

## Post-COVID Teaching and Learning of Religious Education in the Context of School Violence in South Africa



Bekithemba Dube<sup>1</sup>  & Jacob Segalo<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> University of the Free State, South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Central University of Technology, South Africa.

### ABSTRACT

Informed by the Bricolage theory, the authors sought to interrogate the role of religious education in combating school violence in South Africa in the post-pandemic era. While COVID, in many arguments, has been seen as catastrophic to humankind, it has evoked a religious sense among people to enable them to confront vulnerability, which can be harnessed to mitigate school violence. Located in participatory action research, a qualitative approach was used to collect data from twelve participants within the Free State province, where purposive sampling was used. The authors responded to two questions: What are the instigators of school violence? How can religious studies mitigate school violence in South African schools? The paper found that while religious education is underplayed in the South African curriculum, it has an impetus to ignite morality among teachers and learners to address school violence. Based on the paper's findings, the article argues that despite its shortfalls, religious education remains one of the pillars of enacting the missing ingredient of morality which has made schools unsafe havens for educational stakeholders. In light of this argument, the article recommends reconsidering religious education as a core subject in South Africa from a borderless curriculum angle.

Correspondence  
Bekithemba Dube<sup>1</sup>

Email: [dubeb@ufs.ac.za](mailto:dubeb@ufs.ac.za)

Publication History

Received 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2022

Accepted 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2022

Published online 26<sup>th</sup> October,  
2022

**Keywords:** *Bricolage, Religious Studies, School violence, Morality, COVID-19, Sustainable learning and borderless curriculum*

### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic saw the world facing unprecedented times with various solutions seemingly not addressing the pandemic. As of early 2020, the coronavirus had claimed many people's lives even in countries with perceived quality healthcare systems, such as the United States of America, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. Thus, within a short period, the pandemic became the world's most pressing emergency, exposing the limitations of bio-medicine and highlighting the vulnerability of human beings in different parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> To mitigate vulnerabilities, various alternatives were sought to halt the massive deaths. Among the options available to address COVID-19 was religion as a source of comfort and hope amid the human catastrophe brought by the pandemic. In panic mode because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a 50% increase in Google searches for

<sup>1</sup> Fortune Sibanda, Tenson Muyambo and Ezra Chitando, *Religion and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Southern Africa*. (London: Routledge, 2022), 1.

prayer in 95 countries around the world, including the most secular countries such as Denmark, perhaps to invite divine beings to mitigate the massive deaths.<sup>2</sup> To this end, some people saw religion as a shield to protect them from COVID-19,<sup>3</sup> while others saw it as a “secularist ideology to undermine the effectiveness of faith-based groups’ work in health,”<sup>4</sup> thereby giving the impetus to reject government initiatives such as banning social gatherings and also vaccination. Despite some resistance, religion became a source of comfort during COVID-19. There was an appreciation of the divine being as the source of life, which (S)He preserves and as such, there was a need for people to focus on the divine being. Thus, COVID-19 reminded many that religion still occupies a crucial space in humanity and that solutions can emanate from it. Thus, in the post-COVID-19 world, such an understanding should not escape humanity, especially in the context of violence and hate. Religion during the pandemic arguably saw people uniting, working together to mitigate the pandemic, and giving resources to the less privileged. Humanity, through various means, attempted to be one to survive and such a mentality can be cultivated through the study of religion to confront school violence in South African schools.

### School Violence

This paper goes against various studies which have problematised school violence in South African schools. The more resources are put on school safety and research on school violence, the more the problem seems to worsen each day without any valid solution in sight. The Catholic Institute of Education indicated that the Free State had the highest percentage of violent victimisation in South Africa at 30.4%.<sup>5</sup> Jordaan has said that, in 2017, Limpopo province recorded about 358 cases relating to learners attacking other learners.<sup>6</sup> In many schools, there is a culture of insults, threats, harassment, frustration, resentment, use of weapons and anger.<sup>7</sup>

The South African Council of Churches has claimed that South African schools are becoming “mafia schools.”<sup>8</sup> To this end, the authors agree with Dube and Hlalele’s assertion that “school violence in South Africa frustrates the quest for sustainable learning ecologies because schools are war zones, street-fighting centres, and, in some cases, murder scenes.”<sup>9</sup> This is further confirmed by Fishbaugh, Berkeley and Schroth, who pointed out that both teachers and learners see schools as

---

<sup>2</sup> Jeanet Bentzen, In crisis, we pray: Religiosity and the COVID-19 pandemic (May 2020). CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP14824, SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract/43615587>.

<sup>3</sup> Min Min Tan, Ahmad Farouk Musa, and Tin Tin Su, “The role of religion in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic: the Malaysian multi-faith perspectives.” *Health Promotion International*, 37, (2021):daab041 doi: 10.1093/heapro/daab041.

<sup>4</sup> Jean F. Duff, and Warren W. Buckingham, “Strengthening of partnerships between the public sector and faith-based groups.” *The Lancet*, 386, (2015):1786—1794.

