



Leadership and moral literacy in intercultural schools

Leadership and
moral literacy

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore what developing moral literacy for leaders in intercultural schools will mean.

Design/methodology/approach – Relevant literature on moral literacy, leadership, intercultural schools and social learning is brought together and integrated to develop an understanding of the intricacies of leading for moral literacy.

Findings – The foundation for developing moral literacy in intercultural schools requires leaders to become knowledgeable, cultivate moral virtues and develop moral imaginations as well as to possess moral reasoning skills. In intercultural settings these components focus on openly addressing, and indeed exposing, issues of class, culture and equity. The elements which form the basis for improved moral literacy are intimately connected with school life and community through learning. Leaders must simultaneously develop their own and their communities' moral literacy through promoting and structuring community-wide learning through participatory moral dialogue. This may involve sharing purpose, asking hard questions and exposing and acknowledging identities.

Originality/value – This article attempts to apply moral literacy to leading in intercultural schools and suggests that learning holds the key to moral development.

Keywords Schools, Leadership, Learning

Paper type Conceptual paper

Our purpose in this article is to explore what developing moral literacy means in intercultural school contexts. To do this we will first outline our understanding of moral literacy and intercultural schools. Moral literacy involves leaders in learning, in context, a complex set of skills, abilities and habits that can be cultivated and enriched in schools in line with the needs, desires and aspirations of their communities (Tuana, 2003). Our discussion of intercultural schools will focus on those comprising of different, usually minority (in terms of the broader population), ethnic groups. We will then attempt to bring together some of the intricacies of moral literacy in intercultural schools using Tuana's components of moral literacy – becoming knowledgeable, cultivating moral virtues, developing moral reasoning skills, and nurturing moral imagination. Each component is defined and illustrated to explain what it might mean in intercultural schools.

We then argue that developing moral literacy requires an articulated dedication to open and ongoing learning throughout the school community. Communal learning may be best pursued through participatory moral dialogue. To promote this dialogue leaders act to stimulate and facilitate learning, and design strategies and actions which aim to make a difference in their school. Stimulating learning may involve multiple leadership actions, one of which is sharing moral purpose. Taking action that is based on learning may involve experimenting with culturally-responsible teaching methods.



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Moral literacy

Leadership must be ethical. It carries a responsibility not just to be personally moral, but to be a cause of “civic moral education” which leads to both self-knowledge and community awareness (Foster, 1989, p. 284).

Current literature is replete with calls to recognise the place of ethics in schools and for leaders to align school improvement agendas within a values-based moral purpose (Begley, 2004, 2006; Greenfield, 2004; Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992). The basic argument views schools as powerful agents of enculturation that are unavoidably and continuously engaged with moral and ethical issues (Begley, 1999; Hodgkinson, 1978, 1983; Leonard, 1999). Fullan (2003) emphasises moral purpose as a key ingredient in building and leading learning communities. He links moral purpose as both the ends and the means of sustained school performance:

... effective [school] cultures establish more and more progressive interactions in which demanding processes produce both good ideas and social cohesion. A sense of moral purpose is fuelled by a focus on value-added high expectations for all, raising capability, pulling together, and an ongoing hunger for improvement (Fullan, 2005, p. 59).

Having a defined moral purpose, whether it is enacted through a shared vision or in more concrete forms, is about exercising moral leadership. As Bogotch (2000, p. 2) states, educational leadership is a “deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power”. Arguments for the place of moral leadership are widely justified by the increased complexity of the environment within which leaders lead and must make decisions; where strong systemic pressures may at times drag them toward standardisation and uniformity. This argument locates leaders within working lives that are fast moving, where insecurity is rampant and trusted community relationships appear to be in decline. Within such environments, school leaders encounter multiple ethical situations and values conflicts that make their work more and more complex and uncertain (Begley and Johansson, 2003).

Moral leadership, then, can be seen as leading a school in an unsteady environment towards improvements on multiple fronts, from academic outcomes to equity for all, while maximising the chances that related decisions are morally sound and defensible. The formation and exercise of moral leadership is not as simple as doing things a leader considers “right”, but involves the development of knowledge, empathies, virtues and skills, or what is labelled moral literacy.

Recent leadership and leadership development literature converges on the need for leaders to develop higher levels of moral literacy (Begley and Johansson, 2003). Although more comprehensive definitions are available, in simple terms, moral literacy relates to the conceptual and practical capacity of school leaders to make and encourage morally grounded decisions within an increasingly complex and confusing environment (Begley and Johansson, 2003). Such an environment is typified by contradictory values, uncertain and unpredictable decision situations, and problems bereft of simple logical solutions; or even any definitive solutions at all. In short, moral literacy is important, but making moral decisions is difficult because leadership does not operate in a vacuum. Leadership decisions are unavoidably complex as they are connected to and interconnected with different contexts simultaneously, and these contexts themselves are often shifting. Making decisions becomes even more difficult

and confusing when educative issues become tangled with those around culture, ethnicity and social class.

Because of the complex nature of leadership contexts and the uneven nature of morals and ethics, especially as applied to education, moral literacy, like other forms of literacy is not something which develops naturally, nor is it something which is mastered by a certain point of time. As Tuana (2003, p. 2) notes, "...moral literacy requires training and practice throughout our lives". In other words, developing moral literacy is about ongoing learning, where moral or ethical dimensions of leading form an integral part of formal and informal leadership and institutional development. Like any other form of literacy, moral literacy is best developed in schools iteratively in partnership with the broader school community. In 2003 Tuana suggested three basic components of moral literacy – becoming knowledgeable, cultivating moral virtues, and developing moral reasoning skills. Her 2007 framework built upon these by adding moral sensitivity and moral imagination. These integrated components form a base for understanding and developing moral literacy, and as such, the basis for learning.

