"Caring schools" – a solution for addressing challenging behaviour in schools?[1]

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> The best kind of caring helps others to see
> themselves clearly, to realize their potential
> and their dreams. It brings out the best in others.
> (Bach & Torbet, 1982:101.)

> We are born helpless. We need others physically,
> emotionally, intellectually; we need them if we are
> to know anything, even ourselves.
> (Lewis, 2002:2.)

Abstract

"Caring schools" – a solution for addressing challenging behaviour in schools?

Media reports suggest that challenging behaviour is no longer the exception to the rule in South African schools. Furthermore, such problem behaviour is increasingly violent in nature, thus constituting a particular cause for concern. In this article the concept of "caring schools" is explored as a means of addressing learners' challenging behaviour. A research study was undertaken at eight South African primary schools. The conclusions drawn from this research were verified by the correlative research findings of other researchers, as ascertained from the literature study. A key element of this research was the identification of attributes associated with caring schools and the impact thereof on learners' behaviour patterns. From the

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findings of this research study it is concluded that caring schools represent a possible solution for dealing with challenging behaviour in South African schools.

Opsomming

"Omgeeskole" – 'n oplossing om uitdagende gedrag in skole te hanteer?

Verslae in die media toon dat uitdagende gedrag lankal nie meer die uitsondering op die reël is in Suid-Afrikaanse skole nie. Uitdagende gedrag is voorts ook gewelddadig van aard, wat 'n verdere rede tot kommer veroorsaak. In hierdie artikel word die konsep "omgeeskole" verken as 'n wyse om uitdagende gedrag te hanteer. Navorsing is by agt primêre, Suid-Afrikaanse skole onderneem. Die gevolgtrekkings gemaak op grond van hierdie navorsing, is deur die navorsingsbevindings van ander navorsers geverifieer, soos blyk uit die literatuur-studie. 'n Kerngedagte wat uit die navorsing blyk, is die identifisering van gedragspatrone, soos ontleen aan 'n etiek van omgee, wat eie is aan 'n omgeeskool. Die impak daarvan op leerders se uitdagende gedragspatrone, soos blyk uit hulle on-bevredigde emosionele behoeftes, blyk ook hieruit. Die navor-singsresultate lei tot die gevolgtrekking dat "omgeeskole" 'n moontlike oplossing kan bied om uitdagende gedrag in Suid-Afrikaanse skole te hanteer.

1. Introduction

Challenging behaviour is a reality in many South African schools – one that cannot be wished away. Media reports allude to attacks with fists, knives, scissors and even swords on fellow learners and teachers (Bailey, 2007; Burton, 2008:15; Nthite, 2006:2). Even the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, regards South African schools as being the most dangerous internationally (Nthite, 2006:2). The home circumstances of many learners are an extrinsic causative factor. The Minister of Education commented in this regard: "Gaan kyk wat in jul huise aangaan en maak reg wat fout is." (Peyper, 2007.)

Many learners have lost parents to HIV or AIDS, violence or acts of xenophobia. Many are raised by grandparents, since parents work in cities. Yet others have families, but the parents are "absent" in the sense that they are overworked, tired and irritated by the presence of their children. Sadly, all of these children *are in need of a caring family.*

There is a significant number of people who argue that parents or their substitutes should take more effective control of their children (Nthambeleni & Mapheto, 2007; Tau, 2007; Peyper, 2007). Other people maintain that the school itself is the major causative factor in the sense that discipline has collapsed – a reality blamed on the abolition of corporal punishment (Makinana, 2002). Many people in fact tend to regard *discipline* as the solution for challenging be-haviour (Cilliers, 2007; Mati, 2007; Helfrich, 2007). The findings of this research study, however, tend to suggest that the solution lies in caring schools and not only in discipline.

In the past, learners manifesting serious behaviour problems were sent to industrial schools, where stricter disciplinary measures were used to correct their challenging behaviour. According to White Paper 6 on education (South Africa, 1996:11), exclusion of learners is no longer an acceptable policy and all learners need to be inclu-ded in mainstream education, including learners with challenging behaviour.

