



## STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS: AN ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN MAURITIUS

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The increasing economic needs of Mauritius to position itself as an intelligent nation state in the front line of global progress and innovation, mounting pressures to improve the quality of schools, and the shortcomings of various educational reforms over the past two decades have prompted Mauritian education authorities to seek ways to raise educational standards. Reflecting the Mauritian government's 'quality' agenda and its focus on the work of school leaders, this paper reports the findings of research exploring Mauritian principals' views about how a leadership focus on systems thinking could create major changes for school improvement processes directly impacting teaching and learning. Whilst confirming the lack of a systemic focus in Mauritian schools, the paper brings new thinking to understanding the critical role of the school leader for systemic improvement of the total educational system in Mauritius with social justice as the platform for transformation. The paper further reviews an empirically developed and theoretically sound framework that builds on a set of values and ethics that underpin Mauritian principals' leadership practices. The central claim is that this framework could be applied in realizing and sustaining the vision of transformed learners for quality education. Significantly, the paper discusses school leadership from an ethical perspective, often silenced in the literature, and is a serious attempt to relate morality and ethics in educational leadership.

**Keywords:** Educational leadership, Ethical leadership, School improvement, Quality education, Total quality management, Mauritius.

### Introduction

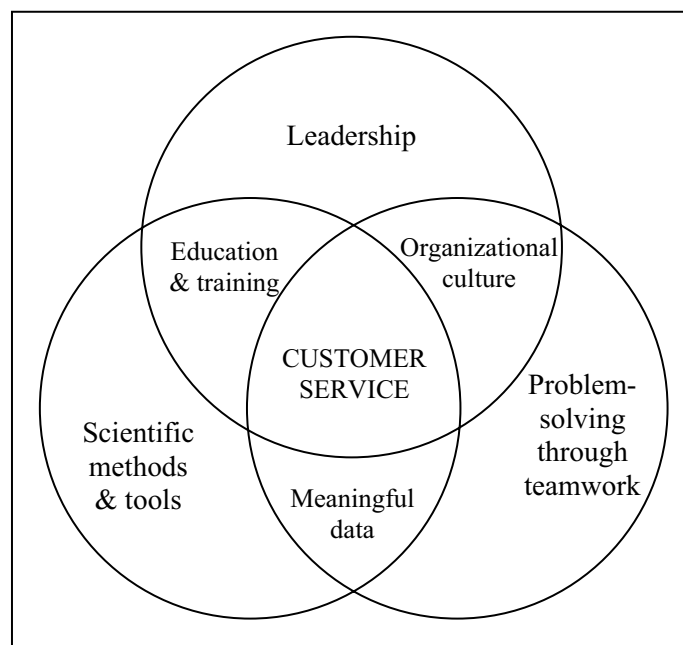
Concerns that the education system in Mauritius has not been adequately preparing students for work and life, and unsatisfactory academic achievement in schools, have fuelled the government's drive to improve the quality of schools. These concerns exist within education structures that systematically segregate students into 'star' schools and less desirable schools that curtail the education experience of the majority of Mauritian children. Within this context, Mauritian education authorities have attempted various educational reforms aiming at 'WorldClass Quality Education' so as to contribute to an efficient and dynamic workforce and to meet the needs of an increasingly competitive, knowledge-based and globalized economy (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2006a, 2006b). Reflecting the Mauritian government's 'quality' agenda and its focus on the work of school leaders, this article reports the findings

of research exploring Mauritian principals' views about the usefulness or otherwise of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles in raising educational standards.

The article focuses specifically on the most important and overarching TQM principle of 'leadership' and discusses it from an ethical school leadership perspective, often silenced in the literature. The findings indicate that, despite the government's efforts at reforms, the education system detracts from ambitions to adequately prepare all Mauritian children for work and life in a globalized and networked world. A conceptual framework for continual systemic school improvement is offered, guided by these very same empirical findings, but now by 'standing on the shoulders of giants' to see what constitutes exemplary, research-based school leadership practices.

### **Total Quality Management in Education: an Ethical Leadership Perspective**

The credit for developing the philosophy of TQM goes to two Americans, W. Edwards Deming and Joseph Juran (Deming, 1986, 2000; Juran, 1999). Deming was one of the world's most renowned advocates of quality and is widely credited as the father of the Japanese industrial revival and worldwide economic success after World War II (Crawford & Shutler, 1999). TQM, as a leadership and management philosophy developed and used extensively in the business world, has made some inroads in education and has been found to be successful in creating major changes for school improvement. De Jager and Nieuwenhuis (2005, p 254) describe the key principles of TQM in education as "leadership, scientific methods and tools and problem-solving through teamwork. These three specific features are linked to form an integrated system that contributes to the organizational climate, [professional learning] and provision of meaningful data with [stakeholder] service at the centre of it all" (see Figure 1). Another important TQM tenet commonly referred to in the literature is a 'focus on systemic thinking' about the school (e.g. Bonstingl, 2001; Deming, 2000; Mukhopadhyay, 2005).



**Figure 1.** Key principles of TQM in education  
(De Jager & Nieuwenhuis, 2005, p. 254)

Ah-Teck and Starr (2012) have already described elsewhere the key TQM principles as they have been applied in education. In the present article, we concentrate on the most important and overarching TQM principle of 'leadership' and discuss it in a school context from an ethical perspective, often silenced in the literature.

### ***The TQM Principle of Leadership***

Quality management stresses the need for visible commitment and support from formal leaders creating trusting teams to embed TQM principles and practices in the culture of the organization (Deming, 2000; González & Guillén, 2002; Perles, 2002). Correspondingly, the failure of quality improvement efforts in schools is often perceived to be caused by ineffective leadership including conceptions of school leadership that fail to engage the talents of staff (Bonstingl, 2001; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006). Hence, the effective implementation and sustainability of TQM in schools depends on the support and inspiration of principals. In particular, TQM recognizes the importance of collaboration and teamwork to enable stakeholders to contribute to the process of visioning rather than simply accepting the formal leader's personal vision, thus endorsing *distributed* or *shared* notions of leadership including an emphasis on *teacher leadership*.