The development of moral literacy is necessary for school leaders regardless of their personal and working contexts, but its efficacy and exercise is in many ways dependent on the context within which it is to be exercised. The context we focus on here is that of intercultural schools. We suggest that the development of moral literacy may be further complicated when a leader's traditional socio-cultural orientations diverge from those of their school community, for example, students, parents, or teachers. This context appears important given the growing number of leaders working in such situations. Leaders in intercultural schools face confusion, as well as opportunity, due to the interplay of the divergent cultural values, inequality of opportunity, and often, social disadvantage, carried by their students, teachers, and broader communities; as well as those confronting them through policy and other education agencies. As such, developing moral literacy in intercultural schools presents leaders and those interested in their development with a unique set of issues.

Intercultural schools

In very general terms, intercultural schools can take any number of forms which, like the term intercultural (or multicultural) education (Coddling and Bergen, 2004), defy exact definition. Their configurations may relate to assorted conceptions of diversity, such as social class, gender, ethnicity, physical or intellectual disability and so on (Blackmore, 2006), or may be classified as voluntary or involuntary minorities (see Garcia, 2002). Although intercultural schools vary in terms of make-up, depth and emphasis, and in relation to context, each of these groups or sub-groups carry their own sets of values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours which they bring to their institutional environment.

Our discussion of intercultural schools focuses on those comprised of different, usually minority (in terms of the broader population), ethnic groups. In many, but certainly not in all cases, such ethnic groups also tend to be classified in lower socioeconomic bands and generally fail to perform at the same level as other students. For example, in the USA, "high failure and dropout rates, over identification of behaviour problems, and placement in low-level academic programs are particularly prevalent among minoritized children" (Shields, 2004, p. 111). The same is generally true throughout continental Europe, Australia, Singapore, Canada, and Great Britain.

Even in apparently homogeneous societies, such as China, intercultural schools are becoming more commonplace.

In many societies intercultural schools are found in depressed urban areas but very different configurations are now becoming more common across a range of contexts. Not all intercultural schools comprise low socio-economic-status (SES) or even minority students. For example, the exponential growth of so-called international schools throughout the world presents a vivid example of intercultural schools catering to elite minority or “local” majority students. These schools are quickly moving from their colonially-driven role of educating the expatriate elite to meeting the needs of multiple cultural groups and increasingly diversified societies.

As is the case here, intercultural schools can be conceptualised in relation to the extent to which different value sets “fit” together in a school. Fit refers to the congruence, or lack thereof, at various levels between the cultural values which underpin the actions and behaviours of the different groups which comprise a school and its wider community (Walker and Chen, 2007). For example, these may range from schools catering to multiple ethnic/cultural groups or schools comprised of a single minority group within a community dominated by a majority group. The concept of fit may be applied in different ways. For example, there may be fit, or otherwise, between the values of the student body and a school’s more immediate internal and external community. Or, it may refer to the fit between leaders’ and/or teachers’ cultural values and those of the broader school community, as comprised of students, parents and other community groups (Walker and Chen, 2007). It is argued that the presence or absence of congruence shapes a key context within which leaders seek to positively respond and intervene, and also where they seek to enhance their own and schools’ levels of moral literacy.

Moral literacy is important to school leaders and others working in intercultural schools. To make a difference in these schools leaders need to know, connect to, and be responsive to their communities, even if values, expectations, and traditions diverge. We know that leaders improve learning and teaching indirectly by influencing staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions (Leithwood *et al.*, 2007), and through modelling, monitoring, and dialogue (Southworth, 2005), but they are also obliged to build moral literacy throughout their school communities. Moral literacy is not something that leaders or others intuitively know; rather, it is learned and refined on an ongoing basis within the context of their communities.

Components of moral literacy

We now turn to what the development of moral literacy in intercultural contexts might mean and look like. To do this we meld elements of what Tuana (2003) described as the basic components of moral literacy – becoming knowledgeable, cultivating moral virtues, and developing moral reasoning skills, with what she (Tuana, 2007) labels the fundamental elements of moral literacy – ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills and moral imagination. For our purposes here we hold that moral sensitivity can be captured within becoming knowledgeable and cultivating moral virtues and that moral reasoning is common across both conceptualisations. Tuana’s recent work on moral imagination, however, deserves separate attention when discussing intercultural school contexts. Whatever discursive framework is used it should be noted that each of the elements are inseparable in that they interact with and feed each other to shape and

inform leaders' moral literacy (Tuana, 2007). We will now describe and briefly illustrate Tuana's components, which underpin the understanding and exercise of moral literacy for leaders and more broadly across schools.

Becoming knowledgeable

The personal and institutional development of moral literacy is dependent on relevant prerequisite knowledge. To illustrate this component Tuana explains that before scientists can design and conduct worthwhile research they need to be familiar with relevant applicable knowledge. If they do not have this knowledge, the purpose, conduct and usefulness of their outcomes can be challenged. They are well informed about a range of facts and theories, including those which may contradict their perspective. Knowledge may be acquired and accumulated in a range of ways from formal avenues to more experiential and reflective modes, or through formal education to professional discussion.

