



Ethical Leadership in Education: A Uniting View Through Ethics of Care, Justice, Critique, and Heartful Education

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ABSTRACT

Several studies have suggested that the implementation of ethical leadership can lead to improved job satisfaction, enhanced emotional commitment, and prevent employees from burnout. This article aims to examine ethical leadership and its repercussions on education through a uniting perspective. This study provides a review of the ethical leadership literature focusing on three paradigms: ethics of care, justice, and critique, which we associate with the concept of heartful education as helpful tools for administrators, faculty, students, and families. The primary objectives of this study are (a) obtaining a concept of ethical educational leadership; (b) examining a relationship between ethical educational leadership and heartful education; (c) adopting a uniting view on ethical educational leadership; (d) examining the roles of educational leaders through the ethics of care, justice, and critique; (e) reviewing previous ethical educational leadership studies (f) obtaining a series of conclusions on the implementation of this type of leadership in education. The literature review shows that the implementation of ethical educational leadership promotes cooperation among students, administrators, faculty members and staff; reduction of ethical scandals; effective leadership; and high productivity.

KEYWORDS

Ethical leadership; ethical behavior; leadership effectiveness; heartful leadership; values; education.

INTRODUCTION

We live in challenging times. Due to continued constraints brought on by a crisis that started in late 2019 and is hurting millions of lives worldwide, the world appears to be in a vulnerable situation. The proliferation of conflicts and challenges of all types has created a period of unrest for humanity. The uncertainty that permeates such a period of time exacerbates this condition. However, the same humanity has shown extraordinary resilience to face such challenging situations, working ceaselessly on solutions, recovery policies, or mobilizing resources to help the most vulnerable in societies. Now, more than ever, the world needs great leaders. The educational institutions need leaders who are endowed with a set of values, principles, and ethics to serve better those under their leadership, leaders who care about those under their authority, leaders who promote justice and fairness for all, leaders who listen, and leaders who make others feel heard. The institutions need leaders who reflect, welcome critiques as another tool in the decision-making process, help and support others, and are able and willing to unite people all. Leaders committed to doing the right thing are considered ethical leaders. Students around the world are guided by school leaders who can help learners fill their minds and hearts. This is when ethical leadership comes to the fore when leaders embrace certain moral values and ethics, represented in this study by the ethics of care, justice, and critique. Thus, ethical leadership requires looking beyond personal gain, power, or influence. Ethical leaders such as Jesus, Santa Teresa, and Martin Luther King Jr., among others, represent such a leadership model. A model with ample repercussions in schools as well as in our daily lives. We want to see the repercussions and consequences of following that type of leadership. To do so, this study aims to examine the concepts of ethical leadership, ethics of care, justice, critique, and heartfelt education, elements considered under a view of unity, the role of educational leaders under ethical leadership, and the most relevant studies in the literature.

CONCEPTS

The concepts of ethical leadership, ethics of care, justice, critique, and heartfelt education, or the idea of educating with the heart are reviewed in this section. In this study, we consider heartfelt education as a theme of unity, even more, when the world of ethics does not seem to be conditioned by themes of diversity (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

Ethical leadership

Considering recent and past ethics scandals in different sectors of society, such as education, politics, business, and sports, we might ask ourselves if we are heading in the right direction. Are we having caring leaders? Are we having fair and just leaders? Do our leaders welcome reflection and critique in their decision-making process? Are these leaders uniting us all? How many people are satisfied with their leaders? What are the qualities that make leaders appreciated? What are the interests and motivations behind our leaders? These questions tackle moral aspects of the leadership construct, which have been attracting the interest of the research community for leadership, looking for ways to combine the concepts of leadership,

morals, and ethics (Ciulla, 1995; Gini, 1997; Dantley, 2005). The increased interest in morals and ethics in leadership took researchers toward the ethical leadership concept, which was originated in the descriptive work on ethical leadership conducted by Treviño et al. (2003) to examine the characteristics that should define an ethical leader as well as to obtain a concept of ethical leadership. The term ethical leadership was then conceptualized by Brown et al. (2005) for the first time, relating the term to positive outcomes for employees and organizations. The following section discusses the definition of ethical leadership and the traits that ethical leaders should possess accordingly.