The challenge to leadership in a TQM context is that of adopting a new philosophy and all other associated processes and systems that ensure generating a quality culture. According to Deming (1986, p. 54), the quality approach to management requires "that managers be leaders." Indeed, since the mid-1980s, educational researchers and authors started "to canonise leadership and demonise management" (Gronn, 2003, p. 269). However, some leading scholars like Bush and Middlewood (2005) and Leithwood *et al.* (2004) believe that good leaders also have to be good managers.

Realizing and maintaining this TQM principle in schools is complex because it depends not only on the school leader but also on teachers and is very much founded on trust and respect. This necessarily requires the presence of principals who generate adhesion to a vision. More than anything, teachers need to trust in the principal's fairness and in his/her intention to preserve their interests, thus highlighting the importance of the ethical dimension of school leadership. This means that principals should be centrally concerned with leadership practices that are ethical and moral by the very nature of the work they do with deciding what is significant, what is right and what is worthwhile (Duignan, 2005, 2007; Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2006). An ethic of care needs to be an integral part of what happens in schools alongside an ethic of social justice (Noddings, 2002).

This ethical dimension of leadership refers to the rightness of decisions and goodness of intentions of the leader in his/her relationship with others, and emphasizes the moral correctness of his/her behaviors and actions. The leader's influence is largely anchored on his/her moral values or virtues such as respect, fairness, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, responsibility and inclusion (Nemec, 2006). Hence school leadership involves an element of social justice (Duignan, 2005) and the use of such relational values is central to people's self-concept and their sense of self and informs the way they interact with each other, and impact positively on personal, relational and collective well-being (Nemec, 2006). This includes a higher sense of autonomy and control at work, improved mental health and higher levels of motivation towards work (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2003).

Correspondingly, Ellyard (2001) talks about the need for school leaders to have 'heart power', referring to the qualities of confidence, courage, commitment, consideration, courtesy, compassion, conciliatory skills and communication. Ellyard (2001) claims that such qualities come from the heart and supersede technical abilities, and enable the principal to build trust as a foundation and works towards achieving school goals relationally via a focus on people. Thus current educational leadership thinking is very much driven by morality and ethics, in that implicit in the relationship between the school leader and other staff is trust in one person's power over another and the way in which that power will be used and the interests it will serve (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Nemec, 2006).

***Starratt's Ethical School Leadership Framework***

In his atypical but timely book, *Ethical Leadership*, Robert J. Starratt (2004) implicitly asserts that school leaders should transcend the technical dimension of their work so as to have a greater positive impact in the delivery and performance of learning. He urges leaders to become ethical leaders who recognize the learning process as a profoundly moral activity that engages the full humanity of the school community. He goes on to emphasize that educational leadership requires a moral commitment to high quality learning for all students, based on three particularly important ethical virtues: 'personal' and 'professional' *authenticity*, 'preventative' and 'proactive' *responsibility*, and an 'affirming', 'critical' and 'enabling' *presence* to stakeholders and the work involved in teaching and learning. These ethical leadership virtues are "needed to infuse and energize the work of schools and hence the work of leaders in schools" (Starratt, 2004, p. 9). They act as standards for leaders as they design opportunities and environments that nurture and sustain teacher capacity (Bredeson, 2005).

The ethic of authenticity challenges school leaders to "bring their deepest principles, beliefs, values and convictions to their work" (Duignan, 2007, p. 5), and to act in truth and integrity in all their interactions as humans "with the good of others in view" (Starratt, 2004, p. 71). This places an obligation on school leaders to promote a reciprocal relationship with teachers in which they express their own authentic selves while simultaneously respecting and affirming how teachers construct authenticity in their lives and professional work (Bredeson, 2005). As Duignan (2007) claims, authentic school leaders focus overwhelmingly on the 'core people' (teachers and students) to achieve the 'core business' of schooling (authentic teaching and learning), based on and whilst embracing the 'core values' (such as respect for the dignity and worth of others). The ethic of authenticity places an obligation on school leaders to think, above all, of teachers as human beings and appreciate and affirm their uniqueness and needs while focused on building individual and collective capacity through professional development (Bredeson, 2005).

Starratt (2004, p. 49) suggests that "[e]ducational leaders must be morally responsible not only in preventing and alleviating harm but also in a proactive sense of who the leader is, what the leader is responsible as, whom the leader is responsible to, and what the leader is responsible for." The first general orientation to the virtue of responsibility ('ex post' responsibility) is that schools leaders should be held responsible for past actions, decisions, and their outcomes. The second orientation ('ex ante' responsibility) is proactive meaning that a school leader should assume a moral responsibility to all stakeholders for thinking about, planning, and taking actions as human beings, professional educators, community members and citizens. Thus, the ethic of responsibility challenges school leaders and teachers to act in ways that acknowledge their personal accountability for their actions, and to create and promote conditions in their schools for authentic learning experiences for students as well as listening to and caring for people making the decisions relating to this learning (Duignan&Bezzina, 2006).

Among the three ethical components of Starratt's framework for educational leaders, it is the last, presence, which empowers principals to be and act with genuine authenticity and responsibility, and tightly links them to the school's stakeholders in the pursuit of quality. Starratt (2004, p. 105) discloses the 'symbiotic' relationships between the three ethics when he says:

[T]o be authentic, I have to take responsibility for the self I choose to be. To be responsible, I have to choose to be authentic. To be authentic and responsible, I have to be present to my authentic self and be present to the circumstances and situations so that I can connect my authentic self to the roles I have chosen to play.