The same logic can be applied to education. To be effective classroom practitioners, teachers require a high level of content knowledge, regardless of their expertise in presentation or communication. Teachers also need basic knowledge in other areas, including effective classroom management, student counselling, cooperative learning, individualised learning and child psychology. If such formal and tacit knowledge is lacking it is difficult for them to engage in worthwhile discussions about student care and improvement. If teachers are to be responsible moral agents, they need knowledge of students' circumstances, problems, values and broader cultures.

Turning specifically to knowledge supporting moral leadership in intercultural schools, four interactive knowledge domains are suggested. The first domain refers to self-knowledge, which includes personal values, biases, vision and so on. The second domain relates to community/social knowledge, including cultural values and norms, social positioning, politics, teacher-student match etc. Leader knowledge (role, staff, influence, competency, place, etc.), and curriculum/pedagogical knowledge (approaches, relevance and effectiveness) comprise the third and fourth domains respectively. These different forms of knowledge combine and then either converge or diverge to form the shifting foundation of moral literacy.

Self-knowledge

Self-knowledge entails critiquing personal beliefs about justice, purpose, culture and ethnicity. Leaders in intercultural schools push themselves to look beneath their pre-determined worldviews and look deeply into the community for causes of social injustice and how this impacts school life. Lindsay *et al.* (1999) suggest that such knowledge in intercultural schools is about respecting differences, assessing present personal knowledge and beliefs and making necessary adaptations to beliefs and practices. Knowledge of self within an intercultural school is essential if leaders are to be role models. As Riehl (2000) suggests: "School leaders promote culturally responsive teaching by demonstrating a culturally responsive approach themselves in their relations with parents, teachers and students" (cited in Leithwood and Riehl, 2005, p. 23).

Deeper self-knowledge helps leaders challenge their existing worldviews and determine how and where they see themselves in intercultural schools. Osler (2006, p. 140) challenges existing leadership orthodoxy in two ways, firstly by pointing out

that current leadership discourse positions leaders in intercultural schools as “outsiders” put into schools to “cope with diversity” as an exceptional or special activity – one where principals are to “manage diversity to counteract disadvantage”. This is set against black or minority leaders’ perspectives which regard intercultural “school communities as advantaged rather than exceptional”. Second, Osler believes current leadership schemas focus overly on cultural or ethnic diversity, without linking them explicitly with issues of equity. Such views are commonly held unconsciously by school leaders until they are consciously challenged.

Knowledge of self is about leaders unearthing and challenging their own preconceived notions of culture, ethnicity, equity, and purpose. This is important, but is only one aspect of the knowledge required to develop moral literacy. As Starratt (2005) notes, knowledge development involves more than leaders simply clarifying and articulating personal values, beliefs, and purpose. Begley (1996, p. 407) states that “effective school leadership practices need to be, not only contextually differentiated but also sensitive to the value orientations of the various educational stakeholders”.

Community/social knowledge

Community/social knowledge is melded with self-knowledge and entails leaders building their own and others’ knowledge of their community. This is done on at least three fronts. First, leaders are aware of the cultural values, traditions, and norms of the community group/s which comprise their schools and how these influence their worldviews and actions. This means viewing the school and broader society through, for example, the cultural lens of students, parents, and teachers. However, it is not that simple; in fact, community/social knowledge also means putting aside the focus on culture and ethnicity. Dimmock *et al.* (2005) found an example of this in their study of multi-ethnic schools in England. One of the head teachers interviewed explained that both within and outside the school white students were categorised in terms of SES, while coloured students were labelled in terms of their ethnicity. This had the effect of discounting economic and class distinctions as being equally influential within as well as between cultures.

The second knowledge front is that leaders recognise that community knowledge is not just about recognising cultural diversity, but that this interacts with conditions, such as racism and other social inequities that influence the community (Henze, 2000; Osler, 2006). In other words, community knowledge anchoring moral literacy rejects the assumption that culture lies at the core of all social and educational disadvantage. Shields (2004, p. 126) stresses this point by suggesting that leaders take responsibility for understanding and communicating that, “some students come from difficult or impoverished family situations, some are not fluent in language, others from ethnic and cultural traditions in which parents who have not experienced the structures of westernised education don’t blame the system”.

Third, leaders in intercultural settings know that values, norms and beliefs vary as much within cultural groups as they do in society and that grouping based just on ethnicity or location risks over generalisation and bland stereotyping. False impressions that all members of an easily identifiable group hold the same values and/or that cultural homogeneity requires less active understanding of individual and sub-group values negates sophisticated community understanding.

Leader knowledge

Leader knowledge is closely linked to community/social knowledge but focuses more on the internal make up of schools. One important knowledge aspect relates to teaching staff and another to the shape of current “formal” leader knowledge. Leaders in intercultural schools first gain knowledge of their staff members’ backgrounds, beliefs, and aspirations not just their technical competence. For example, as efforts intensify to recruit teachers from multiple cultural groups, having a multicultural staff adds a new dimension of required knowledge and understanding. Mabokela and Madsen (2003, p. 104) cite the comments of one African American teacher in the USA concerning fellow teachers: “Teachers here think I know everything about black children, but I never grew up in the city and never experienced the difficulties these students have had . . . Yet, the teachers expect me to have access to every Black student, and I find that really troubling.”