In practice, however, challenging behaviour remains a problem that many educators have not been specifically trained to deal with (Makinana, 2002; Parsons *et al*., 2001:152). With this in mind this article focuses on the need for caring and love as emotional needs that must be satisfied. As noted by Pringle (quoted in Weeks, 2000:368), failure to meet these needs can and does give rise to behavioural problems. Up to the sixties, theorists, psychologists and professionals working in schools believed in the "medical model" introduced by Freud. Subsequent to the sixties, the impact of the overt factors situated in the environment assumed increasing rele-vance and no light was shed on the possible impact of covert factors such as learners' unmet emotional needs on challenging behaviour (Weeks, 2000:299, 338). None of the researchers utilised Freud's insights into the influence of the inner needs and how these needs impact on behaviour (Tompkins & Tomkins-McGill, 1993:15). A report on school violence (Burton, 2008:xiv) gives an account of many facets of violence, strategies on how to deal with violence, et cetera, but none of these strategies focused on meeting the inner emotional needs of learners. Challenging behaviour, which is on the increase (SAHRC, 2008:v) is in effect young people's outcry for help. The author believes that caring schools, as a means of ad-dressing these unmet emotional needs, constitute an answer to this outcry.

The Free State Department of Education (2007) developed a pilot study of the Caring Schools Project, focusing on a specific aspect

namely the placement of youth volunteers in schools who will be supporting vulnerable HIV and AIDS learners. Another South African study relating to schools as measures of school effectiveness linked to caring, was completed by Aldum (1998:23), who argues that if the school is not a "caring school" in the true sense of the word, the school will loose some of its effectiveness as caring impacts on all kinds of relationships, inside and outside the school community. Neither the pilot study, run by the Free State Department of Education nor Aldum's research findings provided an answer to the research question whether "caring" schools can be regarded as a possible solution to address challenging behaviour.

If a tailor-made solution for increasing incidents of violence in South African schools is not urgently identified, the situation could deteriorate to such an extent that the education system would be seriously disrupted, with parents refusing to send their children to school.

The Babylon Online Dictionary (2008) connects *love, affection* and *care* to the concept *fondness.* For the purposes of this article, the concepts *care*, *love* and *affection* are regarded as being synonymous. According to Wikipedia (2007), the Christian interpretation of *love* is based on Mark 12:28-34, 1 Corinthians 13:2-7 and John 3:16-18. Christian theologians regard God as the ultimate source of love, which is mirrored in the loving relationships of humans. Benedict XVI (quoted in Wikipedia, 2008) argues that human beings are able to practise love, as they have been receiving and experiencing God's love; human beings are able to devote themselves to God and their fellow men (*agape*) and by receiving and experiencing God's love in contemplation, they are able to experience the love called *eros*.

The following questions served as the vantage point for this research:

- What are the outcomes of caring schools?

- Are caring schools a solution to challenging behaviour in schools?

The research undertaken commenced with a literature study in relation to the concepts *caring* and *caring schools.* Thereafter a study of the methodological aspects of the qualitative research was undertaken. The research findings were verified by correlating them with the research findings of other researchers, as set out in relevant literature. Finally key conclusions were drawn from the research study and summarised.

2. Perspectives on caring schools

Vare and Miller (2000:27) point out that *care* seems to be taken for granted, "a word that people use in everyday conversation without considering its moral purpose". Care in its fundamental ethical sense provides a foundation for roles and responsibilities within relationships. "Care undergirds the sense of responsibility that humans should have for self, for other living creatures and for the world around them." (Vare & Miller, 2000:27.) Heidegger (quoted in Noddings, 1992:15) goes even further in suggesting that "Care is the very Being of human life." Frankl (quoted in Havenga Coetzer, 2003:87) in a similar sense contends that "the more one forgets oneself – giving oneself to a cause or a person – the more human he is".

Noddings (1992:xi), an authoritative thought leader in relation to caring, claims that

> ... to care and be cared for are fundamental human needs. We all need to be cared for by other human beings. We need caregiving, and we need the special attitude of caring that accompanies the best caregiving if we are to survive and be whole.

Noddings (1992:xi) associates "caring" with the need to be understood, received, respected and recognised – a conscious experience of engrossment and motivational displacement – not something that can either be worked out in terms of a well-constructed formula or a set of specific behaviours that need to be exhibited, or consists of a virtue or an individual attribute that a person has acquired: it is a way of being relating, of participating in embracing address and response, which requires, in turn, different behaviours as it varies from situation to situation. Noddings (1992:18) stresses the fact that people have *different capacities to care* and that although a person might think that he/she can be regarded as a caring person, the "cared-for" person does not experience the relationship as being a caring relationship.

Weil (Noddings, 1992:15, 16) describes caring in a unique way, saying that it implies that

> … the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this.

Such attention, says Noddings (1992:16), is a precondition for caring, and the person who is being cared for also needs to respond positively towards the "care-giver" in order to maintain the reciprocal, caring relationship. If a person has never experienced being cared for, they will not be able to care for others. This links up with the Christian view of love, whereby it is contended that one must know God and experience God's love in order to act with love towards others (John 4:7, 8).