Duignan (2007, p. 6) conveys Starratt's sentiments more plainly in the following terms:

Authentic educative leaders couldn't live with themselves personally or professionally (ethic of authenticity) unless they took responsibility for the quality of students' learning by naming and challenging inauthentic learning (ethic of responsibility), then engaging meaningfully with others and helping them create the conditions for authentic learning (ethic of presence).

Hence school leaders' presence triggers, contributes and enhances a deep sense of their own authenticity and responsibility, and those of others, especially teachers, students and parents, through their active engagement in deep and meaningful professional activities, based on ongoing processes of self-reflection and communication with others.

## Research Methodology

A mixed methods research was employed to investigate principals' views about school and systemic improvement and the usefulness or otherwise of TQM in raising quality (including equity) in Mauritian schools. This paper reports specifically on qualitative aspects of the study related to data collected by means of semi-structured interviews conducted with a purposive sample of six principals. (The quantitative data collected through a countrywide questionnaire survey of all primary and secondary school principals has been the focus of a recent research article [Ah-Teck & Starr, 2013].) The research questions were:

- Do principals' perceptions of their current leadership practices for school improvement corroborate with the TQM philosophy?
- Could TQM tenets not currently used be beneficially adapted for school improvement?
- Based on principals' responses, what leadership strategies could be applied for continual school improvement?

Six schools were involved (two primary and four secondary schools), representing diversity of sector, level of schooling, gender, location and socio-economic status of the enrolling families. Three schools were in urban areas and three were rural, three were state and three Catholic schools (also controlled by Mauritian education authorities). Two principals were females, four were males. One school had children predominantly from professional families, another with a large population from working class families, and the others with students from mixed backgrounds. Difference between schools was seen as valuable for the research in exploring TQM's relevance and applicability in divergent contexts.

The qualitative phase of the research was an exercise in grounded theory building (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this approach, theory emerges from the data gathered through an inductive process whereby emerging research insights are analysed and continually tested, producing further evidence and/or new theoretical insights (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The iterative processes of developing claims and interpretations is responsive to research situations and the multiple layers of meaning produced by the people in them (Gray, 2009). 'Open coding' identified several categories of causal conditions, phenomena, strategies, and consequences. 'Axial coding' identified and classified the data and enabled connections between categories to be made, while 'selective coding' refined the integration of categories.

Issues of reliability and validity were addressed using Guba and Lincoln's (1989) set of standards for establishing the quality or 'trustworthiness' of data in qualitative research. The participating principals were allowed to listen to their audio-recorded responses and read the observational field notes taken immediately after the interview, and were asked if these reflected what they intended them to mean. Transcripts or analysed results were taken back to the interview participants so that they could themselves legitimately judge the 'credibility' of the results. 'Transferability' was enhanced by providing a detailed description of the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. Another technique was the triangulation or multiple methods of data collection and analysis, which strengthens 'dependability' as well as 'credibility' (Merriam, 1998).

## Findings

### Values

In this study, it seems that the values and ethical imperative of Mauritian principals underpinned their vision for their school and shaped their behaviors in their daily professional lives. They all voiced a concern for the integral development of all the students placed in their care. For example:

We care for the integral development of all children because we want them to be able to stand on their own feet and be equipped to face the world of work and life after school. ... All educational programmes and activities are designed in the best interest of the child. Teachers and parents play a key part in our mission but sometimes they may not be pleased with our decisions because these decisions are centred on students, who are our priority. (*Principal 5*)

We value the principle of student-centred education and the realization of each child's potential with the ultimate aim of producing a balanced person. Children have to be developed in all domains: academic, sports, creative arts, debating skills, and so on. (*Principal 4*)

However, the very definition of the term 'integral development' was of a limited perspective. In the educational context in which Mauritian primary schools operate, the rat race inherent in the rote-learning and examination-centred educational system does not provide much scope for the integral development of the child; it limits a majority of children while extending only those in 'star' schools. Thus, it is conceivable that some principals have been over-enthusiastic about their outlooks, which may have resulted in their complacent responses so as to uphold their own reputation and that of their schools. Their comments reveal some contradictions and instances of self-interest. For instance, the use of the collective 'our' in the term "our decisions" (*Principal 5*) in the first quote presupposes that teachers may not be included in the decision-making processes of Principal 5. On the other hand, it has to be acknowledged that Principal 4's comment in the second quote is more inclusive of his/her staff as part of the leadership process and that s/he shows awareness of the need to cater for multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Underlying such concern for the full human development of the child is the notion that students have multiple intelligences and abilities that should be constantly and fully developed (Gardner, 1983), which Mauritian principals in this study seems to adhere to, in theory at least, as the following comment suggests:

We do not just emphasize the development of logical intelligence and linguistic intelligence. It is true that many students function well in this environment, but there are those who do not. ... Students will be better served by a broader vision of education, whereby teachers use different methodologies and activities to reach all students, not just those who are good in linguistics or logic. (*Principal 1*)

If this is so, then it is intriguing to understand why school leaders and central education authorities in Mauritius persist with the 'star school system.'

Another principal said:

We have to acknowledge that students have multiple intelligences, not just a few at which they excel naturally. For example, there are [students] whose base intelligence is musical, others who are good at spatial judgments, etc. but we have to aim at developing all these areas. (*Principal 4*)

Again, the commentary seems more of the domain of discourse than a real practical approach. However, there was no evidence gathered that could suggest the kind of tools and facilities schools were proposing or making available to encourage such 'intelligences' to grow. By saying "we have to aim at ..." (*Principal 4*), Principal 4 could well have been referring to what has to be done rather than what the staff of his/her school actually does at their level.

