



# Learner discipline at school: A comparative educational perspective

C.C. Wolhuter & S.C. Steyn  
Faculty of Educational Sciences  
Potchefstroom University for CHE  
POTCHEFSTROOM  
E-mail: soocw@puknet.puk.ac.za

## Abstract

### Learner discipline at school: a comparative educational perspective

*Learner discipline constitutes an acute problem in South African schools, especially if it is approached within a Reformational frame of reference. The aim of the research underlying this article was to survey the available subject-related literature on school discipline abroad. The available published research results are largely limited to the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia. In these three countries learner discipline in schools constitutes a problem, although it seems to be only relatively minor forms of misbehaviour that dominate. Serious forms of misbehaviour, such as criminal offences are rare. The causes/determinants/correlates of learner-discipline problems can be grouped into five categories: learner-related factors, teacher-related factors, school-related factors, parent-related factors and society-related factors. This discussion draws suggestions from available subject-related literature as to how the discipline issue in schools should be approached. The conclusion is, however, reached that, while worthwhile guidelines can indeed be drawn from available subject-related literature for the correction of deviant behaviour, reference is unfortunately never made to the need of learners to be guided and to be enabled to become followers (disciples) of Jesus Christ in the profound sense of the word, especially in a world that does not adhere to Biblical values. True disciples tend to lead disciplined, well-behaved and intentional lives in His service and to His glory. In conclusion, the role of (Christian) religion and of values based on religious conviction in the creation of healthy school discipline is explicated.*

## Opsomming

Leerderdissipline in skole: 'n vergelykend-opvoedkundige perspektief

*Leerderdissipline is tans 'n akute probleem in Suid-Afrikaanse skole, veral as die aangeleentheid vanuit 'n reformatoriese denkraamwerk benader word. Die doel van die navorsing wat as grondslag vir hierdie artikel dien, was om die beskikbare vakliteratuur oor leerderdissipline in skole in die buiteland in oënskou te neem. Die beskikbare vakliteratuur is hoofsaaklik beperk tot die Verenigde State van Amerika, die Verenigde Koninkryk en Australië. In al drie dié lande is leerderdissipline 'n probleem, alhoewel dit voorkom of dit slegs geringe vorms van wangedrag is wat die toneel oorheers. Ernstige vorms van wangedrag, byvoorbeeld misdad, kom selde voor. Die oorsake/korrelate van leerderdissipline kan in vyf kategorieë gegroepeer word: leerderverwante faktore, opvoederverwante faktore, skoolverwante faktore, ouerverwante faktore en samelewingverwante faktore. Riglyne word uit die literaturoorsig afgelei met betrekking tot die hantering van leerderdissipline in skole. Die gevolgtrekking word gemaak dat, hoewel nuttige riglyne vir die hantering van afwykende gedrag inderdaad uit die vakliteratuur afgelei kan word, daar ongelukkig nooit enige verwysings is na die behoefte van leerders om gelei en in staat gestel te word om ware dienaars en volgelingen (dissipels) van Jesus Christus te kan word in 'n samelewing wat nie Bybelse waardes aanhang nie. Slegs ware dissipels neig om 'n gedissiplineerde en doelgerigte lewe in diens van Jesus Christus en tot sy eer te lei. Ten slotte word die rol van (die Christelike) godsdiens en van 'n waardestelsel wat gefundeer is in 'n religieuse oortuiging verduidelik met die oog op die skep van gesonde skoordissipline.*

## 1. Problem formulation

That learner discipline constitutes an acute problem in South African schools is clear from scientific research (cf. Oosthuizen, 2001:213-237; Geysers & Wolhuter, 2001:94; Magau, 2002; Van Staden, 2003; De Wet, 2003; De Bruin, 2002:6; Zulu, 1999, 2001 ), as well as from the popular media in editorials such as “Discipline cop-out” (Anon., 2002-1:14), reports with headings such as “Primary school sets cops on bullies” (Padayachee, 2002:5) and letters headed “Leerlinge teister onnies” (“Learners harass teachers”) (Anon., 2003:1). As will be indicated below, the problem becomes even more acute when viewed from a reformatory principal perspective. A problem exists in the sense that methods used a decade and longer ago can no longer be used in the contemporary socio-political environment that adheres to relatively few Biblical principles, as well as in the sense that teachers seem to be at a loss as to how to address the issue of discipline.