A related problem here is that of tokenism. Research in the USA has shown that token representation of minorities can highlight their visibility within the school community. Mabokela and Madsen (2003, p. 102) found that visibility could lead to the marginalisation of minority staff and that boundary heightening influenced African-American teachers’ interactions with Caucasian American teachers in terms of differences in pedagogical and management strategies, debunking negative stereotypes held about children of colour and negotiating insider-outsider status. In terms of the latter, minority teachers “were seen as insiders who provided insights about students of color”, but, on the other hand, “they were treated as outsiders whose narrowly defined African-American expertise resulted in their being isolated and unable to attain informal social power”. Based on such knowledge, leaders should see and value teachers beyond their cultural or ethnic origins.

Second, all leaders require particular technical, theoretical, and conceptual knowledge to lead a school. If we accept this, it is axiomatic that they also need relevant knowledge to make a difference in an intercultural school and to become morally literate. In some settings, at least in terms of formal knowledge, this may not be readily provided. While commenting on leadership development in England, Osler (2006, p. 134) states: “My experience suggests it was possible for an aspiring head teacher working in a culturally diverse city, such as Birmingham or Leicester, to register for a master’s degree in educational administration in the 1990s and to complete the course successfully without having to examine race equity issues”. She claims that dominant leadership theories present only limited perspectives and that key insights from minority school leaders remain almost invisible in the current leadership literature. To use Osler’s (2006, p. 136) words: “Current leadership knowledge assumes a leadership which is white (largely male) and a client group from diverse backgrounds.” It may also be true that mainstream leadership literature is seriously lacking in knowledge of multi-ethnic schooling.

Curriculum/pedagogical knowledge

Curriculum/pedagogical knowledge is necessary if leaders are to develop their own and schools’ moral literacy. This entails combining knowledge of community, staff and self with knowledge of curriculum, learning styles, and varied pedagogies. It also involves knowing how these might interact with or be influenced by culture and/or social background. As Leithwood and Riehl (2005, p. 23) note: “Children in diverse contexts

may benefit from culturally responsive teaching, in which instruction is adapted to build on the norms, values, knowledge, skills, and discourse patterns associated with students' cultural backgrounds". For example, students from more collectivist cultures may shun pedagogies which focus on individual competition. Garcia (2002) suggests how cooperative learning techniques used successfully with Hispanic students in the USA "match" their cooperative social and family structures and practices. Likewise, Cooper and Jordon (2003) note in their discussion of African-American male students that minority students can be better served educationally when traditional notions of teaching and learning are reconceptualised. Different cognitive strategies used by students for learning have implications for teachers in their choice of teaching strategies and for leaders in promoting meaningful curricula, learning cultures and practices in schools. Given that cognitive processes and technical skills for learning vary across cultures and communities, such knowledge is vital for making decisions morally (Walker and Dimmock, 2005).

It is apparent, however, that becoming knowledgeable involves more than just seeing or knowing within or across the knowledge domains; it involves being able to apply knowledge by interpreting the ethical content of various situations in intercultural schools. Such interpretation is referred to as moral sensitivity. In very basic terms, this includes what Tuana (2007, p. 6) calls ethics "spotting", or being able to decide if a certain episode actually involves ethical issues and so presents a moral dilemma. For example, a parent of a secondary student complains that a teacher is forcing his daughter to work with a group that includes boys and that this is culturally unacceptable. The teacher, however, insists the grouping is necessary to combat gender discrimination at a classroom and school level. Such a situation also illustrates moral complexity, or what Tuana calls the moral intensity of a situation. This intensity, "is often linked to the seriousness of the harm and/or urgency of a response to action". So what does the leader do? There is no easy answer, but by "knowing" the diverse cultures comprising the school, she sees (is sensitive to) the situation as more than just another parental complaint, frames it in moral terms and recognises that how the subsequent multifaceted dilemma is managed can have significant consequences for the school.

The "knowledge" component of moral literacy suggests that as moral agents, school leaders must be properly and broadly informed before they can make moral decisions (Tuana, 2003). They use their knowledge to recognise when situations involve ethical issues and learn to gauge the moral intensity of these issues. Knowledge comes in different structured (precise demographic data and profiles) and unstructured (stories and dialogue) packages, which leaders must deal with, store, and process simultaneously. It is also their responsibility to communicate, monitor, and model the development of this knowledge throughout the school community. All of this can be difficult given the complex, ever shifting life of school leaders and the particular demands of working in intercultural settings.

Cultivating moral virtues

Tuana (2003, p. 2) defines "common moral values" as, "virtues that are shared across cultures (and) include honesty, fairness, respect, responsibility and caring". Espousing these values, however, means little in terms of moral literacy if virtues are simply stated rather than lived and genuinely modelled. Hence, cultivating moral virtues is

about living certain values so that others can see and understand them, and practice them themselves.

There is little argument about the necessity of modelling virtuous values in any school setting, and particularly in intercultural schools, but what “moral virtues” are or mean in such contexts is certainly contested. Universalistic values, similar to those suggested by Tuana, are present, however, in other forums. For example, Shields (2004, p. 128) suggests transformative education leaders in diverse settings adopt a set of guiding criteria which includes justice, empathy, democracy, and optimism “to act as benchmarks for the development of socially just education”. Likewise, Osler (2006, p. 141) notes citizenship and stresses equity and diversity as the dual principles underpinning inclusive intercultural communities. She also stresses the interrelatedness of values and other factors in such communities. “Models of leadership which are based on recognition of diversity which fail to acknowledge structural inequities are likely to explain equitable outcomes by locating the problem in minority communities or by explaining them in terms of cultural misunderstandings”.

