Discipline in the Classroom: a Levinasian Perspective

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Klaskamerdissipline: 'n Levinasiaanse perspektief

Dissiplineprobleme in Suid-Afrikaanse skole kan as 'n gegewene beskou word. Die probleem self is al van verskeie kante ontleed, en daar is ook al wyd gesoek na oplossings. In hierdie artikel word die moontlikheid ondersoek om die probleem vanuit die nie-ontiese dog antropologies-eties gefundeerde 'alteriteitsgedagte' van Emmanuel Levinas te benader. 'n Oorsig van sy 'alteriteitsiening' dui daarop dat, in weerwil van die opvoeder se mees toegewyde pogings, die leerder as 'ander'/"Ander' nooit regtig verstaan kan word nie. Hoewel daar moontlike waarde sit in Levinas se siening dat die opvoeder (die 'ek') nie die leerder (die 'Ander') behoort te domineer of met geweld teen te gaan nie, maar wel met liefde, simpatie en begrip behoort te benader in aangesig-tot-aangesig ontmoetings, kan daar tog enkele kritiese vrae, onder meer vanuit Skriftuurlik-pedagogiese oogpunt, daaroor gestel word.

1. Introductory remarks

Much has been written in South Africa in recent years about the perceived collapse of discipline. The problem has been analyzed from various perspectives as well as in various contexts such as schools, classrooms, parental homes and

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hostels. According to the literature there can be no doubt that the quality of education in South Africa has been suffering from the perceived collapse of discipline in schools and in society in general.

This article looks at the problem of a lack of discipline in South African schools from a Levinasian perspective. According to Emmanuel Levinas's anti- or non-ontic[2] views, deviant social behaviour in pedagogical context can be ascribed to failure on the part of educators to take account of anthropological and ethical preconditions by which acceptable behaviour, education and pedagogical order are premised. If educators (teachers), for instance, understood Levinas's notion of alterity, i.e. his unique non-ontic though anthropologically and ethically based approach to the 'differentness' of their learners, and how to connect with them on an intimate inter-subjective level, they might be able to pre-empt the emergence of some of the unacceptable social behaviour in their classes.

2. Methodology and conceptual framework

Most of the discussions about the so-called discipline problem in South Africa commence with an outline of the problem in the schools (etc.), then proceed to definitions of the key concepts in connection with the problem and, in some cases, to a discussion of legal constraints and possibilities. Many studies also report on empirical investigations into the problem. Some of these studies ascribe the emergence of the problem to, among others, the new school culture based on learner freedoms and rights that emerged after 1994, which includes a ban on corporal punishment. Some of the studies show that the situation may indeed have been exacerbated by the fact that learners do not understand the limits of their freedom, which in turn can be ascribed to the fact that they have not been equipped with an appropriate value system or that they have not yet internalised the precepts of the *Bill*

2 Egéa-Kuehne (2009: 4) provides a detailed exposition of Levinas's anti- or non-ontic stance: "(The) call to responsibility through the encounter with the Other would be what Levinas described as 'the release of this ontological contraction said by the verb être, the désintéressement opening the order of the human, the grace, and the sacrifice" (Levinas in *Entre Nous; Thinking of the Other*, 1998b). He developed this notion of *dés-intér-essement*, and presented his concept of *il y a* as a trace of the 'necessary' 'test of dis-inter-estedness' [*dés-intér-essement*]' (Levinas in *Ethics and Infinity*, 1985). Levinas split this term in three segments to underscore 'the uprooting of being' (Levinas in *Outside the subject*, 1993), 'the escape from being' (Levinas, 1985) which, according to him, it signifies. *Dés-intér-essement* characterizes the human being parting with, discarding his or her condition of being which Levinas discussed at length in *Otherwise than Being* (1998), arguing that it does not merely mean 'to be otherwise', since to be otherwise is still to be. In *Ideology and Idealism* (1975) he goes as far as using the term dés-intér-essement in the sense of 'a suspension of essence'.

of rights (chapter 2, RSA Constitution, Act 108 of 1996). They contend among others that a learner's acquisition of an appropriate value system depends on 'coaching' by well trained educators (teachers) (see Steyn, 2003; Oosthuizen, Rossouw, Russo, Van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2007; De Beer, 2007; Van der Walt, 2007, and Oosthuizen, 2008 for detailed discussions of the problem).

This article deviates from the approach just outlined. By drawing on the anthropological and ethical insights of Levinas, the theoretician of alterity (Bidima, 2009), it argues the importance for an educator to understand the 'other' as 'Other' as well as the singularity of encounter, i.e. of intimate interpersonal face-to-face connection between educator and learner (educand; 'Other') as basis for pedagogical rapprochement. An outline of Levinas's anthropological and ethical views is followed by a discussion of his approach to discipline problems, including the conundrum of dealing with violent behaviour. This is followed by a discussion of some other theories about these topics that both agree and differ from Levinas's on salient points, and by a critical evaluation based on a Scriptural-pedagogical view of the human being and discipline.