Drawing on foreign experience is an accepted and widely employed approach to education problems (Steinberg, 1987:11). The aim of the research underlying this article was to survey the available subject-related literature regarding the issue of learner discipline abroad, and in particular the extent and nature of learner discipline problems, their causes/determinants/correlates, and the effective handling thereof. The guidelines gleaned from the literature survey will also be assessed from a reformational frame of reference.

## 2. A reformational perspective on discipline

It is important, right at the outset, to have a clear understanding of what the term “discipline” means in the context of education and schooling. From a reformational perspective, “discipline” refers to discipleship, in other words: followership. A disciple is one who hears and does the will of God (Van Dyk, 1997:36, 41), one who participates in the redeeming and healing work of the Holy Spirit (Van Dyk, 1997:39). To become a disciple of Jesus, a learner does not only have to learn *about* God but should also be guided to experientially encounter Him. When one aims for discipleship as an educational goal, one has to create situations in classrooms in which the learners are able to actually experience the authoritative, yet comforting presence of God (Van Dyk, 2000:65). True discipleship is equivalent to doing what humans were created to do in this world, i.e. to serve and glorify Him. Discipleship in the full, restored sense of the word implies explicitly following Jesus Christ.

Doing the will of God has two sides: caretaking of creation and of fellow human beings as well as healing the wounds inflicted by sin. The ultimate goal of human life is to live, in both word and deed, according to the intentions of God (Van Dyk, 1997:41; also cf. 4.4. of the introductory article in this volume, titled “n Beginselgrondslag vir gesag, vryheid, orde en dissipline in die onderwysopset van die vroeë 21-ste eeu”).

## 3. State of available subject-related literature

Learner discipline does not feature prominently on the Comparative Education research agenda (cf. Wolhuter, 1994:157). Furthermore, most of the available literature deals with three countries: the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia. This is an example of a problem in Comparative Education, namely that as the nerve centre of the international research network is located in Western Europe and North America, where most universities, researchers, research institutes, publishers and scientific journals

are, the education situation and problems of these regions enjoy priority (cf. Altbach, 1982:470).

The basic document in the case of the United Kingdom is the Report of the Elton Commission of Investigation into Discipline in Schools (1989). An extensive document of some 300 pages, it is based on a large body of evidence gathered from a wide variety of sources, such as visits to institutions, discussions with expert witnesses, submissions from numerous organisations and individuals, and a large survey of teachers' perceptions of the problem, commissioned by the Commission.

Most conspicuous on the Australian side is the model for school discipline developed by Malcolm Lovegrove and others of La Trobe University, based upon ten years of empirical research primarily in Victoria, but also in Queensland, the United States of America, Norway and New Zealand. There is also the Burke Report (1994) on the situation in the northern suburbs of Brisbane, the Murray Report (1995) on the behaviour of children in South Australia, and the empirical research by Field in Queensland.

Very illuminating from the United States of America are the multitude of surveys, such as the Gallup-polls, the Langdon Survey and the Phi Delta survey. The National Center for Education Statistics commissioned a survey on violence in schools (1996-1997) and published its findings in a report.

#### **4. Extent and nature of learner discipline problems**

In the United Kingdom, the evidence that the Elton Commission received from the seven major professional associations representing teachers revealed that their members saw behavioural problems of learners as serious problems (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:57). In their survey of teachers' perceptions, the Commission found that one in six secondary and one in ten primary school teachers thought that the disciplinary problems in their schools were "serious" (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:62). In a recent survey in the United Kingdom it was established that 50% of primary school teachers and 55% of secondary school teachers found that they spent an extraordinary amount of time controlling learners (Fields, 2000). In Australia school discipline is one of the major concerns of parents (Johnson, 1993).

