Reflections on school leadership focussing on moral and transformational dimensions of a principal's leadership practice

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Abstract

The literature shows the significant influence of school leadership in creating successful schools. Due to the diversity and complexity of schools, theorists, policymakers and practitioners acknowledge the crucial role of school leaders' values and their influence on schools and the community. In searching for new foundations for understanding leadership, three metaphors are used to describe a portrait of school leadership: the moral steward, the educator, and the community builder (Murphy, 2002:176). For the purpose of this study the focus is on the dimension of the moral steward of leadership. It uses this metaphor as one of the lenses to study a South African principal's leadership who regards Christianity as point of departure in his or her practice. A qualitative study using a narrative inquiry was applied to investigate the moral and transformational dimensions of school leadership in the primary school. The following themes emerged from the data analysis: the principal's foundation of leadeship: "I learn from the Big Boss"; caring about the needs, value and feelings of individuals: "I have compassion for people"; developing the potential of others: "You must empower your people". Through the sharing of the leadership experiences of

the South African principal, this study could serve as a valuable resource and lead to similar studies that could enhance the sharing of leadership experiences of successful school principals.

Opsomming

Die literatuur toon die beduidende invloed van skoolleierskap in die daarstelling van suksesvolle skole. As gevolg van die diversiteit en kompleksiteit van skole, erken teoretici, beleidmakers en praktisyns die kardinale rol van skoolleiers se waardes en hulle invloed op skole en op die gemeenskap. In die soeke na nuwe grondslae vir die verstaan van leierskap, word drie metafore gebruik om 'n ver-gestalting van skoolleierskap te beskryf: die morele rentmeester, die opvoeder en die gemeenskapsbouer (Murphy, 2002:176). Vir die doeleindes van hierdie studie is die fokus op die dimensie van die morele rentmeester van leierskap. Dit gebruik hierdie metafoor as een van die lense waardeur 'n Suid-Afrikaanse skoolhoof se leierskap bestudeer word wat Christelikheid as vertrekpunt in sy of haar praktyk beskou. 'n Kwalitatiewe studie wat 'n narratiewe na-vraag gebruik is toegepas om die morele en transformasionele di-mensies van skoolleierskap in die primêre skool te ondersoek. Die volgende temas het uit die data-analise na vore gekom: die skool-hoof se begronding van leierskap: "Ek leer by die Groot Meester"; omgee oor die behoeftes, waarde en gevoelens van individue: "Ek het deernis vir mense"; die ontwikkeling van ander se potesiaal: "'n Mens moet jou mense bemagtig". Deur die deel van die leierskap-ervarings van die Suid-Afrikaanse skoolhoof, kan hierdie studie as 'n waardevolle hulpbron dien en lei tot dergelike studies wat die deel van leierskapervarings van suksesvolle skoolhoofde kan uit-bou.

1. Introduction

Engaging in school leadership is complex (Fry & Kriger, 2009:1667; Leithwood & Day, 2007:1; Thompson, 2004:60) and this accounts for the increase in the studies on this topic (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006:372; Greer, 2009:269; Slater, Garcia, & Gorosave, 2008:702). Studies show the significant effect school leadership has in creating successful schools (Drysdale, Goode & Gurr, 2009; Krüger, Witziers & Sleegers, 2007:1; Macneil, Prater & Busch, 2009:76; Slater, Garcia & Gorosave, 2008:702). Effective school leaders encourage and in-

fluence their followers by being supportive; by giving direction; through encouragement; and by being sensitive (Robbins & Decenzo, 2007:247). Due to the diversity and complexity of educational institutions, theorists, policymakers and practitioners acknowledge the vital role of values and their influence on core activities in schools and the community (Lazaridou, 2007:339; Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson & Jinks, 2007:404; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011:4). For Lazaridou (2007:339), values are seen as explicit or implicit declarations about what is important, worthy, useful or desirable. They serve as standards against which decisions, plans, and actions in schools can be judged. "This means that persons wishing to affect society as school leaders must be directed by a powerful portfolio of beliefs and values anchored in issues such as justice, community, and schools that function for all children and youth" (Murphy, 2002:186).

