

The role of teachers in sustaining moral and character development of learners in the classroom in secondary schools

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Abstract: *The main focus of this paper is based on the role of the teacher in sustaining moral and character development of learners in the classroom. However, teaching act is perceived as a continuously dynamic, reflective and complex decision-making process which involves ethical aspects. The method involved a quantitative with questionnaires distributed to (N=13) schools. A sample of (N=740) grade 8 and 11 learners (N=30) per grade was randomly selected. All teachers in the (N=13) schools participated in completing the questionnaires. We analysed data from socio-cultural perspective on learning focusing on the teachers' role to sustain moral and character development of learners in classrooms. Several strengths that teachers can apply to foster the development of cognitive, social, moral, character and participation of learners in whole class activity. In spite of this, the results showed that for this, there is continue to be a significant lack of dynamism and inflexibility on the part of teachers. However, teacher engagement was encouraged by learning classrooms that were comfortable, open, flexible, keen and appealing.*

Key words: moral, character, education, teacher, learners

Introduction

There is a systematic debate concerning moral and character of learners in South African schools. However, this debate has led by recent disturbances related to moral clouding and safety in school context globally. The teacher's professional ethics are however, noticed as influential to moral and character development of learners during teaching and learning process (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Arends *et al.* (1998) also perceived teachers as being responsible to for maintaining an orderly, safe and productive learning environment in every school settings. However, children come to see themselves as being able to construct order in society either through adults (Farmer, *et al.*, 2011). For safety and order to be maintained in schools, needs the involvement of parents, teachers as well as the community to become part of the game. Even though Jackson *et al.* (1993) maintained that much of the moral influence teachers have on their learners may occur without learners being cognisant of it but other scholars such as Arends *et al.* (1998) illuminate parents and community as being involved. However, the moral fibre and value system of people are constituted at home, in schools, in work places, and in places of worship. Therefore, not only teachers do play a crucial role in developing moral character of learners, parents as well as the community are considered important agents because they are carriers of social values that children internalise as the basis for their moral decisions (Cobb, 1983). These reflections are essential in the face of the moral and character dilemma that schools are experiencing. The moral life of classrooms centres around stage shows and challenges. According to Farmer *et al.* (2011) classrooms are social units where teacher-learner interaction is very active. Yet, there are specific goals for character development offered by Lickona and Davidson (2005) within the classroom that most parents and teachers can agree upon. i.e.

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promoting the development away from egocentrism and excessive individualism and toward cooperative relationship and mutual respect; fostering the growth of moral agency, and developing in the classroom and school a moral community based on fairness, caring, and participation. Teaching of moral and character education in the classrooms is well established in school system around the world but in South Africa it is only now that it partially attempts to catch up through Life Orientation (LO) as a learning area. Serial curriculum changes in South African education system have resulted in a situation where teachers and parents as well as community are still grappling with acquiring an understanding of what their roles are supposed to be in schools and home environment.

Problem statement

The present moral clouds that prevail in schools boils down to learners who do not respect one another, their teachers or property, and also to the absence of work ethics in both learners and teachers (De Klerk & Rens, 2003b; Wentzel, 2003). However, Maslovaty (2000) reflects the centrality of the teacher in the educational process as recently emphasised that teachers' knowledge and skills are the most influential factors in pupil's learning while some researchers disagree as to the role of the moral –ethical component in teachers' practice. Therefore, work ethics, diligence, teaching style and perseverance are primary customs that teachers permit learners to consider genuinely loved (Maslovaty, 2000). Thus discipline for learners and teachers seem to be a problem experienced in the educational system. Accepting discipline is a central element of character development (Wynne & Walberg, 1986). However, teachers are advised to set good example where ever they are specifically during their interaction with learners in the classroom. According to Farmer *et al.* (2011) teachers are people and so are learners. Farmer *et al.* (2011) further argue that when learners are aggregated together within a social unit (e.g classroom) their interpersonal activities and social behaviour tend to be guided by two distinct processes: on one hand, behavioural expectations and social opportunities are directed by adults within the classroom and school (Maslovaty, 2000). Thus, learner character development depends greatly on the school treating its academic program seriously (Wynne & Walberg, 1986). On the other hand, within the boundaries of the school rules, learners and adolescents must also coordinate their actions and activities with each other (Farmer *et al.*, 2011) and by so doing, they institute their own norms, processes, and structures to guide their interactions with peers (Farmer, *et al.*, 2011). Interestingly Stephenson *et al.* (1995) stresses a significant point that teachers acting as role models, influence values as well as transmit values in their regular teaching activities. The kind of role modeling that occurs in both explicit and implicit ways has the potential to be either a positive or negative influence upon the value development process of learners (Stephens *et al.*, 1995). According to Jackson *et al.* (1993) much of the moral influence teachers have on their learners may occur without learners being cognisant of it, perhaps even without teachers being aware of the moral consequences of what they are doing. Therefore, the indirect moral and character influence on learners is deeply rooted in the daily life of the school, either within normal teaching activities or within the contingent interactions at classroom level (Avenarus, 2002). A remarkable statement was offered that supports the initial one which says character develops with a social environment, the nature of the environment, the message it sends and the behaviours it encourages and discourages are important factors to consider character education (Arends *et al.*, 1998). They further allude that, the end of education is the development of moral character. Nevertheless, values are infused and unavoidable in every social situation.