<sup>5</sup> Catholic Institute of Education. *School violence*. (Cape Town: Catholic Institute of Education), 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Nomahlubi Jordaan, Violence in SA schools—by pupils against teachers. Business Day (2018, June 12), <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2018-06-12-violence-in-sa-schools--by-pupilsagainst-teachers/>

<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Hazler and JoLynn V. Carney, “When victims turn aggressors: Factors in the development of deadly school violence.” *Professional School Counselling*, 4(2), (2000): 105–120; Maake J. Musango, “Aggression, anger and violence in South Africa.” *Theological Studies*, 60(3), (2004): 993; S. van Niekerk, “What parents need to know about Corporal Punishment.” (2019). Accessed 28 January 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/lifestyle/family/parenting/what-parents-need-to-know-about-corporal-punishment-18807448>; Guadalupe Francia, and Silvia Edling, “Children’s rights and violence: A case analysis at Swedish boarding school.” *Childhood*, 24(1), (2017): 51–67; Regina Day Langhout, and L. Annear, “Safe and unsafe school spaces: Comparing elementary school student perceptions to common ecological interventions and operationalization.” *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, (2010). Retrieved from [https://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/langhout\\_annear\\_2010.pdf](https://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/langhout_annear_2010.pdf); Francine de Clercq, “Professionalism in South Africa education: The challenges of developing teacher professional knowledge, practice, identity and voice.” *Journal of Education*, 57, (2013): 31–53.

<sup>8</sup> T.J. Strydom, Churches warn South Africa becoming a “mafia state.” *Reuters*. (May 23, 2017). <https://www.reuters.com/article/safrica-politics/churches-warn-south-africa-becoming-amafia-state-idUSKCN18F142>

<sup>9</sup> Bekithemba Dube, and Dipane Hlalele, “Reconceptualisation of the interface of religion and school violence towards construction of sustainable learning ecologies.” *Journal of Theology and Religion in Africa*, 41(1), (2017): 5.

dangerous sites that disturb the learning process.<sup>10</sup> The prevalent aggression has the potential to create turmoil in schools and, ultimately, render schools ungovernable.<sup>11</sup> Based on the foregoing, the authors revisit the most controversial yet important and urgent matter of religion in schools. They are of the view that while the study of religion has its fair share of problems in the South African context, which warranted its removal from the curriculum, its removal has arguably paved the way for the emergence of immorality narratives, violence and various social ills.<sup>12</sup> To buttress this notion, the authors observed that in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana in terms of school violence and teaching and learning of religious education, they have maintained religious education as part of the school curriculum. They hypothesise that it could be an underplayed explanation of low school violence compared to South Africa, which has negated the presence of religion in public schools. Thus, there is a need to revisit the issue of religion in the curriculum informed by the observation by Keast. He posits that the erosion of religion in the educational landscape does not mean the end of the personal and social function of religious beliefs. While religion may no longer determine the way education (especially in South Africa) is run, it continues to play a key role that is not necessarily limited to the private sphere.<sup>13</sup> Hence, it should be exploited to address school violence the same way it was used to comfort and encourage people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the continued problem of school violence should not deter researchers from finding alternatives to address school violence. Concerted efforts should be sought, and the authors believe that championing religious education in the mainstream curriculum could ignite the impetus to address school violence just as how religion played an important role in fostering resilience during the pandemic. Thus, this paper is unique in the following ways. It taps into the need to champion religion in the curriculum, underpinned by how religion has been instrumental in addressing the pandemic. It further locates morality as a key component lacking in the South African curriculum, thus impeding all efforts to address school violence. It argues that religion, as seen in Zimbabwe and Botswana, where there is a low rate of school violence, remains one of the social fibres that can cultivate tolerance and peaceful resolution of difference and hate, which has characterised post-apartheid South African schools. In the following section, the research shows how the Bricolage theory can locate religion as a priceless local available resource to address the challenge of school violence in the post-COVID-19 era.

### **Theoretical Framework: Bricolage**

This paper is located on the bricolage theory. The bricolage is seen as a relevant theory to couch this study since it is a theory that advocates for the use of local resources to address challenges that the community is facing. Thus, religion is seen as a locally available resource which can be used to mitigate school violence in South African schools. The bricolage was first labelled by Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1966, and he explains that bricolage empowers participants, or “bricoleurs”, to use “whatever [is] at hand” to address challenges confronting people.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss adds that the name comes from the French word *bricolage*, which means “amateur repair” or “do-it-yourself maintenance.”<sup>15</sup> It is a theory that advocates that people should construct something out of limited

---

<sup>10</sup> Mary Susan E. Fishbaugh, Terry R. Berkeley, and Gwen Schroth, *Ensuring Safe School Environments: Exploring Issues - Seeking Solutions*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Getruida D. Singh, and Gunam M. Steyn, “Strategies to address learner aggression in rural South African secondary schools.” *Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 78(3), (2013): 457–465.

