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Reflective Essay on EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Quality Education Delivery

What does *quality* mean in the context of *education*? Many definitions of quality in education exist, testifying to the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the concept. The terms efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality have often been used synonymously. Considerable consensus exists around the basic dimensions of quality education today, however. According to Adams (1993), quality education includes learners who are healthy and well-nourished to participate in learning, environments that are safe, healthy and protective with adequate resources and facilities, relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of skills, trained teachers who use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms, and outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, linked to national education goals and positive participation in society.

In Guyana, my country of origin, the issue of *quality education* is becoming wide-spread. Parents, teachers, students, community folk and other stakeholders are calling for change and for renewed efforts towards fulfilling the mandate of quality education to students, so that they can become knowledgeable, thinking and productive citizens in society. There are still many ills that are taking place in schools which should not be. There are some secondary schools in which Head Teachers just pass the students through the system, for a few dollars more, deceiving the parents into thinking that the school is a miracle-worker. I taught at one of the top private schools in my country where this is *still* common practice. Dyslexic students enter the school, and they leave just the same way they come. And to whose detriment? Obviously, the students are the ones who are most affected as they are the ones who ought to benefit from teaching. That is doing a disservice and an injustice to the parents and to the children. Through this deception, some parents condemn the school system as a failed one, because of this spate of events.

I believe that educational leaders need to pay more attention to the provision of quality education to their students because this is part of their mandate to do so. Further, there needs to be quality educators in our school systems, as only quality educators can impart quality education. It involves maximising the educational and holistic development of students. For there to be quality educators, the requisite training must be done so that educators are able to deal with the issues as they emerge. Delivering quality education is a basic human right and this paves the way for students to demonstrate creativity, application, and life-long learning. This is why we send our children to school to get an education. This is why we ourselves attend nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. It is also my firm belief that parents need to have a greater role to play in their child(ren)'s educational development. The PTA Body needs to be a

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protagonist in assisting *quality education delivery*, where parents can truly get involved in activities that would foster holistic child development. Parents need to be able to trust educators and leaders with their children. And it is not right for this trust to be destroyed. This is the way forward.

Professional Learning Community

According to Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008), a professional learning community (PLC) shares a vision. There is vision building. In other words, people are brought together to create the mission statement, develop the vision and value statements, establish the goals, develop co-operative and participatory learning processes with a view to having good governance. This quote rings true because when I hear the terms ‘professional’, ‘learning’ and ‘community’, I think of an institution in which people (leaders and staff members) behave professionally, have respect for each other, maintain dignity, work together and learn and grow together, so that the institution can be effective, promoting and enhancing learning that matters.

At the University of Guyana, where I lecture, this concept of PLC is not fully enforced. There exists a professional community but *not* a PLC in my Faculty. This may be the general trend in the university. There are not sufficient professional development (PD) sessions, so lecturers only employ traditional teaching methods. *No learning is taking place and there is certainly no growth.* Participatory processes are absent. The number of students that we used to have year ago has diminished drastically. Lecturers don’t even do and present research, even though it is encouraged. I have tried to engage leadership, but to no avail. Lecturers are not open to change, and the Faculty is suffering because of their recalcitrance. I am very much aware that this is not the way to go at all, if we are to promote life-long learning.

In the near future, I hope to open my own Modern Languages School and/or a Private School, because of the passion that I have for teaching and learning. As an aspiring leader, I would seek to ensure that my school becomes a PLC because this is the way forward in the 21st century. I have always believed in promoting and encouraging people, as people are central to good governance. By working with other leaders and staff, we will ensure that there will be participatory approaches to decision-making, effective communication will be developed and sustained, professional relationships and individual and collective capacities will be built, potentials will be unleashed and empowerment will be encouraged, and on the job training will take place (persons developing persons) giving rise to positive feelings and changing behaviours due to interpersonal interactions. It’s the *right thing* to do, to deliver high-quality education.