When asked about their beliefs about the underlying purposes of education, the most common reactions referred to producing 'good' citizens. For example:

We consider it our main aim to educate the child so as to make the child a proper and good citizen and a person who can fit into society. The aim for them is to be productive in society. (*Principal 1*)

Preparation for good citizenship also involves teaching those principles to the students that will enable them to take a responsible position in society when they leave school to give their best in their chosen field or career and to reach the top. (*Principal 3*)

It is true that the school is a social institution but the definition of a full-fledged human being goes far beyond good citizenship or good labour force only. The aims of the school should be to help in the complete development of the child as an individual and as a member of a community, nation and global society. It would have been desirable if Principal 1 and Principal 3, whose quotes are referred to above, could adhere to such current notions. Nevertheless, their comments also reflected principals' encouragement for striving for excellence (or working to the best of one's ability).

Furthermore, it has to be noted that these limited assumptions by Mauritian principals about the purposes of schooling may be very 'utilitarian' views of education, where the child is expected to fit into an economic system and to conform to it, which would not be accepted as a 'quality' position by many researchers. For example, Hansen (1997, p. 118) believes that "[a]n effective balance between an academic and utilitarian curriculum might ensure that a broader set of human development principles drives the curriculum in schools, human development principles that are congruent with the egalitarian purposes of schooling."

- ***Relational values of 'trust', 'respect' and 'fairness'***

All principals interviewed implied that they possessed a capacity for promoting relational values for staff and students alike, namely, mutual trust, respect for the dignity and worth of others, and fairness, in varied situations. For instance:

In staff meetings, I make sure that teachers' opinions are expressed and taken into account in a respectful way. (*Principal 5*)

I try not to allow one person or a particular group to dominate the meeting, but rather ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share his or her ideas in a productive way. (*Principal 6*)

Trust in people is an important value. I trust people to make decisions. ... I wouldn't interfere in classrooms. At the same time, there is a strong bonding among the teachers. (*Principal 1*)

It is important that we create the conditions that care for all people in our school community. It has to be a place where children and teachers alike look forward to come, where they feel trusted, respected, happy and safe. (*Principal 2*)

Yet again, the conventional relationship of the 'leader' and the 'led' seems apparent in Principal 5's comment. Principal 5 himself 'takes into account' and 'respects' the opinions of the teachers but s/he fails to state whether these views affect decision-making. So far as Principal 6 is concerned, s/he appears to act as a group coordinator but s/he is self-appointed which means that s/he may have the choice prerogative. While there may be opportunities for sharing of ideas, the principal appears to control the meetings. In the case of Principal 1, however, there seems to be greater overture and freedom given to the staff to team together and to operate on the basis of trust. Principal 1 has an approach that appears to cater more for individual differences and is more ethics or moral based. The statement suggests that s/he is more prone towards distributing leadership and shared responsibilities. Principal 2 on his/her part seems caring and considerate towards his/her staff but s/he still has a kind of paternalistic/parental approach that comes out

especially when s/he talks about 'safety'. There is, however, again the feeling that s/he uses 'we' in discourse but not in practice.

The participating principals also acknowledged the necessity to model the relational values they wished to instil in students. This is captured in the following comments:

If we expect the students to treat us with respect and fairness, then it's only normal that we do the same to them. (*Principal 3*)

When children see adults interacting in a civilized manner, respecting each other treating them fairly, we are modelling the behavior we wish them to emulate. (*Principal 5*)

Such a focus by principals on relational values was seen by principals to have a positive impact on the school community. For example, principals stated:

In this school, teachers and students feel appreciated and valued for who they are. The people work together as one big family, which means that students are well accepted in the school and there is a sense of togetherness. ... there is a spirit among students helping each other towards academic achievement. (*Principal 3*)

The staff members know they are trusted 'from the top' to do a good job. People here form part of a big family, there is a lot of sharing of good practice amongst teachers. ... This sense of belonging is also reflected by the students' pride in their school uniforms, which reflect values like potential, talent, hard work and dedication. (*Principal 4*)

In this last quote, there is a strong sense of the principal's conservative attitudes as demonstrated by his overtly expressed traditional symbols of 'pride.' This again reflects principals' general conservative leadership style in this study.

Duignanet *al.* (2003) and Starr (2012) both assert that leadership challenges currently faced by school principals are complex, multidimensional and even contradictory, thereby creating uncertainty and confusion for many leaders. Thus, there is a need for an important shift in the meaning, perspective and scope (depth and breadth) of leadership in contemporary organizations so as to build a culture of shared leadership, that promotes, nurtures and supports the 'leader' (a figurehead – a noun) and 'leadership' (the act of leading – a verb) throughout the organization (Cunliffe, 2009; Starr, 2012). In this context, it could be argued that the preceding two comments are more suggestive of a distributed, collaborative view of leadership. However, when reference is being made by principals to the school as being a 'family,' it could very well suggest the paternalistic tradition so common in Mauritius, where the father is usually the decision-maker and the other members of the family are the followers.

#### • *Values of 'love' and 'care'*

For some principals interviewed, these values were perceived as their faith in action, corroborating with research findings by Day *et al.* (2000); that is, a work of love and care for the full human development of students, grounded in the teachings of the Church and at the service of society, which are expressed overtly in principals' daily work and ethos of the school, and reflected in teaching and learning. As principals in Catholic schools described:

We give a spiritual dimension to the students' education. We make the teachings of Christ explicit and evident in our everyday activities. (*Principal 1*)

Prayer time during the morning assembly is an excellent way to start the day. ... We also have religious education classes when Gospel values are taught. Our belief in God is reflected in our teaching, our policies and practice. (*Principal 2*)



Pastoral responsibilities of teachers include providing a holistic approach to addressing the spiritual needs of every child, whether these come from a faith or non-faith perspective. (*Principal 4*)

Interestingly, the values of principals as their faith translated in action was a characteristic that was not confined solely to Catholic schools in this study. For example, principals in state schools said:

We deliver a quality moral and human values education program. (*Principal 3*)

Our approach to pastoral care in this school has nothing to do with religion ... it involves attending to the mental and physical welfare of these children ... the social and emotional aspects of learning within normal classes. (*Principal 6*)