In a very different setting, the recent GLOBE study (House *et al.*, 2004) investigated the meaning and exercise of leadership across 62 societies. Part of the study’s findings identified attributes that people across cultures perceived as making effective or ineffective leaders. Analysis broke these down into three distinct categories: factors that people say are associated with effective leadership (universal positive leader attributes) regardless of their cultural context; factors that people associated with ineffective leadership practice (universal negative leader attributes) regardless of cultural context; and factors that in some cultures were seen as enhancing effective leadership, but in others as impeding it (culturally contingent leader attributes). Among the universal positives were just, honest, positive, dependable, and trustworthy.

The cultivation of moral virtues according to Shields (2004, pp. 118, 117) involves “telling it like it is”. She illustrates this concept by citing how her Caucasian and non-Caucasian students define “colour-blindness”. The first group saw the term as meaning, “. . . they do not see difference; they are tolerant; they treat everyone alike.” The second group explained their position: “What are you missing?” . . . They explain that when others ignore differences in appearance, it is likely they are also negating more fundamental differences in worldview, culture and tradition”. Shields labels the tendency to ignore ethnicity and class as “pathologies of silence”, or “misguided attempts to act justly, to display empathy, and to create democratic and optimistic communities”. Her point in terms of cultivating the virtues associated with moral literacy is that if leaders do not openly acknowledge, discuss, value and validate different forms of diversity through action they will not be debated, “believed” or adopted in schools.

Developing moral reasoning skills

“Along with critical-reasoning skills of identifying unwarranted assumptions or prejudices, moral reasoning requires identifying the values at play in any moral situation” (Tuana, 2003, p. 2). Such reasoning operates at multiple levels and is complex in that it requires attention to “rights and duties, codes of action, the intentions of actors, and the consequences of actions”. This calls for openly engaging with and listening to others, critiquing personal and organisational positions, debating

the ethical implications of situations and decisions and, as noted above, accepting responsibility for beliefs and actions and the congruence therein. In other words, the skills of moral reasoning stem from the willingness by leaders to investigate their own values and beliefs and openly identify and confront their and their school communities' preconceived prejudices or stereotypes. Tuana (2007) also suggests that moral reasoning involves building understanding (knowledge of) different ethical frameworks, and how these integrate.

Moral reasoning is about developing the skills needed to work through the many ethical problems that arise in intercultural schools. Associated skills include critical thinking, creativity, and flexibility. At its simplest, moral reasoning involves "working through" ethical dilemmas or situations that involve decisions and being able to explain and justify choices morally. In other words, if leaders are to think about, articulate and defend decisions based on true moral standards, rather than self-interest, they require practical moral structures as well as sharp interpersonal skills.

A number of models have been suggested to help leaders develop moral reasoning. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) built a framework specifically for managing ethical dilemmas. Their model was built around models of justice, caring, and critique which were amalgamated into a fourth model, which they called profession. They placed the "best interests of the student" at the centre of their model (Stefkovich and O'Brien, 2004). Furman (2004, p. 222) added the ethic of community to the discussion and framed it in process terms. Her ethic seems particularly relevant for developing moral literacy in intercultural schools, she defines it thus:

An ethic of community devolves from (this) analysis of community as process ... an ethic of community means that administrators, teachers, school staffs, students, parents and other community members in schools commit to the processes of community.

Skills required within such a community fit neatly with intercultural settings – listening with respect, striving for knowing, understanding others, communicating effectively, working in teams, engaging in dialogue (also see Shields, 2004), and creating forums so that all voices are heard. In short, in school communities, moral reasoning is built around social interaction. Culture, ethnicity or equity should not be the centre of all such interactions, but should certainly be prevalent.

An important caveat runs through the development of moral reasoning in intercultural contexts. This is that engaging openly calls for leaders to challenge, but not deny, their own values and ways of working. There is a difference between learning to see the origins of one's own values in concert with others and surrendering these completely. Put simply, moral literacy for intercultural leaders does not suggest there is one "right way of doing things". Leaders see cultural influences as opportunities to expand their knowledge of learning styles and their repertoire of teaching techniques, classroom management and curriculum tailoring (Mabokela and Madsen, 2003). In fact, Tuana suggests that developing moral reasoning, through a process of debate and introspection, may in fact result in leaders becoming more strongly attached to their beliefs as they are forced to justify them more fully (Walker and Chen, 2007).

Moral imagination

An important recent addition to understanding moral literacy is that of moral imagination (Tuana, 2007). While integrating with other components, the concept is

important to build moral literacy in intercultural school contexts and thus deserves further explanation. In generic terms moral imagination goes beyond listening to what members of school communities say, to attempting to develop empathy for their values, beliefs, attitudes and actions. As such, it is about confronting values conflicts through developing an ability to creatively envision possible solutions to these, including the possible consequences which may result (in further or even more complex ethical dilemmas). In essence, moral imagination enhances contextual sensitivity, logical processes and skills, knowledge, virtue and reasoning by highlighting emotions as a key ingredient of moral literacy.

Moral imagination encourages leaders in intercultural schools to “walk in the shoes” of their communities as a way of empathising and appreciating where they are coming from and to work, with their communities, to generate what may be very different or radical solutions to culturally or socially ingrained dilemmas. The words are pretty here, but the enactment is tough. For example, it is difficult for a white, middle-class male principal to empathise, rather than sympathise, with a community comprised of recent refugees from Sudan or Iraq – the cultural gulf is probably significant. The point of moral imagination seems to be to move thinking beyond ingrained cultural logic and, through this very process reinforce leadership commitment to social justice, equity and divergent thinking. As such, for leaders, it becomes a matter of living ethically and modelling this for others to see.