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UG's Vision and Mission in the Changing Context of Educational Leadership

Biggs & Tang (2011) reveal that “Since 2000 there have been dramatic changes in the nature of higher education. It is not just that participation rates are higher than ever [...], but that these and other factors have altered the main mission of higher education (HE) and modes of delivery” (p. 3). The Bologna Process of 1999 has had a profound impact on the delivery of high-quality HE. Tertiary teaching and learning, therefore, must move away from traditional strategies to more modern methods/approaches of education delivery, due to the increased number of students with different learning abilities who enter these institutions.

The vision and mission of the University of Guyana (UG) are: **Vision** - The University will be academically stable and will have consolidated its curriculum in a manner that reflects the needs and constraints of Guyana and be on a trajectory to becoming a Centre of Excellence for the delivery of tertiary programmes, for its administration and management, and as a leader in research that contributes meaningfully to the development of Guyana and all mankind. **Mission** - To discover, generate, disseminate and apply knowledge of the highest standard for the service of the community, the nation and of all mankind within an atmosphere of academic freedom that allows for free and critical enquiry.

The University of Guyana has celebrated its 50th year of existence (established 1963) and sadly, it is not necessarily cognizant of the changing context of educational leadership. Educational leaders and all other stakeholders continue with their traditional leadership styles, even though there is a clamour for change.

The UG's leadership isn't oblivious to these changes around the world, regarding tertiary teaching and learning. Though leadership is cognizant of these imminent changes, implementation is extremely slow. Face to face teaching is the only didactic method used. There is no visible innovation to teaching and learning. Teacher-centred strategies are still current. Online learning is not a reality. Professional, technical and vocational programmes are absent. Quality Education (QE) is still a very big issue. There is a dire need for modernisation and quality assurance and enhancement: improvement in all UG's facilities, a restructuring of course offerings and curriculum, and an inclusion of more postgraduate (Master's / PhD) programmes, matching the entrepreneurial and developmental phases of the country (business, science, technology, etc.). Ramsden (2003) affirms that there must be appropriate facilities for engaging

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with students at their level of understanding. I dare say that one of the primary reasons why the university is in this state is because of Govt. influence and politics, and due to *bureaucracy*. This is crippling the only tertiary institution in my country, Guyana.

In order to improve this situation at the University of Guyana, there needs to be a sense of *democracy*. It would be advisable for the Govt. of Guyana to reduce the number of representatives it has on the University Council, the premier body that takes all decisions relating to matters concerning the governance of the institution. Due to their influence, the university is suffering tremendously. This has been going on for decades, and I hope for good sense to prevail soonest. I firmly believe that once the Govt. officials are removed, the university will progress. University leaders would now be in a position to take decisions regarding the institution, without fear of dismissal or Govt. threats. There would also be *inclusion* in decision-making. Another way to change this situation would be for the university leaders to come up with plans and strategies to ensure quality enhancement by drafting legislation and fighting for its approval in Parliament, limiting, or completely removing, interference from Govt. officials in the functioning of the university. As far as I know, the University of Guyana has not tried this step, and it would be a brave one to take, simply because the current Govt. does not have a majority in Parliament. Once this move is successful, the UG would now be in a position to focus on quality education delivery.

Shared Leadership

Many years ago, educational institutions were run single-handedly by leaders who thought that was the best approach to ensure that the institution met expectations. Spillane (2005) calls this the “heroics of leadership” (p. 143) and admonishes us that this is an antiquated way of viewing leadership, as times have changed and leadership practices must also change. No one person can do it all, as there would be over-burdened leaders and under-utilised staff. *Shared Leadership* (also called *Distributed Leadership*) the modern approach to leadership, is a strong reaction to that traditional leadership, as it is primarily concerned with leadership practice across the educational institution.

In *Shared Leadership*, the objective is to ensure that the matters of the educational institution are considered by all employed there, as it is a matter of concern for all. Each and every person there has a say in how the school should be run. It is not to be left up to one individual to take all the decisions relating to that. I believe that principals can facilitate opportunities for teachers to work together and help build ongoing collaborative structures that encourage teachers to take

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leadership. They can create the environment, the time and the opportunities for leadership to arise. By sharing responsibility for making decisions and exercising leadership, principals let the teachers know that their voice is important and that they are partners in making the school a place where students and staff, parents and community members can thrive.