From the above views of Noddings (1992:15, 16) it appears that learners have to experience their teachers' caring, in order for them to be able to care for one another – to really "hear, see or feel what the other tries to convey – to be seized by the needs of another" (Noddings, 1992:15, 16). Caring about somebody else is the opposite of "me first". Vare and Miller (2000:27) and Noddings (1992:21) quote Gilligan, who says: "Caring is grounded in an ethic of responsibility to self and to others. Morality is based on the recognition of needs, relation and response."

Noddings (1992:21) claims that the "ethic of caring" is founded on a needs-based and response-based ethic. The focus is on the caring of the carer towards the cared-for. It is thus an ethics of relation, which focuses on the development of attitudes and skills for sustaining caring relations, and of moral reasoning. Lewis (2002:42-46) and Puurula *et al.* (2001:175) refer to the following values that are embedded in the ethics of caring behaviour: honesty, fairness, respect for others, responsibility, kindness and modesty. To these one can add trustworthiness and dignity.

Noddings (1992:22) identified four major components of an ethic of caring, namely *modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. Modelling* refers to teachers who demonstrate caring to learners by creating caring relations with learners. *Dialogue,* refers to genuine and open-ended dialogue. It implies a joint search for understanding, for demonstrating empathy or for being appreciative. Whatever the nature of the dialogue, it is always an honest search for something unidentified from the onset of the relation. The dialogue enables the carer and the cared-for to talk about what they try to show in terms of caring, and it provides an opportunity for both of them to make well-informed decisions after having discussed the options. Discussion, stimulated by dialogue, also contributes to making caring a "habit of the mind" (Noddings, 1992:23). Dialogue connects people and maintains caring relations; it provides an opportunity to get to know more about each other. More effective caring can be demonstrated if the carer and the cared-for know

about each others needs as well as the background to those needs. Knowledge of the other person, guides the responses of the carer and the cared-for.

The third component of teaching an ethic of caring is *practice.* Learners need to have opportunities to gain skills in care giving and the capacity to care. The fourth component is *confirmation.* Buber (quoted in Noddings, 1992:25) sees confirmation as reinforcement and encouraging only the very best in others – a better, improved "self". The care-giver sets expectations, but also praises attributes in the cared-for person. The teacher, as carer, can approach the learner (cared-for) and demonstrate non-approval by sending a message to the cared-for that he/she sees a self that is capable of doing better than the present act. Noddings (1992:25) maintains that "confirmation lifts us toward our vision of a better self". Confirmation does not judge and separate, it calls for connection.

Theron (1996:68) identified Jesus as the exemplary care-giver. Jesus cared for people by being with them, being where they were and entering into their sorrow and pain. Jesus was willing and prepared to listen to people, He invited them to share their feelings and thoughts. Jesus was not in a hurry to tell people what to do – He rather reflected back to them what they were thinking and feeling and helped them to sort out their confused thoughts and feelings. Jesus was the enabler Who helped people to discover their own strengths and resources that were already part of their experiences and their faith. Jesus portrayed love wherever He was present. Young people especially need such exemplary care.

Pringle (quoted in Weeks, 2000:342-361) maintains that the self-image of a learner will be harmed if the following five emotional needs are not met within a learner's relationships: love, security, re-sponsibility, praise and recognition and the need for new expe-riences. The parents, teachers and peer group are the most signi-ficant other role players with whom the learner is in relation. If a learner's self-image is harmed, challenging behaviour will most probably be triggered. The learner's challenging behaviour is an outcry for help in search of the satisfaction of his unmet emotional needs. Pringle (quoted in Weeks, 2000:342), like Noddings (1992: 15, 16), argues that the learner's *loving/caring* relationships with parents paves the way for all later relationships – the more love the learner experiences, the more the learner will be able to give love and experience love themselves, as it is a cyclic process of positive reinforcement of love/care. Learners who do not experience *love/care* will be emotionally vulnerable.

3. Literature review

As stated in the introduction, the following questions guided the empirical research and the literature survey:

- What are the outcomes of caring schools?

- Can caring schools be regarded as a possible solution for addressing challenging behaviour in schools?

The literature indicated positive outcomes of caring schools:

- Blum (2005:1) found

  > ... scientific evidence demonstrates that increased learner connection to school decreases absenteeism, fighting, bullying and vandalism while promoting educational motivation, classroom engagement, academic performance, school attendance and completion rates.

- Kirk and Maloney (2001:6) stress that teachers who not only teach but provide their learners with supportive caring relationships combat learners' stress (which can trigger challenging behaviour) because they help meet their social and emotional needs.