- **Value of 'social justice'**

Building an inclusive and caring school community, based on the value of social justice, also featured strongly in the interviews, as the following comments suggest:

I do whatever I can to make all students and teachers feel important and cared for within this big family, without regard to social class, sex, race or whatsoever. (*Principal 1*)

Here we care for all our children ... not only the high performers but also for less fortunate in life ... it means so much to them. (*Principal 2*)

I support the notion of the school as an extension of the family. Teachers get to know each other better and the individual needs of students are catered for. As a result, students develop a sense of belonging and feel more comfortable, teachers are more satisfied and parents experience the school as a caring place. (*Principal 6*)

We welcome and serve children from all walks of life: the poor, the socially disadvantaged and others most in need. Everybody has a place here. (*Principal 3*)

We make sure that our policies and teaching practices reflect the principles of social justice and equal opportunities. (*Principal 5*)

Thus, most schools in this study tended to be inviting as they embraced the diversity of people and cultures and endeavoured to reach out particularly to those most in need. This important finding within the Mauritian context is congruent with what Duignan (2005) refers to as 'socially responsible' leadership and educational practices in schools that model a more just and democratic society.

However, given that the above comments are from principals of 'star' schools, there are also inherent contradictions that can be detected here. In any case, in a multiracial country, these schools do not have a choice other than to be inclusive and inviting. What these principals' statements suggest is that social justice is about a welcoming school environment that cares for all students with the aim of dispensing 'quality' education to one and all alike with a view to achieving quality outcomes across the board and to build a characteristic ethos typical of the institution. This says a lot because principals in Mauritius generally function in and tolerate a highly divisive, segregatory 'star schools system.' This might actually mean that their theory and actions are contradictory because the Mauritian reality is different from what they tend to say. This being so, the extent to which they claim that they put into practice what they believe and/or preach is very much debatable. The majority of Mauritian students would not make it to the few 'star' schools that exist.

However, some principals complained about the personal cost and effort involved in adhering to the principles of a caring and inclusive community although they also clearly saw the good in such practices. The breadth of concern is captured in the following comments:

Sometimes it is such a battle with staff, students and their parents ... but at the end of the day you get so much personal satisfaction that you forget about what you have to endure to keep this school on track. (*Principal 3*)

This is not an easy job at all and I sometimes wonder if it's worth the pay ... [but] I remain committed to my calling. ... Everything I do is in the best interest of these children. (*Principal 5*)

In the second comment, the use of the word 'calling' indicates that principal *PE* views his job as a 'vocation,' perhaps decided by God. However, in both of the above comments, pastoral care does not seem to be an integral part of education; it was a "battle" (*Principal 3*) and they were rather forced to do it for they question whether their job was "worth the pay" (*Principal 5*). In particular, it seems that Principal 5 viewed his/her responsibility separately from the rest of the school – s/he brought authority and responsibility down to himself/herself and did not seem to distribute leadership; s/he appears to operate by fighting to set the right example despite the odds. None of these principals appear to be taking on leadership as a systemic issue and their notions of social justice, equity, democracy and distributed leadership were very conservative, weakly supported and focused only on one school.

- ***Value of 'excellence'***

Unsurprisingly, in these high-performing schools, the pursuit of excellence was valued strongly in the interviews. Principals made it their key responsibility to seek the very best outcomes, albeit mostly academic outcomes, for students by ensuring the highest quality of learning for both staff and students in an ethos of high expectations and strong support. Principals were eager to point out the following:

We hold high expectations of students and teachers, with a persistent focus on learning outcomes for students. (*Principal 1*)

We are always allowing teachers a fair go at experimenting new teaching methods and styles because they have to aim for their personal best for the benefit of all students. We have very high expectations of students and teachers alike. (*Principal 5*)

We support continuous staff development and expect all teachers to be involved. ... We provide staff with access to appropriate professional training and personal development opportunities. (*Principal 3*)

It is clear that all the above comments aim towards high performance but how far teachers are really allowed to experiment is questionable, especially given the high performance pressures which is characteristic of star schools. At the same time, in this culture of high expectations, principals recognized the need for responding to students' ability differences and for providing educational approaches tailored to their individual needs. The following comments reveal overt and covert examples of principals' high expectations:

We expect all students to achieve their personal best and for ongoing instruction to recognize where students are and engage them in learning using multiple approaches and supports to move to the next level. It's only fair that we develop understandings and capacities to cater simultaneously for the specific needs of all students. (*Principal 3*)

I would consider a student to be successful if she were making progress and meeting learning goals. Here, we have very different expectations of highly gifted students and average students in, say, mathematics class though they may be working on similar content in that class. (*Principal 1*)

We strive to create instructional environments that support personal best and just right learning challenges without segregating students by ability or any other variables. This is in line with our policy to promote a spirit of welcome and inclusion within the school. (*Principal 4*)

But again these comments seem to have an inherent contradiction because star or high performing schools have to carry the burden of good performance perpetually on their shoulders and they work in the direction of high academic performance. Moreover, with reference to the last comment, it has to be noted that students are already segregated by virtue of their being in 'star' schools. Principals therefore abide by the notion of equity and equality of treatment in theory only. They do not really have the means and the structure to cater for individual demands. Thus, they cannot really tailor their approaches to the needs of the individual students as they tend to state.