“Learning” to be morally literate

The interrelated components of moral literacy not only help to define it in intercultural schools but also illustrate some of the complexities involved. At least six conclusions may be drawn from the discussion of these components within intercultural schools.

First, becoming morally literate does not just happen; it is consciously and openly promoted and built. As such, it requires different forms of knowledge, certain ways of thinking and a range of cognitive and practical interpersonal skills. In intercultural schools understanding values, knowledge, and even skills are influenced by the cultural and social make-up of the constituents, and these often diverge markedly from those of the leader and dominant social norms. Second, the development of moral literacy in schools is certainly not a static exercise; rather it is a continually evolving learning process. Given that culture, and to a lesser extent class, are constantly shifting, adapting and evolving, the values knowledge and skills required to become both morally and educationally effective in intercultural schools must be constantly reviewed – this mean engaging in continuous learning.

Third, moral literacy is unavoidably interpersonal and often contextually dependent; it is, therefore, not a literacy which leaders can master in isolation. This is particularly important in intercultural schools where leaders may be culturally and socially detached from their communities. Unless they engage purposefully with the values, traditions, and beliefs of their communities, moral literacy will remain undeveloped. Fourth, although leaders work to develop their own moral literacy, by virtue of their place in schools they are also responsible for its development at an institutional level, and even beyond. In intercultural schools, this means moving beyond the “coping with diversity” mentality, which remains common, to positively “working with and in diversity”.

Fifth, the exercise of moral literacy is not restricted to some “parts” of the school only. Rather, the need for moral literacy cuts across school functions, structural and cultural relationships, classroom learning and social connections, and so on. Given that moral literacy is about being able to make ethically-based decisions across a school, and that culture and class influence even the most inconspicuous areas of school life, developing moral literacy is important for all, including students, and to take it even further, educational policy makers, system leaders and other “outsiders” who hold sway in schools. Finally, given the interpersonal, learning, institutional, and social emphasis of moral literacy, people’s individual and collective development may best be pictured as an ongoing, communal learning process. The complex, often socially and financially disadvantaged, nature of intercultural school contexts suggests that community learning is essential if moral literacy is to develop.

Developing and leading a morally literate intercultural school involves ongoing communal learning. Framing moral literacy within a learning process recognises that in practical terms, for example, becoming knowledgeable does not happen in a vacuum. Moral virtues are culturally and socially contested and defined; moral reasoning abilities can only be sharpened through practice and moral imagination can only develop through understanding cultural values and perspectives. In other words, Tuana’s (2003) key components of knowledge, virtues, imagination and skills may be usefully framed in schools by adopting a learning emphasis.

Building on the work of theorists such as Wenger (1998), Furman (2004, p. 224) suggests three sets of communal processes to guide ethical practice. As such, these processes can be seen to act as the learning vehicles through which moral literacy is enabled and embedded in intercultural schools. Furman’s communal processes are: “processes for knowing, understanding, and valuing; processes for full participation and inquiry and processes for working toward the common good”. According to Osler (2006), such learning processes move leaders beyond simply “coping with diversity” to seeing it as a powerful force within schools.

Learning to be morally literate in intercultural schools is anchored in school/community dialogue and participation. Neither of these, however, happens naturally in many schools, and they are often undertaken by those in formal positions of power. If this is the case, their “learning value” is severely restricted and does little to connect with real school issues. The leader’s role then becomes one of fashioning formal or informal structures and environments which embed dialogue and participation as an ongoing ingredient of school life. This can be done in a number of interrelated ways. Among these are asking hard questions, sharing purpose, and exposing identity (individual and shared). The learning which accumulates from stimulated participatory dialogue must then be translated into leader and school action which makes a difference. Over time, collective learning informs practices that reflect both the pursuit of shared enterprise and the accompanying social relations. These practices then become the property of a kind of community that Wenger (1998, p.45) calls “communities of practice”.

To summarise, in order to develop their own and schools’ moral literacy, leaders in intercultural schools need to become and help others become knowledgeable, be sensitive to the intensity of ethical situations, cultivate moral virtues, develop community-wide moral reasoning skills, and build their own and others’ moral imaginations. Doing this calls for an articulated dedication to open and ongoing

learning throughout school communities. For such learning to happen, there is a need for broad participation and “moral dialogue” (Shields, 2004) – or what can be labelled participatory moral dialogue. This does not simply happen in schools, leaders need to take action both to stimulate and facilitate learning, and then turn it into strategies and actions that make a difference to their schools. Stimulating learning may involve multiple strategies (which may indeed be culturally contingent themselves), some of which involve leaders in sharing purpose, hard questioning and exposing, and acknowledging identities. Taking action based on community learning may involve experimenting with culturally responsible teaching methods, connecting with key community and affiliated support groups to address issues of equity, forming broad-based decision groups to deal with social problems or even altering the school schedule to match community needs.

We will now briefly outline participatory moral dialogue and some of the leadership strategies leaders may engage in to develop and embed these in intercultural schools. It should be noted that the learning processes themselves mirror those in any school, but, as discussed above, the intricacies and environmental specifics within a school frame that inform these can differ significantly for schools in more heterogeneous settings.