Research question

What role do teachers play in order to create as sustainable moral and character development for social justice in the classroom in secondary schools?

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Research objective

The aim of this study was to determine teachers' role as mediators to create a sustainable moral and character development for social justice in the classroom in secondary schools.

Concepts definitions and theoretical Framework

Development is a progressive change towards some more complex level, usually a change of an irreversible nature (Kohlberg, 1984). Moral according to Arends *et al.* (1998) and Mwamwenda (1995) refer to commonly accepted standards of right and wrong. Character is described as striving for excellence and striving for ethical behaviour as a cornerstone of success in school and life (Arends *et al.*, 1998; Lickona & Davidson, 2005) refraining from certain conduct or words (Wynne & Walberg, 1986). Again, character involves engaging in morally relevant conduct or words or Moral development reflects a progressive internalisation of both standards for behaviour and motives for living according to those standards (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). Character development refers to the outcome of value determination, thus it is not only the collection of qualities, but also holds a dynamic aspect which includes the relationship, balance and integration of these qualities (Abdool, 2005). According to O'Leary (1983) character development plays an important part in moral education and as well as having a cognitive feature of which clearly require teachers to enhance a child's cognitive powers.

However, a disagreement has rise among some scholars with regard to teachers having moral influence to learners in the classroom. Apart from that, Maslovaty (2000) highlights two main theories which are more relevant to the topic: that of social learning and that of cognitive developmental learning. Thus, the social learning approach perceives teachers as agent of socialisation in several ways: role models for imitation, identification and internalisation by directly pursuing curriculum charged with positive values, or indirectly by creating an appropriate educational atmosphere. On the other hand, the cognitive developmental theory accentuates the role of the teacher in developing socio-moral reasoning and behaviour by creating opportunities for their learners to think cognitively in a more sophisticated, consistent and comprehensive manner. Therefore, Farmer *et al.* (2011) affirmed "teaching as a juggling act that aims to balance the two goals of making learners become acceptable members of the society with transmitting educational information effectively". Further, Farmer *et al.* (2011) suggest that teachers are uniquely situated to be the experts with regard to facilitating positive and productive interpersonal contexts that can simultaneously promote academic engagement and competent patterns of social behaviour. However, moral principles constitute character formation and learners' moral development is coupled with his or her cognitive development. Effective moral teachers should help learners to understand the core values, adopt or commit to them and act according to core values in their personal life (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

The influence and roles teachers can and do have on moral and character development of learners in the classroom is the topic of several research studies (Hansen, 1993; Veugelers, 2000), but it does not appear to have been exhausted as a research issue. According to Wynne and Walberg (1986) to serve their rightful role in the society, schools need to focus on the educational goals of character development and academic learning. Other point of focus of the studies on moral and character education including investigating the extent to which parents values orientations influences their view of the priorities of the education system (Muller, 2004; Maslovaty, 2000), an exploration into the way teachers would teach values as required by the curriculum 2005 (C2005). However, there is an increasingly deep rooted feeling that many schools globally are failing learners as well as their communities (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). The occurrence of socially unacceptable behaviour in schools is of great concern and many people are not satisfied with this (Taylor, 1996). They apply strong pressure to schools to modify. However, schools,

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teachers and the community (parents) appear to overthrow their significant focus and collective purpose. In every school surrounding, teachers are responsible for maintaining an orderly, safe and productive learning environment in their classrooms (Arends *et al.*, 1998).

As a result, most teachers' continuing commitment to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships with their learners is not sufficient to guarantee a sustainable learning environment and social justice amongst learners. According to Kurt-Shai (1990) the social and political status afforded to children/learners must determine a society's ethical stance toward them. However, if teachers want to respond to learners in an ethical correct manner, they must first and foremost, comprehend the social assumptions, processes, and the conditions that shape children's lives. Parents as well experienced more difficulty in raising their own children (Kurt-Shai, 1990). Noticeably, a nation that was once characterised as being "child-centred" is increasingly ignoring the young (Abdool, 2005). The power of caring relationships at school found that at a time when the traditional structure of caring becomes deteriorated, schools become places where teachers and learners have to live together, take pleasure in each other's company (Lickona & Davidson, 2005; Abdool, 2005). In their research Farmer *et al.* (2011) postulate that the interaction that teachers create with learners, both collectively and individually, set the context of the classroom social environment and may communicate critical information about the type of relationships that learners are expected to establish with each other. On the other hand, within every classroom, learners' academic engagement, social competence and emotional adaptation are associated both concurrently and in subsequent grades with the level of warmth and emotional sensitivity that teachers demonstrate with the class in general (Farmer *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, O'Connor (2011) and Farmer *et al.* (2011) cite that teachers' own social and emotional functioning impact classroom quality and learners' school adjustment.

