A case for relational leadership and an ethics of care for counteracting bullying at schools

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This paper attends to a theoretical exposition of relational leadership and ethics care as complementary approaches to educational leadership in counteracting bullying at schools. Schools constitute complex systems of activities, processes and dynamics. More specifically, a social system in schools is a web of interactions between the various groups within the school, serving a number of purposes, with the intention of facilitating the flow of information, reflecting a process of socialisation, and the transfer of moral values. Such moral values underpin the value of social justice for all stakeholders in the education system. The moral standing of a school principal is key to creating such an educational landscape, where leaders care for their teachers and learners. Caring leadership is in its very essence relational, where an ethic of care observes the principle of fairness and social justice.

Keywords: bullying; conducive learning environments; ethics of care; relational leadership; social justice; social systems

Introduction

In this paper, we present a theoretical exposition of relational leadership and an ethics care as complementary approaches to educational leadership in counteracting bullying at schools. We posit that in education systems, there is a gap between stakeholders' expectations, on the one hand, and what can actually be achieved, on the other (Bryk, 2015). This disjuncture is also relevant for schools in South Africa. In this regard, Fisher and Fraser (1990) for example, assert that the curriculum, resources, leadership, and the school climate are significant contributing factors in the effectiveness of a school, or the lack thereof. In particular, utilising limited resources in an efficient manner is critical for sound educational leadership and management in a school. Leadership skills and characteristics of the school principal as an information provider, coordinator, meta-controller of classroom processes, and an instigating participatory decision maker appear to be necessary to perform the everyday duties in a school (Adewuyi, 2002; Bryk, 2015; Heck, 2000; Howie, 2002; Scherman, 2007; Van Staden, 2010). A firm, professional leadership style that is purposeful and participative in nature is required for dealing with the everyday education challenges in a school, specifically bullying (Sammons, 1999).

Within an African context, principals often work in conditions that are characterised by severe hardship as they face a number of challenges, which are often intensified by a sense of hopelessness and lack of agency regarding, for instance, improvements within the school environment (Bosu, Dare, Dachi & Fertig, 2011). It is widely acknowledged that schools are seen to play a pivotal role in alleviating poverty, which oftentimes results in augmented stress for principals. Not only do they have to ensure that children are reaching their potential, but they are also tasked with creating environments that are conducive to learning, assuming that these environments are orderly, courteous and safe (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

School environments are, however, not always safe, and disruptive and violent behaviour does break down relationships and can create places of chaos, which unsettles the stakeholders (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Sound relationships, trust and a sense of belonging are core characteristics for a conducive school climate. Maslowski (2001) claims that the nature of interpersonal relationships in a conducive school climate is vital for the effectiveness of learning, as this will determine the level of trust. Trust within a school environment facilitates the processes necessary for the smooth functioning of the school (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). If trust is established, cooperation and communication will prevail, both of which are integral to productive relationships. Conversely, when fear increases, confidence in the school administration decreases, and as a result, the informal social controls against aggressive behaviour will decrease (Welsh, Stokes & Greene, 2000). The core issue is that human behaviour is shaped by the social environment and the school, and that its leaders play a critical role in the socialisation of learners of what constitutes acceptable behaviour (Leone, Mayer, Malmgren & Meisel, 2000).

Socialisation of learners presupposes a focus on what acceptable social and moral behaviours are. If schools play a meaningful role in this process, it means that schools have a direct impact on how their learners will one day interact with other members of society, and it is these interactions which will either dictate social cohesion or social implosion. This speaks directly to social justice, the arena of moral behaviour in interactions (Bosu et al., 2011). Social justice and the manner in which we engage with these issues is an international concern, and not just an issue in resource constrained environments. Social justice is most prominent in education, specifically, as through schools, social values are put on display for the world to see. Values and

attitudes are fostered within this school environment, and very often, the development of the values stems from adults modelling value-based behaviours.

In this article, we argue that relational leadership, together with an ethics of care as leadership skill and as leadership characteristic, can mitigate bullying in schools and foster values-based behaviour. To this end, we argue that if school leaders adopt a relational leadership approach and an ethics of care, the overt and covert processes of bullying can be counteracted, and that instead, positive behaviours can be modelled, contributing to socially just ways of acting, which exemplify fairness and equality. The systemic literature review by Bush and Glover (2016) offers a comprehensive analysis of school leadership and management research in South Africa, which confirms that specialist leadership training for current and aspiring principals is required. We propose that coaching in relational and interactional mindfulness and qualities of caring be supplemented in such training opportunities, particularly in the context of school bullying.