Ethical Leaders

Brown et al. (2005) defined ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (p. 120). According to this definition, an ethical leader is someone who behaves with moral conduct at a personal and corporate level. That moral conduct is based on a series of values that defines the actions and behaviors of the person with a position of authority over others. Brown and Treviño (2006) mentioned the following traits characterizing an ethical leader: care, honesty, fairness, empathy, transparency, humility, trust, power inhibition, balanced decisions, frequent messages about ethical beliefs, and actions. Therefore, ethical leaders are people of action and do what they say, ensuring they communicate their ethical vision in their own environment.

Ethical leaders are perceived as people with moral values in their personal and professional lives (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ethical leaders commit themselves to high moral standards, which models the type of action and decision they take daily. These leaders believe profoundly in this type of leadership, letting the group around them know their consistency and determined purpose in leading the group. Consequently, ethical leaders use a values system to guide themselves and their groups to achieve their goals. These values are well represented in a series of traits mentioned earlier. Researchers (Zhu et al., 2004; Yidong & Xinxin, 2012) have a common agreement on the benefits of this type of leadership regarding satisfaction, engagement, productivity, organizational environment, effectiveness, agreeableness, and positive and enjoyable ambiance.

Ethical Educational Leadership

Following in this paper the definition of ethical leadership by Brown et al. (2005), we adjust this definition by adding the specific context in which we are situated to obtain a concept of ethical educational leadership. Thus, ethical educational leadership can be defined as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making in the context of an educational organization.

Since the early '90s, several scholars have emphasized the need for educational administrators to foster an ethical environment in their schools (Starratt, 1991; Quick, 1997).

Starratt (1991) considered the importance of building the schools' ethics on the paradigms mentioned in the title of this paper: care, justice, and critique. Campbell (1997) reinforced the idea of seeing school administrators as ethical practitioners. Later, Starratt (2005) demanded that educational leaders hold a moral vision and an ethical responsibility to serve their communities better. Recently, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2022) advocated for a multiple ethical paradigms approach in educational institutions, adding a fourth paradigm, the profession paradigm. They presented several cases in a school setting that show the dilemmas tackled by educational leaders. At the end of each case, some questions are presented to promote reflection.

Ethical Educational Leaders

As mentioned earlier, this paper follows the definition of ethical leadership by Brown et al. (2005). At the same time, we are applying this concept to an educational context. Accordingly, we can state that an ethical educational leader performs appropriate actions as an individual and in connection with students, families, faculty, staff, and other administrators. However, to be an ethical educational leader, it is also compulsory to promote that appropriate conduct in three ways: two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. Therefore, an ethical educational leader must foster the necessity to let others be heard, reinforce appropriate conducts at the school level, and ensure that those conducts are well preserved at the core of any decision-making process.

Some authors (Berkovich & Eyal, 2020; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2022; Starratt, 1991) related ethical educational leaders to the preservation and support of multiple ethical paradigms, some of which will be reviewed in the next section.

Ethics Of Care, Justice, and Critique

The Ethic of Care

Ciulla (2014) placed ethics at the heart of leadership and stated that "ethics generally consists of examining questions about right, wrong, good, evil, virtue, duty, obligation, rights, justice, fairness, and responsibility in human relationships with each other and other living things" (p. 4). This study focuses on the following three ethical paradigms in an educational setting: ethics of care, ethics of justice, and ethics of critique.

We need school administrators who care about the people under their leadership: students, faculty, and staff. Noddings (1992) stressed the importance of caring to provide successful education for learners and emphasized that caring is the most important job in the schools. Therefore, students should be at the center of the educational process and need to be supported, encouraged, and inspired. Leaders also should apply the ethic of care to faculty and staff. But what is caring? According to Noddings (1996, p. 23), caring is "a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility." As the definition shows, caring involves the presence of a relationship between educational leaders, students, faculty, and staff or, as Noddings (1984) stated, between the "one caring" (leaders) and the "cared for" (students,

teachers, and faculty). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2022) stressed that the ethic of care has been traditionally related to feminists. However, this study aims to adopt a uniting and integrative view of ethics. Following that uniting conception, Starratt (1991) exposed education as fundamentally human, with no other label or title. In this regard, Krishnamurti (1993) warned us about the fundamental separation that any division implies.