Shared Leadership encourages *participation* (Spillane, 2005). As an aspiring school leader, this tells me that I will need to have my staff very much involved in all matters relating to school governance, simply because participation lends itself to new and creative ways of teaching and learning. I would exercise faith and confidence in my teachers to use their initiative in planning for the teaching and learning process. I would encourage my teachers to share their ideas and develop their talents. They would be given the freedom to explore innovative and creative ways of teaching their pupils. I will ensure that pupils are taught using a repertoire of teaching and learning strategies that will enable the teachers to meet the needs of each pupil within their classroom, thus promoting creativity, application and life-long learning. I am very much aware that all we do must ensure that students receive high-quality education.

The *decision-making process* in any educational institution is vital to its smooth governance and its enhancement of learning that matters. Participation in decision-making (Spillane, 2005) is a vital component of *Shared Leadership*. The objective is to ensure that the matters of the educational institution are considered by *all* employees, as it is a matter of concern for all. Each and every person there has a say in how it should be run. It is not to be left up to one individual to take all the decisions relating to that. In addition, the participatory approach lends itself to new, creative ways of teaching and learning.

The University of Guyana presents a very unique situation, where the input and participation by members of staff is minimal. The decisions taken, regarding administrative and pedagogical practices, are done by the HODs, the Dep. Deans, the Dean, the Board of Deans, and all those leaders in very ‘high’ offices in the university. They decide what is best for the various Faculties of the university, and lecturers are forced to simply abide by whatever they say. In essence, some of the pertinent issues are not addressed due to ‘*exclusive participation*’ in decision making. There is no *inclusivity* and this is not active participation, as lecturers feel shunned from contributing to the growth and development of the institution.

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I believe that university leaders can facilitate opportunities for lecturers to work together and help build ongoing collaborative structures that encourage them to take leadership. They can create the environment, the time and the opportunities for leadership to arise. By sharing responsibility for making decisions and exercising leadership, leaders let the lecturers know that their voice is important and that they are partners in making the institution a place where students and staff, parents and community members can thrive. Leaders need to exercise faith and confidence in them to use their initiative in planning for the teaching and learning process. Lecturers need to be encouraged to share their ideas and develop their talents. They need to be given the freedom to explore new and creative ways of teaching their students. This increases the students' academic performance. As such, students will be taught using a repertoire of teaching and learning strategies and lecturers will be able to meet the needs of each student within the classroom, thus promoting creativity, application and life-long learning. This is the impetus for promoting and fostering high-quality education at the University of Guyana.

Pedagogic Leadership

One of *the* most important areas in Educational Leadership is the concept of *Pedagogic Leadership* (also called *Instructional Leadership*). The emphasis of this kind of leadership is teaching and learning, simply because all that we do in the educational institution has the objective of ensuring that instruction – teaching and learning – is effective and that students are able to maximise their outcomes. It is primarily concerned with *what* students learn and *how* they learn what they are supposed to. Lunenburg & Irby (2006) affirm that the goal of education is *learning*, and the vehicle used to achieve that goal is *teaching*. The phenomena of teaching and learning have been around since the genesis of civilisation, though quite different in their applicability and function throughout the ages. Shuell (1993) affirms that “Within an educational context, the two phenomena [teaching and learning] are so inextricably intertwined that it often is difficult to imagine one without the other” (p. 291). It would not be therefore unfair to say that the two are interdependent, as one cannot exist without the other.

I dare say that in an educational institution, pedagogy is one of the most important functions of the head teacher/school leader. He must have a wealth of experience in this area and must be able to translate this body of knowledge to his staff, so that best practices are adopted for teaching and learning. This is where professional growth and development comes in. Once teachers are frequently involved in it - to improve themselves in their area of expertise - then student learning will improve. There are no *ifs*’ and *buts*’ about this. For any educational institution, *teaching effectiveness* (Biggs & Tang, 2011) must be the objective, as there is a diversity of students

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entering the school system with different learning abilities. Therefore, one teaching method will not be apt to address the needs of all these students.