Understanding effective school leadership remains an ongoing challenge for all school systems that are dedicated to attaining quality in education (Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson & Jinks, 2007:402). In a search for new foundations for understanding leadership, Murphy (2002:176) used three metaphors to describe a portrait of school leadership. These were the moral steward; the educator; and the community builder. For the purpose of this study I focussed on the dimension of the moral steward of leadership and used it as one of the lenses to study a principal's leadership practice. As such this study investigated the moral dimensions and transformational leadership role of a principal as he explained his school leadership practice.

Although many theories and practices acknowledge the value foundation of leadership (Middlehurst, 2008:329), moral leadership, and studies on moral dimensions of schools leaders, are absent in educational leadership literature (Glanz, 2010:68). Furthermore, studies on transformational school leadership have only recently bcome the focus of empirical studies (Sağnak, 2010:1139). This study is another response to the study of Møller and Eggen (2005:335) that views leadership 'practice' as a narrative that "may open up approaches to analysis which would be useful in exploring the complexities of leadership practice in schools".

South African and international school leadership narratives are limited (Brumley, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Slater *et al.,* 2008). Because of the lack of narrative studies, this article is used to determine how

the leadership practice of a South African school principal demonstrates aspects of moral and transformational leadership. Building on the studies of Spillane (2005) and Schall, Ospina, Godsoe and Dodge (2004), the life story of a principal, who placed a high premium on values and the inculcation of values, was investigated.

The narrative in this study was socially constructed using a number of interviews and interactions between the school principal and the researcher (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007:151).

2. Conceptual framework

According to social constructivism, leadership is a social construct, since it develops through interaction with others over a period of time (Ladkin, 2010:21; Schall, Ospina, Godsoe & Dodge, 2004:2). It is considered to be a subjective experience that is significantly influenced by both culture and context. Focussing on the experience of a principal's leadership and a constructionist approach to leadership, this study is likely to reveal the sense in and relational aspects of the principal's leadership practice (Schall *et al.,* 2004:3).

This study further explored the moral and transformational leadership nature of a principal using a leader's values and beliefs as the points of departure (Sağnak, 2010:1137; Werner, 2003:194; Robbins & Decenzo, 2007:263; Nel, Werner, Haasbroek, Poisat, Sono, & Schultz, 2008:365). For the purpose of this study, leadership is regarded as a moral act that respects the welfare of the followers and promotes an improved environment for their human existence (Norris, Barnett, Basom & Yerkes, 2002:75). Caring about the needs, values and feelings of individuals is very important when working from a caring perspective (Glanz, 2010:75). Moreover, having strong and sound personal and professional values, and respecting the values of others in the schools, are regarded as an essence of successful school leadership practice (Raihani, 2008:487; Gurr *et al.,* 2006:375; McEwan, 2003:133). School leaders who understand this moral concept also acknowledge that schools do not only focus on student performance, but that they are places where creativity and human imagination can be employed to transform the world (Dantley, 2005:40). In these schools, favourable environments that help to shape and maintain positive values and shared purposes are created (Masitsa, 2005:206; Niemann & Kotzé, 2006:622; Peterson & Deal 1998:29).

In a certain sense moral leadership shares certain elements of spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is the individual leader's own search for meaning based on his or her own spirituality (Pruzan, 2008:101). Fry (2003:711) defines spiritual leadership as the "values, attitudes and behaviours that are required to intrinsically motivate the leader and followers so that they experience a sense of spiritual survival through calling and empowerment". Spiritual leaders are guided by their personal values which serve as a guide for understanding the self and the world (Pruzan, 2008:102; Taylor *et al*. , 2007:404). As regards schools, spiritual leadership entails the creation of a school culture in which the leader and followers demonstrate sincere care, (Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki & Giles, 2005:612; Saǧnak, 2010:1145; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011:18) concern and appreciation for the self and others. The school culture also has to embody the values of altruistic love, and leaders should abide and embody such values in their behaviour and attitude (Fry, 2003:719).