Teaching is regarded as a primary social outreach to teenagers but teachers on the other hand, are perceived as infrequently encouraged to explore the worlds of childhood beyond the classroom door (Kurt-Shai, 1990). An astonishing statement was made by the above proponents that this behaviour is unlikely to vanish without someone making some effort towards a new move. Equally so, teachers and parents have a significant role to play in developing the performance and moral character of learners in schools while education is for character formation. Consequently, teaching as a profession, calls for teachers to encourage the development of not purely good learners, but of good people as well (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). The neo-Vygotskian perspective on cognitive development as quoted by Clark (1990), offers a useful framework of reference for understanding the social, psychological, and moral dynamics of learning environment. The central ideas of this theoretical position include that learning is a socially and culturally mediated process. The role of the teacher consists of creating conditions that enable a gradual shift of the locust of the learning activity from the teacher to the collective of learners (Farmer *et al.*, 2011; Clark, 1990). According to Clark (1990) teachers, learners, learning activities and materials must interact with the learners "zone of proximal development" for effective learning to occur. Therefore, the psychosocial learning environment is defined as the level and quality of emotional involvement experienced by the classroom group. It also evolves through the dynamic process of classroom interactions involving personal relationships at several levels, such as teacher-class, teacher-learner, and learner-learner (Bangeni, 2000). However, in the school, many events take place simultaneously, especially in the classroom. Some of these events can have a positive or can impact negatively on learners. To get a good picture of what is happening in the lives of learners within the classroom, we need to have a closer look or identify elements that can impinge or enhance the psycho-social needs of learners as they interact with teachers and one another within the classroom

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(Bangeni, 2000). The interaction of these elements is aimed at achieving the educational objective in that particular classroom. The argument in this regard is that the learner and the teacher interact in a dynamic way with the idea of achieving educational objectives. However, the subject matter that the teacher has to unfold to the learners, and which the learners must in turn make their own, constitutes their common field of involvement on the way to the achievement of these objectives (Le Roux, 2001). Hansen (1993) and Arends *et al.* (1998) refer to teaching as a means of enacting in the classroom the best knowledge available of pedagogy of subject matter, and of how the young people learn all with the artisan-like aim of shaping the mind. Some scholars have asked this question “how can classrooms be prearranged so as to promote moral and character development? There are several strengths of moral and character development which are applied in several schools in America by Lickona and Davidson (2005). These strengths for moral character development are the operating principles for creating productive ethical learning community. All the same, character is considered as a pathway to both excellence and ethics (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). The following are as follows:

Key dimensions for creating a sustainable moral and character development of learners in the classroom. Education has a formative effect on learners as it influences and determines their intellectual, social, moral, spiritual, physical and emotional development (Taplin, 2002; Rhodes, 2003). However, De Klerk and Rens (2003b) perceive education as a process of raising an immature child towards a higher level of maturity. Therefore, the heart of education as influential in this regard consists of the purpose of guiding, unfolding and enabling. Have a voice, and take a stand

Classrooms are considered to be a small community where young people begin to find and develop their voices (Farmer *et al.*, 2011; Lickona & Davidson, 2005). They opine that, if learners experience a feeling of discomfort and not being competent in speaking in their classrooms, they are not likely to do so in a larger or less familiar group. However, learner-learner and teacher-learner participation in the classroom is significant. Classrooms may be viewed as democratic units for learner participation to exist. Democracy is what Lickona and Davidson (2005) and Lickona (1991) refer to as maximising opportunities for meaningful participation. It is the best way of securing an individual learner’s rights and to promote general welfare (acting responsibly for the good of all). Lickona and Davidson (2005) and Maphumulo and Vakalisa (1996), report that most teachers expect learners to respond to questions, participate in classroom discussions without applying adequate strategies or implementing their strategies well enough to bring that about. Therefore, for beginner teachers this may initially seem unrealistic, even risky. However, thoughtfully structured, incrementally expanded strategies can be applied to increase learners’ voice, responsibility, and productive engagement (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Maximise all learners’ responsibility for participating in academic excellence

In more fully engaged classrooms, teachers maximise learner participation and accountability, by not letting learners raise their hands but instead calling on learners in an unpredictable pattern (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). However, by providing learners with the opportunities for meaningful involvement and responsibility within the classroom is a natural outcome that has high expectations (Bernard, 1993). Additionally, excellence is a manifestation of ethics (Robbinson, *et al.*, 2009). Both components encourage every learner in the classroom to work hard. Therefore, academic excellence (performance

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character) itself presupposes universal ethical values, e. g honesty, compassion, empathy, integrity, commitment and courage (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Hold class meetings that seek and act upon learner feedback

The class meeting held on a need basis or at a regularly scheduled time is a vehicle for recruiting learner as partners in sharing responsibility for making the class the best it can be (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Therefore, teachers applying such meetings in their classrooms will gain more control in managing their learning environments. Class meetings help learners become active participants in decision-making. The purpose of classroom meetings is to build a sense of community within the classroom and its spirit is to address any challenge in the collective moral voice (Epanchin *et al.*, 1994).