<sup>12</sup> Bekithemba Dube, “School violence, mafiarisation and curriculum trajectories: A need for a pedagogy of disarmament.” *African Promotion Safety. Journal of injury and violence prevention* 17(1), (2019): 49-59.

<sup>13</sup> John Keast, (ed.) *Religious diversity and intercultural education: A reference book for schools*. (Council of Europe, 2007), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 17.

available resources or systems to achieve new goals.<sup>16</sup> Using this theory to interrogate school violence in South Africa “inspires creative thinking because it encourages seeing new relationships between seemingly disparate objects.”<sup>17</sup> Through this theory, religion becomes critical to ignite processes by which people acquire objects from across social divisions to create new cultural identities, which, in this case, are safe schools for all educational stakeholders.<sup>18</sup> Thus, locating this paper in bricolage, the authors ignite new progressive pedagogy by constructing new things out of what is available,<sup>19</sup> which is religion underpinned with the values such as morality, tolerance and appreciation of human life as divine and should be preserved at all costs. Furthermore, bricolage can be used to describe not only new relationships between items or ideas but also the production of something new from reworking items.<sup>20</sup> In short, the authors located this article in bricolage because it facilitates the adaptive design process necessary to develop resilience and make solutions to problems more achievable through the use of critical resources or social systems.<sup>21</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

### Participatory Action Research

The paper is located within the transformative paradigm, which seeks to change the status quo through promoting peace, social justice, equity and equality. Under the transformative paradigm, the paper is located with participatory action research (PAR) as a research approach. PAR seeks to understand the world by trying to change it collaboratively after reflection.<sup>22</sup> PAR is a research approach that influences and democratizes the creation of knowledge-making and grounds it in real community needs and learning.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, PAR as a research approach “identifies the rights of those concerned by the research and empowers people to set their own schemas for research and development, thereby giving them tenure over the process.”<sup>24</sup> PAR has been used since it “opens doors for the marginalised people to criticise, problematise, and claim their condition, which will eventually enable them to overcome”<sup>25</sup> school violence in this case. Furthermore, PAR is relevant for this study since the approach has “aspects of popular education, community-oriented research, and action for social change

---

<sup>16</sup> Magdeline Aagard, “Bricolage: Making do with what is at hand.” *Creative Nursing*, 15(2), (2009): 84. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1078-4535.15.2.82>.

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca J. Blankenship, Which Window Is Open?: Online Discussions and the Development of Pre-Service Pedagogic Digital Agency. In Wilton, L. and C. Brett (eds.): *Handbook of Research on Online Discussion-based Teaching Methods* (IGI Global, 2020), 74.

<sup>18</sup> Jenny I. Phillimore, Rachel Humphries, Franziska Klaas, and Michi Knecht, Bricolage: Potential as a conceptual tool for understanding access to welfare in super diverse neighbourhoods. IRIS Working Paper Series, No. 14/2016. Institute for Research into Super diversity, University of Birmingham, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Séverine Louvel, “Understanding change in higher education as bricolage: how academics engage in curriculum change.” *Higher Education* 66(6), (2013):669-691.

<sup>20</sup> Blankenship, Which Window Is Open?, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Jeff Vanevenhoven, Doan Winkel, Debra Malewicki, William L. Dougan, and James Bronson, “Varieties of bricolage and the process of entrepreneurship.” *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship* 14(2), (2011): 53; A.S. Masten, “Ordinary magic. Resilience processes in development.” *American Psychologist*, 53(3), (2001): 228. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227>

<sup>22</sup> Peter Reason, and Hillary Bradbury, Concluding Reflections: Whither Action Research. In Reason, P. and H. Bradbury (eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Action Research* California: Sage, 2008 <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781848607934.n60>.

<sup>23</sup> Kitty Kelly Epstein, Kimberly Mayfield Lynch, and J.D. Allen-Taylor, J.Douglas, *Organizing to Change a City*. (Berne: Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Cornwall, and Rachel Jewkes, “What is Participatory Research?” *Social Science and Medicine* 41, (12) (1995): 1674.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Glassman, and Gizem Erdem, “Participatory action research and its meaning. Vivencia, Praxis and Conscientisation.” *Adult Education Quarterly*, 64(3), (2014): 213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713614523667>

to promote marginalised communities, where the quest is to unearth the causes of social inequality and consequently the solution to alleviate the identified problems.”<sup>26</sup>

To implement PAR in this research, the author used purposive sampling, which resulted in twelve participants for this study. The participants comprised six learners, four teachers and two principals in the Free State province in South Africa. The study adhered to ethical considerations such as ensuring the anonymity of the participants and voluntary withdrawal from the study should the participants feel they are no longer comfortable with the study.<sup>27</sup> The participants were assured that this data would be used for research purposes to mitigate problems associated with school violence in South African schools. The participants responded to two questions underpinning the study: What are the instigators of school violence? How does religious education in the post-COVID era mitigate the challenges of school violence? The gleaned data were analysed using the format suggested by Laws et al.<sup>28</sup> which involves the following steps:

Step 1: Read and reread the collected data.