A school educator is both a teacher, i.e. a person who guides a learner to master knowledge, skills and attitudes, and an educator or pedagogue, i.e. a person who guides or leads, enables, disciplines and unfolds a less mature person, the educand (see Van Dyk, 1993:155 ff. for a detailed discussion of this process from a Christian perspective). Effective teaching depends on effective pedagogy (Imelman 1982:42). For instance, when discipling (i.e. inducing followership) fails, teaching will be ineffective, which explains why Van Crombrugge (2006:189) regards 'vorming als principe van opvoedend onderwijs' (formation/forming as basic principle of pedagogical teaching). This essay restricts attention to only one of a teacher's many pedagogical activities, namely interaction with learners (see Langeveld, 1959:26-39, Imelman, 1982:24-116, Ex, 2007, Verbrugge, 2007:45-55 for discussions of many other pedagogical aspects).

Levinas's term 'alterity' ('otherness') is derived from Latin *alter*, other. Alterity theory is essentially concerned with the 'other'/'Other' and with encounters with him or her, as explained in the following section with reference to the ethics of Levinas which according to Balint (2008:51), Levinas never tired of saying is not derived from metaphysics (especially ontology) and makes no appeal to abstract arguments. On this point, Valenkamp (2009) agrees to some extent with Balint. Although Levinas's ethics does not flow from an ontology, it no doubt flows from his philosophical/theological anthropology.[3] As this discussion will show, Levinas's views of the ethical relationship

3 Levinas regarded ethics as the 'first philosophy' (Egéa-Kuehne, 2009:7).

between the self and the 'other'/'Other' are indeed rooted in his philosophical anthropology. Valenkamp is convinced that critiques of Levinas's work tend to begin with his ethics because of the conceptual complexity of his anthropology.

Levinas attempts to fashion a discourse on ethics that accounts for the relation between self ('I') and radical alterity ('other'/'Other') without sacrificing the unicity of that alterity (Chandler, 2009:248). He distinguishes between the 'other' (*l'autre*) and the 'Other' (*l'Autrui*). The uncapitalised 'other' is that which the self has claimed to do minion over and on which the self ('I') is predicated. The capitalised 'Other', on the other hand, is a figure of absolute alterity that cannot be assimilated into the self's (the I's, ego's) totalising vision of the world and his/her place in it (Chandler, 2009:245). In Levinas's (1969:39) own words: 'the absolutely other is the Other'.

Although this article focuses on Levinas's views about the 'other'/'Other', sight should never be lost of the entire context in which the 'other'/'Other' finds him-/herself or in which encounters with him/her arise. All educators understand that in pedagogical eco-systemic context the other should not be seen in isolation. Everything that transpires in a school classroom can be regarded as parts of a complex system featuring a wide variety of interactions (such as teaching-learning) and feedback loops (such as questioning, testing, examining, supervising). This resonates with the systems theory as conceived by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, based on the assumption that everything, including a school class, is a system of some sort. Every part of the system/organism, including the 'other', is more than a mere cog; each is part of an intricate complexity (Audi, 2005). The parts of the system do not work in isolation; they only work in systems; the whole is more than all the constituent parts put together (Higgs & Smith, 2003:33). The dynamics in a class should therefore be interpreted in terms of the interrelationships among the participants, and not seen as linear cause-effect chains or as snapshots of atomistic events (Russell-Walling, 2007:172-175).

3. Levinas on connection with the 'other'/'Other'; pedagogical interaction between educator and learner (educand)

This section focuses on alterity, the key concept of Levinas's anthropology and ethics[4], and how it relates to education.

4 Levinas's ethics can be characterised as not only dialogic but also as going beyond dialogue (Lipari, 2009:44, 56) and as an ethics of responsibility (Ziarek, 2006:227). His ethical project promotes a positive concept of responsibility; it embodies a shift from concern with the self to a preoccupation with the other/with others (Katz, 2008:161).

Priority of the 'other' forms the very basis of Levinas's philosophy (anthropology) (Hand, 1989:38). The implications of the philosophies of Hegel and Heidegger that Levinas' critiques aim to subordinate individual unicity to inexorable (ontic) natural or social laws has to be investigated. These schemes, Levinas argues, are characterised by an activity through which the self (the 'I') has already unwittingly sacrificed what it thinks of as its 'ownmost' to the other (Chandler, 2009:248). These efforts have the (uncapitalised) other at its centre. The other then becomes the very conduit of sameness (with the 'I' or self), precisely what Levinas denounces: according to him, the other cannot be assimilated into the same without failure, malfunction or mistranslation (Chandler, 2009:256). This explains why in Levinas's opinion the other persists in undermining all attempts at control of it by the self (the 'I') (Chandler, 2009:249). Also in contrast with Heidegger's philosophy Levinas does not see the 'I' (self, subject) as 'thrown into the contingent world'. He maintains that the self's dwelling in the world and its enjoyment of that world are based on, not in spite of, its relation with alterity (otherness). For him, the act of feeding on the world's otherness generates the self as a separate being (Chandler, 2009:244). The I or self exalts in the other which, according to Levinas (1969:164), 'is initially neither for nor against' the I/self (also see Chandler, 2009:245).