Bullying within a Social System

Bullying is one of the most underestimated problems in schools, and it occurs at both primary and secondary schools (Neser, Ladikos & Prinsloo, 2004). Bullying is a worldwide problem, and it has received a great deal of attention within academia, as well as in the media. This is perhaps not surprising, given the increase in the occurrence of bullying as an indication of societal changes (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). In the past, bullying has been viewed as harmless, or as a phase some children go through, which has downplayed the serious implications of bullying behaviour. However, bullying is one of the covert aspects within a culture of violence that ultimately contributes to different manifestations of violence within societies (Neser et al., 2004). Accordingly, bullying appears to be a systemic problem (Cross, Monks, Hall, Shaw, Pintabona, Erceg, Hamilton, Roberts, Waters & Lester, 2011), as it mirrors behaviour patterns within society (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

We acknowledge that schools are open systems, which interact with the environment and society at large. Dealing with educational challenges such as bullying requires an interactional approach, in which the school principal plays an integral part. Their leadership style and their communication style within the school and beyond, in short, their interpersonal influence, may shape the way such education challenges are dealt with. We thus see the principal as an integral part of a social network, where a social network can be defined as a set of people, and the relationships among these people. These relationships can be concentrated, as observed in smaller subgroups, or

even connections between subgroups. Typically, a school would consist of a network composed of subgroups. Within such a network, a key factor in the flow of information and the growth of the network is trust. Trust is the core resource for educational change. It is important to understand the ties between people and within subgroups, in addition to the interactions taking place, as school change emerges from these interactions (Penuel & Riel, 2007).

Bullying is a complex social and educational problem, which has been researched by a number of scholars; the prevention of bullying through intervention programmes has been one area of study (Crothers & Levinson, 2004). Research shows that the school principal plays a key role in the prevention and reduction of bullying (Craig & Pepler, 2007; James, Lawlor, Courtney, Flynn, Henry & Murphy, 2008). The literature is silent, however, when it comes to a caring and relational stance of leadership, which may mitigate bullying. Put differently, the quality of relationships that school leaders have with staff, learners, parents, and the community, matter. It thus matters in the way bullying is dealt with.

Relational Leadership

We propose a relational leadership style that speaks to the quality of relationships that school principals have with staff, learners, parents, and the community. Relationships form an integral part in schools, because of their effect on the "key aspect of leadership, namely the ability to influence others to get things done" (Uhl-Bien, 2007:1305). Given that leadership is such a complex phenomenon, which involves the interaction of school leaders with followers and situational variables, it is clear that relational leadership is fundamentally more about "participation and collectively creating a sense of direction" than it is about "control and exercising authority" (Denis, Langley & Sergi, 2012:44).

Uhl-Bien (2006, 2007, 2011a, 2011b), who has written extensively on relational leadership, explains that the term "relational leadership" is fairly new, although the concept of relation-oriented behaviour is not so new in leadership studies. Specifically, Uhl-Bien (2006) writes that relational leadership theory has been defined as an overarching framework for the study of leadership as a social process of influence, through which emergent coordination (such as evolving social order) and change, are constructed and produced. As such, relational leadership and its practice are socially constructed through relational and social processes. Uhl-Bien (2006:662) defines social processes as

> the influential acts of organizing [sic] that contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships. In these processes, interdependencies

are organized [sic] in ways which, to a greater or lesser degree, promote the values and interest of the social order; definitions of social order are negotiated, found acceptable, implemented and renegotiated.

It is against this background that we put forward our argument that school leadership that is relational, focuses on social processes, rather than on leader actions and behaviours. Such social processes are open, contested, and negotiated, and, indeed, relational, as they concern the processes of "being in relation to others and the larger social system" (Uhl-Bien, 2006:664). The focus is therefore not on the leader per se, but on the staff, the learners, and the parents who interactively define and negotiate leadership as a process of organisation. What is important, therefore, is that relational leadership becomes a quality of the educational setting. Leadership is then studied as it occurs, rather than merely being an investigation into what individuals do.