In spite of encouraging signs of a decrease in incidents of misbehaviour (Hyman & Snook, 2000), both the Gallup and Langdon surveys indicate that the lack of discipline in schools in the United States of America constitutes a major problem – in the view of teachers as well as that of the broader community (Fields, 2000). The country-wide Langdon-poll, for example, reported that 58% of teachers' classes are regularly disrupted by misbehaviour (Fields, 2000). Although the shooting tragedy at the Columbine School has drawn attention to violence on school premises (Dodd, 2000), criminal behaviour seems to be less rife. In a survey of public schools in the United States of America, 43% of the schools reported that they had experienced no incident of crime during the 1996-1997 school year, 37% that they had one to five incidents of criminal behaviour, and 20% had had six or more incidents (Anon., 2002-2).

Turning to the nature of disciplinary problems, it is the relatively minor forms of misbehaviour that dominate. Fields (2000) requested 30 teachers in a city in Queensland to identify the pupil in his or her class who causes most problems, to analyse that pupil's behaviour according to the "Walker Problem Behaviour Identification Checklist" and to place the findings in a rank-order of importance and seriousness. The aggregate rank-order was as follows: top of the list was the need for continual and persistent supervision, followed by the refusal to listen to directives and to carry out assignments, then the incessant fiddling with pens, pencils and other items, the fact that learners had to be prodded to commence with their assignments, then talking out of turn, whispering, laughing and giggling; followed by their lack of motivation; then the fact that their attention easily gets distracted, then their need for attention. The Burke Report (1994) on the state of affairs in the northern suburbs of Brisbane indicated the following forms of misbehaviour: verbal disruption in the classroom, physical distractions, unwelcome teasing, verbal and physical resistance against authority, impertinent language, and interruption of teachers and others (Fields, 2000).

In the United Kingdom the teacher questionnaire of the Elton Commission requested teachers to report on their experiences in and around the classroom during the week prior to completion of the questionnaire. The vast majority reported that, at some point, the flow of their lessons had been impeded or disrupted by having to deal with minor disciplinary problems (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:61). Pupils "talking out of turn", "hindering other pupils", "making unnecessary (non-verbal) noise", and "calculated idleness or work avoidance", were the most

commonly reported forms of misbehaviour. Other frequently encountered problems were “showing a lack of concern for others”, “unruliness while waiting” and “running in corridors” – one in four teachers reported having to deal with such behaviour on a daily basis. “Verbal abuse towards other pupils”, “general rowdiness” and “cheeky or impertinent remarks or responses” were also encountered frequently.

Shifting the focus to the incidence of criminal offences (i.e. serious misbehaviour), the mentioned survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics in the United States of America found in their natural representative sample of 1 234 schools that more than half of the schools experienced at least one incident of crime during the 1996-1997 school year, 30% reported one to five crimes, and about 20% six or more crimes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). One in ten schools had experienced at least an incident of a serious *violent* crime.

Concerning physical attacks on teachers, the Elton Report quotes ILEA (Inner London Educational Authority) figures which show that, in the 1987-1988 school year, 187 teachers reported injury due to attack on them by pupils. This constitutes less than 1% of all teachers (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:60). 2% of the respondents (teachers) of the Langdon-poll in the United States of America indicated that physical attacks on them, their colleagues or learners have taken place at their schools (Fields, 2000).

## 5. Causes/correlates of learner discipline problems

The causes/determinants/correlates of learner discipline problems, according to the evidence found in relevant literature, could be grouped into five categories: learner-related factors, teacher-related factors, school-related factors, parent-related factors and society-related factors. The overview has also revealed (by default, as it were) that the fundamental reason for ill-disciplined behaviour in schools, i.e. the need for learners to be guided and enabled to become true disciples of Jesus Christ, tends to be overlooked. True disciples are also truly disciplined. As it has been explained in 2 above, a disciple, i.e. a disciplined person, is also one who not only possesses the wisdom of hearing and understanding the word and injunctions of God but is also willing to do his Word (God’s will). It emerges from the discussion below that this fundamental perspective tends not to be acknowledged in international subject-related literature in discussions of the reasons for deviant behaviour.

The discussion below of the various factors contributing to behaviour in schools and classrooms should be viewed in the light of this lacuna or hiatus in the subject-related literature.