According to Levinas, all the participants in a certain situation or context, each of whom is an 'other' for all the others, form part of a complex system: personally, socially, culturally, religiously, and spiritually. One (i.e. I, self) is for the other what the other is for oneself; there is no exceptional place for the subject (i.e. I) (Levinas, 1989:47). *Being-for-oneself* is conditional on the unconditioned responsibility *of being for another* (Hand, 1989:7). The other is known through sympathy, as another (my)self (or I), an alter ego (ibid.). Where two people just coexist, they cannot 'know each other through sympathy':

> Between persons circulating in the strange house where the action takes place, where there is no work to pursue, where they only abide – that is, exist – this social relationship becomes total reciprocity. These beings are not interchangeable but reciprocal, or rather they are interchangeable because they are reciprocal. And then the relationship with the other becomes impossible (Levinas, 1989:47-48).

These remarks are apposite in and for the classroom situation: teaching-learning is the work that is being pursued there. The interrelationship between the teacher as educator and the learner as educand should be characterised, as Levinas (1989:48) insists, not by reciprocity but by alterity:

> (A)lterity appears as a nonreciprocal relationship – that is, as contrasting strongly with contemporaneousness. The other as other is not only an alter ego; the other is what I myself am not. The other is this, not because of the other's character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the other's very

> alterity (Ibid.).

What counts, says De Villiers (2008:43) following Levinas's line of thinking, is respect for the 'exteriority' of others, i.e. recognition of their existence outside that of the self. Levinas's view is, contrary to autonomous Western thought, heteronymous in nature, focused on the other, rather than the self (De Villiers, 2008:44; also see Kodelja, 2006:186-197). Alterity does not consist in the other's simple exteriority, neither in a clash of wills. According to Levinas (1989:49):

> the other is not a being that we encounter that menaces us or wants to lay hold of us. The feat of being refractory to our power is not a power greater than ours. Alterity makes for all its power. Its mystery constitutes its alterity.

He does not define the other in terms of freedom or as 'the other existent in front of me'. He posits alterity, i.e. a form of alienation, from which nothing can be deduced, not even the freedom of the other. The other bears alterity as an essence, which will for ever remain a mystery to the 'I' (Levinas, 1989: 50).

Interpersonal relations are about people encountering each other. Such encounters are of an apophatic nature, in other words characterised by 'unsaying' or 'speaking away from' (Kourie, 2008: 62): the I is never really able to fathom the depths and the mysteries of the other. Although we encounter the naked, defenceless, vulnerable face of the other, we do not really know them. The more we think we know and understand the other, the more we understand how different the other is (from us), says Van den Beukel (1996:158-159) in another context. In his (Van den Beukel, 1996:159) opinion, 'knowing' is much more than cognitive understanding and insight (Dutch: *weten*). It is knowing also with one's heart, somewhat in the Biblical-Hebrew sense of *jada*. True to the apophatic nature of this knowledge, it is deep, personal and intimate. It embraces knowing, perceiving, discerning, being aware of, recognizing and acknowledging. Levinas (1989:50), however, seriously doubts whether one could ever speak of knowledge in view of the mystery of alterity. He would therefore differ from Van den Beukel's (1996:158-159) view that one is able to know and understand the other, and that based on this knowledge of the other we grow towards each other/one another.

The relationship with alterity (the other) is complex, as can be demonstrated in the case of (love for) a feminine other:

> It is a relationship with alterity, with mystery – that is to say, with the future, with what (in the world where there is everything) is never there, with what cannot be there when everything is there – not with a being that is not there, but with the very dimension of alterity. There where all possibles are impossible, where one can no longer be able, the subject is still a subject through eros. Love is not a possibility, is not due to our initiative, is without reason; it invades and wounds us, and nevertheless the I survives in it

(Levinas, 1989:150).

Instead of the egocentric attitude that regards the other as an extension of the self, that manipulates and uses the other, existence in this encounter implies a being for the other. This different non-ontic relationship rests on the conviction that people are each and everyone an individual with an own integrity. The inter-subjective space between I and the other is not symmetrical (Levinas, 1989:48). The other, once it is recognised as 'Other', lives in a completely different world and is totally different from the I. The I must therefore allow the Other to exist intact. Interaction of the 'I' with the Other, such as a gesture, 'does not know what it seeks', says Levinas (1989:51). It is like a game with something slipping away because of alterity, a game without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something Other, always Other, always inaccessible, and always still to come. The action (gesture) is the anticipation of a pure future without content.