Moral leaders' views go beyond that of student development and performance but also realise their social responsibility within society (Dantley, 2005:41; Dantley, 2007:172; Gurr *et al.,* 2006:377). They contextualise the responsibility of the school within a vibrant, ever-changing surrounding (Dantley, 2005:42). This means that moral leaders are courageous enough to place their work and role into a deeper and broader space, with a view of bringing about transformation within the society (Dantley, 2005:45).

Theories on transformational leadership propose that leaders can inspire their followers to higher levels of performance "through the values they espouse, the aspirations they awaken and the levels of energy and commitment that are released to achieve particular goals" (Middlehurst, 2008:336). It is particularly the charisma of transformational leaders that can create a school structure that

- enhances shared decision-making;
- encourages autonomy in teacher decision-making (Gurr *et al*., 2006:376; Printy, 2010:115; Raihani, 2008:490);
- builds and develops a culture through vision and empowers followers to achieve this vision;
- improves the 'esprit de corps';
- leaves behind a 'cadre of transformational leaders' (Dobbs & Walker 2010:10);

- advances a school environment of care and trust among staff members and creates a climate for respectful interactions with students (Jacobson *et al.,* 2005:612; Printy, 2010:115; Sağnak, 2010:1145);
- moves beyond care of self and demonstrates a sincere interest in the development and welfare of others (Norris, *et al.,* 2002:77);
- inspires followers (Van Eeden, Cilliers & Van Deventer, 2008:225);
- provides intellectual stimulation and supporting individual staff members (Gurr *et al.,* 2006:375; Jacobson *et al.,* 2005:611; D'Alessio, 2006:3; Katz & Earl, 2010:32; Van Eeden *et al*., 2008:225); and
- attempts to meet the emotional needs of followers (Sağnak 2010:1137; Robbins & Decenzo 2007:249; Van Eeden *et al*., 2008:225).

3. Research design

A qualitative case study was employed to investigate the moral and transformational dimensions of school leadership. A primary school that excelled in various aspects of school life was purposefully selected. The principal, who was a participant in previous studies (Steyn, 1994; Steyn, 2006; Steyn, 2007; 2009a, 2009b, Steyn, 2010), was recognised as being competent, having sound values and beliefs and "on the cutting edge of leadership as reflected by theory and best practice" (Reyes & Wagstaff, 2005:111). Although implied, the studies mentioned did not focus on the principal's moral and transformational leadership practice. They, however, provided valuable insights into this principal's leadership practice and were added to provide a more holistic understanding of this particular phenomenon. After the retirement of the principal, empirical data for this study were collected through a number of interviews, field notes, e-mails and telephone calls.

The participant in this study was a principal of an Afrikaans-medium, urban school situated in the province Gauteng, South Africa. The school catered for students from Grade R to Grade 7 and offered numerous curricular and extracurricular activities. They excelled in a number of activities, such as chess, rugby and choir competitions. This principal was appointed in 1986 and retired at the end of 2009.

The principal's story was recorded using a narrative that reflected his leadership practice during his career; naïve sketches that he wrote about his leadership; field notes that were taken during an interview in 2010; and a number of telephone conversations and text messages on the cell phone. The main interview focussed on the principal's personal view of his leadership practice during his career. During this interview the principal often referred to facts or incidents from previous studies to confirm his stance. Such facts or incidents were also used in this study to present a better understanding of his leadership practice. The data collected from the life story was recorded, transcribed, translated into English and analysed using inductive methods. Views of teachers who experienced the principal's leadership practice were collected using a focus group interview in 2010 (Kelly & Saunders, 2010:129). Ethical measures, which included requesting participants' willing participation; treating the participants in a humane way; and obtaining the informed consent (Johnson & Christensen, 2008:109) of every participant before the interviews were conducted, were employed. Transcripts of the interviews were sent to participants via e-mail to ensure accuracy of the data collected (Kelly & Saunders, 2010:128) and as a means of member-checking.