Develop learner voice in the school

Learners are better prepared to use their voice in venues beyond the classroom, only when they have sufficient practice formulating and expressing their perspectives in the classroom (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). However, to maximise their voice in a whole-school affair, the school must be able to create a variety of participatory student government policies such as, using surveys to seek students' input on school improvement; structuring small group discussions of whole-school issues; creating a democratic school-wide governing system that gives students a voice in decisions affecting the whole school.

Develop faculty and staff voice

According to Lickona and Davidson (2005), a basic rule for an effective ethical learning community is that faculty and staff are expected to do something with learners, for example to giving them greater voice and responsibility. Then the administration will be in a better position to treat faculty and staff in the same manner.

Develop parent voice

By increasing parents' voice and stakes in the ethical learning community, decisions can be carried out in ways that parallel those processes, such as surveys and membership in decision-making groups used to increase student and staff voice (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Therefore, it is important for every teacher and the school to work together with parents, to involve them (parents) in any school matters as this can in future prevent learners' infractions of school rules and provides a framework for dealing with any challenges that can face after their school years. However, as the child develops ethically, parents act as educators of the child in many ways i.e. morally and also bringing in the introduction of the child to various cultural purposes. However, to educate the parent is to educate the child for a life span (Switch, 1986).

Develop community voice

One way of cultivating the wider community's concern for excellence and ethics in its school, is that community's task forces must be created in order to examine particular areas of school life (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). However, increased linkage between school and the community have been reflected to have multiple positive results i.e increased access to school resources and facilities, cost-saving and improved services through collaboration, increased capacity to solve community problems, and community pride (Davies, 1993). Everything is based on school improvement.

Take a personal responsibility for continuous self-development

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Excellence and ethics according to Lickona and Davidson (2005), Maphumulo and Vakalisa (1996) and De Klerk and Rens (2003b) begins at home. Therefore, the emphasis on personal responsibility is basically for continuing growth, for striving to be the best both in our work (performance character) and in our relationships (moral character). This principle means that adults don't ask children to do anything they themselves are not willing to do, because example is the most powerful teacher. Children are good observers, follow and imitate anything which parents/teachers model in front of them. Teachers together with parents must, at all times be exemplary models, worthy to be followed and imitated.

Promoting the value of striving for excellence and ethics as central to a fulfilling life in school and beyond

The best challenge of an ethical learning community (ELC) is to communicate a vision, the ideal of striving to be the best that one can be, the belief being that every person has gifts and the conviction and that developing our gifts and using them to make a positive difference in the world is the only way to be happy (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Promoting ongoing self-reflection in the quest for excellence and ethics

For a sustainable learning environment to foster ongoing personal reflection as essential for self-assessment, goal setting and continuing growth, it must be in a better position to promote personal responsibility for pursuing excellence and ethics (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Challenge students to move outside their comfort zone

Striving for excellence means being willing to move outside one's comfort zone, beyond the limits one may initially set for oneself. The challenge for teachers is to involve learners by giving them opportunities to participate in meaningful activities as well as roles (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Create a culture of excellence in the classrooms and a school-wide system that monitors and supports achievements

The ideal of striving to be the best one can be comes to life in school culture when it is translated into classroom practices used across the school. This can only begin with a teacher's belief that every learner is not only capable of learning, but with enough time, effort, and support, capable of producing high quality work (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Foster personal responsibility for excellence and ethics among faculty and staff, parents as well as the wider community

For schools to inspire parents and the wider community to become part of the quest for character, the following points may be taken into consideration:

Helping parents do their best

The most crucial part of family cohesion is protecting young people against high-risk behaviour. However, the most important thing that the school can do is to enhance parents in developing communication skills for connecting with their children. Involving parents have great advantages, but there are still several other reasons why it is important for them to be involved in the education of their children. When teachers make parental involvement part of their regular teaching practice, parents increase their interaction with their children at home and feel more positive about their own abilities to assist their children (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). One way of

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improving the quality of education is by combining the forces of the home, the community as well as that of the school. Seemingly, education is the task that no school can undertake on its own; therefore, parents must be involved. Parents and citizen participation in schools can contribute to advance the prospects of a more democratic and equitable society (Davies, 1993).

Create communities of character

Schools are not in isolation; they exist in the communities (Bagarette, 1995; Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Schools together with other groups have to recreate a more valuable cohesive environment in order to develop “communities of character.” These will include groups that educate, care for, and influence the young including the families, youth organisations, faith communities, etc, in working together to model and promote good character to children (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Collaborate to create career opportunities

For communities to foster excellence and ethics in their youth, they must work together with schools to design courses and programmes that will prepare workers who are needed in their local community. In programmes where parents and teachers work together successfully, teachers experience a more supportive environment and appreciate parents more (Lickona & Davidson, 2005; Swap, 1993).