Our administrators face dilemmas in our schools every day. The ethic of care is used to solve these dilemmas by making moral decisions. We need our leaders to feel ready to tackle those dilemmas. But how can our school leaders be prepared to face such moral challenges? Guthrie (1990) noted that educational leaders were taught to follow a business or military model of hierarchy in the past. However, in the context of an educational institution, those models don't seem to be the best option, considering the presence of various individuals in the decision-making process. Beck and Murphy (1997) emphasized the need for school leaders to transition to an educational model based on relationships and connections. These connections are supposed to be obtained through relationships among administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

In these relationships, the ethic of care represents a prevalent role. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2022), educational leaders become "head learners," a term used by Barth (1990), who refers to the idea that when school leaders are on their path to excellence, they are in the habit to listen to others, to make others feel heard before making important moral decisions. These leaders take into consideration the emotions of the "cared for" because, as Kouzes and Posner (1999) stated: "without caring, leadership has no purpose" (p. xi).

The Ethic of Justice

We need administrators who are fair and balanced to students, faculty, and staff in their decision-making process. Mathur and Corley (2014), stated that "the ethic of justice provides a framework for people to solve problems by first establishing what is just and fair for the individual and the school community" (p. 137). Thus, if school administrators want to provide solutions to the challenges and dilemmas faced by any educational institution, it is necessary to establish conditions where fairness and justice are possible for all, no matter who the individuals are. These administrators need to ensure equitable treatment to all because applying a separate set of rules to different people creates a sense of distrust in the followers (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In this sense, Sergiovanni (1992) considered that the ethic of justice must be the epicenter of any school, providing the school leadership with a moral compass to be applied to the decision-making process, which will create a virtuous school. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2022), "the ethic of justice serves as a foundation for legal principles and ideals" (p. 12). Therefore, laws and constitutional rights should be protected, especially in the schools. Lukianoff (2014) expressed his concerns about the growing censorship on campuses: the freedom of expressing opinions and points of view in a respectful and considerate manner is protected by universal rights. If we want a free and just school system, a free and just world, this should not be an issue anywhere in the world.

The Ethic of Critique

The ethic of critique has its foundation in critical theory, a social theory that evaluates society in trying to find aspects subject to improvement to create a better world. It promotes a reflective evaluation of society and culture to challenge the established power. The ethic of critique is based on the idea of being vigilant regarding the ethic of those in power.

Some scholars, researchers, writers, and thinkers (Bakhtin, 1981; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2006, Krishnamurti, 1993; Shapiro, 2010) believed that it is important to analyze in depth the paradigm of justice so that rights, laws, and regulations are compatible with the principles of justice and fairness. In the educational context, the ethic of critique consists of being vigilant of the school leadership as a representation of their power to illuminate flaws: are their laws, rules, and regulations fair? Are constitutional rights protected? Is there any discrimination allowed for any reason? Are the rights of all students, faculty, and staff protected? Parker and Shapiro (1993) concluded that to improve schools and society, it would be beneficial to help principals and superintendents understand the importance of social class. These scholars believe that educational leaders can benefit from the analysis of social class so that they are better equipped to solve the moral challenges they face at their schools. The ethic of critique aims to analyze educational institutions so that unfairness and injustice are not present. If those conditions exist, school leaders must create a trust-based culture where students, faculty, and staff feel comfortable sharing what they consider can be improved, and from there, establish some conversations where everybody feels heard (Murdoch et al., 2020).