This study used a qualitative research approach, in particular a narrative inquiry that focussed on a participant's personal storytelling (Creswell, 2007:93; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:65; Gough, 2008:335, 336; Oplatka, 2004:57; Slater *et al.*, 2008:705) to describe the principal's leadership practice. The principal's views and expriences and the way in which he interpreted his work were used to present a 'thick' (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:62) and 'rich descriptive detail' (Saldaňa, 2009:111; Schall *et al.*, 2004:18) of his leadership practice.

The transcribed interviews and field notes were open coded using a moral and transformational leadership lens to conceptualise the data. In the analysis of data, structural coding (Saldaňa, 2009:68) was used in identifying the different themes of the study. Vivo coding in the themes was added to "prioritise and honour the participant's voice" in the study (Saldaňa, 2009:74), while the conceptual framework regarding moral and transformational leadership provided a suitable way of structuring the data collected.

The trustworthiness of the data was attained by including different means of data collection and by comparing the evidence from the

most recent data with previous studies within the school (Muijs, Ainscow, Dyson, Raffo, Goldrick, Kerr, Lennie & Miles, 2010:145). Moreover, the themes and the final version were confirmed by the participants. A literature control provided a framework for contrasting the findings of this study with those of others (Creswell, 2007:102, 103).

For the purpose of this discussion the following themes were identified: The principal's foundation of leadership: 'I learn from the Big Boss'; Caring about the needs, value and feelings of individuals: 'I have compassion for people'; Developing the potential of others: 'You must empower your people'.

4. Discussion of findings

My involvement at the primary school started in 1991 when I job shadowed the principal. Since then I have been involved in a number of studies at the school (Steyn, 1994; Steyn, 2006; Steyn, 2007; 2009a, 2009b; Steyn, 2010). The school is located in an average to above-average socio-economic environment.

I observed the following characteristics at the school:

- a safe and well-functioning school environment (Danielson, 2007:18; Jacobson *et al.,* 2005:614)
- a culture of care (Jacobson *et al.,* 2005:613; Saǧnak, 2010:1145; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011:17, 18)
- a commitment of teachers and students
- flexible and purposive leadership
- a harmonious relationship with the parents and community.

The school excelled in various areas such as sport, culture and academia. The principal noted: "I think the school achieved a lot". The school previously won garden competitions in Pretoria. Their curriculum was enriched by including subjects like Study methods, Chess, Music, English as a spoken language, and Remedial teaching. It also encouraged Grade 7 learners to write the Oxford/Cambridge international examination to determine their standard. The school had an extensive reward system for students, staff, parents and 'friends of the school'. This was considered as 'very motivating'. There were at least 20 different parent committees, which, according to the principal, was 'the best in the world'. Although not the focus of the mentioned studies, the leadership practice of the principal was prominent in

these studies. The principal regarded his leadership as a 'calling' and sincerely wanted to make a difference in the lives of all individuals at the school and community, particularly in the lives of students. Even after his retirement he confirmed his stance: "I'm very interested in leadership, I enjoy it."

During the many school visits there was ample evidence to indicate the principal's commitment to reach out to the community – emphasising his 'social responsibility'. During the principal's term in leadership, the school adopted a disadvantaged township school in Mamelodi. Both schools were homogeneous and made regular cross-cultural contact to enhance an understanding of cultural and other diversities. According to the principal the schools were "almost like brothers, like a big family". The school staff was also keen to arrange workshops for the staff at the disadvantaged school. The twinning of schools also offered opportunities to exchange valuable hints about quality teaching practices. Donations and sponsorship toward upgrading the school buildings and other school facilities were also given. As indicated previously, a moral leader's views also acknowledge his or her social responsibility within society (Dantley, 2007:172; Gurr *et al.,* 2006:377). The principal believed that he (and also his school) "who had something [privileges] had a tremendous responsibility towards others who were disadvantaged … God was good" and they needed to extend the love and blessings of God to others.