Participatory moral dialogue

If we accept that a leader’s job in building a morally literate school is to fashion a moral purpose that not only reflects their community’s values but also helps to bind them together, it is important that they recognise everybody in and associated with the school, and that they actually construct a personal reality that contributes to its success (Whiteley, 1995). Learning for moral literacy entails dovetailing formal and informal structures that promote open and ongoing dialogue, and which invites real involvement by the community across cultural and social divides. Southworth (2005, p. 80) defines the leader’s role in facilitating dialogue as, “creating opportunities for teachers to talk with their colleagues and leaders . . .” Furman (2004) and Shields (2004, p. 115) frame dialogue more specifically in moral terms and claim that the facilitation of moral dialogue in contexts of diversity is one of the central interventions of leadership. Shields explains that dialogue can take multiple forms and have several purposes and stresses that it is, “not a weak concept of dialogue interpreted as strategies for communicating but a strong concept of dialogue as a way of being”. For dialogue to be used as a basis for learning in intercultural settings it has to be grounded in the community and respect (not necessarily accept) its diversity, in other words, it is inseparable from broad community participation.

Social learning theory provides a useful vehicle for framing the process of moral literacy in intercultural schools. The primary focus of Wenger’s (1998) social learning theory is on learning as social or community participation (also see Furman, 2004). Participation can be defined predominantly in terms of dialogue, which is vital if understanding is to gel in diverse settings. For example, Starratt (1993) suggests that there is often a false assumption that leaders and followers inhabit the same meaning-world. In reality, however, those who share a common space in a school inevitably negotiate meaning. Moreover, leaders in intercultural and multi-class schools cannot assume that their values are held by other members of the school community – be they students or teachers – or that attributes of meaning automatically cross ethnic, cultural or class divisions. Therefore, building

understanding through participative dialogue is an important expression of leadership. Such dialogue, however, does not just happen; it involves leadership stimulus and facilitation. One approach to this is to deliberately involve others in discussion and development of a school's moral purpose.

Sharing purpose

Regardless of a school's make-up, facilitating dialogue involves leaders in engaging others in sharing their individual perceptions and interpretations of school life in order to arrive at some common agreement on a course of action. Learning is woven into practice and indeed every aspect of school and classroom practice. Individual or institutional learning for moral literacy, however, is not learning without a purpose, instead, it is underpinned by a moral order. The task of leadership in intercultural schools is to create a moral purpose that binds leaders and members together in the practice of learning. In intercultural communities this means that leaders pay attention not only to the formal and concrete aspects of schools, but also to the more informal, subtle and symbolic aspects of their communities. They explicitly negotiate purpose with teachers, parents and students using questions such as: What is this school about? What is important here? What is right here? What do we believe in? Why do we function the way we do? How are we unique? How do I and how do others fit into the scheme of things? Such questions are infused with issues of community, culture, class, and equity. The communal pursuit of purpose frames the understanding of school and community life from which people derive "a sense of purpose and enriched meaning" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 1).

Leadership is imbued through learning and school practices; learning practices are informed by a moral purpose that makes sense to all school members. The process of developing the moral purpose is also a meaning-creation process in which leaders play a central role. Only when purpose and meaning realistically reflect the cultural values can parents, students and teachers have faith in schools and participate comfortably (Greenfield, 1973). The best indicator of a good school may well be the extent to which its image and actions reflect the needs, desires and shared purpose of its parents, teachers and students' cultural and social backgrounds (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 2).

Asking "hard questions"

Meaningful participative dialogue in intercultural schools is unlikely to happen unless previously taboo areas are exposed. This involves leaders asking questions beyond those asked in more culturally stable settings. In other words, the questions become much harder. Here, hard questions are those that plainly lay out issues of culture, racism, politics, social class, and diversity for the school community to discuss (Osler, 2006). Leaders socialised to hide behind political correctness or entrenched mono-cultural value systems, policy or formal communication requirements will not present themselves as moral leadership role models. Shields (2004, p. 127) suggests that any framework for moral literacy must value and acknowledge, not ignore complex issues of culture and colour. To use her words; "If strong relationships with all children are at the heart of educational equity, then it is essential to acknowledge differences in children's lived experiences. To ensure that we create schools that are socially just, educators overcome silences about such aspects as ethnicity and social class". Overcoming silence inevitably involves asking hard questions about understandings

of culture, race and equity and how they fit, or not, in schools. The difficulty of asking such questions openly should not be underestimated, in fact, in many circumstances considerable courage is required.

Exposing and acknowledging identities

Leaders involve themselves and others in finding out how to become as well as how to belong (Wenger, 1998), which involves exposing and acknowledging identities. Citing a study by Reyes *et al.* (1999), Reyes and Wagstaff (2005, p. 112) illustrate this in the case of migrant students. They reported:

... principals of schools successful with migrant students managed the meaning of what it meant to be a migrant student. Being a migrant student was not perceived as being negative; it was seen as an opportunity to travel, which was seen as a platform for learning. By managing the meaning of migrancy, the principals centered the conditions needed for migrant students to be an integral part of the school community...