### 5.1 Pupil-related factors

The incidence of disciplinary problems appears to be related to ages/phases of pupils. These problems seem to occur more frequently on secondary-school level than in primary schools. Mention has been made that the survey of the Elton Commission found that a significantly higher proportion of secondary school teachers than primary school teachers in the United Kingdom felt that the disciplinary problems in their schools were serious. The research of the National Center for Education Statistics also established that crime and violence are bigger problems in middle and high schools in the United States of America than in primary schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). It can be expected, in view of the reformational perspective expounded above, that undesirable behaviour in children will be difficult to eradicate if learners do not receive the appropriate guidance to attain the wisdom of trying to fathom the will of God (as encapsulated in the Bible as His inscripturated Word and in His laws for the orderly functioning of creation – of which the learner is a part). Wisdom in this sense is a prerequisite for true discipleship in learners, and therefore for discipline in school context. It is, however, an unfortunate fact that learners find themselves in a social environment that is not conducive to true discipleship in this Biblical sense of the word.

### 5.2 Teacher-related factors

The evidence of the Elton Commission shows a broad measure of agreement across the education service (teachers, principals, teachers' professional organisation, etc.) that a teacher's general competence has a strong influence on his pupils' behaviour (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:67-72). There was also a broad measure of agreement on what a teacher needs in order to be fully effective: knowledge of the subject is crucial, as is the ability to present a lesson which flows smoothly and holds pupils' attention. The third area of competence comprises a range of skills associated with managing groups of pupils, i.e. group management skills. The teacher should know his pupils as individuals. This means knowing their names, their personalities, their interests, and also who their friends are.

Furthermore the following classroom techniques should also be kept in mind or practised:

- A teacher should plan and organise both the classroom and the lesson to keep pupils interested and minimise opportunities for disruption. This planning requires attention to such basics as furniture layout, grouping of pupils, matching work to pupils' abilities, pacing the lesson well, being enthusiastic and using humour well to create a positive classroom atmosphere;
- continually observing or "scanning" the behaviour of the class;
- being aware of and controlling their own behaviour, including stance and tone of voice;
- modelling the standards and courtesy they expect from pupils;
- emphasising the positive, including praise for good behaviour, as well as for good work;
- making the rules for classroom behaviour clear to pupils from the first lesson and explaining why they are necessary;
- using reprimands sparingly and consistently;
- using punishment sparingly and consistently;
- analysing their own classroom management performance and learning from it.

All the classroom techniques mentioned will, in view of the ubiquitous argument in favour of promoting discipline from a reformatory perspective, have scant impact on effecting true discipline in learners if discipline is not approached from the perspective of "discipling" in the Biblical sense of the word. According to the Bible, wisdom in the teacher (educator) is a prerequisite (Prov. 10:13) for helping learners understand the tenets of true discipleship (discipline). Wisdom is displayed by a teacher who understands the aims and purposes of education from a Biblical point of view, i.e. as formulated in 2 Timothy 3:16: to teach, rebuke, correct and train the learner in righteousness "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work".

### 5.3 School-related factors

The Elton Report draws attention to the fact that the Commission's body of evidence indicates that school-related influences are also important factors in determining children's behaviour. The most effective schools seem to be those that have created a positive



atmosphere based upon a sense of community and shared values (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:12, 13).

The Report further draws attention to the evidence indicating links between the physical appearance of the school premises and the behaviour of pupils (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:13). The creation of a positive atmosphere is also a prerequisite for helping learners to become true disciples of Jesus Christ. From a reformational view, “sense of community of Christian believers”, and “shared values” refer to those values shared by the members belonging to such a community. As has already been intimated elsewhere, the atmosphere in most schools falls well short of this requirement. Most schools, at least in a Western context, breathe a spirit of individualism, materialism, competition, and the ideals of the progress myth.

The Report also points out the links between content and method of delivery of the school curriculum and the motivation and behaviour of pupils (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:13). The curriculum should offer stimulating and suitably differentiated programmes of study for the full academic range, and the assessment system should be supportive, not threatening. The school should strike the best possible match between the needs and interests of individual pupils and the curriculum they are required to follow. Most teachers see smaller classes as an important measure towards reducing the problem of classroom disruption (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:17). Ideally, the expression “study of the full academic range” should include guidance of the learners to understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, to do His will. The academic range offered by most schools also falls short in this respect. In most cases, the range is limited to what can be mastered for the purpose of regurgitation in an examination. The range does not include guidance towards enabling learners to become true disciples, i.e. to be truly disciplined.