Step 2: Draw up a preliminary list of themes arising from the data.

Step 3: Reread the data to check if the themes that had been identified corresponded with what the participants had said and with the research questions.

Step 4: Link the themes to quotations, scholarly views and notes.

Step 5: Peruse the categories of themes to interpret them. During interpretation of the data, remain cognisant of the research questions.

Step 6: Design a tool to help discern patterns in the data.

Step 7: Interpret the data and derive meaning: This step mainly involves highlighting the research findings and arranging material according to categories that are premised on or guided by the research questions

To ensure the validity of the paper, the authors engaged in member checking.<sup>29</sup> The back data was taken to the participants to confirm if the themes and findings resonated with the research questions and responses they had given.

### **Instigators of School Violence in South Africa**

This section responds to the first research question: What are the instigators of school violence in South African schools? The field data revealed that there are various causes of school violence in South Africa. However, the research focused on the causes which are often overlooked but have a bearing on school violence directly or indirectly. The first one which was identified through this research was curriculum challenges.

### **Curriculum Challenges**

The research indicated that the South African curriculum while having good intentions as stipulated on the National Assessment Statement (NAS), is not impacting and implemented in people's lives. For example, life orientation is responsible for producing good citizens. According to the Department of

---

<sup>26</sup> B.T. Williams, and Mary Brydon-Miller, Changing directions: Participatory action research, agency, and representation. In S. G. Brown, and S. I. Dobrin (Eds.), *Ethnography unbound: From theory shock to critical praxis*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Katherine Fritz, *Ethical issues in qualitative research*. (Bloomberg: John Hopkins University, 2008), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Sophie Laws, Caroline Harper, and Rachel Marcus, *Research for Development*. (London: Sage, 2003), 395.

<sup>29</sup> Linda Birt, Suzanne Scott, Debbie Cavers, Christine Campbell, and Fiona Walter, “Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation.” *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(12), (2016): 1802 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>; Bendik Bygstad, and Björn E. Munkvold, The significance of member checking validation in qualitative analysis: Experiences from a longitudinal case study. *Proceedings of the 40th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. (2007), 1. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/52058218.pdf>; Joko Gunawan, “Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research.” *Belitung Nursing Journal*, 1(1), (2015): 10. <http://belitungraya.org/BRP/index.php/bnj/article/viewFile/4/pdf>

Basic Education, life orientation seeks to ignite a holistic approach to learners' personal, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, motor and physical growth and development. This encourages the development of a balanced and confident learner who can contribute to a just and democratic society, a productive economy and an improved quality of life for all.<sup>30</sup> However, the reality on the ground is that the curriculum seemingly has not produced what is intended, as manifested by the spark of school violence. To this end, the participants' curriculum failure must lead to reforms. During the research, the participants noted the following:

- T1 *Our curriculum has a problem. It produces learners who are so violent, and this is despite efforts put into life orientation to ensure people live together harmoniously in society. We should address the curriculum that produces learners opposite of the expectation of the national assessment statement.*
- P1 *Any nation is as good as its own education system. If the produced learners do not reflect the values envisaged by the country, it means we have a challenge with the curriculum.*
- L4 *I think what we learn in life orientation is not enough at all. In fact, it is a subject that no one regards as serious; thus, important human and life lessons are lost in the process. Sometimes teachers do not even attend LO lessons and it's never a problem because we have been made aware that the subject is unimportant.*

It is clear from the sentiments that curriculum has challenges in South Africa, especially on the failure to enact a non-violent society, which is evident in schools. From this, school violence in the post-COVID era in South Africa cannot be mitigated effectively unless fundamental curriculum changes are done to deliberately include contents that can thwart school violence, which includes the study of religion. With this in mind, it is important to ensure that the curriculum cultivates deliberative encounters during the education of young citizens to alleviate the scourge of school violence.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Rights without Responsibility***

Related to the first challenge, the participants noted that school violence is because of an over-emphasis on rights compared to responsibility. The authors do not seek through this paper to undermine the rights of learners in any way, but they argue that while it is good to emphasise the rights of the learners, the rights should be accompanied by a high level of responsibility among learners. To elaborate on this, the participants noted the following;

- T 3 *Our government has failed a lot. We have learners who have too many rights. These rights end up messing with other learners' rights. So, many learners have rights but lack basic tenets of responsibility.*
- P 1 *I support the sentiment by T3; we are growing into a nation that emphasises too much on rights and ignores the responsibilities associated with the rights. As such, these rights make them irresponsible to the extent of executing school violence.*

The rights of children are fundamental and are enshrined in the South African constitution. As such, schools as social institutions should be harbingers of ensuring that rights are cultivated. However, cultivating learners' rights only is a minimalistic approach to grooming children in society. The other side of raising children is ensuring that rights are coupled with a high sense of responsibility among the learners. Such an approach would mitigate school violence in school since learners will understand

---

<sup>30</sup> Department of Basic Education, "Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement GRADES." *Life Orientation*. (2011): 8, [https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/CD/National%20Curriculum%20Statements%20and%20Vocational/CAPS%20FET%20\\_%20LIFE%20ORIENTATION%20\\_%20GR%2010-12%20\\_%20WEB\\_E6B3.pdf?ver=2015-01-27-154251-017](https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/CD/National%20Curriculum%20Statements%20and%20Vocational/CAPS%20FET%20_%20LIFE%20ORIENTATION%20_%20GR%2010-12%20_%20WEB_E6B3.pdf?ver=2015-01-27-154251-017).