I have always been very passionate about teaching and learning. When I first started as a teacher, some years ago, I was truly oblivious of what teaching was all about. As a Modern Languages teacher, I just taught based on what was taught to me. However, with the changing times, I realised that the ‘modern-day’ students were frustrated with the traditional teaching methodology, as it was *teacher-centred*. It did not address their needs. As an aspiring school leader, given that I hope to open my own Modern Languages School, this means a lot to me. It means that I will have to work together with my staff to ensure that teaching and learning are *student-centred*, that it is all about what the students do to maximise their learning. I will ensure that a professional learning community is created and maintained, so that the objective would be to enhance learning that matters. To do this, staff members would have to undergo professional development sessions so that they come up with the best and most current pedagogical methods to deal with student diversity, ensuring that positive learning is promoted, that learner enthusiasm for learning is sparked, and that a strong foundation for life-long learning is provided.

Learning & Teaching at the University of Guyana still leaves very much room for improvement. The truth of the matter is that face to face teaching is the only didactic method used. There is no visible innovation to teaching and learning. Teacher-centred strategies are still current. Online or blended learning is not a reality. Professional, technical and vocational programmes are absent. Lecturers hardly are engaged in reflective practice. Leaders have to beg them to do research. In essence, some lecturers are quite comfortable with using traditional didactic methods to deliver course content, much to the detriment of the students. The students are not considered at all. It is simply a regurgitative process where students give back to lecturers what they want, come exam time. HODs, Deans and other stakeholders seem not too interested in addressing this issue, as nothing much is done at the university about improving pedagogical practices.

There first needs to be *consciousness-raising* about the need to ensure *good teaching* and its vitalness in improved student learning outcomes, before trying to implement current pedagogical practices and methodology. To improve teaching and learning, lecturers need to undergo constant transformative reflection through action research, reflective practice, doing research. Once teachers are frequently involved in it - to improve themselves in their area of expertise -

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then student learning will improve. There are no *ifs*’ and *buts*’ about this. Further, a *learning team* could be established. The objective of the learning team is to facilitate self-development and interdependence. Each member of the team is actively involved in upgrading themselves and their colleagues. They are involved in an ongoing cycle of improvement.

Another suggestion would be to have a *departmental teaching and learning committee* or even a *centre for teaching and learning* to make on-the-ground decisions relating to the setting up, design and implementation of courses and programmes to monitor teaching, define problems and solve them collaboratively. Added to this, it would also be best to have a *Quality Enhancement Team/Department/Committee* which has the responsibility of reviewing not only how well the institution works in achieving its mission, but also how it may keep improving in doing so. I feel this is way to achieve teaching effectiveness and improved students’ outcomes through quality teaching and learning.

Transformational Leadership

The concept of *Transformational Leadership* was initially introduced by leadership expert and presidential biographer **James MacGregor Burns**. According to Burns (1978), *Transformational Leadership* can be seen when leaders and followers make each other to advance to a higher level of moral and motivation. Through the strength of their vision and personality, transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions and motivations *positively* to work towards common goals. Transformational leaders are generally energetic, enthusiastic and passionate. Not only are these leaders concerned and involved in the process, they are also focused on helping every member of the group succeed as well.

Later, researcher Bernard M. Bass expanded upon Burns original ideas to develop what is today referred to as **Bass’ Transformational Leadership Theory**. According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership can be defined based on the impact that it has on followers. Transformational leaders, Bass suggested, garner trust, respect and admiration from their followers. Bass (1985) also suggested that there were four different components of transformational leadership: intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealised influence. This tells me that change is inevitable, and that as leaders we must be the propellers of change. We should seek to employ those principles that motivate other leaders and staff to want to work, to want to participate, to want to be involved in decision-making so that good governance can be accentuated in the school environment.

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As an aspiring school leader, I would articulate a clear vision to my staff. I would be primarily concerned with developing a vision that informs and expresses my institution's mission, laying the foundation for strategies, policies and procedures. I would use strategies and techniques to empower the followers, enhance their self-efficacy, change their values, norms, and attitudes, which are consistent with my vision for the school and help them to experience the same passion and motivation to fulfill these goals effectively and efficiently. I would not only challenge the *status quo* but also encourage creativity among staff. I would encourage staff members to explore new ways of doing things and new opportunities to learn. In order to foster supportive relationships, I would keep the lines of communication open so that staff feels free to share ideas and I can offer direct recognition of each unique contribution. I would be a role model for my staff, encouraging them to be role models especially for their students. This would foster a school climate which is conducive for optimised learning.