Heartful Education

According to Kouzes and Posner (1999), “nothing great ever gets done without a heart” (p. xi). Heartful education is based on the vision in which the heart is placed at the center of learning and teaching processes. Amann et al. (2022) believed that heartful leadership supports transformational education, which helps everyone achieve their potential. Amann (2022) stated that “mere knowledge would clearly not suffice any longer” (p. 12), arguing that educational leaders must consider a wider vision of education beyond the content. Kimakowitz (2022) declared that adding love to education leads to effective education and that educational administrators should embrace love in their educational vision and mission. Joshi (2022) advocated for the presence of a thought leader in academic institutions because “the thought leader has a flow of positive thoughts. These thoughts are peaceful, purposeful, powerful, and not pointless! The thought leader is one who does not find fault with others and has no place for jealousy” (p. 45). Lastly, Sharma (2022) believed that care, courage, consciousness, and composure are the four elements that lead to a heartful education providing quality learning, improved relationships, creativity and innovation, and emotional and mental well-being.

Ethical educational leadership and heartful education: Toward a uniting view

Ethical educational leadership is based on a series of moral values or principles that enhance the quality of education for all (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2022). Heartful education incorporates a uniting perspective in education as it places the heart as the main pillar in the educational

process for students, administrators, faculty, and staff (Amann et al., 2022). Heartful education also represents a uniting view as it is based on the human being without external distinctions. It is an inside-out approach, acknowledging first the natural and innate qualities of the human being. In this sense, love is considered the key quality to help education be effective (Kimakowitz, 2022). Ethical educational leadership and heartful education are centered on human beings, trying to find solutions and answers regarding education. Ethical educational leaders and heartful educational leaders prioritize a human-centered vision in which ethic (care, justice, and critique) and human (love, patience, compassion, resilience, presence, etc.) paradigms are fundamental instruments in the decision-making process. This vision is based on what unites us rather than what separates us (Sharma, 2022). Following this, Kouzes and Posner (1999) established encouragement as the heart of leadership or, in other words, they believe heartful leadership is based on encouraging one another through care, affection, and love. Both ethical educational leadership and heartful education share the same goals: bringing the whole educational community together, paying homage to the extraordinary qualities that every human being holds and that can be used in education and every other sector of our society.

STUDIES ON ETHICAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP.

Eyal et al. (2011) conducted a study in which 52 participants enrolled in principal training programs in institutions of higher education in Israel were asked to fill out the Ethical Perspective Instrument and a demographic questionnaire. It was found that critique was the ethic paradigm most implemented by educational leaders to solve moral dilemmas, followed by the ethic of care.

Kutsyuruba and Walker (2013) conducted a descriptive ethics study with 177 principals across Canada. The methodology consisted of self-report, open-ended questionnaires administered in both mail-out and online forms. Their findings revealed that most ethical issues occurred between administrators, faculty, and staff. It is remarkable that the study also reported that participants experienced internal (being loyal to personal values) and external (stakeholder groups) pressure at the time to face ethical dilemmas and that those types of pressure conflicted with one another.

Arar et al. (2016) developed a study investigating the role that different ethical paradigms play in the exercise of ethical educational leadership in Arab schools in Israel. An Ethical Leadership Questionnaire was sent to 189 Arab school leaders. One hundred fifty of them fully completed the questionnaire. These scholars found that their cultural and social backgrounds affect their ethical leadership behaviors. They also found that male leaders reported a higher tendency for the ethic of care, which contravened other studies postulating that female leaders would show a higher impact regarding the ethic of care. Another interesting finding revealed that less experienced educational leaders valued the ethic of critique the most.

Arar and Saiti (2022) conducted a study in 2018 in school organizations in two different regions of Israel. This research aimed to determine the impact of ethical leadership on

educational leaders' decision-making process. An Ethical Leadership Questionnaire was used in this study. The results showed that the implementation of ethical leadership by school administrators positively affected the appreciation of social values, the better handling of moral dilemmas, and the improvement of ethical decision-making.