In the judgement of the Elton Commission, school management, particularly the headmaster’s management style, is a crucial factor in encouraging a sense of collective responsibility among staff, and the sense of commitment to the school among pupils and their parents (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:13-14, 119). Time-tabling, curriculum and supervision of pupils when circulating between lessons are important. The greater the size of the school, the bigger the risks of disruption as a result of

organisational defects. Treatment of pupils and relations with parents are two significant elements in the school-management factor. Evidence indicates that pupils tend to behave more responsibly if they are given responsibilities (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:13, 14). The research done by the Elton Commission found that the most effective schools tend to be those with the best relationships with parents: parents are well informed about school matters, open and active communication channels between school and parents exist, and school policy on discipline is fully and clearly communicated to parents.

The role of parents can hardly be over-estimated from a reformational perspective on education. Parents are the primary educators of their child; teachers are secondary educators. Parents are entitled, therefore, to expect from the teachers to guide and to equip the child (who now, in school context, becomes a learner) in the same religious spirit as that in which the child is being raised in the parental home. It can be expected that, in homes where the religious spirit is Christian in warp and wove, parents will tend to guide, enable and discipline their children to become true followers of Jesus Christ as their leader. In an ideal world, such parents will expect from the teacher to conduct teaching-learning episodes in schools in the same spirit. However, as has been averred above, life in most schools are not conducive to this approach to discipline.

#### **5.4 Parent-/family-related factors**

The two important factors in parent-related (family-related) factors are parental guidance and example, and parent-school relations. Parents play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes that produce good behaviour in schools. As indicated in the previous paragraph, inculcating true discipline in their children can hardly be over-estimated.

Family stress (this term is used here to cover both the emotional and material problems from which families may suffer, such as marital discord, poverty and bad housing) is indicated by research evidence to be conducive to behavioural problems by children at school (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:135). Children from families in the lower socio-economic strata are more exposed to these conditions; therefore the incidence of misbehaviour among children from these families tends to be higher than the occurrence of misbehaviour among children from middle-class or upper-class families (Bear, 1998). Dysfunctional families,

i.e. families that do not function according to the ordinances of God for marriage and family life, can indeed impair the disciplining of children. This is because sin has tarnished the lives of all people. The task of teachers has become appreciably compounded in cases where learners from such malfunctioning families enter the school: the teacher should not only guide and equip the learners to become true disciples of Jesus Christ, but should also purposefully engage in the work of renewing and redeeming. Traces of discipleship are discernable always, says Van Dyk (1997:30), even in sinful conditions. Teachers have to capitalise on such traces. Unfortunately, most schools (teachers, principals) are not aware of this additional duty.

Several studies indicate a positive correlation between parental involvement in school activities and the disciplined behaviour of their children at school (cf. Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:124-127).

## 5.5 Society-related factors

Examples of violence, racism and other antisocial behaviour which people perceive via the media (especially television and video programmes) could be a cause of misbehaviour and disciplinary problems (McHenry, 2000). The Elton Commission draws attention to the fact that children in the United Kingdom spend 1 200 hours per year at school (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:16). They watch on average 1 000 hours of television per year. On the basis of received submissions, the Commission too raises concerns about the effects of television and video programmes on children's behaviour. These findings are hardly surprising, if assessed from the perspective of a reformational view of the child (learner), education and society. The environment in which children currently grow up is hardly conducive for the inculcation of true discipleship in children. According to Middleton and Walsh (1995:77) the demise of modernism, accompanied by the absence of alternative life-views (meta-narratives), has left a world-wide gap for many a dispirited and hopeless young person who then acts out of his or her hopelessness, often in violent ways. Young people have become submerged in a world of disorder, senselessness and madness (Middleton & Walsh, 1995:59). In fact, many people feel as if they are in the depths of a cultural winter characterised by a loss of hope and a sense of *angst* (Middleton & Walsh, 1995:23-25). In fact, as Hoppers (2002:x) says in another context, "the enemy has been largely internalised".

## 6. Handling of discipline

What follows are suggestions emanating from relevant subject-related literature about the coping with the issue of discipline on classroom level, at school level and at home.