Most principals interviewed perceived discipline and hard work on the part of both students and teachers as prerequisite conditions in order to be able to strive for and achieve excellence and meet high expectations at all times. For example, principals said:

We view discipline as instrumental to excellent academic performance. ... there is no learning without discipline. (*Principal 1*)

Hard work and discipline are the main reasons why our students perform well academically and even in other school activities. (*Principal 2*)

The aim with discipline is to create an atmosphere in which order prevails. Order is conducive to effective learning, but also to high performance in sport and cultural activities. (*Principal 5*)

It can be presumed from these and other comments that principals were referring to a school culture dominated by rules and obedience. This can be detrimental to empowerment and lead to excess conformity, which is not in line with truly distributive leadership. Given the nature of the Mauritian educational system, there was general agreement by principals that the highest priority and the core business of schools was the academic development of the child whilst other domains were relegated to less important status. The following quote further exemplifies the point made:

We aim to make students achieve very good grades when they leave the school. Extra-curricular activities such as sports and speech competitions are bonuses ... but for the school to remain competitive, we also need to ensure excellent performance in non-academic disciplines, otherwise demand for your school will decrease. (*Principal 2*)

The overriding focus of schools in the Mauritian study was on setting high academic standards and supporting learning, but other domains were used mainly to enhance the school's reputation and marketing potential. Thus schools want to retain their market share and attract new students and their parents and are in a competitive market for enrolments. However, this is in direct opposition to the TQM tenet that focuses on external networks and that privileges cooperation, rather than competition (Deming, 1986, 2000).

Although high academic standards were set, it also meant that reasonable targets were set for student achievement. Principals remarked:

It is not expected of students to perform well at all cost, but to produce results that are in accordance with their potential. This means that it is not required of a student to be a '90% performer' but 'just to give your best'. (*Principal 5*)

Every child can be challenged, supported and valued for who they are. (*Principal 3*)

Some schools seemed to put aside the idea of meeting grade level expectations and focused instead on helping each child move to the next level of their learning, thus reinforcing the values of 'inclusiveness', 'care' and 'personal excellence' and the ethic of 'authenticity', found earlier, which underpinned school leadership, albeit within an 'exclusive', elitist system. This was evidenced by principals' comments such as:

We don't have the moral right to leave any child behind. We take children where they are, help them move to the next level, without segregating or grouping them based on ability. (*Principal 6*)

You must simply forget the idea that children have to be grouped by some presumed ability for teaching to work. Teachers must be committed to teaching children with mixed abilities together and look for opportunities for 'multilevel' teaching. You find what you look for. (*Principal 2*)

It can be concluded that a strong sense of academic mission and engagement was a central feature of the high-performing Mauritian schools in this study. The responses of the participating principals point to an unequivocal, though not unique, commitment to academic performance and results as a key driver behind their strategic planning. This also concurs with the learning-centred approach of effective schools found across contexts, whereby effective schools emphasise academic goals as their most important task (Chapman *et al.*, 2004; Fertig, 2000; Taylor, 2002). It is a noteworthy observation that none of the principals interviewed mentioned the fact that some students miss out in the Mauritian educational system.

### ***Ethics***

Hereunder, Starratt's (2004) insightful ethical leadership framework for the professional development and capacity building of teachers based on the ethics of *authenticity*, *responsibility* and *presence* is used as a lens through which the ethical or moral principles underpinning school leaders practices are analyzed.

- ***Ethic of 'authenticity'***

In this study, principals believed that they were demonstrating their adherence to the ethic of authenticity by acting and challenging others to act in truth and integrity in all their interactions as school leaders, teachers and human beings. The following comments indicate that they were promoting a school culture that fostered relational values and encouraged learning that has real meaning and purpose:

Teaching and learning must connect with the real life and real concerns of the students. If they cannot see what's the link with reality, then they will see no point in learning these stuff. (*Principal 4*)

I encourage my staff and students to engage with each other in interpersonal relationships that are truly reciprocal and genuine (*Principal 5*).

In this school, we seek to make a positive difference in the lives of all members of the school community. (*Principal 2*)

Yet, it is questionable how much scope there is in the local context for such a kind of education since the focus is almost invariably on examinations and rote learning (Bah-lalya, 2006). The Mauritian system of education itself hardly provides for the kind of learning stated by the principals above.

Some principals interviewed also expressed the idea that they were challenging teaching and learning practices which are hollow, meaningless or, in Starratt's (2004) term, 'inauthentic.' For example:

One day, a student said to me that: "in mathematics, you don't understand things but you just get used to them." I thought that I had to challenge his teacher and went to have a quiet talk with her. (*Principal 1*)

Real learning must take place. Teachers cannot just teach to the tests. I require integrity and authenticity in all my staff in the discharge of their duties and I will confront those who do not do comply with this principle. (*Principal 3*)

However, it seems that principals here adopt a very authoritarian and autocratic leadership style, confirming a point made earlier. These principals seem to view the ethic of authenticity too as their own preserves to be imposed on the staff, thus functioning primarily as controllers of performance which, indeed, is in total contradiction to the very ethic of authenticity. The comment of Principal 3 specifically indicates that s/he positions himself/herself as being authentic and will ‘confront’ those who are not. Though all the principals above do try to express their authenticity and beliefs in their teachers, they do not seem to respect or affirm how teachers construct authenticity in their lives and professional work (Bredeson, 2005). They rather seem to position themselves as justice dispensers against teachers when they should actually think of teachers as human beings and appreciate and affirm their uniqueness and needs in an atmosphere of trust, while focused on building individual and collective capacity through professional development (Bredeson, 2005).

- ***Ethic of ‘responsibility’***

At first sight, the leadership of principals in this study also seems to be underpinned by the ethic of responsibility, with each principal being responsible in different ways and on different issues. Principals’ comments, listed below, suggest they felt a primary responsibility, as leaders and educators, for their own actions and for the authenticity of the learning of students in their schools:

I am the one responsible for promoting the learning and practice of virtue for all students and teachers. (*Principal 1*)

Ultimately, I have to take responsibility for the quality of the learning outcomes of all students. (*Principal 4*)

I am responsible for creating and sustaining authentic working relationships among all stakeholders. (*Principal 5*)

It is my responsibility to create and sustain a healthy environment, conducive for teaching and learning, for all teachers and students. (*Principal 4*)

I also try to cultivate in this school the habits of self-responsibility among teachers and also students. (*Principal 1*)

The responding principals appear to be responsible or accountable to themselves and to the people making the decisions related to that learning. Yet, there did not seem to be a culture of corporate responsibility as related to distributed leadership. Note again that the frequent use of ‘I’ in principals’ comments reveals a tension between their ethic of responsibility and a collaborative leadership approach, which is contradictory evidence within rhetoric and behaviors. These comments also expose arrogant assumptions by Mauritian school leaders participating in this study in the sense of them knowing best or perceiving themselves as faultless. They considered themselves alone as leaders in their respective schools and therefore as responsible and role models. It is important to keep a sense of humility and modesty in serving others rather than taking a ‘know-it-all’ attitude (Sentočnik&Rupar, 2009). It should however be borne in mind again that these principals are the ones accountable to the government authorities when it comes to school learning outcomes.