<sup>31</sup> Zahraa McDonald, "Interrupting school violence with deliberate encounters." *South African Review of Sociology*, 45(3), (2013): 20–33.

that their rights should not infringe on other people's rights in the process. The authors agree with the preceding approach, cognisant of the observation by Singh and Steyn that igniting a sense of responsibility in observing rights is intended to manage learner aggression within the school system, enhance academic performance and achieve holistic development.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the participants noted that rights without a sense of responsibility are dangerous, as evident with school violence.

### ***Lack of the Value of Human Lives***

The participants noted that school violence is caused by the lack of valuing human life. Generally, South Africa has a high volume of loss of life through violence, gun-related crimes, hijacking, etc. As such, there is a sense that human lives are not valued in society, which is consequently cascaded to the learners. To elaborate on the foregoing, the participants noted the following:

- P2 *Our greatest challenge in South Africa is that not everyone values people's lives.. Every day, there are reports of people being killed and raped, but police and courts are seemingly helpless. It is then easy for learners to copy the behaviour and implement it in schools*
- T4 *The continued violence in society is easily translated into schools. Once our society does not encourage peace, then we are assured that our schools will remain unsafe since the school is a miniature of the society*

The data revealed that a lack of valuing human life is a catastrophe and should be addressed. Thus, to address school violence, there is a need to develop a high sense of valuing human life as a panacea to social trajectories affecting South African schools. This valuing of human lives should not be at the school level but should be demonstrated throughout the spheres of life where adults model the desired behaviour of valuing human life. Consequently, modelling a life valuing humanity becomes an asset that the community and schools can tap into to address school violence in the post-COVID-19 era. Such an approach resonates with bricolage thinking which argues for using the available resources to address the lived realities of people.

### ***Light punishment for violent offenders***

School violence can be attributed to the light punishment for violent offenders in society. To elaborate on this, the participants noted the following.

- L2 *Where I live, many people are not arrested for violent acts. If they are arrested, they are released within the shortest time, which then tells us as learners that violence is sometimes rewarded in the community*
- P1 *As principals, we are incapacitated to deal with school violence. We must follow procedures that, unfortunately, seem to glorify school violence instead of thwarting it. The end of corporal punishment meant that we are careful to address violence; otherwise, as principals, we can be in problems because the perpetrators have rights too.*

The participants' sentiments come against the background that most schools in South Africa have become highly volatile and unpredictable places, yet seemingly, the law is rather helpless or too fragile to confront the perpetrators of violence, especially in the community.<sup>33</sup> Thus, with light or no punishment for the offenders, there is a silent encouragement that violence is not punishable. The government must adopt a new approach, which can send a clear message to the would-be offenders that violence is not tolerated, and should be discouraged using every available option, including inculcating morality through religion.

---

<sup>32</sup> Singh and Steyn, Strategies to address learner aggression in rural South African secondary schools." 457.

<sup>33</sup> B.M. Zulu, G. Urbani, Andre Van der Merwe, and J.L. Van der Walt, "Violence as an impediment to a culture of teaching and learning in some South African schools." *South African Journal of Education*, 24(2), (2004): 173.

## **Rethinking the Relevance of Religion in School Curriculum**

This section responds to question two: How can religion mitigate post-COVID-19 school violence? The responses of the participants are summed up as follows, the need for curriculum reformation, instilling value in human life, and adoption of a borderless curriculum.

### ***Curriculum reformation***

During the research, it emerged that the post-COVID-19 period should consider curriculum reformation in order to address school violence, and this should involve the reconsideration of religion in the curriculum. To elaborate on the foregoing, the participants noted the following:

- P1 *The post-COVID experience should rethink curriculum practices in South Africa. I believe religion should dominate the life orientation curriculum or have it as a standalone subject so that there is enough content coverage on issues concerning morality, which is missing among the learners.*
- T4 *We had a religious-oriented curriculum during our days as students and we did not see rudeness among learners. We used lessons we were taught from religious studies.*

From the sentiments passed here, the curriculum has a role in reconfiguring schools and society to be a better place for everyone. To achieve this, the participants are of the view that religious education, when prioritised in the curriculum, has the impetus to change circumstances for the better. The authors agree with Kadayifci-Orellana, who observes that education is “peace-oriented, able to open channels of communication that are geared towards peace-building.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, religious education can emancipate “societies with common languages to address people’s hopes and discontents.”<sup>35</sup> As suggested by the participants, this curriculum reformation would mean the reintroduction of religion in schools as a deliberate effort to address school violence. The authors submit that removing the religious dimension or resisting engagement with religious actors through the mainstream curriculum disregards opportunities to tap into religion as a force for compassion and one that can promote peace.<sup>36</sup> By this, they do not suggest that religious education does not have limitations but the curriculum can be crafted, so that religious differences are mitigated while uniting under the belief in the existence of a divine being. Consequently, learners can strive for humanitarian equality and peace ... [as] not just rhetoric but a reality.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, a post-COVID-19 curriculum can exploit the strength of religious education to address school violence since it arguably enacts morality and appreciation of human life.