4.1 The principal's foundation of leadership: 'I learn from the Big Boss'

The principal regarded the Bible as his source of inspiration and guidance. On various occasions he referred to Psalm 127:1 and 2 which he considered to be his point of departure in his leadership practice in the school: "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain … In vain you rise early and stay up late, tolling for food to eat – for He [the Lord] grants sleep to those He loves" (NIV). Considering these verses the principal explained:

> I want to tell you the big secret … There's truth in what the
> Bible says about rising early, going to bed late, and working
> by the sweat of one's brow … If the Lord works, who can
> stop you ...? My secret is that I think the Lord worked to a
> great extent … The Lord [works] through you ... We work

> ourselves until we feel disillusioned, we are frazzled, we land in institutions, we take pills … I made many mistakes because I tried too hard ... At times I was depressed – being a principal isn't an easy job … If you can't give it to the Lord – and say, Lord, now You take over … Lord, this thing is too heavy for me now … and then things often start to change.

Sharing his religious values and beliefs were crucial for the principal and he made an extra effort through various ways to teach children the 'basics of life'. Even after retirement he continued with his mission and wrote a programme that was based on Christian leadership targeted at children: "What does a Christian do? How should a Christian behave? I take texts and things from the Bible." Reminiscing about his leadership practice in general, he realised a shortcoming in his approach, which is also prevalent in many other schools.

> I would fight for the whole spiritual development of the child … We are pushing these children so much, culturally, academically and in sport, that we are losing the essence of life. And that is what I think the schools should start doing differently … We encourage children to aim for so many distinctions, we make them into cultural champions, they take part in any kind of competition … But when a child is growing up, this stuff is actually worth nothing. Then your spiritual qualities, the value system that was inculcated in you, begins.

The approach of the principal is supported by the literature review and theoretical framework. A spiritual leader's own search for meaning is based on his or her own spirituality (Pruzan, 2008:101), which is also confirmed in the findings. It was particularly the principal's religious beliefs and values that were very strong and had a great influence on his leadership practice (Raihani, 2008:486; Thompson, 2004:63). As was eminent from the principal's practice, his values influenced his behaviours (Lazaridou, 2007:339; Murphy, 2002:186; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008:30) and guided him to understand the self and the lifeworld (Pruzan, 2008:102; Taylor *et al.,* 2007:404). Transformational leadership, as previously discussed, regards the beliefs and values of leaders as the point of departure to effective leadership. The values of the principal particularly focussed on students and the youth (Murphy, 2002:186). Thompson (2004:63) asserts that staying focussed on a higher purpose in a challenging environment requires "an inner

strength that results from a spiritual practice". As a charismatic and moral leader, he believed that schools should not focus on student performance only, but should be a place to transform lives of students. The principal's approach to his leadership practice was particularly evident from the way in which he cared for people.

4.2 Caring about the needs, value and feelings of individuals: 'I have compassion for people'

Throughout his career as principal he continued to focus on the needs, interests and welfare of others. It was the principal's love; respect and care for individuals; particularly students; that were dominant in his leadership practice. He often mentioned that the school was a 'caring school'. It was also the principal's caring attitude; his availability; his strong presence at every level of the school and at school activities; that were so remarkable. The principal's values were strongly child-centred and an array of personal and professional values and beliefs underpinned his leadership approach.

His stance was confirmed in the 2010 narrative:

> I have been extra blessed with a great love for children – especially for children, and that's what I can really say, I didn't have it right from birth – it's something that has been given to me from above ... I love children, that's true.

His love for children was strengthened after he attended a conference on "Youth with a Mission for Christ" several years ago. The audience was invited to make a prayer request and his was that they should pray that his existing love for children should increase even more. He believed that this prayer was answered. An experienced teacher in Steyn (2006:6) confirmed his love for children: "It is the Lord who gives him that love. And I think that is actually the essence ... and I think that is perhaps what you don't get at some of the other schools, they don't have that love." The principal explained the impact of his love by referring to a letter written by a gentleman from Cape Town who was already in his thirties. In this letter the gentleman wrote that the principal merely touched his head when he once walked past him. "… that small gesture, made him start observing me … he says I won't believe what a huge impact I had on his life ... It's an insignificant little deed of love and of caring."