- Alder (2002:45), Kirk and Maloney (2001:1), Poulou (2005:48) and Visser (2000:4) draw attention to the importance of meeting the "psychological and emotional needs" of learners. Schaps and Lewis (1999:2) maintain that when learners' basic psychological needs are satisfied, they are more likely to become engaged in school (school bonding), act in accordance with school goals and values, develop social skills and understanding, and contribute to the school and the community. Alder (2002:258) found that the "psychological needs" of learners are met by teachers, communicating as well as talking with and listening to learners. Talking with teachers and being heard by them were highly valued commodities to the students.

- Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps and Lewis (quoted in Osher & Fleischman, 2005:84) argue that when the *internal assets* (psychological or emotional needs) of learners are nurtured, this has the following positive outcomes: it helps learners regulate their own behaviour and deal with the many social and academic challenges they face; it teaches learners social and emotional skills such as relationship building, social awareness, self-management

and responsible decision-making; it also can prevent challenging behaviour and promote academic success.

* Alder (2002:246, 245, 258), Battistich, Schaps and Lewis (quoted in Perry, 2002:81, 99), Bauermeister and Leary (quoted in Schaps, 2005a:40), Clark (2003:92), Curtis (2007:1-2), Jackson and Davis (quoted in Major, 2004:5), Osher and Fleischman (2005:84, 85), Lyons (2006:7), Oliner and Oliner (1995:11), Prilla-man *et al.* (1994:92-95), Resnick *et al.* (quoted in Schaps, 2005a:40), Schaps *et al.* (2003:9, 10), Schaps (1998:1, 3) and Schaps (2005b:19) have identified the following important characteristics of caring schools: personalised, trustworthy and caring relationships, especially with regard to the teacher/learner relationship; teachers listening to learners when they express their needs and problems; a supportive, comfortable and ready-to-learn, warm, nurturing, humoristic school climate; experiencing feelings of belonging/connectedness/community/bonding, responsibility and autonomy; an emphasis on acquiring problem solving skills; a positive school climate engendering a feeling of being a family, with an emphasis on respect, safety and learners experiencing themselves as being valuable; setting of high expectations regarding the learners' behaviour and academic performance; unconditional acceptance and fairness towards everybody ("rooting for everyone's academic success"); experiencing concern for others which leads to a sense of self-worth by helping/caring for others; experiencing encouragement, empathy, and positive feelings towards others; experiencing feelings of sharing and of being able to have a say in what happens at school, to be heard and attended to; learners not being left out when they are discussed during teacher/parent meetings – instead, they are sharing in the discussion and gaining information as to their strengths and areas that require extra attention, which enhances their feeling of self-worth and being in control of their lives; learners feeling happier with themselves which creates a sense of emotional attachment; experiencing closeness, tolerance and the fact that each learner experiences himself or herself as being "special"/unique; teachers who "feel" the pain and sorrow of learners when they are hurt or when they are unhappy; teachers knowing each learner and making "time to connect" with learners in classrooms, hallways and playing fields.

Caring schools with the above characteristics were found to generate the following positive outcomes according to Clark (2003:92), Cothran and Ennis (quoted in Alder, 2002:245), Osher and Fleish-

man (2005:84-85), Perry (2002:95), and Schaps (2005a:40; 2000:3; 2005b:19, 45):

- *Improved academic performance:* learners work harder, care more about their school work, care more about the school in general, are more motivated, ambitious and engaged in their learning and have positive relationships with teachers. The fact that learners think and feel that teachers care about them stimulates their efforts, which leads to higher academic grades and test scores. Learners are more committed to school, problem-solving skills are fostered and academic aspirations and achievement are boosted by learners bonding with the school. Learners from disadvantaged areas perform better when teachers match high expectations with warm and safe environments and social support.

- *Improved discipline:* The learner's capacity for self-discipline is strengthened by a caring teacher. Disciplinary problems are reduced when teachers are explicit about behavioural expectations and directly model appropriate behaviour, while at the same time providing support to help learners meet expectations. Disciplinary problems are reduced when teachers monitor individual behaviour and provide frequent positive reinforcement. Many of the above researchers found that learners actually thrive in a teacher-centred classroom, as the teacher who asserts her/his moral authoritative position provides a stable and secure environment. Thus a caring teacher must establish her/his moral authority in the classroom.