Why Professional Development Matters

“Another professional development day! What an inconvenience!” This comment is emitted from the lips of many teachers in the educational institution, both from new and experienced ones. Mizell (2010) affirms that "Educators who do not experience effective professional development do not improve their skills, and student learning suffers" (p. 6). Staff professional development has the objective of familiarising staff with (a) classroom management, school culture, operations and administration, and (b) the necessary skills to deal with students' learning challenges. In other words, it deals with *administrative issues* and *pedagogical issues*. It is vital for the sustenance of any educational institution. Professional development (PD) is the strategy schools and school districts use to ensure that educators continue to strengthen their practice throughout their career.

I first started to teach in 2004 at one of the top private secondary schools in my country. I taught there for 1 yr 3 mths and then I moved to the top senior secondary school. I stayed there for another 1 yr 3 mths before leaving for postgrad studies abroad. For the time I spent at those institutions, I never underwent a PD session that focused on instructional matters. The very PD sessions I attend at both schools focused on administrative issues. It was popular thought that once a teacher entered the educational institution with a degree (without teaching training) that he knew how to teach. This is further from the truth. As time passed, I moved to the University of Guyana, where I am still a lecturer. At this tertiary institution, surprisingly, the only PD sessions held, just like at the secondary schools, centred solely on administrative issues. Not once have I ever undergone a PG session for pedagogy. Though the university sponsors the

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DipEd for lecturers (time not convenient for me), that alone is not enough. To date, 7yrs later, the situation remains the same.

In response to this dire situation, the first step in the right direction would be to have teachers change their *conceptions* about staff development and what it entails. Teachers/lecturers need to have a clear picture of why there is a need for professional growth and development. Once this is understood, then steps can be taken to implement PD programmes. A *Professional Development Team* needs to be instituted and established, at the secondary/tertiary institution, whose specific responsibility would be training and development of all teachers/lecturers for all subject areas. This team would consist of a body of experts and specialists in the relevant subject areas. There should be regular *departmental 'sharing sessions'* where staff members tell each other what is working for them and what is not. The experience of one teacher could easily provide the answer for another who is experiencing problems, say a novice teacher. A genuine sharing of problems and solutions through the lenses of effective teaching can life the game of the whole department. In addition, a regular *departmental retreat* can be held where teaching-related matters are at the top of the agenda.

Another important suggestion would be to ensure that those responsible for organizing professional development often do so in ways that energise and assist educators, rather than alienate them. It would also be good to get teachers/lecturers input on PD issues that they would like to see addressed. Teachers/lecturers voices need to be considered in this process. Those organizing the professional development may not be clear about specific improvements in educator and student performance that should result, or may not carefully determine what steps will lead to the desired performance levels. This needs to be avoided at all costs. Why? Poorly conceived and ineffectively implemented professional development leads to complaints, monotony and lack of interest. Where professional development is organised well, educators value and embrace it, because they know it will be of great benefit to them as administrators and teachers. This is the way forward for sustainable development in education.

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Ethical leadership

In every educational institution, there is either a written *code of conduct* to which we must adhere, better known as the *code of ethics*. These behavioural norms determine what we do as well as how, where, when and why we do it. It is to say that everything that is done must be governed by ethical statutes. Ethics governs how we act, behave, think, feel, speak, and the like. Ethical practices in the educational institution are to be maintained at all times, to avert disaster and to ensure good governance.

I have decided to leave *Ethical Leadership* as the last of these key concepts to be discussed, as it is vital to everything that concerns Educational Leadership. Ethics is like the invisible thread that runs through all of these leadership issues and situations. It is to say that everything that is done must be governed by ethical considerations. Ethics governs how we act, behave, think, feel, speak, and the like. This is irrefutable.