According to Jansen (2009), pedagogical situations include differentials that vary from subliminal, tacit, hidden, to 'in your face'. They include race/colour, socio-economic background, language, gender, history of abuse, personality, culture, religion, life view, spirituality, ability and many more. To be able to provide guidance, the educator should not only know each educand (learner) personally and relatively intimately (which Levinas would argue is not possible without destroying the other's alterity. Whatever the educator does, the Other reveals only his/her absolute difference in the locus of such a face-to-face relation) (Hand, 1989:6).

Only when the I encounters the Other as individual and allows him or her to be what they are, the I is acting ethically (De Villiers, 2008:45). According to De Villiers (2008:45), this face to face relationship, the knowledge of the individuation of the Other brings about an ethical order characterized by an infinite responsibility for him or her. The responsibility is incumbent on me (the I), and is not a matter of intentionality or dependent on reciprocity. It demands my unconditional attention and ethical action. Levinas conceptualizes existence as being ultimately about goodness, friendship and hospitality to the Other. The Other arouses one's (I's) freedom (De Villiers, 2008:46). In all of the actions of 'I' there is no trace of possessing, grasping and truly knowing the Other or fusion with the Other. If one could do all of these, there would be no Other, only an 'other'. Possessing, knowing, grasping and fusion are power images. The relationship with the other is the absence of the Other, not in the sense of absence pure and simple or of absence in the form of pure nothingness but absence in a horizon of the future, and absence that is time (Levinas, 1989:51).

Levinas (1989:48) insists that such relationships can not be based on reciprocity:

there is no situation where the Other does not have alterity; alterity does not depend on the 'I' or a relationship with the 'I'. Relationships with the Other can not result in a Heideggerian ontic *Miteinandersein* which is a collectivity around something common (Levinas, 1989: 53). It also does not result in a Buberian 'I-you' collectivity where reciprocity is the tie between two separated freedoms, and where alterity (in the sense of 'isolated subjectivity') is underestimated. Levinas's relation with the other is asymmetrical, whereas Buber's idealized I-thou relation is profoundly reciprocal (Balint, 2008:52).

In referring to asymmetry Levinas discovered an important feature of pedagogical relationships, as Langeveld (1959) indicates: the educator always has 'something more' to provide to the educand, and the latter always thirsts for 'something more' from the educator. According to Valenkamp (2009), this is where Buber's 'I-you' pedagogy falls short: the 'something more' cannot serve a purpose in a Buberian dialogical/reciprocal relationship.

Levinas would differ from Jansen's (2009) critical-theoretical view that when you see yourself in the other, all differences tend to disappear. In Levinas's anthropology and ethics, the relationship with the Other can never result in sameness. A relationship with the Other/alterity cannot, in his view (1989:48), result in a kind a Platonist fusion where the subject tends to be identified with the other by being swallowed up in a collective representation or a common ideal. It is only by allowing the existence of Otherness to change us that we can be said to have a truly ethical relationship.

As indicated, the relationship with an Other/alterity according to Levinas amounts to 'temporal transcendence of the present towards the mystery of the future' in the Other. It is a 'collectivity' that is not a communion or sameness, where the one (I) loses itself in the other (Other), or vice versa; it is the face-to-face without intermediary where, in the other's proximity, distance is integrally maintained, whose pathos is made of both this proximity and this duality (Levinas, 1989:54). This is illustrated in the purest form of alterity, namely that of femininity. The love between a male 'I' and a feminine Other does not fuse them together into a whole:

> The pathos of love … consists of an insurmountable duality of beings. It is a relationship with what always slips away. The relationship does not *ipso facto* neutralize alterity but preserves it. … The other is not here an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery (Levinas, 1989:49). '… the ego takes the place of the same (i.e. ego) and the other takes the place of the other' (Levinas, 1989:54).

The Levinasian view does not exclude a change in/of the I, which is another feature of pedagogical interactions. The Other indeed transforms the one who sees

the other (i.e. I) (Jones, Parker & Ten Bosch, as quoted by De Villiers, 2008:45) but not by attempting to use the other to promote own interests. Correia (2008:276) makes the important point that Levinas's concept of radical alterity allows us to shed some light on a series of problematics which underlie (love) relationships. It becomes clear why love and understanding cannot be objectified, why it cannot be demonstrated in any way but through its fruits – because the 'I' can never be certain of what goes on in the mind/heart of the Other. One can better understand why uncertainty can consume us; it is difficult to trust the inapprehensible and to believe in a relationship which depends not only on me but also on some Other whose interiority will always remain a mystery to the 'I'.

4. Levinas on violence/violent exertion of discipline

According to a Levinasian approach, exertion of power and the use of violence would not be appropriate for dealing with the other, since they stand in the way of recognizing and respecting the alterity/individuality of the other, and of experiencing an authentic relationship with the other as Other in own right, i.e. an individual who possesses integrity of his or her own. The exertion of power and the application of violence have, in Levinas's view, no place in authentic relationships. This causes a dilemma, as Egéa-Kuehne (2009:3) points out. In a person's insistence or 'concern' to be, Levinas sees a violence; there is even a 'savagery' in a person's struggle to affirm the self 'without regard, without care' for the Other (Levinas, 1998:10).