- *Improved behaviour:* In a caring school learners are less likely to become involved in substance abuse, violence and other problem behaviour. Learners behave better when they feel they belong. They are then inclined to be concerned about others, exhibit altruistic behaviour, experience intrinsic pro-social motivation and enjoy assisting others in learning. In caring classrooms learners exhibit positive interpersonal behaviour. Within a caring, respectful classroom environment, learners show increasing feelings of empathy for others. Intergroup tensions and antisocial behaviour are reduced. Moral judgement improves and positive feelings towards other ethnic groups develop. When learners, especially alienated learners, believe that their teachers care about them, they are less likely to join gangs for a sense of belonging.

The literature study clearly indicates that the feeling of belonging (to a "family") that may be lacking in a learner's life-world could be met

by a caring school and such schools could, therefore, possibly serve as a solution for learners' challenging behaviour. Schaps (2005a:53) summarises this well:

> Learners who experience their school as a caring community consistently become more motivated, ambitious, and engaged in their learning. In particular, learners' positive connections with teachers and their perceptions that teachers care about them are what stimulate their effort and engagement ... community building also promotes social, emotional and ethical growth and the prevention of problem behaviours.

4. Research methodology

A qualitative research approach was implemented since this type of approach has "relevance for everyday life" and "describes a case in its concrete circumstances" (Flick, 2006:12). In fact, the very nature of the research questions that focus on social relationships calls for a qualitative design (Flick, 2006:12; Fouche, 2005:268).

The *purpose* of this research was to find answers to the following questions: What are the outcomes of caring schools? Can caring schools be a possible solution for addressing challenging behaviour in South African schools? The literature study has provided a positive answer, and this answer was confirmed by this researcher. The empirical qualitative research is described below.

The input of learners, teachers and principals was sought in order to identify their views on the following: the characteristics of a caring school and a caring teacher; the difference between a caring school and an ordinary school, the factors that make school enjoyable for a learner; the concept *caring*, and the strategies of a caring teacher.

Purposeful as well as convenient *sampling* was used for the study, and only Grade 6 and Grade 7 learners were used. The empirical part of the research was undertaken during the latter part of the year, which meant that the learners were between eleven and thirteen years old, with their own opinions on matters and they could logically understand and formulate answers to the questions put to them. Learners were of both sexes. Black and coloured as well as white learners formed part of the sample. They were learners from primary schools in Pretoria, ranging from schools in affluent neighbourhoods to sub-economic neighbourhoods and even township schools. The learners were chosen by the principal and teaching staff. The researcher had no say in the selection of learners, apart from stipulating that they must be in Grade 6 or 7.

Principals and teaching staff selected learners who were leaders in the school. However, not all learners included in the sample were prefects. Learners were speakers of Afrikaans, English and African languages. The principals granted the researcher permission to conduct the focus group interviews during school hours. Question-naires were left at the schools and handed out by teachers to the selected learners. One hundred questionnaires were handed out to principals and one hundred completed questionnaires were received back. In the focus group discussions 40 learners were included.

Questionnaires to be completed by teachers were left at the schools and the principal requested the teachers' participation in the re-search. The researcher was not allowed to address the teachers. This proved to be limiting as teachers might have responded more positively to the questionnaire if the rationale of the research had been explained to them. The principals described the poor return – 139 out of 300 handed out – to the fact that the teachers experienced a time management problem. The completion of the teachers' questionnaires was voluntary.

The eight schools selected were primary schools. The researcher interviewed three principals. The same topics discussed in the focus groups and questionnaires informed the lengthy interviews with prin-cipals. The schools included in the sample were selected by means of snowball sampling, as principals guided the researcher regarding schools that might qualify as caring schools. None of these schools were formally classified as a caring school. After they had completed the questionnaires, some of the learners and teachers did, however, comment that they believe their school to qualify as a caring school.

Multiple data sources were used in order to enhance the level of trustworthiness of the research findings. The use of multiple meth-ods of data collection and the integration of the research findings with theory formed part of the crystallisation process, which provided the researcher with a complex and deeper understanding of the phenomenon and enhanced the level of validation of the research findings.

The questionnaires provided for an element of confidentiality as they were completed anonymously. During the focus group discussions, the learners were spontaneous and keen to respond to questions. The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were semi-structured, as a specific set of topics and the context in which the study was done were dealt with.

The data recording was done manually after analysing, interpreting, summarising and classifying the data in the topics mentioned in the beginning of this section. The raw data was obtained from the completed questionnaires by teachers and learners as well as the field notes recorded by the researcher during the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with principals. A literature control was then conducted in order to identify the contributions of this research to previous research findings on caring schools, internationally and in South Africa.