Earlier writings on relational leadership (Regan & Brooks, 1995) offer insight into how women, specifically, transformed their understanding of school leadership. We argue, however, that male principals can also model relational behaviour, and that leadership as a relational influence can be performed by anyone. We maintain that leadership is not a person or a place or a thing; rather, it is an action: "leadership is the action of influence; it is relation, and it does not exist by itself" (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992, cited in Regan & Brooks, 1995: xi). A new "language" that is relational is proposed, and which includes concepts such as care, vision, collaboration, courage, and intuition, which are conceived of as relational attributes of leadership. While these concepts are not new in the vocabulary, they are given new conceptualisations for the practice of relational leadership. Scholars such as Lichtenstein and Plowman (2009) offer additional behavioural qualities for relational leadership, such as encouraging novelty, sense making, sense-giving activities, and stabilising feedback. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) propose that relational leadership is about a way of being in the world, together with practical wisdom, intersubjectivity, and dialogue. Odora Hoppers (2012:2) offers a helpful explanation in this context, noting that: "leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do. How to do is the task of a manager". Caring leaders are a living demonstration of how values and character, when combined in action, "carry the day". This supports the view by Fletcher (2004:650) and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011:7), who propose a particular type of competence:

> Creating a context in which growth-fostering, high-quality connections […] and social interactions can occur and mutual learning […] can take place, requires relational skills and emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, empathy, vulnerability, and

openness to learning from others regardless of their positional authority, and the ability to work within more fluid power dynamics, re-envisioning the very notion of power from "power over" to "power with".

An Ethics of Care

School leaders have a duty to both care for and take responsibility for their teachers and learners. This can present ethical challenges, hampering the efforts of school leaders to perform their duties effectively (Ciulla, 2009:1). An ethics of care, as propounded by Noddings (1984:69), maintains that caring should be rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness (Kordi, Hasheminajad & Biria, 2012:4). Other scholars, such as Koggel and Orme (2010:10), refer to an ethics of care as a normative ethical theory regarding what makes actions right or wrong. Caring relationships are basic to human existence and consciousness, and they consist of two parties, namely a carer, and a person that is being cared for (Noddings, 2009:9). Put differently, "the central focus on the ethics of care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" (Held, 2006:10). The carer should display qualities that have been referred to as "engrossment" and "motivational displacement", and the person receiving care should display some sort of response to the caring (Noddings, 1984:67). Furthermore, an ethics of care appeals to the desire to do the right thing, especially for those who are concerned about people. As Sander-Staudt (2011:23) illustrates, the most important thing about the ethics of care is that "morality is grounded in a psychological logic, reflecting the ways in which we experience ourselves in relation to others and that the origins of morality lie in human relationships as they give rise to concerns about injustice and carelessness".

In this article, we propose that the term "caring" refers to the relationships between principals and teachers and learners. As teachers attempt to address the needs of their learners, they may deem it necessary to design activities that cater for individual learner differences, as they interact with their learners every day, and so get to know their needs and interests (Noddings, 1984:5). Similarly, it is fundamental to caring that principals understand their teachers as individuals, and that they not treat them as a collective, homogeneous entity. Slote (2001:7) emphasises empathy and moral development in caring. Principals need to establish continuous relationships with teachers and learners, so as to develop a deeper understanding of their needs. In this regard, Noddings (1984:6) proposes the practice of engrossment, whereby someone thinks about other people in such a way as to gain a more in-depth understanding of them. An ethics of care is likely to claim that we have a

stronger obligation to help someone whose stress we are witnessing than to help a person whom we do not know.

Principals are tasked with trying to understand the problems experienced by their teachers and their learners. Caring ought to be a principle underlying ethical decisions, since caring is a fundamental human need (Noddings, 2009). Sander-Staudt (2011:29) argues that caring relationships should develop naturally out of the instinctual desire to do something good, rather than out of abstract moral reasoning. In this regard, Noddings (2003:19) contends as follows:

> [a] major act done grudgingly may be accepted graciously on the surface but resented deeply inwardly, whereas a small act performed generously may be accepted nonchalantly but appreciated inwardly.