In Levinas's (1969:21) opinion, violence can be ascribed to people's aspiration to manipulate the world and to control others to their advantage. By doing so, they regard others as extensions of themselves and expect them to reciprocate. This approach to violence is rooted in an egocentric attitude. It lacks the genuine, authentic alterity-based relationship with the Other because it finds its strength in power systems that control people and nature. Control is what counts here, and not the otherness (alterity) or the individuality of others. In his view, the present existence of people is characterized by tyranny and violence and thus lacks a true ethical foundation (De Villiers, 2008:43).

Violence, physical or otherwise, cannot restore in 'alienated beings their lost identity'; only 'a primordial and original relation with being' can do so (Levinas, 1998b:166; see De Villiers, 2008:43). A relation begins with an 'I' and goes to the other, in desire and goodness, where the I maintains itself and exists without egoism (Levinas, 1969:306). It is interesting to note that Levinas does not posit the Other as freedom, because that would suggest in advance a failure in communication between the 'I' and the other. With freedom, he says, there can be no other relationship between them than that of submission or enslavement. In

both cases, freedom is annihilated, and it would take a struggle to reassert freedom. The relationship between master and slave can therefore be grasped at the level of struggle, but then the relationship has become reciprocal (Levinas, 1989:49-50) and therefore pedagogically barren.

5. The face-to-face encounter as key to the maintenance of discipline

Instead of forcing others to do as one wishes through violent means, one should approach them in a face-to-face encounter whilst preserving their alterity.[5] For Levinas, the encounter with the face of the Other represents the ethical moment par excellence (Chandler, 2009:251):

> The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name the face. [. . .] The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing in my own measure and to the measure of its ideatum – the adequate idea (Levinas, 1969:50-51).

For Levinas, our ability to make a difference comes from the degree of our embeddedness within the plural and face-to-face world in which we live (Edgoose, 2009:118).[6] In the face-to-face encounter the other has to be seen in his or her 'nudity' or 'ipseity', i.e. in their individuality (Chandler, 2009:251). For Levinas, the nudity of the face cannot emerge in these efforts to apprehend it precisely because these efforts attempt to place the other's face under control:

> The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me – and this is its very nudity. It is by itself and not by reference to a system. [. . .] The nakedness of the face is destituteness. To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give. But it is to give to the master, to the lord, to him whom one approaches as 'You' in a dimension of height (Levinas, 1969:74-75).

The 'I'/self should seek for the future and for a relationship with the future in a face-to-face with the Other (Levinas, 1989:45). For him, the Other is the future: 'I do not define the other by the future, but the future by the other …' (Levinas, 1989:47).

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5 Levinas is aware of the fact that humanity cannot be reduced to only two individuals. There is always *un tiers*, a third party – the reality of society – who disrupts, upsets the simplicity of this one-on-one encounter with the emergence of this third party next to the Other (see Egéa-Kuehne, 2009:4-6).

6 See Ziarek (2006), Love (2008), Rosen-Berry (2008) and Krycka (2009) for other applications of Levinas's ethics and his views about face-to-face encounters.

As discussed, Levinas rejects the notion of a structure of equivalences because it always contains a self-serving symmetry (Chandler, 2009:251). In his ethics, asymmetry plays an important role. It is precisely the asymmetry between the 'I'/self and the other that enables the 'I' to see the alterity that he does not see in the self (Chandler, 2009:252).

Levinas seems to suggest that discipline problems and wayward behaviour should be handled in face-to-face encounters whilst concentrating on recognising and preserving the alterity of (for instance) a perpetrator of misbehaviour. Although in the terms 'encounter' and 'conversation' the self and the other are mentioned in the same sentence, they never become crystallised into a single system. Mentioning of them in one breath creates a synthesis, i.e. a togetherness in transcendence in which totality is broken up. The putting-together of the self (I) and the other, which already consists of their verbal proximity, takes the shape of a frontal and face-to-face reception by the 'I' of the Other. This togetherness should not be construed as a form of totality because the position of 'opposite me' is no modification of 'next to me'. Despite the fact that I have bound an Other to me by the conjunction 'and', the Other remains standing opposite me, in the process continuing to reveal his/her face to me. Although bound together in encounter/conversation, the Other remains my counterpart: my friend, my enemy, my teacher, my learner. The Other remains standing opposite me, for ever unfathomable (Infinite) (Levinas, 1966:70-71).