In contrast, there were comments made by principals which underpinned a more democratic stance in terms of their ethic of responsibility. As some hinted:

We have to create a culture of mutual accountability for the core values and practices of the school. (*Principal 3*)

This school builds a culture of shared accountability for the core values of the school. (*Principal 2*)

Here, reference is made to ‘mutual accountability’ and ‘shared accountability’. But notice that the way Principal 3 addresses the issue is rather indicative of him/her saying ‘what ought to be’ and not ‘what is’.

- *Ethic of ‘presence’*

Different schools leaders in this study appeared to be manifesting their ethic of presence in different ways, as suggested by Starratt (2004): an ‘affirming’ presence, a ‘critical’ presence, and an ‘enabling’ presence. Some principals generally indicated an affirming presence to teachers in the form of clear messages to them that they were valued, encouraged, and would not be judged or sanctioned as they made themselves vulnerable to new learning and took risks to experience novel teaching practices. For example, one principal stated:

Students have to be supported in every possible way and we also have to acknowledge the crucial contribution of teachers in their achievements. ... Teachers know that we are backing them.  
(Principal 5)

Yet, this principal hardly gives hint about the kind of support that s/he gives to the teachers in his/her school. S/he assumes that the teachers know that they are being supported but s/he does not appear to talk about his/her own presence and the symbiosis that s/he manages to create between himself/herself, staff and students.

Another principal said:

We encourage teachers to experience new approaches to teaching and learning, and we guarantee them that there will not be any consequences for failing. The aim is to learn from failure, if any, and to learn continuously. (Principal 3)

This principal seems to be supportive of his/her staff and to vet their approaches but there is still an absence of the strong bond of support and ‘unification’ that this ethic suggests. How school leaders support and empower teachers in their duties is more of the domain of ‘professional learning,’ which will be the focus of a future research article.

Principals’ critical presence meant that they were being there to acknowledge teachers’ authentic and understandable negative reactions to professional development in the course of building teacher capacity, to contribute to reduce such resistance to change, and also to challenge injustice and ensure that unfair expectations and demands on teachers are not made. Some indicative comments were:

I think I have to provide an empathic ear to people’s worries and concerns – why they believe any change or innovation would impact on them negatively – and communicate clearly to them to overcome their resistance to change. (Principal 2)

I will not hesitate to take a public position on issues of injustice and inequity, even if it is an unpopular decision. ... For example, ‘merit pay’ for teachers is simply not acceptable; it means that teachers will be competing against each other instead of collaborating and sharing good practice.  
(Principal 4)

Principal 4 seems to be hinting towards the collaborative rather than the competitive in his/her above comment. However, there was no evidence whatsoever suggesting that any of the principals interviewed were showing real leadership in the sense of speaking out against the system, asking the difficult questions or leading debate that might have been controversial or that might have lead to policy questioning. Arguably, these principals were focused only on what happens in their schools, not about the Mauritian education system generally. In the present educational context in Mauritius, real educational leadership would be for principals and teachers to call the ‘star-school system’ into question as an issue of social injustice, for example. TQM is about grassroots decision-making for improvement in education and beyond.

A critical presence by principals also meant leading at the forefront by example, albeit uncovering their somewhat traditional, hierarchical, 'heroic' leadership inclination, while showing their human side in interpersonal relationships with staff. This is illustrated in the next quote, which also shows some other qualities of the principal such as respect, principal's approachability, team building and acknowledgement:

It would be a nice gesture from me to put a 'thank you' note on the notice board in the staff room, but it would be so much more meaningful to others if I were to do that in person, in a staff meeting for example. (*Principal 1*)

Principals' enabling presence is supposed to be more proactive in the sense that they should be directly involved with teachers in ways that are truly open and engaging to build specific capabilities (knowledge, skills), for example, by looking at research-based exemplary practices that might be usefully adapted in their own context, and aimed at authentic teaching and learning of students. The participating principals attempted to demonstrate their enabling presence in comments such as:

Teachers have to be encouraged in increased participation in the life of the school, in the organization of the annual fancy-fair, sports day, open day for parents, etc. This is an effective way to team building. (*Principal 5*)

We have to respond to opportunities for professional and personal development of our staff. There are academic courses that our teachers attend at the MIE [Mauritius Institute of Education] and there are others that are organised by the BEC [Bureau of Catholic Education] either in-house or at the BEC office, for example, courses on child psychology, human values, MEd courses, etc. We certainly encourage our staff to engage themselves for their own benefit and for the benefit of our students. (*Principal 1*)

I encourage and create opportunities for self-reflection, dialogue as well as group discussion among teachers, based on experience as well as new research in educational practice. (*Principal 3*)

However, it has to be noted from these comments that principals did not 'engage' with teachers in capability building but simply 'allowed' them to pursue their own professional development as they deemed fit. While the above comments show that the principals were aware of the need for teacher empowerment and team building, these principals also showed reluctance or inability to demonstrate how they created such opportunities, let alone how they shared leadership with the teachers in actual practice. This tendency towards theoretical discourse as against practical reality yet again seems apparent.