Practice collective responsibility for excellence and ethics

Collective responsibility is countercultural, but essential for optimal human development (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Therefore, working collaboratively to assist each other succeed and do the right thing, is regarded as an essential part of the ethical learning community (ELC) and it is also necessary for optimal human development. According to their research, Lickona and Davidson (2005) and Maphumulo and Vakalisa (1996) indicate the power of positive peer culture which influences youth behaviour in healthy directions, especially when it is coupled with direct-instruction in perspective-taking and communication skills. However, in order to create such positive peer culture through an ethic of collective responsibility, it is considered an excellent developmental match for adolescents for at least three reasons, the task of adults being to help shape a positive peer culture that teenagers can fit into, a positive peer culture, committed to supporting the “quest for one’s best,” helps to offset the influence of the media culture (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Therefore, if collective responsibility is cultivated effectively, it may however, provide learners with a strong support system that can enhance the establishment to distance themselves from media messages and develop an identity based on solid values that they can feel good about an ethic of collective responsibility is again helping to counter the distorting and destructive aspects of competitive individualism (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Model care-confrontation as adults

Learners will be able to push each other to be the best only when caring parents/ teachers have pushed them to be their best. According to Galvin *et al.* (1990) the influence of parents on the social and emotional development of their children is very strong. Children spend more time at home than they do at school, and their parents have the primary task to educate them. Therefore, the widespread understanding is that both have the crucial and continuing role to play in the education, welfare and development of their children (Llale, 2003). Epstein and Dauber’s (1991) research indicates that children are more successful learners at all grades levels if their parents participate in school activities and encourage education and learning at home.

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Create a school norm of collective responsibility and structures that institutionalise it

According to Lickona and Davidson (2005), an ethical learning community (ELC) who wants learners and others to act on the principle of responsibility must be able to take deliberate steps in order to make it normative. Creating structures that will ensure its regular practice, for example a classroom of critique, brother's keeper, discovery group, and meeting, can do this.

Grapple with the tough issues the elephant in the living room

Whether the issue is hazing, drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, or any other problem a school will only be in a better position to take action once it knows the size and nature of the elephant in its living room. Schools should always try to assist learners who experience difficult situations in their lives so as not to affect their performance and moral character in future (Farmer *et al.*, 2011; Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Create study groups to struggle with high-priority issues

Something of major importance to the ethical learning community (ELC) is that they will only benefits from a thoughtful discussion by all groups in the community (Farmer *et al.*, 2011; Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Community engagement by study group of learners brings efficient and effective teaching and learning in schools. On the same token, parents go to the extent of knowing what their responsibilities are concerning their children at school. They start realising the importance of education for their children.

Help families confront their issues

The first principle in parenting according to Lickona and Davidson (2005) and Maphumulo and Vakalisa (1996), is truth over harmony. Because of their work being to prepare children for life, they need be willing to confront problems rather than to avoid conflict for the sake of harmony. Therefore, families, schools and the community that have protected learners growing in adversity are characterised by being supportive, caring, having positive high expectations and ongoing opportunities for participation (Farmer *et al.*, 2011). The more parents, staff members and learners accept these principles, the greater will their commitment be. Such values and principles should come from the school's mission statement and should form part of the school policy, classroom policy and practice (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Research design/ Methodology

This study has employed a qualitative approach. Questionnaire one was given to a random sample of (N=30) learners respectively from one grade 8 and one grade 11 from each of the (N=13) secondary schools in the Potchefstroom area (N=780). Questionnaire two was also given to all teachers from the participating schools (N=473).

Analysis of data collection

Interested in helping learners with their learning problems

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	50	6.80	-	-	1

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2	201	27.35	25	12.32	2
3	212	28.84	97	47.78	3
4	224	33.33	78	38.42	4
5	27	3.67	3	1.48	5
Total=	714	100	203	100	

If learners experience learning problems, it is the duty of every teacher to assist them (learners) so that they should become effective problem solvers i. e. people who can generate useful and original solutions when they are confronted with problems they have never seen before (Farmer *et al.*, 2011). Meaning the problem solving strategy that the teacher has to apply, can prepare learners to an adult world where they can serve their society to the best of their abilities. Teachers should take care for learners especially those who experience difficulties in their learning. The ethical responsibility to care may be fulfilled by what Roger and Webb (1994) called “loving the student as learners”, caring directly related to making sound decisions about learners and their educational needs. 33.33% of the learners agreed that teachers are “always” interested in helping them with learning problems. According to Kohn (1991), concerning the need for caring kids wrote that “the very profession of teaching calls on us as teachers to try to encourage the development of not merely good learners but good people.” Therefore, an ethic of caring in teaching requires teachers to encourage learner learning (Kohn, 1991). Caring according to Rigger and Webb (1984) refers to much more than affect alone, it encompasses caring about learning, living and each other. According to Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack (1985), learners usually perceive teachers as being “easy to talk to” and ready to listen when they have difficulty understanding learning material.