Although the principal's own values were central in his leadership, he also strived to inculcate particular values such as love, diligence and honesty in students. He was convinced that a suitable value system could train students for becoming successful citizens in society.

His care for people came from his compassion for people as revealed in the following statement:

> I'm very people oriented ... I have compassion for people, and I was – I think I had the right calling ... And here's another thing, do something every day that someone else can't give back to you ... When a guy begs, he expects something, but do something unexpected for someone who doesn't expect anything, and who can't give it back – I think that's the heart of compassion.

To have a heart of compassion the principal believed that a passion, particularly in the work life, is required. He explained:

> Passion can't be extinguished … When people are passionate about what they do, about 99.9% of the time, they are successful. It's like a ripple effect – you need to be able to sell what's inside you, what you are busy with. That's why I say many people don't do what they've been graced with – they are too busy with the wrong things. They die inside because they don't enjoy what they're doing, and they also make the people around them die because they can't get excited about the things they're involved in.

According to the principal, passion is linked to a person's attitude. He believed that people place too little value on positive attitudes and explains "people struggle and go downhill and become depressed and land up in hospitals and institutions … The war is fought here [showing his head] – in your head, and you have to teach people to [win] this war here – they have to start getting fit on the inside".

The findings were confirmed by literature and the theoretical framework. According to Thompson (2004:63) it is important to maintain compassion in the face of diversity, which the principal tried to do. A compassionate leader acknowledges that values and attitudes are closely linked to leadership (Kelly & Saunders, 2010:138; Gurr

et al., 2006:375; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011:18). The principal's leadership practice was *inter alia* based on his love for children and respect for all other people as is the findings in the study of Drysdale *et al.,* (2009:704). He also demonstrated sincere care (Jacobson *et al.,* 2005:612; Sağnak, 2010:1145; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011:18), concern and appreciation for others. The principal's leadership practice also links up with the spiritual leadership theory (Taylor *et al.,* 2007: 402; Thompson, 2004:61) and moral and transformational leadership theories. It is crucial to care about the needs, value and feelings of individuals when working from a caring perspective (Glanz, 2010:75). As principal he attempted to inspire his followers to higher levels of commitment through the values he espoused and tried to meet the emotional needs of followers (Sağnak, 2010:1137; Robbins & Decenzo, 2007:249; Van Eeden *et al*., 2008:225).

It was not only an interest in and care about people that were important to the principal, but also their continuous growth and development (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe & Aelterman, 2008:161).

4.3 Developing the potential of others: 'You must empower your people'

Previous studies of Steyn (2007; 2009a) indicated the principal's passion for empowering others, which he also confirmed in his narrative. He believed that managers don't develop people effectively although 'leaders are everywhere' and 'everyone is actually a leader'. Creative ways, such as benchmarking with 'the very best in the world' after identifying the shortcomings in the school, mentoring new and beginner teachers, in-school workshops and sponsoring staff members to attend suitable workshops, was used to develop staff abilities. In his text message he wrote that "continued, selective training and development are the greatest tasks of the principal". He believed that he needed to empower people beyond himself so that the staff could run the school without his leadership. The principal considered the crux of empowerment as 'ownership', which he believed was the secret of successful businesses. To attain ownership he employed "very fine methods to develop joint responsibility" among staff, students and parents because he was of the opinion that "everyone has an unbelievable say and value."

Successful empowerment requires the identification of individual's talents before sending them on appropriate workshops. He explained that teachers who "are administratively talented ... are brilliant people" and that they should not 'work with people', because their "gift is to work with computers and admin and do that sort of thing". According to him the 'right' people should be sent to workshops to avoid unhappiness among staff. He criticised many official professional development programmes and therefore sent teachers on 'the best courses'. He explained: "You must buy the best quality material in the world and you sometimes have to almost force them [to attend], and you must accredit them." He wanted to believe that the result of teacher's successful development made them do things for him "not because they had to, but because they really wanted to ... and hopefully they enjoyed doing it".