Noddings (2009:89) indicates that the carer and the cared-for should each make a contribution, with the cared-for recognising the efforts of the carer, and thus completing the relationship. Noddings (2009:87) elaborates that we cannot care for everyone, and that caring needs direct contact. A caring relationship between teachers and the principal is bound to prosper, as they are frequently in contact. Caring relationships are bound by moral significance, where the ethics of care strives to maintain relationships by encouraging the welfare of the ones giving the care, and the ones receiving the care, while networking social relations (Sander-Staudt, 2011:29). It instils strong motivation in people to care for those who are vulnerable and dependent. An ethics of care seeks to hinder the accretion of power to those who are already in power, and to encourage activities that give rise to shared power. Consequently, Vetter (2010) has proposed that the following ethical factors facilitate penetration of followers' sensitive issues of care: attentiveness to the needs of other people, responsibility and willingness to care for others, competence and ability to care for somebody, and responsiveness to circumstances of vulnerability and inequality. Responsiveness is a way of understanding the vulnerability and inequalities of those who are vulnerable in sharing their experiences. In sum, an ethics of care starts from the premise that as humans, we are inherently relational, responsive beings, and the human condition is one of connectedness and interdependence.

Bullied learners depend on their principals for support. The learners need principals to act in a manner which signals that bullying is not just wrong, but hurtful. In an environment of care, this message has to be sent in numerous ways and modelled as well. Furthermore, bullying is what Craig and Pepler (2007) term destructive relationships. They claim that "the highest costs arise from destructive relationship dynamics in bullying because relationships are the foundation for healthy development and well-being throughout the life span" (p. 88). Thus, an important component of the shared vision within the school would be to foster healthy relationships. Principals cannot avoid taking responsibility for the well-being of their teachers and their learners, as they are bound by a moral imperative. With regard to morality, Held (2006), Koggel and Orme (2010) and Noddings (2009), assert that caring manifests as a moral attitude, connected to the complicated skills of interpersonal reasoning, and that it is neither without its own intellectual rigour, nor professionally less significant than the calculated skills of formal logic. In addition, Baier (1995:32) strongly contends that a basic relationship and trust are fundamental to morality, and that these encourage development of character traits such as agreeability, gentleness, sympathy, compassion, and good-temperedness. These character traits are especially important to model, given that bullying is seen as aggressive behaviour, the opposite of these traits, imposed from a position of power (Craig & Pepler, 2007). Accordingly, Noddings (2002:43) makes the following assertion:

> Ethical caring, the relation in which we do meet the other morally, [arises] out of natural caring – that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination. The natural caring [is] the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as good? It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring – to be in that special relationship – that provides the motivation for us to be moral. We want to be moral in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring.

Similarly, Noddings (1984:8) asserts that the carer acts in motivational displacement, by which is meant their "motive energy" flows towards the cared-for individual. Principals who model care demonstrate to learners that the promotion of healthy relationships is important and eliminating violence in the school-environment is everybody's responsibility (Craig & Pepler, 2007). The art of talking is fundamental to relationship building. To refine this point, Noddings (1984:9) contends that dialogue contributes to growth of the cared-for. Furthermore, the best way to show love for other people is to directly focus our attention on and be emotionally engaged with them. Accordingly, Noddings (2003:2) maintains that, ideally, we need to talk to the participants, to see their eyes and facial expressions, to receive what they are feeling, and that moral decisions are, after all, made in real situations.

School principals act as role models and mentors. They can influence their teachers to practise caring and reflection, thus developing them into people who care for one another. Noddings (2009:10) refines this point by suggesting that principals model ideal behaviour by demonstrating

caring in their relations with their colleagues and their learners. This is done by talking with people and by eliciting their views on what needs to be done (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011), including bullying. People often either deliberately teach other people not to care, or can place others in situations that do not allow them to care. Principals can influence teachers to care. Koggel and Orme (2010:10) stress affirming and encouraging the best in others. Thus, the ethics of care model stresses the need for school leaders and teachers to interact as a whole community. At the same time, the ethics of care emphasises modelling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation as indispensable in education, and as central to the cultivation of caring in society, in the widest sense (Engster, 2005; Noddings, 2002, 2006). The ethics of care emphasises that people choose to care for others because they believe that caring is the appropriate way to relate to others (Held, 2006:10). People in organisations can either intentionally or unconsciously contribute to deterioration of the ethical ideals of other members (Noddings, 1984:8). The onus rests on principals to develop insight into the moral values required in the practices involved in caring.