Asking learners about problems they have

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	112	15.30	2	0.97	1
2	240	32.79	26	12.62	2
3	198	27.05	89	43.20	3
4	154	21.04	86	41.75	4
5	28	3.83	3	1.46	5
Total =	732	100	206	100	

What we see, what we experience, and what we are told, constitute our belief systems and affect our perspective (Jalongo & Krall, 1998). According to Jalongo and Krall (1998), the best way to discover what a child/learner is thinking or struggling with, is to ask and then really listen with full concentration on problems they are experiencing. Information above reflects that 21.04% of the learners claimed that teachers “always” ask them about the problems they already have. 32.8% of learners indicated that teachers “sometimes” ask learners when they suspect that they

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have problems. The responses of teachers differ to a great extent to what the learners experience as approximately 85% of the teachers (against 48% of learners) say, they often/always ask learners about problems they have. However, problem solving is an important skill for human functioning in which teachers as well as parent are expected to support learners. According to Lickona and Davidson (2005), teachers must show concern for learners as individuals by asking whether they need help and by asking them if there is something wrong with what they experience. Concern and respect for learners can continue to promote their feelings of self-respect and consideration for others (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Encouraging learners to behave correctly

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	39	5.37	-	-	1
2	84	11.57	5	2.43	2
3	207	28.51	55	26.70	3
4	366	50.41	140	67.96	4
5	30	4.13	6	2.91	5
Total =	726	100	206	100	

According to the information above, the evidence is that both teachers and learners agreed that teachers encourage them to behave correctly. 50.41% learners and 67.96% teachers reflect that teachers “always” encourage correct behaviour. According to the figures given above, it seems teachers are given a great deal of weight to good behaviour. However, the task of the school must always be to teach and hold its learners accountable to a high standard of behaviour (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Teachers should endeavour to get learners to fully comprehend why they are expected to behave according to certain norms.

Teachers as role models concerning correct behaviour

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	97	13.27	-	-	1
2	160	21.89	4	1.95	2
3	228	31.19	49	23.90	3
4	208	28.45	147	71.71	4
5	38	5.20	5	2.44	5
Total =	731	100	205	100	

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Modeling is linked to the mastery of every facet of development and learning. The concept of teachers as role models is based on modeling of constructive social and intellectual behaviours (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). However, Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack (1985), describes how young people imitate and internalise the behaviour of their elders. Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack (1985) further opine that for a teacher to have an impact on the behaviour of learners, the teacher must be viewed as having full control over resources that the learners desire. The majority of the learners 28.5% revealed that teachers as “always” displaying correct behaviour as role models, while 71.71% of teachers regard themselves as complete role models for their learners concerning correct behaviour. The implication of these outcomes revealed that teachers according to learners, as not being role models concerning correct behaviour. Ashton and Watson (1998) stress a significant point that teachers acting as role models influence values as well as transmit values in their regular teaching activities. They should set a good example to learners they teach through the presentation of their personal and professional conduct (Halstead & Taylor, 2000).

Promising practices to further moral and character development

According to the tables illustrated below, four questions were rated into three levels i. e. Yes, No and Unsure and the other two into five levels just like the above-mentioned rating levels.

Written agreement with learners’ parents to further learners’ academic excellence

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
Yes	305	41.95	45	22.28	1
No	263	36.18	143	70.79	2
Unsure	159	21.87	14	6.93	3
Total =	727	100	202	100	

Sixteen (16) learners and four (4) teachers did not respond to the question/statement above.

The above table illustrates that the majority 41.95% of learners agreed that teachers have a written agreement with their parents in which they (parents) promise from their side to help in furthering the learners’ academic excellence and ethic behaviour, while 70.8% teachers disagree with this statement. 21.9% of the learners and 6.93% teachers revealed to be unsure about a written agreement with learners’ parents to further learners’ academic excellence. This gives a reflection that teachers did not have a written agreement with parents concerning the future of their children. Education for a child is more than institutional provision (Macbeth, 1993). According to Macbeth (1993) the relationship of parents to school must be set in the broader context of parents’ role in their child’s total learning experience. They remain the main unit of care for the child: a source of protection, nourishment, belonging and education (Macbeth, 1993). Lickona and Davidson (2005) opine that schools must be in a position to take proactive steps to forge a character compact with parents. By making such an explicit compact with parents will then create a common language i. e. a language of character. Families must share a school's sense of purpose (Lickona & Davidson, 2005:38). Parental involvement not only has great advantage, but there are also several reasons why it is important for them to be involved in the education of their children. According to Lickona and Davidson (2005) by combining the forces

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of the home, the school and the community, the quality of the education can be much improved. Teachers in these findings contribute to the marked absence of parent involvement at school level. A written agreement with parents can be applied as problem-solving adequacy, where sharing of ideas and parent involvement will ease the solving of problems in schools.

Conducting action research in classrooms on values/or character

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	156	22.03	52	26.40	1
2	180	25.42	47	23.86	2
3	184	25.99	57	28.93	3
4	134	18.93	30	15.23	4
5	54	7.63	11	5.58	5
Total =	708	100	197	100	

Thirty-five (35) learners and nine (9) teachers did not respond to the question/statement above.