In the school's annual staff development programmes the principal provided daily opportunities for staff collaboration during staff openings in the morning. He also invited experts, showed DVDs or arranged workshops as part of the school's weekly staff meetings.

The principal's stance on teacher development and the necessity of appropriate opportunities for development were confirmed by Danielson (2007:19). Leaders should, however, recognise the abilities and potential of staff so that they can be empowered in the organisation (Nel *et al.,* 2008:369) as the principal did. However, to ensure staff's commitment, their involvement in decision making is required, and ample opportunities are provided where their knowledge and skills can be employed (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2010:36).

To develop role players effectively, the principal regarded his own development as crucial (Steyn, 2007; Steyn, 2010). In his narrative he confirmed the necessity of a leader's self-development. If school leaders did not grow, he considered such leaders as mere 'fakes'. Moreover, he believed that his development would impact the development of others. He considered his development as an 'unbelievable responsibility'. He explained:

> The principle is, if you have arrived, the writing is on the wall ... The whole thing is self-development – I think that's the most important. If you are not growing, you are dying … You must search, you must do research, you must listen, you

> must look, you must attend courses, you must listen … You must force yourself ... Especially on your specific role and skills.

Developing and empowering himself and others should impact the approach to education. In this regard he referred to two photographs of schools, the one 50 years old and the other a current picture of a school. He compared their approaches to education and believed that nothing had changed in the school system.

> The world is growing, so education must also grow. Your methodology must grow, the way you approach the child [must change] ... So the [main] thing is to keep up; a lot of research is being done and a person must listen to people. I know that what works in place A will not necessarily work in place B, but you must find out what's important for you, in your environment.

It is clear from the findings that the principal valued teachers, their talents and their growth. These findings were also supported by the literature and moral and transformational leadership theories. He identified and acknowledged the professional needs of teachers (Jacobson *et al.,* 2005:613; Raihani, 2008:491) and provided appropriate opportunities for their professional development (Reyes & Wagstaff, 2005:111). This implies that principals need to have the ability to continuously monitor what is needed to develop a person, the organisation and/or community as a whole (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2010:41).

Principals, through their transformational influence, can play a crucial role in encouraging teacher participation and development, and establish conducive conditions in which influence from colleagues can thrive (Printy, 2010:117; Höög, Johansson & Olofson, 2005:597). Transformational leadership also allows followers to emerge as leaders in the school which elevates both the leader and the follower (Dobbs & Walker, 2010:10; Harris, 2007:322; Norris *et al.,* 2002:85). Such leaders do not lead from the top of the organisational pyramid, but from 'a web of interpersonal relationship'. This is based on their professional expertise and not on the line of authority (Murphy, 2002:188). They are not subjected to top-down decisions, but are able to influence the functioning of the school (Singh, 2005:11). The study of Meyer, Macmillan and Northfield (2009:184) found that teachers who

felt valued and participated in decision-making became more committed to their work. It is primarily through principals' efforts with staff to collaboratively discover and make changes to teachers' practice, that they influence student performance (Printy, 2010:125; Raihani, 2008:487). Such endeavours may have an impact on the creation of a school environment.

4.4 Developing a 'happy' school environment: 'You are in paradise'

The happiness of role players in the school, in particular the happiness of students, was very important for the principal. In the text message he wrote: "A workplace is a 'HOME' where everybody should buy into and experience happiness." He considered himself in a privileged position to motivate staff and contribute to the happiness of all role players. The principal believed that as staff they worked 'in paradise'. He often reminded teachers of the song of Phil Colins: "Another day for you and me in Paradise" (Steyn, 2006:12, Steyn, 2007:273), because he was convinced that teachers could make a difference in the lives of their students. For him teachers should come to school 'with a song in his [and her] heart' since this could 'excite' students. The principal believed that appointing 'the right people', whose 'hearts were in it' contributed to his successful leadership. With his own "very few talents … the school must actually have been an average to below-average school".