### ***Instilling value in human life***

The second issue which the participants raised was to emancipate the curriculum to enact a sense of responsibility where learners have a moral obligation to value life. During the group discussion, the following emerged from the participants:

- L1 *Our curriculum lacks the element of instilling human value among the learners. Some see life as helpless and because of that, they become directionless. In the directionless state, they give other learners problems, eventually leading to school violence.*

---

<sup>34</sup> S. Ayşe Kadayifci-Orellana, “Religion violence and the Islamic tradition and non-violence.” *The Turkish Yearbook*, XXXIV, (2003):33.

<sup>35</sup> Eduardo Mendieta, (Ed.). *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writing by the Major Thinkers*. (New York, USA: Routledge, 2005), 80.

<sup>36</sup> USAID (United States Agency for International Development). *Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding. An Introductory Programming Guide*. (New York: USAID, 2009), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Mahjabeen Khaled, *Globalization and Religion. Conference on Globalization, Conflict and the Experiences of Localities*, (28-29 June 2007 in Rome, Italy). (Bangladesh: Institute of Hazrat Mohammad, 2007), 9.

P2 *I always try to ensure my learners understand that nothing is as important as human life. It is, therefore, the duty of every citizen of the country to ensure that valuing human life is cultivated in young ones through modelling a life that values humanity.*

The sentiments echoed by the participants denote a need for a great sense of responsibility from the learners and the education stakeholders to ensure schools remain safe sites for teaching and learning. Hence, the authors agree with the observation by Jebungei that the role of the school is not merely to help learners accumulate knowledge but also to mould them into well-cultured citizens.<sup>38</sup> Such an approach is indispensable for conflicted South Africans. It has the impetus to transform groups and societies through mechanisms and institutions that can channel the energy of conflict into constructive rather than destructive channels, as evident with school violence.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Adopt a borderless curriculum***

In addition to the above, the participants noted the need to adopt a borderless curriculum where best practices from different contexts are imported into the South African curriculum to improve practices and, in this particular case, school violence. During the discussion, the following was noted by the participants.

T2 *Now, as we discuss, we notice that countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana do not have alarming cases of school violence. Why don't we borrow what they do and implement it in our curriculum? I see one thing common among these countries: religion, an essential subject in the curriculum. It would not be wrong to bring religion back into schools to mitigate school violence.*

P1 *I agree we need to be humble about this and request other countries doing well on school violence to assist us with the right ingredients to make our schools safe zones for learning.*

Learning from best practices in solving school violence in South Africa is an agent matter to ensure schools are safe sites. This could be possible by embracing a borderless curriculum approach that allows scholars and curriculum planners to implement curriculum reforms in other countries. As echoed by the participants, countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana have minimal cases of school violence and there is a need to ask critical questions as to what they do that South Africans are not doing. Among many variables is the teaching and enforcing of religion in schools which, in terms of bricolage, allows the adoption and usage of religion as a local resource to address pressing issues of the day, such as school violence. Cognisant of this, the borderless curriculum approach propels the rethinking of South African practices towards appreciating what other countries do well in addressing social unrest, such as school violence. When applied to religious education, a borderless curriculum approach is positioned to enact, as suggested by Hutchings, a caring demeanour and the ability to address the needs of the learners through non-violent means such as dialogue.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Davids and Waghid note that when learners are exposed to a language of mutual engagement, instead of corporal punishment or exclusion from the classroom, they will learn what it means to engage with others in a language that is not necessarily constituted by disregard, ignorance, and harm.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> K.N. Jebungei, "Overcoming the challenges facing secondary school teachers in using Christian religious education to convey morality to students in Eldoret municipality, Kenya." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(15), (2013): 271–278.

<sup>39</sup> Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Amal Khoury, and Emily Welty, *Unity in diversity: Interfaith dialogue in the Middle East*. (Washington: FUSIP Press, 2007), 131.

