Fostering an effective school through moral leadership:
A South African case study

By

Vuyisile Msila

University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Further Teacher Education, UNISA, 0003

Abstract

School principals today face a number of challenges and many dysfunctional schools are plagued by low teacher morale, drug abuse by learners and violence. While many critics argue that it is necessary to bring back morality and ethics in "messy workplaces", others do not agree. The focus on ethics, as some would argue, appears soft and elitist in dysfunctional schools, "the job is to clean up the mess and get the kids learning. Ethics we can worry about later" (Sobol, 2002, p.83). Yet, effective principals learn the art of leading with their staff members. Moreover, it is also crucial for staff members to be involved in bringing about solutions. When educators learn to address the challenges their schools face, they empower themselves. Principals who want to create leaders within their schools will utilise morals and ethics as they involve the educators in improving their schools. This case study investigates how a principal of a dysfunctional school used a people-centred approach that emphasised morals, ethics and values to bolster the school's effectiveness. Using ubuntu (African) philosophy, the principal encouraged character-building through values among the educators. This study shows that school leaders should not overlook collaboration with their followers as they create a community of leaders. Furthermore, effective leaders would not eschew values as they take their followers with them while learning to learn.

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