According to information given above, only 18.93% of the learners and 15.23% of teachers is of the opinion that action research on values and/or character is taking place “always”. Action research according to Lickona and Davidson (2005) is a process of data-based reflection on the impact of a particular practice in a particular school setting. It helps to determine what practices to start, stop, continue, or improve (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Manion and Cohen (1981) opine that action research is a way of stimulating the social and spiritual life of the school, and of creating a social milieu where participants could co-operate in setting up a better community. Therefore, ‘group interaction’ became more emphasised. This type of research is needed because it will enhance teachers to get the process of effective teaching and learning in schools under way. For schools to engage in such a process clearly requires that faculty possesses several performance character virtues like diligence, perseverance, and ingenuity among them as well as equally important moral virtues such as respect, honesty and humility (Lickona & Davidson).

Encouraging learners to move out of their comfort zones and explore more things

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	150	20.52	6	3.00	1
2	167	22.85	32	16.00	2
3	210	28.73	84	42.00	3
4	168	22.98	74	37.00	4
5	36	4.92	4	2.00	5
Total =	731	100	200	100	

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Twelve (12) learners and six (6) teachers failed to respond to the question above.

Then above information indicates that 22.98% of the learners and 37% of teachers felt that learners are “always” encouraged to move out of their comfort zones and explore more/deeper things. Striving for excellence according to Lickona and Davidson (2005) means willing to move outside our comfort zone, beyond the limit we may initially set for ourselves. Teachers must encourage learners beyond their perceived limitations in ways that are important for their growth (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Learners should be encouraged to strive for excellence and to give the best effort they can.

Appointing study groups to look into moral issues and come up with possible solution

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	229	31.85	68	34.87	1
2	205	28.51	62	31.79	2
3	133	18.50	41	21.03	3
4	110	15.30	20	10.26	4
5	42	5.84	4	2.05	5
Total =	719	100	195	100	

Twenty-four (24) learners and eleven (11) teachers did not respond to the above question.

The statement above illustrates that only 15.30% of learners and 10.3% of teachers claimed that appointing a study group to look into moral issues and come up with possible solutions is “always” encouraged in the classroom. By appointing study groups to look into moral issues according to Lickona and Davidson (2005) is something important. Schools will benefit from thoughtful discussion within all groups of the community. This will be regarded as an effort made to reach out to every learner (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Encourage learners to think in complex ways about moral issues in life as they appear in the curriculum. Concepts like kindness, generosity, perseverance, and related concepts can be addressed through plot and character studies. Therefore, literature based reading and programmes can stimulate points of views and discussion about values. The very kind of projects can be beneficial enough when they spend a period of time and require also caring, planning, commitment and dedication to a predetermined goal or group. Therefore, the application of moral discussion and service learning are the two important ways to advance learners’ moral development (Abdool, 2005).

Encouraging learners to participate in classroom discussions and having a say

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	71	9.70	3	1.49	1
2	157	21.45	22	10.95	2

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3	225	30.74	77	38.31	3
4	233	31.83	93	46.27	4
5	46	6.28	6	2.99	5
Total =	732	100	201	100	

The data above indicates that 31.83% learners and 46.3% teachers do feel that learners are “always” encouraged to participate in classroom discussions and have a say. Lickona and Davidson (2005) and Farmer *et al.* (2011) opine that most teachers want more learners to respond to questions, participate in classroom discussions, but failed to apply adequate strategies or implementing their strategies during their interaction with learners. Therefore, thoughtfully, structured, incrementally expanded strategies may be utilised in order to increase learners’ voice (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Encouraging learners to take part in a discussion and activities create a climate in which learners can work with a sense of security and self-confidence, facilitating the growth of understanding by offering the optimum i.e. optimum opportunity, for them to talk reflectively with teachers and other learners, thus promoting a spirit of co-operation and mutual trust (Lephollitse, 2001). Discussion in the classroom provides opportunities for learners to reflect consideration to others by allowing all members to have a say, by showing respect for what others contribute even if they are not in agreement with their opinions (Arends *et al.*, 1998).

Creating opportunities where learners can exhibit their work to a large audience

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	172	23.43	13	6.53	1
2	196	26.70	47	23.62	2
3	157	21.39	74	37.19	3
4	159	21.66	62	31.16	4
5	50	6.81	3	1.51	5
Total =	734	100	199	100	

Nine (9) learners and seven (7) teachers did not respond to the question/statement above.

The information above revealed that 21.7% of learners and 31.16% of the teachers claimed that are “always” creating opportunities where they can exhibit their work to a large audience. Lickona and Davidson (2005:29) advise teachers to make use of public performance, competitions, speeches, concerts, shows, “real world” work, and the like in order to increase learners’ motivation to do their best work and be their best ethical self. For teachers to create opportunities for learners to exhibit their work to a large audience makes them feel confident and focus seriously on what they are doing at school.