Leaders encourage intercultural communities to “refer to their own personal purpose, values, vision, and courage” (Leider, 1996, p. 192), to help them articulate their identity. To do this leaders push themselves and others to challenge ingrained cognitive patterns and assumptions associated with race and culture. By exposing and acknowledging identities, leaders recognise that students, teachers, and others have lives outside the classroom and staffroom (Starratt, 2007) that are made up of family relationships, religions, traditions, and interests, which in intercultural schools may be far removed from the formal culture and structure of their school (Osler, 2006). In this sense, the moral imperative for leaders in intercultural schools is to create a learning environment where learners can be true to themselves and can discover who they want to be as well as who they have to be, often within multiple or unclear identities. This then forms a basis for improving moral literacy.

A clear sense of personal, educative, and cultural identity is necessary if schools are to make sense of the knowledge and virtues needed to make morally reasoned decisions in turbulent environments. Building moral communities through dialogue and participation, however, does not negate individuality; rather it situates it in a shared setting. As Wenger notes in his discussion of community learning, “[t]alking about identity in social terms is not denying individuality, but viewing the very definition of individuality as something that is part of the practice of specific communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 146). He further explains, “[w]e cannot become human by ourselves; it is through the interaction of the individual and the community that identity is continuously buffeted and reshaped” (Wenger, 1998, p. 41). In other words, there is a difference between being centred on being true to oneself and being self-centred (Starratt, 2007).

Leadership that is focused on moral literacy requires leaders to challenge themselves and assist others to find out how to be, as well as how to belong. A sense of belonging can only be forged when leaders view schools and their accompanying identities as communities (rather than just organisations) characterised by collaboration, affection, diversity, and sometimes misunderstandings instead of cold structures comprised of regulations, rules, and segregation. The task then of leadership is to bring together individual sets of cultural and social reality in order to form a holistic identity, a shared vision, and set of values. In intercultural schools, this can often take amazingly complex forms which require deep understanding of the multiple cultures within and around the organisation.

Action-oriented

Moral dialogue is about leaders helping their communities make sense of what happens in their schools and for those within these communities to experience life as meaningful. Unless finding meaning leads to action, however, and it thereby makes things better in schools, its usefulness is highly questionable. Action, for example, may involve generating new approaches which challenge inequality or experimenting with culturally-influenced pedagogies – these may result from the application of moral imagination. The job of school leaders is to make decisions about and take action on the means, structures, and policies which serve schools' shared purposes and values, rather than purely on rigid systemic requirements. As such, action involves interpretation.

The purpose of leadership is to ensure that personal organisational action is based on moral fidelity and mutual understandings developed within the common meanings of individual and collective identity. This is necessary to form a community where each member can find a sense of belonging and act accordingly. Leadership, therefore, can be redefined from an activity of directing and guiding to an activity of fostering pragmatic, collective, situated learning – and subsequent action. This shifts, or at least shares, the “locus of moral agency to (or with) the community as a whole” and leads to a practice of moral leadership that “is clearly distributed and based first and foremost in interpersonal and group skills, such as listening with respect; striving for knowing and understanding others; communicating effectively; working in teams; engaging in ongoing dialogue; and creating forums that allow all voices to be heard” (Furman, 2004, p. 222). Action is both the process and the result of learning for moral literacy in intercultural schools.

In sum, moral literacy cannot be developed in isolation from schools and the societal contexts within which leadership is exercised. As such, the learning process and associated leadership strategies are applicable generically across leadership contexts, but the “devil is in details” in terms of intercultural schools. Leaders in intercultural schools lead very diverse communities of practice and are committed to authentic learning and lives. They seek to assemble communities of practice which enable diverse community members to encounter the meanings embedded in the natural, social, and cultural worlds they inhabit, and, at the same time, find themselves in and through those very encounters (Starratt, 2007).

Conclusion

In this article we have focused on leadership for developing moral literacy in intercultural schools. One important caveat before concluding, however, is that moral literacy, or for that matter culture and/or ethnicity, should not be the focus of all school discussions. Schools must still meet systemic requirements and prepare students in ways that maximise their life chances within the dominant culture. Both Begley (2004, 2006) and Starratt (2005) stress that ethics alone cannot explain the array of human nature and, therefore, are not always a suitable basis for administrative decisions. Similarly, and as implied throughout, moral leadership cannot be conceptualised purely in terms of interpersonal morality. Starratt (2005) warns that to do so is to ignore that leadership is exercised within an institutional context, one that is certainly not neutral in terms of structure or equality.

Such caveats aside, however, it is important for school leaders, regardless of context, to develop their own and their community's moral literacy. However, insufficient consideration has been given to what this might mean in intercultural schools where complex issues of culture and equity abound and are perhaps even more pronounced than in other settings. The development and practice of moral literacy in these schools takes careful account of the cultures which comprise the school and how these impact areas such as social positioning, relationships, curriculum and learning and teaching to name a few.

Developing moral literacy in intercultural schools involves leaders in becoming knowledgeable: about themselves; across a range of other relevant cultural and social knowledge; and about their unique communities. Without this knowledge leaders will be ill-prepared to make decisions on moral grounds. Developing moral literacy in intercultural schools requires leaders negotiate and then champion a set of moral virtues and develop more finely honed cognitive and practical skills to support moral reasoning. It also involves leaders in "stepping outside of themselves" to understand their multicultural communities and then designing and experimenting with strategies which address performance, equity and justice. The knowledge, virtues, imagination, and reasoning skills that form the basis for improved moral literacy, especially in intercultural settings, are intimately connected with school life and community through learning. Learning which is stimulated and facilitated in various ways by leaders is embedded in participative moral dialogue. The process and outcomes of learning are used to inform morally sound decisions and action which aim to make a difference educationally, morally, and socially.

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