5. The research findings

The research findings were analysed without a predetermined outcome in mind. Categories were discovered, mapped out and theories were evaluated by allowing patterns or trends to emerge from the information collected. Meaningful understanding was further enhanced by the identification of relationships and connections that exist between the mapped-out categories. A significant understanding of the concept *caring schools* and the way in which caring schools can serve as a *solution* to challenging behaviour in South African schools directed the process.

The findings are grouped together under the following categories relating to the responses of the learners, teachers and principals: psychological/emotional needs, behaviour, academic performance and discipline. Answers to the questions are quoted in order to record the "voices" of the participants.

5.1 Learners' responses relating to what they thought the outcomes of "caring schools" would be:

5.1.1 Psychological/emotional needs

- Learners will experience unconditional acceptance by the teacher. ("She [the teacher] cares, is friendly with us, she is a good teacher, is very patient with us children"; "She is like a godmother to me"; "She treats us all as her children".)

- Learners feel that they are more likely to be liked by their teachers. ("Onderwysers is vriendelik, hul help as jy 'n probleem het"; "She believes in you"; "Ek dink ons sou minder raas gekry het".)

- Teachers will love and respect learners. ("She must respect us"; "As sy praat moet sy uit haar hart praat"; "He or she must be sensitive and always talk to the children and let the children talk

about their feelings about what happened"; "Teachers must treat the learners with respect and learners must respect teachers".)

- Learners will feel relaxed and safe. ("Mense moet nie baklei en lelike dinge vir makaar [sic] sê nie"; "Gates must be locked during school hours, there must be a guard at the gate"; "It will always be nice to go to school".)

- Teachers and other learners will understand if a learner experiences problems. ("A caring school is a school that understands children's problems".)

- Learners will feel at home – like being with their families. ("I must feel at home when I am at school – at home with my family and cousins for the teachers are my parents, friends are my sisters and brothers and school learners are my cousins".)

- Learners will have fun, will be able to express their feelings more and understand one another better. ("Onderwysers wat grappies maak as ons werk maar kwaai is as dit moet"; "She is fun to learn with, she believes in you"; "The teacher must let the children talk about their feelings".)

- Learners will experience a feeling of love among each another and in the school, people will help one another. ("To love them and treat them the way you would like them to treat you"; "Dit is 'n baie lekker gevoel binne in jou om te weet dat jy kan help en dat jy vir die mense omgee en hul vir jou".)

5.1.2 Behaviour

- Everybody will care about one another; will solve one another's problems. ("You are always there for the person and listen to him"; "Vir hom bid, hom bystaan as hy deur moeilike tyd gaan"; "Caring about somebody else is like caring about yourself ... who knows maybe someday they will be the one who's helping you".)

- All learners will experience that they are treated equally. ("To listen when he or she is speaking, not to discriminate against that person"; "Love them equally, treat them as his children"; "All children must be treated the same".)

- There will be no occurrence of crime, dangerous weapons will not be brought to school, less fighting, no stealing, and no misbehaving learners. ("Niemand moet baklei, vloek of met die juf. terugpraat nie"; "There will be no crime in schools or dangerous weapons".)

- It will be the nicest and best school. ("This school will be more nicer than it is at present, it will be the nicest and best school"; "Dit sal ons skool 'n spesiale skool maak".)

- School will be a better place for learners – learners will enjoy coming to school. ("It is nice to be in the teacher's class"; "Die onderwysers maak die skool vir ons lekker"; "We must be proud of all the things the school does for us because many schools can't do these things we do"; "'n Skool wat dit vir jou lekker maak om elke dag terug te kom"; "It will be the best school in Eerste-rust".)

- The school will make a difference to the community by caring. ("The school must care about less privileged children"; "The school will help other schools who need help".)

5.1.3 Academic performance

- The teachers will assist learners if they don't understand the school work. ("Teachers teach in the easiest way so that children can understand"; "Sy verduidlik [sic] mooi, is behulpsaam, sy het respek en geduld"; "Sy moet oor en oor verduidlik [sic] vir die wat nie verstaan nie".)

- Learners will perform better. ("Children will learn better and be proud of their school"; "Make sure learners get good education and that no parents are complaining that their children don't get a good education"; "There will be good education so that children will have good jobs in life".)

- The teachers and learners will be proud and happy – no further problems will be experienced regarding the school work. ("The teachers will be proud and happy and we will no more have problems"; "I am proud of my school".)

5.1.4 Discipline

- Disciplining of learners is necessary. ("There is discipline and fun at school"; "By ons skool is daar baie speciale joffrouens [sic] wat entoesiasties is oor werk, jou laat welkom en tuis voel in hul klas en ferm dissipline het, sonder onnodige reels [sic]".)

