ball venue. His mum says that the school has humiliated her family. "We spent between R30,000 and R40,000 for everything. We had a party for more than 100 people; that was family, friends and for people in the street", she says. His mother got into an argument with the principal outside the venue, but they refused to let him in, so the boy's family took him and his partner to a restaurant for supper instead. "It was to compensate for the night being spoilt", the boy's mum reported.

According to his mum, the problems started several months ago when the school principal told her son to cut his ear-length bob. The mum claims that she phoned the principal, who was allegedly rude to her. "I wanted to go see her, but she just said that she gave me instructions and that was that. I told her I do not take instructions from her and I would not have his hair cut," she says. "It was not long, and it was neat – it was as set out in the code of conduct, which they later changed."

She says, the next day after she phoned the principal, the school instituted disciplinary action against her son and the principal allegedly made him sit at a desk outside the girls' toilet to humiliate him. The boy explained: "I had to ask teachers who were passing by for schoolwork to do because they took me out of class." His mum added that after several hearings and appeals, she lodged a complaint with the relevant education MEC and met with a circuit manager who informed them that sanctions would be lifted; and only if the boy cut his hair above his collar, he would be allowed to attend the matric ball. The boy's outraged mother explained: "If you look around us, all you see is gangsterism and drugs. I have raised a decent child, but they keep victimising him over hair. I mean, it is short and neat. If they said he murdered someone or had drugs or something then I can understand, but over hair?"

A spokesperson for the MEC clarified that the boy was denied access to the ball based on a sanction imposed by the School Governing Body (SGB), following a disciplinary hearing regarding misconduct. The spokesperson reported that the MEC is not aware of any appeal being lodged. She also mentioned that the school felt that the teen's hair contravened the school code of conduct (Source: Daily Voice/IOL, 24 October 2017).

From the scenario above, it is evident that in order to foster social justice through discipline, and to promote democratic citizenship in schools, what is needed is a disciplinary approach that would avert conflict and harm for all disgruntled parties (McCluskey et al., 2008). Ideally, what is desired is an approach that:

- is value-laden;
- maintains discipline by promoting attitudes of empathy and respect towards others;
- promotes mutual understanding;
- fosters self-discipline;
- nurtures learner-attitudes of self-confidence, independence, responsibility and co-operation in school governance (Gregory et al., 2016); and
- encourages expressions of remorse, compassion, apology and forgiveness for wrongdoings (González, 2015:3).

Essentially, then, what is required is an approach that infuses social justice principles with school-based disciplinary policies, practises and procedures. An approach such as this is vital if school managers are to meaningfully develop schools into spaces that recognise social injustices and to earnestly try to correct these injustices by promoting the dispositions of democratic and good citizenship. While this may sound like a pipedream for South African schools, the literature shows that such an approach does indeed exist; it has been widely and successfully implemented in American and European schools, in particular (González, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison and Vaandering, 2012). This approach more commonly is known in education circles as restorative practises – which emerged from a restorative (criminal) justice system that is both grounded in and informed by social justice imperatives, and therefore strives to correct behaviours of criminal offenders in a way that preserves their human rights and dignity. In what follows, we explore the notion of restorative practises further. More specifically, with reference to Scenario A above, we consider the implications of restorative disciplinary approaches for creating socially just schools.

7. IMPLICATIONS OF RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES FOR CREATING SOCIALLY JUST SCHOOLS

Despite it being found that one-size-fits-all disciplinary approaches impact negatively on the physical, emotional and mental well-being of schoolchildren (Breen, Daniels and Tomlinson, 2015), South African schools are well known for adopting homogenous approaches to discipline (Human-Vogel and Morkel, 2017; Morrison and Vaandering, 2012). Such approaches are usually carried out by imposing and enforcing standardised prescribed school rules and codes of conduct on learners, which are devoid of any sensitivity for social justice and diversity (Gaillard-Thurston, 2017). As shown in Scenario A, in most cases, the standardised punishment that schoolchildren receive for disobeying school rules - irrespective of whether the rules might be perceived as bias or prejudicial – is generally retributive and is therefore meant solely to cause the "wrongdoer" some form of physical, emotional or mental discomfort. In the process, the root causes underlying schoolchildren's undesired behaviours are ignored (Gaillard-Thurston, 2017). These root causes could be located within, and linked to, social injustices characteristic of the South African society.

What is also unfortunate is that for children like the boy described in Scenario A, what educators and principals see as defiance is most often framed and regulated in moral and legal terms, asking: "[h]ow evil is this action, and how much punishment does it deserve?" (Morrison and Vaandering, 2012:140). For the boy in Scenario A, the "evil action" he committed was solely his refusal to trim his hair in a way that the school rules dictated. On the other hand, for the educators dealing with his disobedience, retribution was obviously not a question of how much punishment he deserves. Instead, it was more about punishing him publicly, to remind him (and his on-looking peers) of the authority that educators wield in schools. In Scenario A, the principal did not consider the possibility that the boy's hairstyle may have been a harmless expression of his self-identity. Instead, it could be that she saw his hair length as a symbolic way of openly undermining her authority. Therefore, it is possible that to enforce her authority, she sought retribution in public and vindictive ways.