CONCLUSION

Ethical leaders are crucial in our schools because they commit themselves to high moral standards, professionally, and personally (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Pursuing those standards makes them effective and inspiring (Kolzow, 2014). Students, teachers, and faculty are inspired when they believe in what their leadership stands for. Ethical educational leaders are caring, fair, willing to listen, and humble in serving their followers (Arar, 2017). Therefore, these leaders tend to develop a vision based on the community's needs, ensuring that the followers get the instruments and mechanisms for professional development. With all of that, ethical leaders in schools create a culture where all are embraced. A culture where heartfelt education plays a prominent role in uniting all community members by emphasizing the common aspects that all human beings share. Thus, ethical educational leaders understand the power of educating with the heart, a loving heart that extends to all educational institution members (Kimakowitz, 2022). More than ever, our schools need this type of leadership, based on building bridges through moral actions and inspiring policies. It is in our schools where our young learners are helped to discover the world through content learning. In ethical schools, these learners fill their minds and hearts because they understand the importance of learning with a purpose. It is now the moment to put all the necessary efforts into trying to make this world much better, peaceful, and united. This study and the following conclusions serve to join this precious endeavor:

- Ethical educational leadership creates a series of advantages for the school community: cooperation among students, administrators, faculty, and staff; healthy attitude of employees; drastic reduction in ethical scandals; students' satisfaction, effective leadership, and high productivity (Shapiro & Stefkovic, 2016). These advantages are possible due to school leaders' commitment to ethical values demonstrated through consistent actions and behaviors (Shapiro et al., 1997). Ethical schools are originated from ethical leaders, who build an ethical culture for all the school community members. These institutions' ethical and moral values are implemented in the areas and have positive implications for all.
- Multiple ethical paradigms serve as guides for school leaders to solve and confront challenging real-life dilemmas that occur on a daily basis in our schools. Through the ethic of care, justice, and critique, these educational administrators try to create schools where all individuals feel taken care of, a sense of justice and fairness in the decision-making process, and a feeling of being heard is promoted. This model of multiple ethical paradigms includes other paradigms, such as culture, and decision-making (Arar et al., 2016), profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2022), utilitarianism (Eyal et al., 2011), or

sensitivity (Arar & Saiti, 2022). Ethical schools apply, implement, and emphasize these moral paradigms so that the values they represent building a culture of respect, understanding, and empathy.

- Heartful education promotes a holistic learning approach. According to Amann et al. (2022), “to be effective in teaching, the teacher needs to be touched more holistically than just in her or his cognitive capacity” (p. 40). Heartful education comes from heartful leadership. In other words, heartful leaders create heartful education, so leading and educating are with the heart, which fosters a culture of authenticity, emotional intelligence, resilience, leading by example, and inspiration (Kimakovitz, 2022).
- Studies (Eyal et al., 2011; Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2013; Arar et al., 2016; Arar & Saiti, 2022) showed that a multiple ethical paradigms model helps school leaders implement effective policies and develop a caring, fair, sensitive, practical, inspiring, and compassionate culture. Also, implementing these multiple ethical paradigms is crucial to solving the ethical dilemmas that arise in schools (Norberg & Johansson, 2007).
- This study aims to be transformative in the sense of advocating the unity and fraternity of all human beings. There are many aspects that all human beings share. Many extraordinary events are happening every day that show us how amazing things can be achieved if we try focusing on what we all have in common and prioritize the essential patience, compassion, understanding, goodness, and love that are part of all human beings (Amann et al., 2022). Ethical educational leadership is an example of what unites us and brings us together. Creating schools under such leadership can change the world for the better. Schools whose pillars embrace and recognize all human beings. Schools whose pillars are those universal values that, if followed, create caring, peaceful, courageous, confident, and understanding individuals (Joshi, 2022).
- Educational leaders worldwide are trying to make an impact on their school communities. Ethical leadership may serve as a decisive instrument of inspiration and motivation for students, faculty, and staff, fostering a culture of mutual trust, respect, satisfaction, and productivity (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). It is time that school leaders get the preparation and resources needed to become ethical leaders, and to put the ultimate uniting element first: the human being. That is the hopeful beginning. Then, it is up to all of us to follow that lead.

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