- Nobody will fight or "backchat" the teachers. ("There must be dis-cipline and no talking back to teachers"; "Children will follow the rules and teachers and learners will make sure of that, learners will do their duty".)

- There will be less moaning and complaints and fewer learners being punished. ("If a teacher has no caring for learners, the learners are going to become scared every time when they come to school, because they will know that he or she is going to swear at them or mock them"; "They must make sure no parent is complaining about schoolwork".)

5.2 Teachers' responses on what they thought the outcomes of "caring schools" would be:

5.2.1 Psychological/emotional needs of learners

- Learners will experience that teachers praise, recognise and congratulate their academic performance and behaviour. ("Elke kind word persoonlike geken en voor omgegee"; "Teachers need to recognise learners' academic achievements and provide encouragement"; "Erkenning moet deurlopend wees".)

- Learners will respect each other, teachers will respect one another, and teachers and learners will respect each other. ("Respect for each other is a precondition"; "Die personeel dra mekaar werklik baie"; "People don't care about how much you know until they know how much you care for them".)

- The basic needs of learners will be met. ("View each learner and their needs as being unique"; "Om by elke kind se hart uit te kom – help met struikelblokke".)

- All learners will be treated equally. ("Unconditional acceptance irrespective of background or culture".)

- The needs of learners will be addressed. ("Caring – take note of learners needs and do something about them"; "Address basic needs of children"; "Onderwyser moet meer gee as wat verwag word – om alles te gee om die kind te bereik en hom menswaardig te laat voel".)

- The school will not only focus on the academic performance of learners. ("Develop learners' self-image – then a lot of things will come right by itself"; "Be sensitive to learners' emotional disposition"; "Ontvanklik wees vir 'n kind se probleme"; "Know each child's needs and circumstances"; "Nie net boekekennis nie, maar ook hartekennis".)

- Learners will be happy and well behaved. ("A caring school is a place where the child can be him or herself and where the focus

is on the positive aspects involved"; "Kind sal gelukkig wees en sal trots wees op skool".)

- A professional paramedical team (psychologist, remedial teacher and speech therapist) will be part of the staff in order to meet the needs of learners. ("Paramedic team available to develop the potential of the child and remove stumbling blocks".)

- A sense of belonging will be visible to people in the community – the school, learners, teachers and parents will belong together. ("Propagate idea of caring within community"; "School interaction with institutions such as church in community, welfare, etc.".)

5.2.2 Behaviour

- Teachers and learners will be positive in general. ("Positive child-centred environment"; "A positive image of school reflected to external community".)

- Nobody will gossip about somebody else – not teachers, learners or administrative staff. ("Onbevooroordeeld erkenning vir elkeen"; "Colleagues need to support each other and work as a team"; "Almal weerhou hul van skinder – praat openlik en reguit indien probleme onstaan [sic]".)

- Learners will be rewarded for good behaviour. ("Prys prestasies volgens vermoeë [sic] van elke kind"; "Learners are rewarded for positive behaviour".)

- Learners will be so proud of their school that they will try to convince their friends to come to the school. ("Learners' pride in school reflected in what they tell their friends"; "The children bring their friends to their school".)

- Learners and teachers and all other stakeholders will care for one another as well as for people in the community. ("Moedig 'n 'buddy' stelsel aan onder kinders"; "Teach children to help each other".)

- The caring attitude will be noticeable in the community and by other schools. ("If the school receives guests they must be able to see it is a caring school".)

- The positive attitudes of teachers and learners will impact on the image of the school in the community. ("Kinders is trots op skool en wys dit na buite"; "'Word-by-mouth' advertensie".)

5.2.3 Academic performance

- The academic and sport achievements of learners will be an asset to the school's image. ("Akademiese en sportprestasies sal tel".)

- Learners from less fortunate homes will perform academically. ("Leerders presteer goed, al kom hul nie uit goeie omstandighede nie".)

- Teachers will be able to actualise the potential of learners. ("A teacher, who believes in a child, motivates and supports the child and can make a significant difference in the child's performance".)

- Parents will be supported by the school and acknowledged as partners in the education of their children. ("Het in die gemeenskap [Eersterust] groot geword – voel veilig – dis my mense daardie"; "Teachers and parents need to be a team – supporting the children".)

- The governing body and management team will be working closely with the teachers, learners and parents. ("Governing body needs to know what is being done by teachers and provide them with support".)

5.2.4 Discipline

- Good discipline will be maintained. ("See that the rules of the school are applied and work in accordance with these rules".)