### 6.1 Classroom level: Lovegrove model

The model for discipline developed by Lovegrove and others (cf. Lovegrove *et al.*, 1989:255-281) was drafted for implementation on classroom level by the class teacher. The model departs from the premise that classroom discipline and its creation should be an educational activity: an exercise in the operation of and participation in democracy, and an education process towards the ultimate aim of the development of self-discipline resulting from participation in group decision-making about classroom behaviour (cf. Lovegrove *et al.*, 1989:278).

The following two rights underly classroom rules:

- pupils and teachers have a right to feel physically and emotionally safe in the classroom;
- teachers have a right to teach and pupils have a right to learn.

Rules should be as clear and simple and as few as possible.

Attention should be given to working out ways to develop rules. The process should provide for input by all role players (pupils, teacher, principal and parents). Lovegrove *et al.* (1989:275-278) suggest the following way of going about to develop rules:

- each pupil in the class writes down five to ten rules that will enable the classroom to be run well;
- the teacher collects the rules and writes a new list consolidating the suggestions made by pupils;
- the teacher shows the rules to the principal and obtains his/her suggestions;
- parents are given the opportunity to comment;
- once agreement has been reached among all the stakeholders, the rules are displayed in the classroom;
- every class has regular meetings to discuss whether rules are working and whether they need changing.

It is essential for teachers to plan responses to bad (consequences) and good (recognition) behaviour.

While the mastery and application of all these techniques might be valuable in restoring discipline in classrooms, they should always be approached and applied in the context of the broader view of a reformatory approach to education and “disciplining”. Only if this is done, can the application of such techniques be meaningful, i.e. lead to true discipleship in the sense of the word expounded in this discussion.

## 6.2 School level

The same applies for establishing a culture of discipline at school level. In the drafting and regular reviewing of school rules and discipline policy, the involvement of all role players (principal, parents, teachers and pupils) should be maximised, as in the case of the drafting of class rules.

A school discipline policy should include the following elements (Lovegrove *et al.*, 1989:259):

- moral values, such as respect for one another as persons (preferably from a reformatory perspective);
- application of the laws of society (not only secular but also from the point of a Biblical life-view, and view of society);
- technical correctness in the sense that they represent efficient means of facilitating the educational process (keeping in mind the notion of teaching Christianly, i.e. guiding, enabling and disciplining learners to become true followers of Christ), and
- a reflection of the traditions and customs of a particular school, for example school uniforms.

On the subject of punishment, Lovegrove *et al.* (1989:260-261) cite Crittenden who, while he employs the legal model of differentiating between the retributive, deterrent and rehabilitative purposes of punishment, emphasises the need to ensure that, whatever form of punishment is meted out, it should not undermine the educational objectives and the relationship that should exist between teacher and pupil. Understandably then, he rejects retribution, questions the value of deterrents, and favours rehabilitation (also cf. the article titled “A classical approach to the restoration of discipline in South African schools”, elsewhere in this volume, where it is explained that discipline should in principle not be approached in terms of the

restrictive framework of chastisement of punishment, but rather in terms of the much wider perspective of true discipleship).

Furthermore, the school should give attention to the school-based factors outlined in the previous section on the correlates/determinants of school discipline. All these perspectives gain greater significance in the context of a Biblically-based perspective on education and discipline.

### **6.3 Parents**

In line with the exposition given on the parental factor influencing school discipline, parents could contribute, on the basis of reformatory views about education and discipline, to high standards of learner discipline in schools by setting a responsible example, giving guidance to children, and participating in positive and responsible involvement in school matters. Parents need to provide their children with firm guidance and positive models through their own behaviour and on the basis of their Christian life-view (if applicable). Parents should also do everything they can to help their children relate co-operatively with adults and with other children, where possible from the vantage point of a Biblically-based view of humans and society. Parents must also do their best to encourage their children to develop the attitudes and values on which both school and society are based. Better still, from a normative reformatory point of view, they should be helped to develop a framework of attitudes on which to base school and societal life. They should understand that societal life, in its current condition, has been highly contaminated and its functioning impaired by sin. They should, therefore, contribute to the redemption and the renewal of a society that has become secularised, i.e. a society that ignores or sets aside the will of God (Van Dyk, 1997:5). Values such as self-respect, respect and concern for others, self-discipline and moral qualities, such as truthfulness and honesty have to be redefined within a Biblical perspective. The Elton Commission quotes research indicating that children who present serious behavioural problems in school are likely to have experienced either neglect (which could have been expressed by either of the two extremes of physical punishment and permissiveness), or rejection (Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office, 1989:134).

