

## Chapter 14

# Leadership and Stakeholder Involvement in Creating a Non-Violent Early Childhood Development (ECD) School Environment in South Africa: Cultivating a Culture of Nonviolence in Early Childhood Development Centers and Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter seeks to consider strategies and means that early childhood development (ECD) leadership in South Africa can use to create a non-violent environment at ECD centers and in the foundation phase in primary schools. In South Africa, ECD is defined as a term indicating the procedures under which children from birth to nine years of age grow and flourish emotionally, morally, socially, physically, and spiritually. The chapter focuses on Pre-Grade 1 to Grade 3 environments. It also addresses the roles that relevant stakeholders can play in support of school leadership in the creation of a violent-free environment. The research is guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Since early childhood is a sensitive and impressionable stage in children's lives, a living, supportive atmosphere as well as an enabling social setting is essential to ensure their complete development. This requires the involvement of all stakeholders (school governing bodies), especially members of the schools' leadership teams in considering policy.*

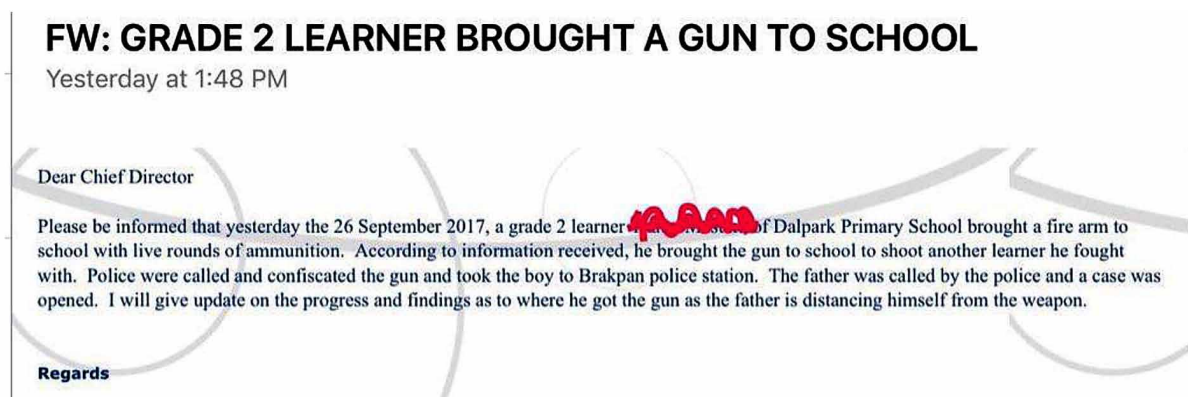
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## **INTRODUCTION**

*I object to violence because when it appears to do well, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent (Mahatma Gandhi, quoted in The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas, [2012, p. 22].*

In the above quote, Mahatma Gandhi suggested that problems cannot be resolved through violence. The majority of young children at Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, as well as children at primary schools and high schools in South Africa, seem to experience such violent activities that, at times, lives are lost, (Nhtate, 2017). The questions that beg to be answered are: Are ECD children free from being exposed to violent activities? Are they too young to personally be involved in or witness violent activities? These types of questions may be answered by media reports on the happenings in primary school environments that we may not be aware of or not even think may happen. Examples of such incidents are the report in News 24 (2017/09/28) where it was reported that a member of the Executive Council for Education in Gauteng, South Africa, tweeted a message of shock asking people to pray after an incident where a Grade 2 learner brought a gun to school. Figure 1 shows a screenshot of what appeared to be an e-mail.

*Figure 1.*



It is possible that the child witnessed violent activities where at some stage the perpetrators used a gun to resolve the problem and he might have thought it is the right thing to do. It was reported that this incident came after a spate of violence in various schools across townships in the east of Gauteng, including an incident where a pupil in one township lost his life following continued bullying, a pupil who ended up in hospital after a gun went off during an altercation in the south of Johannesburg, and the fatal shooting of a principal in one school (News 24, 2017.09.28).

Other questions that may still be asked are: Do the adults who interact with these children refrain from violence in maintaining discipline or in resolving issues with other adults? Are the homes and community environments that children are exposed to free of violence? The environment at ECD centres and primary schools may be seen as being free of any type or form of violence. As an experienced primary school teacher and subject advisor in ECD and primary school environments, the author has

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