Correia's (2008) discussion of the face-to-face encounter explains how difficult and paradoxical it can be because of the mystery of the Other's interiority. A face-to-face expects both encounter and proximity between two radically different and separated alterities (Correia, 2008:268). There is a deeper paradox here: the 'I' or self is by nature self-centred, yet to truly understand, love and encounter the Other as a 'self-other' or 'other-self' the 'I' has to face the 'Other' who will always remain the total 'Other', a mystery, unfathomable and also self-centred in his or her own right (Correia, 2008:270). Understanding and love consequently implies an encounter between two self-centred, two distanced egos, each exiled in his or her own 'I' (Correia, 2008:276). This explains why Levinas considers proximity not as a static state of repose but rather as restlessness (Levinas, 1998:82). Correia (2008:277) formulates this conundrum as follows: If already the epiphany of the Face of the other gives the 'I' the dimension of the absolutely Other, what certainties do I have of that other person who shall always remain foreign and a mystery to me? On the one hand, the 'I' (for instance, an educator, teacher) needs to understand, love and the proximate the Other (in this case, the learner) but, on the other hand, the Other can never be 'sufficiently a proximity' to me; the Other will always remain an enigma, an absolute mysterious subjectivity to the 'I'. How,

then, can a teacher understand and fathom that which will always be foreign to him or her? And what is more,

> … even if he wants to show me his inside, and I to him, our languages will always be mutually foreign, unrecognisable by the other, for they are born in this exiled 'I' which recognizes all only from the 'I' (Correia, 2008:276).

6. Other approaches

Levinas's views resonate to a certain degree with several other approaches to education and discipline. Van den Beukel (1996:159), for instance, argues from a Christian pedagogical viewpoint that discipline and order in classrooms can benefit from insight in the intimate relationship between a person, in this case an educator/teacher, and the other (the fellow human being), in this case, an educand/learner. Teachers have to develop the skill of opening themselves to the others in their classes, to carefully listen to the voices of the others, to feel themselves addressed by these voices while understanding how different the others are from them (and vice versa). This attitude will enable them to deal with others (the learners) with great respect and empathy (Van den Beukel, 1996:159).

Although as a critical theorist Jansen (2009) sees the solution to the so-called discipline problem in creating sameness and in working with reciprocity, he arrives at conclusions that are similar to those of Levinas. In his opinion, the educator should seek for 'a common place where both can work with sameness'. Instead of focusing, like Levinas, on difference with the other, the educator should concentrate on anthropological sameness. He lends support to Levinas's views in saying that this should be done in a way that is contextualized and local. It has to be done for each educand (learner) *as if s/he were the only person present* in the class for that particular educator to interact with. Levinas would however have placed stronger emphasis on this last remark by insisting on the preservation of the alterity of the learner as the (capitalised) Other. Jansen's ontic view of sameness does not reckon with the non-ontic status of Levinas's view of the 'other/Other'. To the extent that each person shares 'otherness'/'Otherness' with all other people (all others) all people are the same. This non-ontic 'sameness' (i.e. viewing and experiencing the other/all others as other/Other) can form the basis of co-operation and possible moral appeal by the other on me/me on the other. Jansen, on the other hand, seems to operate with the classical Western concept of 'sameness' as an ontological category. Human beings are viewed as entities ('things') that can be compared for sameness and difference. Levinas does not employ this classical ontological approach in his anthropology: the human being does not reveal him- or herself in terms of ontological categories. In his view, an 'ontological approach' would not be worthy of the human being. People are equal

in being the other/Other for one another; they also differ in their equality (Valenkamp, 2009).

Jansen agrees with Levinas in saying that for the process of understanding sameness and difference to be effective, the educator and educand should each constantly seek for answers to the question 'Who am I?'. (In Levinasian terms, they should each be aware of their respective alterity.) They should seek for understanding of self, i.e. of identity and how it is constructed. This is a prerequisite for decentring (Jansen, 2009) (a notion that Levinas would question because it would compromise the alterity of the 'I' and the 'Other'). Each participant in the pedagogical process in a classroom should learn to manage the self, understand his or her place in the world and the possibilities of engaging with others. The identity of educator and educand as well as the context and locality are shaped through connection and engagement with others. This reconstruction is dialectical (not reciprocal, as if one were endeavouring to exert power over the other) – it always leads to higher levels of engagement. The rules of engagement are therefore co-constructed in a non-reciprocal partnership that acknowledges, respects and preserves the alterity of the other.

In terms of Jansen's (2009) ontological reciprocal and sameness approach (critiqued above from a Levinasian perspective), both partners should become responsive to the inputs of the other in the process of co-construction and partnership. Jansen seems to concur with Levinas that this process is not so much a matter of knowledge but rather of attitude and sensitivity towards the other that, in Jansen's view, leads to the collective generation and transmission of shared values.

Social constructivism, another ontological approach to the human being and to teaching-learning, also casts light on the encounter between educator and educand. They constantly and repeatedly co-construct their environment, in the process transforming the status quo from, for instance, a situation of unruliness, disobedience, misunderstanding and deviant behaviour to a situation characterized by oneness in pedagogical purpose, based on a set of shared values. To do this, the social group, in this case the educator and the learner, have first to decide on what they jointly wish to accomplish, and then also how they should go about doing what they agreed upon. What is required here, says Van Crombrugge (2006:128) is pedagogical tact:

> knowing what, when and how something should be taught. In this situation, 'logical consequence and coherence' are not the most important. What is important, however, is respect for the 'subject' that has to be mastered through learning as well as the 'person' that one desires to form/educate (also see De Muynck & Van der Walt, 2006:32).