Bullying, Relational Leadership and Care

Bullying as a social phenomenon is a complex issue, which is marked by differences in power, and manifests in deliberate acts of harassment and blame, levelled at the victim for whichever reason (Salmivalli, 2001). Given the dire consequences of bullying behaviour, such as anger, violence, later delinquency and criminality, as well as victimisation, such as illness, avoiding schools, increased fear, low self-esteem, anxiety and depression, it is imperative that schools find mechanisms to deal with bullying (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2010). In a school where dialogue (both verbal and non-judgmental receptivity), empathy, compassion, and modelling are encouraged, a safe space can be created. Such a safe space is where the damage caused by bullying, can be counteracted and psychological connections with learners can be created (Shariff, 2004).

Accordingly, relational approaches to leadership, as described by Hollander (1980) (Hollander's idiosyncrasy credit model), then by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) (the vertical dyad linkage model, and the leader-member exchange theory) emphasise the interplay, or the relational exchange, between leaders and followers, which creates an effect that produces beneficial leadership outcomes. These types of leadership outcomes that benefit all kinds of relationships would include safe spaces where bullying can be mitigated.

Virtues such as compassion and care should not only be interpreted in a narrow way and be limited to private life, but should also be appropriated in public and political life, including educational life. Tronto (1993), cited in Vetter (2010:8), redefines care as both disposition and action, to reach out to other people in society at large. Care is connected to democratic processes and a concern for social justice. Vetter (2010:8) contends that an ethics of care requires several components, such as "attentiveness to the needs of others, responsibility, understanding of contexts, competence and responsiveness on the part of those who receive care". She asserts that "[s]uch ethics of care is applied in relational leadership and is often recognised by compassion, empathy, collaboration, and social justice" (Vetter, 2010:8). School leaders who regard care as a political, moral and ethical imperative are committed to "making a difference" in the lives of their learners. The studies of several researchers, such as Blackmore (1989), Strachan (1999), Williamson and Hudson (2001) and Wyn, Acker and Richards (2000), were motivated by the researcher's desire to do what was best for their learners and their staff. These leaders tend to practice what they preach.

The first of the cited relational attributes of leadership is care, which has been defined as "the development of an affinity for the world and the people in it, translating moral commitment to action on behalf of others" (Regan & Brooks, 1995:27). Care involves shared meaning making, engaging in a dialogue about issues, understanding of the problem, and the learnings of what can be taken forward (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011), especially in light of the bullying phenomenon within the school environment. Caring is, after all, the essence of education (Regan & Brooks, 1995:27), and education leaders remain in caring relationships over a period of time, nurturing the growth of learners and staff. Put differently, relational leadership displays care and concern for colleagues and learners. Beck (1992), cited in Regan and Brooks (1995), suggests that ethics play an important role in educational leadership. Such ethics are informed and guided by care (Regan & Brooks, 1995:29). A relational perspective of care allows for interaction with particular individuals as individuals with whom leaders are in professional relationships. Caring promotes understanding of the experiences of individuals who are living, for example, in poverty, or with a disability (Grogan, 2000:133). Within the school environment, the principal in collaboration with staff could provide opportunities, where difficult topics such as bullying can be discussed in an environment in which individuals feel safe to share. This could be during dedicated times in the school term, at which individuals connect with one another. Such discussions could culminate in a particular code of

conduct, for example, preventative measures that could be put in place, such as increased adult supervision in "undefined spaces" within the school (outside of bathrooms or by the stairs).

The next cited attribute of leadership is vision, which has been defined as the ability to formulate and articulate original ideas through a facilitated process of encouragement. A visionary leader creates a trusting work environment, where colleagues are invited to collaborate and participate. Visionary leaders contribute to a new vision for schools. With regard to bullying, this would also mean that the principal is committed to allocating time and resources to bullying-related activities, involving staff in a collaborative process focused on common goals (Craig & Pepler, 2007). This also means that visionary leaders are able to be "responsive to the present moment in problem solving" (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011:1443).

The next attribute is collaboration, which is the ability to work in a group, supporting group members and creating a synergetic environment for all. Collaboration entails inclusiveness, shared ownership, connectedness, and cooperativeness. It is important that the principal is part of the collaboration focused on overcoming bullying, because research suggests that without the support of principals, anti-bullying programmes are less likely to succeed (James et al., 2008).