<sup>40</sup> T. Hutchings, Protecting the profession: Professional Ethics in the Classroom. *Real Clear Politics*. (2016). <https://www.ets.org/s/proethica/pdf/real-clear-articles.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> N. Davids, and Y. Waghid, "Responding to School Violence in Post-Apartheid Schools on Social Leadership as Mutual Engagement." *Education as Change* 20(1), (2016): 28-42

## SUMMARY

This paper couched in bricolage responded to two research questions: Who are the instigators of school violence? How can religious education mitigate school violence post-COVID-19 pandemic? The research noted issues such as lack of value to human life, curriculum challenges, and lack of morality with the mainstream curriculum as causative factors of school violence. To address these trajectories, the study noted the need for curriculum reforms, revisiting the need for religious education in the curriculum as urgent matters, and also encouraging the adoption of a borderless curriculum. Thus the study makes the following recommendations:

- The curriculum planners should reconsider the introduction of religious education in the mainstream curriculum.
- Morals should be co-elements of education coming from multifaceted and religious pluralism.
- Adopt a borderless curriculum approach where best practices are adopted from other countries that have managed to deal with school violence.

## CONCLUSION

Despite various trajectories associated with it (which also can be overcome), religious education remains indispensable to regulating people's emotions, controlling behaviour and advocating for peaceful resolution of difference. As such, it is an urgent matter to be addressed since there are incidents of the continuous loss of innocent lives in schools where in the bricolage sense, religious education can be used to mitigate the challenge as it has done in many countries which have kept religion in the curriculum. The post-COVID-19 era presents an opportunity for stakeholders to exploit the positive side of religion to render schools safe sites for teaching and learning.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was made possible through the National Research Foundation Grant No: 129837. All views expressed here are of the authors and do not represent the views of the funder.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aagard, M. "Bricolage: Making do with what is at hand." *Creative Nursing*, 15(2), (2009): 82–84. <https://doi.org/10.1891/1078-4535.15.2.82>
- Abu-Nimer, M., Khoury, A., and Welty, E. *Unity in diversity: Interfaith dialogue in the Middle East*. Washington: FUSIP Press, 2007.
- Bentzen, J. In crisis, we pray: Religiosity and the COVID-19 pandemic (May 2020). CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP14824, SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract/43615587>.
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C. and Walter, F. "Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation." *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(12), (2016): 1802-1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Blankenship, R.J. Which Window Is Open?: Online Discussions and the Development of Pre-Service Pedagogic Digital Agency. In Wilton, L. and C. Brett (eds.): *Handbook of Research on Online Discussion-based Teaching Methods* IGI Global, 2020.
- Bygstad, B. and Munkvold, B. E. The significance of member checking validation in qualitative analysis: Experiences from a longitudinal case study. Proceedings of the 40th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. (2007). <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/52058218.pdf>
- Catholic Institute of Education. *School violence*. Cape Town: Catholic Institute of Education, 2013.
- Cornwall, A. and Jewkes, R. "What is participatory research?" *Social Science and Medicine*

- 41,(12) (1995): 1667–1676.
- Davids, N. and Waghid, Y., “Responding to school violence in post-apartheid schools on social leadership as mutual engagement.” *Education as Change* 20(1), (2016): 28-42.
- de Clercq, F. “Professionalism in South Africa education: The challenges of developing teacher professional knowledge, practice, identity and voice.” *Journal of Education*, 57, (2013): 31–53.
- Department of Basic Education, “Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement GRADES.” *Life Orientation*. (2011): 10-12 Available at [https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/CD/National%20Curriculum%20Statements%20and%20Vocational/CAPS%20FET%20\\_%20LIFE%20ORIENTATION%20\\_%20GR%2010-12%20\\_%20WEB\\_E6B3.pdf?ver=2015-01-27-154251-017](https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/CD/National%20Curriculum%20Statements%20and%20Vocational/CAPS%20FET%20_%20LIFE%20ORIENTATION%20_%20GR%2010-12%20_%20WEB_E6B3.pdf?ver=2015-01-27-154251-017)
- Dube, B. “School violence, mafiarisation and curriculum trajectories: A need for a pedagogy of disarmament.” *African Promotion Safety. Journal of injury and violence prevention* 17(1), (2019): 49-59.
- Dube, B., and Hlalele, D. “Reconceptualisation of the interface of religion and school violence towards construction of sustainable learning ecologies.” *Journal of Theology and Religion in Africa*, 41(1), (2017): 1–22.
- Duff, J. F. and Buckingham, W. W. “Strengthening of partnerships between the public sector and faith-based groups.” *The Lancet*, 386, (2015):1786—1794.
- Epstein, K.K., Lynch, K.M. and Allen-Taylor, J.D. *Organizing to Change a City*. Berne: Peter Lang, 2012.
- Fishbaugh, M.S.E., Berkeley, T.R. and Schroth, G. *Ensuring Safe School Environments: Exploring Issues - Seeking Solutions*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003.
- Francia, G., and Edling, S. “Children’s rights and violence: A case analysis at Swedish boarding school.” *Childhood*, 24(1), (2017): 51–67.
- Fritz, K. *Ethical issues in qualitative research*. Bloomberg: John Hopkins University, 2008.
- Glassman, M., and Erdem, G. “Participatory action research and its meaning. Vivencia, praxis and conscientisation.” *Adult Education Quarterly*, 64(3), (2014): 206–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713614523667>
- Gunawan, J. “Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research.” *Belitung Nursing Journal*, 1(1), (2015): 4 -11. <http://belitungraya.org/BRP/index.php/bnj/article/viewFile/4/pdf>
- Hazler, R. J. and Carney, J. V., “When victims turn aggressors: Factors in the development of deadly school violence.” *Professional School Counselling*, 4(2), (2000): 105–120.
- Hutchings, T., Protecting the profession: Professional Ethics in the Classroom. *Real Clear Politics*. (2016). <https://www.ets.org/s/proethica/pdf/real-clear-articles.pdf>
- Jebungei, K. N. “Overcoming the challenges facing secondary school teachers in using Christian religious education to convey morality to students in Eldoret municipality, Kenya.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(15), (2013): 271–278.
- Jordaan, N., Violence in SA schools—by pupils against teachers. Business Day (2018, June 12), <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2018-06-12-violence-in-sa-schools--by-pupilsagainst-teachers/>
- Kadayifci-Orellana, S.A. “Religion violence and the Islamic tradition and non-violence.” *The Turkish Yearbook*, XXXIV, (2003):23-62.
- Keast, J. (ed.) *Religious diversity and intercultural education: A reference book for schools*. Council of Europe, 2007.
- Khaled, M. *Globalization and Religion. Conference on Globalization, Conflict and the Experiences of Localities*, (28-29 June 2007 in Rome, Italy). Bangladesh: Institute of Hazrat Mohammad, 2007.