7. Discussion

Based on Levinasian anthropology, and in particular Levinas's view of the encounter between the 'I' and the Other, how should educators (teachers) then approach the maintenance of discipline and the meting out of punishment in a school classroom? How does one counter the current use of violence by learners (in the form of cheekiness, lack of punctuality, rebelliousness, swearing, vilification, backbiting, disparagement, theft, disobedience, emotional, verbal and physical attacks (bullying) (see Nel, 2009, 2009b), spitting, lying, laziness, trading in banned substances and gang violence on school grounds (see Rahman, 2009) without resorting to counter-violence (De Villiers, 2008:43)? In Levinas's (1989:44) words: "How can a being enter into relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other? This question must be posed first, because it is the very problem of the preservation of the ego in transcendence."

A Levinasian answer to this question would probably run along the following lines. Firstly, according to Levinas, the 'other' should be seen and respected as the 'Other', a person that should not be dominated in any way, over whom power can and should not be exerted, whose absolute alterity (exteriority, differentness, otherness) is/should be recognised and respected, who is/should not be seen as an extension of the 'I' (the teacher), from whom neither sameness nor reciprocity is expected, who can not be seen as equivalent or equipollent to the 'I' but rather as an 'Other' in own right, an autonomous person who is never expected to sacrifice his or her alterity.

Looked at from a Biblical-pedagogical point of view, this Levinasian perspective does not seem to take at least Old Testament anthropological data and guidelines about the human being and education into account. One would have expected Levinas as orthodox (Chasidic) Jew to have taken cognisance of Old Testament principles with respect to the human being and the relationships between human beings. Because of his anti- or non-ontic approach to alterity, Levinas seems deliberately to have avoided speaking of the human being as *created* by God, in His *image*, as His *steward* on this earth, responsible to God, fellow-human *beings, creation* at large and him- or herself, a being called to cultivate and care for this *earth* and for other human *beings* (among others through education, i.e. through guiding, enabling, equipping and discipling), a fallen/sinful *being*, a being that is constantly open to reciprocity and interaction with others (i.e. a social being). Levinas consistently fails to reflect any of these Old Testament ontic-anthropological perspectives in his portrayal of alterity.

In addition to this, he seems preoccupied with the relationship with 'the other' while leaving the other relationships of the human being by the wayside. According to the Old Testament, the nature and quality of a person's relationship with

'the other', one's neighbour or fellow human being, depends on one's relationships with God and with the self. Levinas makes no mention of this Old Testament perspective. As a Jew he understandably also does not mention any of the anthropological principles flowing from the New Testament. He seems oblivious of the fact that many sinful and fallen human beings have found redemption in Jesus Christ, and solace and guidance from the Holy Spirit living in their hearts of hearts. The deepest grounds for respecting the alterity, the otherness of others – in this case, learners – are therefore not to be found in complicated philosophical distinctions and arguments but rather in Spirit-induced and -guided love for one's Creator and, flowing from that, for one's fellow human being, in this case the learner.

Secondly, according to Levinas, educators (teachers) should deliberately cultivate mutual respect between the 'I' of the teacher and the alterity of the 'Other' (the educand, learner), and should therefore avoid any semblance of domination of one over the other. Neither should be expected to sacrifice their 'ownmost' to the other. They should avoid speaking of the 'freedom' of the Other because that would presuppose a struggle between them. Teachers should contrive to know the other through love, respect and sympathy, but should understand that the alterity of the Other will always remain fundamentally unfathomable, a mystery. Teachers should realise that the Other is what they are not, and that the relationship between them is asymmetrical, never based on sameness or reciprocity. The pedagogical encounter is essentially heteronymous.

Christian educationists would agree in broad terms with all of these insights into alterity. Education should indeed be based on love for, care and understanding of the educand, characterised by the avoidance of domination, by respect, sympathy, the absence of struggle and violence, and the realisation that the other will always remain essentially 'different', unfathomable, a mystery. Christian educationists would however part ways with Levinas about the deepest grounds for these anthropological perspectives. Whereas Levinas's views are rooted in his anti- or non-ontic anthropology and ethics, Christians deliberately derive them from the entire inscripturated Word of God. The same applies for the basic asymmetrical structure of education. According to Scripture, children are gifts from God to parents and other educators, and have to be lovingly and caringly guided to and equipped towards responsible maturity and adulthood. Levinas seems to find the deepest grounds for pedagogical asymmetry in alterity and in heteronomy, not in Biblical injunctions about caring for children on their development road to maturity. Christian educators would furthermore not refrain from speaking of the freedom of people. According to Biblical precepts, a person can only experience true freedom within the religious and ethical boundaries provided by the inscripturated Word of God.