The teacher and learner responses listed above are illustrative of the outcomes of caring schools that they envisage. It is notable that there is a significant similarity between the expectations that both learners and teachers have, and that both the learners and the teachers envisage positive outcomes in regard to challenging behaviour.

6. Discussion of the findings

The results of the study are presented as follows: firstly, the outcomes envisaged by learners are compared to those of teachers. Secondly, the findings of the study will be compared with the research findings of other researchers. These two exercises will provide answers to the research questions (see section 1).

Both teachers and learners agreed that the following elements are those which a caring school must have in order to be a solution to challenging behaviour:

- Discipline

- Respect for one another

- The basic needs (school uniform, money and food) of financially disadvantaged learners will receive attention

- Equal treatment of all learners

- Teachers have to focus not only on school work, but they also have to take every learners' circumstances at home into consideration

- Extra-mural activities

- Happy learners

- Well-behaved learners

- Positive school climate

- The school reaches out to the community and demonstrates caring by means of learners becoming involved in caring projects within the community

- Involved parents

- A general feeling of caring where everyone cares for one another

- School pride

- Professional therapists available at school to assist learners emotionally and academically

The fact that both the teachers' and learners' perceptions described the same key elements of a caring school, as well as the fact that some of the empirical findings resembled the exact findings of other researchers (see below), is of particular pertinence. Furthermore, a majority of the teachers and learners held the view that their school was already a caring school and that many of these listed attributes were already a reality in the school. This attests to the possibility of their attainment in practice. The teachers indicated that there were still some areas that required further attention and that it takes leadership, team work, persistence and a lot of hard work to reach a point where one can say that the school has reached the status of

being a caring school. The teachers' responses revealed their understanding of the fact that achieving all the attributes of a caring school entails a journey of change that involves experiential learning and new ways of doing things. It might also entail a change in expectations, values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and views that collectively give rise to and underpin a caring school.

In the following table the findings of this research study are verified in terms of the research findings reflected in the literature.

Findings of the study	Findings of researchers in literature
"A caring school is a school that understands children's problems."	"... staff is spending time listening to what pupils have to say" (Visser, 2000:4; Alder, 2002:258).
"Learners will be happy, respectful and well-behaved."	"... students who are more ethical and caring, more socially adept, less inclined to engage in misconduct at school, and less prone to problem behaviours such as drug use and violence" (Schaps, 2000:2).
"The caring school must meet the basic needs of learners."	"When students' basic needs are met, they become attached to the school community." (Schaps *et al.*, 2003:8.)
"All learners must be treated the same."	"Helping ALL children grow to their full potential intellectually, ethically and socially." (Schaps, 2005b:19.)
"Care for one another and help one another with your problems."	"... students and educators in a school with a positive school climate take pride in identifying and solving problems" (Clark, 2003:92).
"I must feel at home when I am at school."	"My school is like a family." (Schaps, 1998:1.)
"She must respect us and learners must respect the teacher."	"You are respected, nurtured and protected." (Baldwin *et al.*, 2003:158.)
"Parents are supported by the school, so that parents can support their children."	"... and through programs that boost parents' comfort at school and their involvement in students' learning" (Schaps & Lewis, 1999:2).

"The school focuses on the learner in totality. There must be painting/ computer classes after school hours, so that children don't think school is boring."	"It is the caring, inclusive community that after school programs build for and with their children that enables them to grow in spirit, mind and body." (Schaps, 2005b:19.)
"Every learner must be accepted unconditionally by teachers/the school."	"Students who experience acceptance are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school." (Perry, 2002:81.)

7. Conclusion

There is a pressing need to find a solution to challenging behaviour in terms of "caring" schools. The transformation of South African schools into caring schools is a worthy aim to strive and work towards. Caring schools appear to be a possible solution to challenging behaviour. The focus in such schools would be on satisfying the unmet emotional needs of learners instead of focusing on discipline only. Caring schools and communities can combine their efforts to be a family to all learners. Further research is needed to compile a step-by-step model according to which schools can become caring schools and communities can become caring communities. The fruits of putting such research into practice is summarised by Schaps (1998:3):

> In a caring school community, students can experience a developmentally appropriate version of the just and caring society we hope they will create a generation hence. But this essential opportunity will be lost to students unless we roll up our sleeves and get serious – not just in our classrooms and schools, but in our legislatures and school boards – about education for citizenship as well as competence.

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Key concepts:

caring schools
challenging behaviour
discipline
ethics of care
unmet emotional needs
violent behaviour

Kernbegrippe:

dissipline
etiek van omgee
gewelddadige gedrag
omgeeskole
onbevredigde emosionele behoeftes
uitdagende gedrag