Also, worth mentioning, is that the principal's uncompassionate (and possibly bias) zero-tolerance approach to discipline induced many long-term risks for the boy's future. For one, suspension from classes could have resulted in him failing his examinations or dropping out of school. In addition, growing up in a social environment of moral degradation, where gangsterism and drug abuse are rife, the boy could have sought revenge against the principal in a criminal way (Gregory et al., 2016; Morrison and Vaandering, 2012) by, possibly, enlisting the help of local gang members (Maphosa and Shumba, 2010). However, against the adversities of his social circumstances, this particular boy chose to complete his schooling – only to be denied, in his school, access to learning on account of his hair length.

On the other hand, not only did the principal manage to humiliate the schoolboy publicly; her uncompassionate zero-tolerance approach and the injustices that accompanied it also deprived him of an irretrievable, once-in-a-lifetime, experience that most high-school children hope for at the peak of their schooling careers: the matric ball. Had the principal demonstrated a sensitivity for social justice, and had she employed a restorative disciplinary approach, she would have taken into account the unique merits of the boy's infraction and would have addressed the root-causes of his undesired behaviours, in an empathetic way (González, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008; Morrison and Vaandering, 2012). Existing studies suggest that root-causes of rebelliousness can be easily determined by exploring the challenges that schoolchildren face in their private (out-of-school) lives – among these may be feelings of frustration, induced by assuming parental responsibility for younger siblings. Root-causes may also include feelings of depression from coping with family-related issues such as bereavement and divorce. Coping with illnesses, as well, may be a factor (cf. Chapter 7). Drawing from the research (McCluskey et al., 2008), it is possible that dealing with personal difficulties such as self-loathing, feeling negative about physical appearance and outward presentation, could have been the root cause of this particular boy in Scenario A's dress-rule defying behaviours. However, we may never know his reasons for going against his principal's dress-expectations, because the zero-tolerance approach that she adopted, unfortunately, does not regard schoolchildren's explanations for their infractions as worthy of being heard.

In contrast to what Scenario A depicts, in what follows (in Scenario B), we demonstrate the positive outcomes for all disaffected parties, when a principal approaches discipline in a way that espouses the values of social justice.

8. POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF USING RESTORATIVE APPROACHES TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Scenario B

At the principal's desk, a quiet, shy boy is trying to get permission to re-enter school after several weeks of absence. His class teacher barred him from entering the class because he was absent from school for two consecutive weeks without reason. The boy explains that his mother has been in a serious car accident and since her hospitalisation, he has not come to school. The boy, who is frail and awkward, looks strikingly vulnerable and the principal's tone seems to soften.

A call is made to the boy's aunt, who is at work. "I'm going to dial the number", says the principal "and then you should say hello to your aunt, so she won't get scared. Tell her it's your principal. Then I'll talk to her." The boy repeats the principal's words and hands the phone across the desk. The principal is gentle and respectful. "Hello, how are you? We wanted to call to confirm your nephew's absence. He has been absent a lot and we've received no notes from home. He will fail his subjects unless we hear from you confirming his absence." The aunt must have been offering an explanation in a long pause that followed. The principal follows with a few questions and then closes by saying: "Okay, we'll try to help him. He seems like a nice boy. Take care now and thanks for your time." The boy has been on the edge of his chair – his body erect and tense, during the telephone conversation. His eyes search the principal's face.

The principal returns his full gaze and says with a stronger voice: "Let me tell you something important. What happened to your mom is very serious, no doubt about it. It was very scary, extremely frightening but rather than being absent through all the hard times, you must come to school. Come here and we'll talk about it. Just think, if your mother comes out of the hospital and you've failed your subjects, she's going to be very sad and disappointed. There are many people around here who you can get to know, and who could care about you, but you have to be in school. If you must stay out, you have to call me. Not your aunty, you. It is your responsibility. If you want to visit your mother in the hospital, you can come to school, and I will give you permission to leave school a bit earlier." The boy seems to hang onto each word and looks comforted – not chastised. He stands, offers a limp handshake, looks solemnly down at his shoes and walks quietly away. (Adapted from: Department of Education, 2008)

In line with the values of social justice (González, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008), it is evident that, in Scenario B, the principal's approach to discipline has restorative intentions. Unlike the principal mentioned in Scenario A, this principal (in Scenario B) address a schoolboy's wrongdoing in a way that seeks to repair harm, involve stakeholders and transform community relationships (González, 2015).