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Encouraging learners to differ from teachers and other learners in a respectful way

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	106	14.52	2	1.00	1
2	158	21.64	9	4.48	2
3	221	30.27	93	46.27	3
4	191	26.16	93	46.27	4
5	54	7.40	4	1.99	5
Total =	730	100	201	100	

26.16% of the learners indicated that teachers “always” encourage them to differ with them and other learners in a respectful way, while 46.3% teachers agreed that they “always” do it. The task or role of the teacher is to keep on encouraging learners to differ from other learners and teachers in a respectful way. However, by so doing, s/he encourages perspective-taking in the classroom among learners. Perspective-taking is therefore defined as the ability to take the viewpoint of other people, see a situation as they see it, imagine how they might think, react and feel (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Learners must learn to respect the rights and dignity of their fellow mates (Lickona, 1991). This is a fundamental goal for character education, that learners must be assisted to experience the world from the point of view of others, especially those who are different (Lickona, 1991).

Encouraging learners to solve conflict between them

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	117	15.94	7	3.52	1
2	191	26.02	21	10.55	2
3	196	25.70	86	43.22	3
4	175	23.84	79	39.70	4
5	55	7.49	6	3.02	5
Total =	734	100	199	100	

23.84% of the learners and 39.70% of teachers felt that they “always” encourage learners to solve conflict between themselves. Conflict resolution must be taught to learners so that they can acquire essential skills of solving conflicts fairly and without force (Lickona, 1993). The teacher must primarily create “conflict”, the type of mental structural change in learners and stimulate learners’ ability to take the perspective of others beyond them (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). However, for teachers and learners to solve conflict fairly there must be teaching of practical

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skills, for example listening and problem-solving. They define the problem solving strategy as the strategy for finding or constructing a solution to a task for which no ready solution is at hand. Halstead and Taylor (2000) opine that for teachers to encourage learners to solve conflict between them and a peer mediation approach can be applied because it engages them to address their conflict situations and communication problems within the school/classroom. It is an approach that can diffuse tension, hostility and violence and transform the classroom into a more co-operative situation (Halstead & Taylor, 2000).

Creating a caring atmosphere among learners in class

	LEARNERS		TEACHERS		
	FREQ	%	FREQ	%	
1	190	25.99	3	1.49	1
2	214	29.27	32	15.92	2
3	172	23.53	95	47.26	3
4	119	16.28	65	32.34	4
5	36	4.92	6	2.99	5
Total =	731	100	201	100	

The statement above shows that 16.3% of learners and 32.34% of teachers indicated that teachers “always” create a caring atmosphere among themselves in class. It is the duty of every teacher to create a classroom environment that is generally considered to best facilitate learner learning, the one that is purposeful, task-oriented, relaxed, warm, and supportive and that has a sense of order. This environment establishes and maintains positive attitudes and motivation, which will in turn encourage effective participation in lessons and communication during lessons (Lephalletse, 2001). Most positive attitudes are associated with a high level of involvement, personal support, strong positive relationships with classmates and the use of various teaching strategies and learning activities. A supportive or caring classroom makes each learner to feel valued and secured (Drinkwater, 2003).

Conclusion

Farmer *et al.* (2011) remind us in their commentary that teachers are perceived as de facto leaders of the classroom system. However, they have the opportunity to shape learners morally by tactfully managing classroom interactions patterns and activities, promoting the productive engagement of all learners and assisting socially struggling learners to develop new social roles (Farmer *et al.*, 2011). What teachers should remember is the fact that everything they do in front of learners transmits a message and every teaching act has a moral facet. During classroom interaction, there are confrontations for both teachers and learners with multitude of potential moral dilemmas which exist. Moral and character education has major implications for the teaching role. Aristotle makes a remarkable statement by saying that a man becomes virtuous by performing virtuous acts; he becomes kind by doing kind acts; he becomes brave by doing brave acts. However, any morally person must be able to act in morally appropriate ways in varying situations. Teachers must assist learners to acquire the skills, attitudes and the character that will help them to have a healthy lifestyle and to facilitate the common good to prosper. By the same

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token, effective teaching in moral learning environment dependent on the prerequisites of socially, emotionally and teaching skills, creative thinking, innovation, and empathy on the part of teachers. Teacher competence plays a vital role in this regard. Trust, respect and fairness must be intentionally fostered as the necessity to encourage moral and character development and they must become part of every classroom norms. However, failure to seize the day with innovation and creative thinking and design over utility and function will result in education not only becoming irrelevant but also for these learners becoming less employable in a global market (Muscovitz, 2013). The culture of professionalism must prevail, i.e. teachers have to understand their purpose at school level and what they are suppose to do.

Recommendations

School should appoint teachers who are committed, able to give guidance and good leadership; they need to accomplish high level of moral and character development;

Teachers may become accountable of what they are doing;

Schools may develop an environment that can sustain performance and moral character;

Parenting education is of paramount important;

Every school should be a morally coherent and microcosm of democracy.

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