In Ethical Leadership, *real leaders concentrate on doing the right thing, not on doing things right*. According to Bello (2012), “Ethical behaviour includes key principles such as honesty, integrity, fairness, and concern for others. This is a situation in whereby leaders engage in behaviours that benefit others and refrain from behaviours that can cause harm to others” (p. 229). Bello (2012) establishes that *ethics must begin at the top*. Leaders cannot shrink from their obligations to set a moral example for their followers; formal ethical codes and ethic training have little chance of success unless the *ethical actions and behaviour of leaders are consistent with what they teach*. Leaders are the key to determine the outcome of organisational goals and to set the tone for employee behaviour which may include promotion, appraisal and strategies.

Being a part of ED 491, I am realizing how these concepts are absolutely important to good governance in the educational institution. As a leader, so much is expected because so much has been given, being entrusted with such a coveted office. As an aspiring school leader, I would seek to have a *Code of Ethics* for all to follow, including me. I see no reason why I should not follow ethical principles. And since I am God-fearing, it behooves me even more to seek godly counsel. As the leader, it is my responsibility to demonstrate to my staff that my dignity and self-respect are very important to me, that I live by ethical principles, and that I would seek to execute my duties knowing that I have weighed the issues and made informed decisions in the best interest of all concerned parties. While I am not perfect, I am very much aware of my

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strengths and weaknesses. These I embrace and this is what I would portray to my staff, that I am *authentic* and *credible*: I have firm beliefs about doing things, and I will uphold them even if it means that some feathers will be ruffled in the process. In so doing, my staff will also be encouraged to allow their every action to be guided by ethical standards. In other words, we all have to understand the dynamics in ethical leadership and seek to embrace them for the greater good of all, so that ultimately we can deliver quality teaching by enhancing learning that matters.

The University of Guyana has experienced all sorts of unethical practices through the years. Most of these unethical practices that come to light deal with sexual misconduct of lecturers, in which lecturers bribe students (male and female) with sex for good grades, especially for those troublesome and difficult subjects. All of the lecturers implicated are men and have since been removed from their jobs. Even though lecturers are aware of ethical norms and behaviours for tertiary teachers, some choose to demonstrate total disregard which results in their being disgraced and shamefully and publicly fired from their place of work. This leaves a permanent stain on them. Such an incident happened only two months ago.

Further, the former president of the University of Guyana Student Society (UGSS) was fired from his post and his studies at the institution suspended, pending an investigation into his ‘borrowing’ in excess of USD \$4,000 from the Student Fund *without* the approval of the 21 Board Members of the UGSS Council. His claim is that he was forced to take the money because of ‘personal issues’. And because of what he has done, his name is plastered all over the media. He has destroyed himself because of his greed for money and because he failed to be guided by sound ethical practices. These incidents leave a very bitter taste in the mouths of his peers, his colleagues, and it brings shame and dishonour to the good name of the university.

As a leader, so much is expected because so much has been given, being entrusted with such a coveted office. Leaders and staff need to sensitise each other about the importance of maintaining good ethical practices in the institution. The Code of Ethics must always serve as a guide, in order to prevent public embarrassment, shame and disrepute. It is the responsibility of leaders to demonstrate to staff that their dignity and self-respect are very important to them, that they live by ethical principles, and that they would seek to execute their duties knowing that they have weighed the issues and made informed decisions in the best interest of all concerned parties. Even though at times it may be difficult, it is advisable that they remain above reproach and above condemnation. Though they are not perfect, they are very much aware of their

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strengths and weaknesses. These are to be embraced and portrayed to staff, that they are *authentic* and *credible*: they have firm beliefs about doing things, and they will uphold them even if it means that some feathers will be ruffled in the process. In so doing, their staff will also be encouraged to allow their every action to be guided by ethical standards. I would urge the leader to care strongly about certain ideas that deserve robust concern and to be persons of prudence. In other words, it would be of benefit to all concerned if they understand the dynamics in ethical leadership and seek to embrace them for the greater good of all, so that ultimately quality teaching by enhancing learning that matters can be delivered.

Educational Leadership involves *leadership practice*. The responsibility, therefore, is on the head teacher/school leader to be efficient and effective, encouraging his staff to demonstrate those very qualities. Once the quality of leadership in schools is improved, it will give rise to the delivery of high-quality education.

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