The principal explained the impact of his emphasis on people's happiness at the school:

> What I've seen is that children were spontaneous and happy ... A mother once told me that she is so happy. Her child doesn't even say hello to her in the morning, but when the child sees me, she jumps out out of the car and runs over to say hello. She embraced me ... It meant a lot to me.

Although the principal considered his influence on the school environment as important during his term in office, it was even more important for him that the school would thrive after he had retired. He explained that if the school collapsed after he had left, it was his 'fault': "The greatest gift that I could have given to the school was that I could establish a place, and it's been doing better since I left. That's a fact."

The findings are supported by the literature and his leadership was consistent with the theoretical framework. Moral and transforma-

tional leaders, in particular, shape the school culture by communicating core values, supporting the school's heart and soul, acknowledging the hard work and commitment of staff, and by celebrating accomplishments of staff, students and the community (Masitsa, 2005:206; Niemann & Kotzé, 2006:622; Peterson & Deal, 1998:30). It is reasonable to suggest that at least part of the success sustained by this school principal was a result of disposition and focus on people and their happiness. Trompenaars and Voerman (2010:33) believe that the positive way of working with people has huge implications for the organisational environment. As in the case of Ramsey's study (2003:20) the principal played a key role in creating a healthy school climate where he wanted role players to feel "like living in a close-knit community". Such a conducive environment has the potential to assist every student to thrive (Elbot & Fulton, 2008:2), something which the principal tried to do with his effort to focus on them being in 'paradise'.

The principal's ideal to leave a school that will prosper after he left, links up the legacy leadership framework. According to the legacy leadership framework, the "changed lives" of staff provides a measure of the impact of leaders on the lives of their followers (Fry, Matherly, Wittington & Winston, 2007:8). Followers of legacy leaders internalise the values demonstrated by the leader which may lead to increased commitment and performance of followers even in the absence of such leaders.

5. Conclusion

What I hoped to accomplish with this study was to provide a valuable insight into the moral and transformational leadership practice of a school principal.

A principal is regarded as the key school leader and the most appropriate individual in the school who can exercise effective school leadership. However, school leadership occurs in particular school contexts and requires a deep understanding of the school, its staff, students and other role players.

According to Thompson (2004:62) "The most powerful and sustainable progress in educational change may not result from wilful efforts to plan, control, determine, and push forward, but from an openness of heart and mind that allow more powerful possibilities to unfold". The study revealed the vital role of values, in particular religious values,

which served as a point of departure in the principal's approach to leadership. As a Christian, it was his love, respect and care for individuals that were central in his leadership practice.

This study, as in Pruzan's study (2008:112), shows that the principal drew on his spirituality as he led the school. By doing this he found deeper meaning in his leadership calling and satisfaction, happiness and 'living with harmony' between his values, thoughts and actions (Pruzan, 2008:112). The values that he demonstrated also included his passion to develop the potential of staff and students. It was particularly his focus on the professional development and empowerment of staff that he tried to bring about behavioural changes that could impact teachers' performance, and ultimately the development of students' potential. To achieve this, he considered his self-development as crucial to be in a position to assist them in their professional development. These aspects all contributed to the principal's ideal of creating a 'paradise' and 'home' for people in the school, one in which they were happy.

Through the sharing of the principal's leadership experiences, this study could serve as a valuable resource and lead to similar studies that could enhance the sharing of leadership experiences of successful school principals, especially in South Africa. I agree with Kelly and Saunders (2010:139) who state: "Effective headship requires the incumbent to achieve a balance of action over time and across a range of behaviours – a balance that will be different in different schools at different times – and a headteacher's internal operational accountability for achieving the school's agreed outcomes lies at the heart of that task."

Despite the enlightening findings there is also a limitation in the study. It concerns the complex interplay between the contextual factors within the school and the exercise of school leadership. As such the statement of Fry and Kriger (2009:1667) is very appropriate: "Clearly there still is a need for leadership theories to be developed that can increase our understanding of the broader and often subtle contexts within which effective leadership takes place."

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