The next attribute is courage, which has been defined as "the capacity to move ahead into the unknown, teasing new ideas in the world of practice" (Regan & Brooks, 1995:29). This means that the issue of bullying, which can be difficult to discuss, especially when there are several other factors that need addressing, has to be made a priority. It does mean that there needs to be a plan that all stakeholders are aware of and follow, in other words, a shared vision for the school. It involves a degree of risk-taking for the good of the group or the individual, and the quality of making oneself vulnerable in a difficult situation. This kind of leadership does not draw attention to the leader, but rather draws attention to everybody else (Regan & Brooks, 1995:30). The last of the cited attributes of leadership is intuition, which is "the ability to give equal weight to experience and abstraction, mind and heart". Often intuition is given little credibility. However, "intuition as the initiator is the capacity of mind and heart that is integral to a relational approach to leadership" (Regan & Brooks, 1995:34). These attributes of relational leadership differ greatly from the traditional administrative "language" of control, hierarchy, authority, and division of labour.

In a more recent text, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) explore the concept of relational leadership, based on research conducted specifically with female leaders in education contexts. They suggest relationships with others in a horizontal sense, rather than a hierarchical sense (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011:6). Stated differently, relations produce power in a flattened organisational structure. According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011:47), "[l]eaders who develop coherence around shared values are likely to deepen the sense of community within an organization [sic] – a sense of being in relationship with others who are striving for the same goals." Accomplishing goals usually takes place with and through others; power is conceptualised differently, and the emphasis is on increasing power for everyone. Given the often perceived and/or experienced unequal distribution of power in favour of men, women have often expressed discomfort at wielding power, or have denied their own power. What may have to change is the language that is used when talking about power, where power relations should perhaps be expressed as "power with", rather than "power over" (Fletcher, 2004:650). This signals a relational approach to power in the work of school leaders. According to this approach, power is conceptualised as something that is shared, where leaders would thus seek to expand the power of everyone (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This supports a view of how power and relationships are perceived as closely related, and how power facilitates the strengthening of relationships, rather than being used to control relationships.

By its very nature, relational leadership is embedded in dialogical practices. This type of leadership requires that the leader is always morally accountable to others (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). This ties in with the social justice agenda, which is very prominent, both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, bullying is an international epidemic for schools in every country. Apart from the psychological consequence, there is recognition nationally and internationally that bullying is linked to poor academic performance, and thus these bullied learners may not have equitable access to school-based resources. In addition, the power dynamic at play in the bully-victim relationship, in which there is an exercise of authority in a cruel and unjust manner, is sadly a real example of oppression in our society today, whether in Africa or on any other continent (Polanin & Vera, 2013). While there are real differences between developed and emerging economies, the issue of bullying and its relation to social justice is the same. Furthermore, the role of supportive leadership in combatting bullying in schools is well documented (Nickerson, Cornell, Smith & Furlong, 2013). Thus, the manner in which bullying is dealt with from a leadership perspective, in this case relational leadership, regardless of the context, could provide valuable insights to investigate further.

Conclusion

This theoretical exposition did not draw on empirical data, instead it exposed the concepts of relational leadership and an ethic of care to propose complementary leadership approaches in the pursuit to counteract and mitigate bullying in schools. This discussion hopes to have set the scene for further empirical inquiries, where these theories of leadership can be invoked in qualitative ethnographic case studies. We acknowledge that bullying is a social and an education challenge, a challenge that threatens social justice and the development of citizen with strong moral values. In order to counteract and mitigate bullying at schools, a relational leadership approach and an ethics of care is proposed. The reason for this is that modelling care amongst the adults within the school will inevitably filter down into the learner population. Bullying in itself is a destructive act that has lifelong consequences; the very nature of bullying is to ensure that power imbalances remain in place. Those with power in the social group marginalise those who do not have power. Given the complexity of a school as a social system, within a broader economic and social system, a relational and caring leadership style appears appropriate to deal with the phenomenon of bullying. Bullying requires a caring and inter-actional approach by school principals and teachers in order to bring about the required change in attitude towards it, and to actively move the social justice agenda forward.

Note

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