Largely, in a restorative approach, and thus also in practice, repairing harm entails restoring relationships that have been destroyed by conflict or other forms of harm (McCluskey et al., 2008). Common practises of restoration involve participating in what is referred to as "peace-making circles" (Morrison and Vaandering, 2012:142; Chapters 4 and 10), which are believed to "address the harm through nurturing the human capacity for restitution, resolution and reconciliation" (Morrison and Vaandering, 2012:140). There are two kinds of peace-making circles: "responsive circles", which are used for minor incidents and "restorative conferences", which are used for more serious contraventions (Gregory et al., 2016:328). However, in both cases, the offender and the aggrieved, together with other stakeholders affected by the behaviours in question, will jointly discuss and decide on how to repair the harm done. The shared goal is to re-establish an amicable relationship between all parties concerned (Gregory et al., 2016). Correspondingly, in Scenario B, the principal's interaction with the learner illustrates an evident agenda to ensure that the mental, physical and emotional health of all who are affected by this boy's circumstances is preserved in the restorative process (McCluskey et al., 2008). Therefore, in a respectful and supportive environment, and through restorative practices (Gregory et al., 2016:328; Chapter 4), the principal offers the boy an opportunity to reflect on his (the boy's) undesirable behaviours. At the same time, the other role-players (in this case the principal and the boy's aunt) are also given a voice to express how they feel about what they have experienced (McCluskey et al., 2008). Had this opportunity not been provided, and had the principal instead opted to use an uncompassionate zero-tolerance approach (as shown in Scenario A), he may have never come to find out about the distinctive and traumatic circumstances that this learner has been silently dealing with in his private life.

Then again, "prevention is better than cure" and the ideal situation would have been for the boy's educators to be made aware of his personal challenges in more proactive ways – instead of learning about them only after he has landed himself in trouble. Considering that restorative discipline favours a proactive (rather than a reactive) approach (Gregory et al., 2016), *proactive circles* could be introduced in the school to *prevent* learners from expressing undesirable behaviour in the first instance. Proactive circles would allow for members from various levels of the school community to come together regularly, to participate equally in structured teacher-led community-building conversations (Gregory et al., 2016:329). Through proactive circles, the principal mentioned in Scenario B would be able to manage and enforce the values of restorative and social justice, in his school, through the empowerment of staff. This could be achieved by, for instance, discussing issues such as the one described and arranging for support through, for example, a Life Orientation teacher, a social worker, or a non-governmental organisation that offers psychosocial support to children dealing silently with issues of personal conflict and trauma. The research shows that, as a result of participating in various kinds of restorative circles, participants learn to convey their feelings and thoughts by using a restorative language (McCluskey et al., 2008); this, in turn, leads to a change in the whole school culture, resulting in schools becoming generally calmer and manageable. With this in mind, it is inarguable that proactive circles would provide an opportunity for the principal mentioned in Scenario B to speak, using a restorative language, to the specific teacher who sent the schoolboy to him, about her attitude and to educate her on the importance (and benefits) of using restorative practises in disciplining learners.

When one compares Scenario A to Scenario B, what becomes explicitly evident are the implications of using a restorative disciplinary approach for meeting the national goal to make South African schools sites of social justice:

- sites in which democratic policies are given expression in fairways;
- sites which preserve stakeholders universal individual rights to learn in an environment where they feel safe, empowered and valued;
- sites that promote, among stakeholders, understanding and tolerance, particularly in contexts of racial, religious and ethnic diversity.

Overall, if properly implemented in schools, restorative discipline can indeed affect the environment and learning positively, by nurturing a school community that interacts respectfully with each other, where attitudes of responsibility, empathy, compassion, remorse and forgiveness are encouraged. It can repair relationships by developing problem-solving skills among learners, by "humanizing" (Gregory et al., 2016:330) teacher-interactions with learners, as well as by fostering mutual understandings between transgressors and persons affected by infractions (McCluskey et al., 2008).

9. CONCLUSION

Bearing in mind South Africa's political history, and considering specifically the present educational context, we pronounce that social justice is indeed an ideal worth striving towards. Unfortunately, as expressed in this chapter, when it comes to education, South Africa has been known for maintaining the historical status quo and perpetuating social inequalities, particularly amongst the youngest of its citizens, in places like schools. With this in mind, we have considered the huge injustices that are prevalent not only in educational provisioning and in access to education, but also in what is practised in schools particularly. Accordingly, we have argued for concerns with social justice to be a central aspect of educational provision, access and practise, particularly at grassroots-level in places like schools. We have recognised, as well, the critical role that restorative approaches can play in implementing policies, procedures and in this case, school disciplinary practises in schools, for the purpose of meeting both the goals and processes of social justice. We therefore conclude our discussion by stressing a dire need for South African schools to (restoratively) infuse social justice principles into the everyday rules of engagement among stakeholders. This is imperative if schooling spaces are to become meaningful and fertile grounds for germinating the seeds for a socially just South African society.

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