Although all the guidelines mentioned above seem to be valid in their own right, they will gain deeper significance if they were placed in the context of a Biblical view of discipline and discipleship. Every measure taken by an educator to restore discipline should be placed

in this perspective. Each measure should help the learner to understand what God truly wishes him or her to be and to do. The learner should then be encouraged to do the will of God. By following this strategy, an educator will make a significant contribution to the restoration of discipline in schools.

## 7. Overlooking the positive and stabilising force of religion

In the discussion so far, it has transpired that in the relevant subject-related literature surveyed, the role of religion and religious upbringing as a contributing factor to disciplined behaviour seems to have been overlooked. Discipline, school rules and school policy on discipline are *all* anchored in values. In all the subject-related literature that has been surveyed the acknowledgement of the role of religion and religious upbringing as a contributing factor to disciplined behaviour has been omitted. Discipline, school rules and school policy on discipline are anchored in values. The *only* source of *absolute* values is religion. In coping with the issue of learner discipline in schools, the role of religion should therefore be acknowledged, but – as has been argued consistently in this discussion – not just “religion” in a generic sense. Schools need to educate and enculturate learners to be followers of Jesus Christ: values are more than mere secular notions of what is worthwhile, the rules of the school are more than mere secular conceptions of ideals or guidelines for orderly living in the school as a societal structure. Education, enculturation, social norms and values, discipline and so forth, all gain depth of meaning (significance) if viewed from a reformational perspective. Discipline is a case in point. Discipline is much more than the restoration of law and order in the classroom or in the school. Discipline is the process of helping learners to become disciples. “Discipling” should be recognised as a core value of school life, a value that gives it meaning and purpose. Because values are often “caught” rather than taught, schools should carefully consider how they affect the lives of learners, both implicitly and explicitly (Van Brummelen, 1994:58, also cf. 2.2 of the introductory article to this volume).

This view of values calls into question the present trend to separate education and religion. Schools need to educate and to enculturate learners to function in a society that adheres to few Christian or Biblical values, i.e. has become secular, as explained above. It will consequently be difficult to help learners to exercise their gifts “as apprentices of the Christian life” in an environment that promotes

individualism, aggression and consumerism (Van Brummelen, 1994: 59), power, technicity as a mind-set, development (Visvanathan, 2002:41 *et seq.*) and the progress myth. At least as far as addressing the problem of learner discipline in schools is concerned, religion constitutes a salutary and positive force in education, worthy (if not indispensable) to be afforded a place in the education system. This is especially true of the Christian religion in a context of teaching Christianly, i.e. in accordance with the dictates of the Bible.

## **8. Guidelines for South Africa**

Based on the views expressed in research abroad, the issue of learner discipline should be addressed at classroom level and at school level. At the level of the classroom, the key seems to be learner participation, after having brought home the fundamental rights upon which classroom rules should be based. The Lovegrove model provides a concrete model for the process of establishing a set of classroom rules that will be conducive to proper learner discipline.

At school level, involvement of all role-players (principal, teachers, parents, learners and community) once again appears to be the crucial factor, with parental involvement worthy of being singled out as being of special importance.

The views expressed in literature abroad about the issue of discipline fail to mention the role of values and religion in establishing discipline. Values lie at the base of disciplined behaviour, and religion is the only source of absolute values. These two factors – values and religion – should be accorded their rightful place in any strategy and programme aiming at restoring and maintaining learner discipline in schools.

All of these guidelines, especially those pertaining to religion and values, should ideally be reinterpreted, as has been argued throughout, in the framework provided by the perspective-giving light of the Word of God, in other words from the perspective of a reformational view of the human being, schooling, education and discipline (in the sense of “disciplining”).

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### **Key concepts:**

comparative education

education

learner discipline: incidence, nature, causes and handling of problems

### **Kernbegrippe:**

leerderdisipline: voorkoms, aard, oorsake en hantering van probleme

opvoedkunde

vergelykende opvoedkunde