- Langhout, R. D., and Annear, L. "Safe and unsafe school spaces: Comparing elementary school student perceptions to common ecological interventions and operationalisation." *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, (2010). Retrieved from [https://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/langhout\\_annear\\_2010.pdf](https://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/langhout_annear_2010.pdf)
- Laws, S., Harper, C., and Marcus, R. *Research for Development*. London: Sage, 2003.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Louvel, S. "Understanding change in higher education as bricolage: How academics engage in curriculum change." *Higher Education* 66(6), (2013):669-691.
- Masten, A. S. "Ordinary magic. Resilience processes in development." *American Psychologist*, 53(3), (2001): 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227>
- McDonald, Z. "Interrupting school violence with deliberate encounters." *South African Review of Sociology*, 45(3), (2013): 20–33.
- Mendieta, E. (Ed.). *The Frankfurt School on religion: Key writing by the major thinkers*. New York, USA: Routledge, 2005.
- Musango, M.J. "Aggression, anger and violence in South Africa." *Theological Studies*, 60(3), (2004): 993-1006.
- Phillimore, J. I., Humphries, R., Klaas, F., and Knecht, M., Bricolage. Potential as a conceptual tool for understanding access to welfare in super diverse neighbourhoods. IRIS Working Paper Series, No. 14/2016. Institute for Research into Superdiversity, University of Birmingham.
- Reason, P. and H. Bradbury. Concluding Reflections: Whither Action Research. In Reason, P. and H. Bradbury (eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Action Research* California: Sage, 2008 <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781848607934.n60>
- Sibanda, F., Muyambo, T., and Chitando, E. *Religion and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Southern Africa*. London: Routledge, 2022.
- Singh, G. D., and Steyn, G. M. "Strategies to address learner aggression in rural South African secondary schools." *Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 78(3), (2013): 457–465.
- Strydom, T. J., Churches warn South Africa becoming a "mafia state." *Reuters*. (May 23, 2017). <https://www.reuters.com/article/safrica-politics/churches-warn-south-africa-becoming-amafia-state-idUSKCN18F142>
- Tan, M. M., Musa, A.F, and Su, T.T. "The role of religion in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic: the Malaysian multi-faith perspectives." *Health Promotion International*, 37, (2021):daab041 doi: 10.1093/heapro/daab041
- USAID (United States Agency for International Development). *Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding. An Introductory Programming Guide*. New York: USAID, 2009.
- van Niekerk, S. "What parents need to know about Corporal Punishment." (2019). Accessed 28 January 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/lifestyle/family/parenting/what-parents-need-to-know-about-corporal-punishment-18807448>.
- Vanevenhoven, J., Winkel, D., Malewicki, D., Dougan, W. L., and Bronson, J. "Varieties of bricolage and the process of entrepreneurship." *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship* 14(2), (2011): 53–66.
- Williams, B. T., and Brydon-Miller, M. Changing directions: Participatory action research, agency, and representation. In S. G. Brown, and S. I. Dobrin (Eds.), *Ethnography unbound: From theory shock to critical praxis*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004.
- Zulu, B.M., Urbani G., Van der Merwe., A. and Van der Walt, J.L. "Violence as an impediment to a culture of teaching and learning in some South African schools." *South African Journal of Education*, 24(2), (2004): 170- 175.

## **ABOUT AUTHORS**

Dr. Bekithemba Dube is currently a Senior Lecturer at the University of the Free State, South Africa. He holds a PhD in Curriculum Studies from the same institution. His research focuses on Religion, Education and Politics in Post Colonial Africa.

Prof. Jacob Segalo is currently an Associate Professor at the Central University of Technology, South Africa. His research focuses on School Violence and Education.