In the third place, Levinas argues that recognition of alterity brings about an ethical order characterised by infinite responsibility for the 'Other' – though without expecting anything in return, in other words, without reciprocity. Recognition of alterity also

underscores the pivotal roles played in pedagogical interactions by face-to-face encounter and the proximity of the 'Other'. Both participants get affected, changed and transformed in these encounters.

Again, Christian educationists would formally agree with him about 'infinite responsibility' for the other based on ethical principles, about not receiving or expecting anything in return, about the importance of face-to-face encounters and the proximity of the educand, and that educator and educand both tend to be affected by their interactions. However, they would go beyond formal agreement, and seek the grounds for all these pedagogical interventions in a Scripturally-based ethics. The educator's ethical relationship with the other (the learner) depends on the nature and quality of his or her religious relationship with Triune God.

Fourthly, violence and the exertion of power and control are unacceptable from a Levinasian point of view. Interactions should rather be characterised by sympathy, love and understanding. Sympathy, love and understanding can, however, only be demonstrated in the fruits of face-to-face encounters. The above Scripturally-based view must be reiterated here. Sympathy, love and the other manifestations of the educator's relationship with the educand as well as the avoidance of violence, power and control should not be based on technical philosophical arguments, but rather on a Biblical ethics.

Finally, while many of Levinas's guidelines for avoiding violence and maintaining discipline appear plausible from a pedagogical point of view, they leave us with a conundrum. How is it possible to construct an entire philosophy of pedagogy and of discipline in pedagogical situations on anthropological-ethical foundations only? The many references to ontic structures by Levinas himself seem to prove the unfeasibility of such an approach. Furthermore, as Egéa-Kuehne (2009:6) points out, how realistic is his call for a responsibility to the other/ Other in a world where the persistent focus on self-interest appears to be at the antipodes of what he advocates? Levinas (1985:90) himself is aware of this dilemma but seems to regard it as of little consequence: "My task does not consist in constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning." He did not concern himself with concrete reality. His discourse should therefore be taken as 'prophetic' rather than as prescriptive or legislative (Egéa-Kuehne, 2009:7; also see Katz, 2008:162). And what is more, the future is for him fraught with unpredictability and uncertainty (Edgoose, 2009:116-117). This may be a result of his reclamation of the figure of the 'wandering' and 'rootless' (nomadic) Jew[7] (Hammerschlag, 2008:547-549).

7 According to Hammerschlag (2008:548), Judaism's rootlessness sets it outside of the way of being that differentiates native from stranger, for the Hebrew Bible 'knows only a Holy Land, a fabulous land

A Christian approach to education and discipline cannot be based on a Levinasian non- or anti-ontic view of the human being and ethics. Levinas's own frequent use of ontic structures and images confirms the unfeasibility of his anthropology and ethics. The Bible tells of all the ontic structures that God created, among them the human being and education based on the interaction between a more mature and a less mature human being. This should not be overlooked in a philosophy of education. The Bible furthermore warns against self- and other-centredness to the detriment of God-centredness. In addition to this, to what extent can education as an essentially normative, prescriptive process in itself be guided by and rooted in a philosophy that regards itself as merely 'prophetic', non-prescriptive, unpredictable and uncertain?

8. Conclusion

The keys to solving discipline problems in pedagogical situations are, according to a Levinasian view: alterity, the 'Other' as enigma, heteronomy, respect, sympathy, love, asymmetry, the non-exertion of power, rejection of sameness, reciprocity, control and violence, proximity, ethical responsibility and the demonstration of love and understanding in face-to-face encounters.

A Levinasian view resonates well with some other perspectives on class room situations and teaching-learning, such as eco-systemic theory, complexity theory, spirituality theory, constructivism, and also certain Biblical principles. Despite being a Chassidic Jew[8] Levinas did not avail himself of the many Old Testament perspectives on neighbourliness, love, understanding and sympathy, and could in principle also not avail himself of New Testament perspectives on education, of which the injunction to love one's neighbour as oneself forms the epicentre. Despite its aversion to onticity and its failure to account for Biblical views of the human being and of education, the value of a Levinasian view for coping with the so-called discipline problem in South African schools should not be underestimated. Levinas's view of the alterity/otherness of the learner could arguably develop into a valuable and valid philosophy of education once it has been reinterpreted in Biblical light.

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that spews forth the unjust, a land in which one does not put down roots without certain conditions', (as Levinas maintained in *Difficult Freedom*, 1990, quoted by Hammerschlag).

8 See Hammersclag (2008:541 ff.) and Katz (2008:162-163) for an overview of Levinas's engagement with Judaism, in Hammerschlag especially his relationship with Alain Finkielkraut and Maurice Blanchot. In shaping his own ideas, especially in his 'confessional writings', Levinas refers to the Talmud and the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament), among others to monotheism and Abraham (also see Rosen-Berry, 2008:97). Although he contrived to keep his confessional writings apart from his philosophical project, certain 'confessional notions' do appear in the philosophical texts (among others the principle of 'individuation').

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