## Discussion of Findings

A notable finding of this study was the identification of an overriding aim – the ultimate transformation of students – that school leaders claimed they achieved by building their practices on a foundation of values and ethics. Principals implied that the values and ethics that they upheld underpinned their vision for their school and shaped their behaviors in their daily professional lives. These principals voiced their strong commitment for the integral development and well-being of the children placed in their care. In so doing, they claimed that they promoted authentic learning, over and above the pursuit of academic achievement, that related the students' search for meaning and purpose in their lives to a variety of personal experiences in the curriculum. From the principals' perspective, therefore, authentic leadership practices seemed to be the key to unlocking the ultimate potential of TQM in schools which, in turn, had a transformative effect on students.

The Mauritian study appears to support Starratt's (2004) view that school leadership should be very much concerned with authentic leadership, focusing "on ethics and morality in actions and interactions" (Duignan, 2007, p. 3). However, this study also reveals a major contradiction: even if school leaders

adopted a discourse towards developing and supporting a culture that promotes their authentic self and authentic dimensions of teaching and learning in their schools, in actual fact, this was easier said than done (Ah-Teck and Starr, 2012).

Next, this study identified a set of relational values promoted by the participating principals for students and staff. These included *trust*, *respect* for the dignity and worth of others, and *fairness*. These findings are congruent with the outcomes of other research compiled across different contexts. For example, optimism, respect, trust and intention were those values upon which the *invitational leadership* of British headteachers was founded (Day *et al.*, 2000) while trust, caring and empathy were among the values that influenced the practice of successful school leaders in Indonesia (Raihani, 2006; Raihani&Gurr, 2006). That principals in Mauritius tended to demonstrate a high capacity for promoting relational values among students and staff ought to be a most encouraging finding, assuming that they were ‘walking their talk,’ as research has shown that change sustainability is determined by the level of ‘relational trust’ that permeates a school (Bryk& Schneider, 2003). Similarly, a high level of trust in school leaders impacts positively on student academic outcomes (Beatty & Brew, 2005).

It also appeared that, the values school leaders in this study upheld were a manifestation of their faith in action resulting in a work of *love* and *care* for the full human development of students, again substantiating the findings of Day *et al.* (2000), and this was a characteristic that was not restricted to religious (Catholic) schools although it did not extend to all students in all schools.

Another value strongly suggested by principals in this study was that of *social justice*. This seemed to be the foundation on which an inclusive and caring school community was built. Most schools involved in the interviews were perceived to be inviting as they welcomed people from all cultures and paid particular attention to the needy, but given the national policy mandated from above, they had not much choice. Moreover, given the ‘star-school system,’ strictly speaking, social justice was actually elusive and precluded by the exclusive nature of star schools.

At the same time, unsurprisingly, the pursuit of *excellence* as a value was predominantly felt in the participating schools. In a culture of high expectations and support, principals acknowledged students’ ability differences and suggested that they promoted educational approaches tailored to their individual needs and worked simultaneously towards student’s personal excellence and citizenship although there appeared to be an intolerance of the less able students. Indeed, principals equated ‘quality’ with excellence and viewed their jobs as having to ensure excellent student results and outcomes.

In essence, school leaders in this Mauritian study seemed to hint that it would be desirable to go along the lines of what Duignan (2005), Fullan (2003) and Sergiovanni (2006) all refer to as the ‘moral imperative’ of school leadership, whereby schools “hav[e] a system where all students learn, the gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced and what people learn enables them to be successful citizens and workers in a morally based knowledge society” (Fullan, 2003, p. 29). Put another way, principals’ responses in this study lend credibility to the view that the moral and ethical imperatives which underpin school leadership, caring and inclusive school communities, and the transformative school leadership approach in the TQM scenario are not discrete entities but interactive aspects of the same package.

The Mauritian study also gives credence, at least in theory, to Starratt’s (2004) contention that school leadership requires a commitment to three particular ethics: *authenticity*, *responsibility* and *presence*. Starratt’s three types of ethics challenge principals to attend to the wholeness of teachers in building teacher capacity in schools by being more proactively responsible for supporting and enabling teachers to create an ethos that encourage deeper, authentic dimensions of learning. Concurrently, these ethics also urge principals to be more fully aware of and present to the transformational potential in student learning. Ultimately, corresponding to Starratt’s framework, school leaders share leadership responsibilities with other stakeholders, especially teachers and students, in what turns out to be a humane, caring and successful school community (Bredeson, 2005). Yet principals did not trust these stakeholders to be involved in major decision-making. Leadership was not shared or distributed; it was ‘consultative’ at best (see also Mafora, 2011; Starr, 2012).



## Implications for School Leadership and School Improvement

Generally, the findings reported in this study paint a rather gloomy picture of school leadership in Mauritius in relation to the application of effective practices embedded within the TQM paradigm despite government aims. Practical solutions to redressing the situation are guided by considering these very same empirical findings, but now from the perspective of what constitutes exemplary, research-based school leadership practices. Hence, what emerged from this research is a conceptual framework for systemic school improvement, capturing principals' key ideas and backed by the literature review that focused on scholarly writing in respect of TQM, educational leadership and ethical school leadership. This framework comprises six main elements, identified in this research as follows:

1. Authentic School Leadership
2. Values
3. Ethics
4. Teacher Leadership
5. Authentic Learning
6. Transformed Students

Figure 2 depicts an overview of the resultant framework, integrating these six elements. The 'Caring and inclusive school community' ('roof' of figure) sets the context for school operations.

From bottom to top, the framework can broadly be considered in two main strands. *Authentic School Leadership* (Element 1), *Values* (Element 2) and *Ethics* (Element 3) represent the 'leadership' strand. These elements are placed together to emphasise the importance of moral values and ethics which underpin school leadership. School leaders' commitment and actions are a manifestation of the values and ethics they personally espouse as important and which they put into practice in their schools.

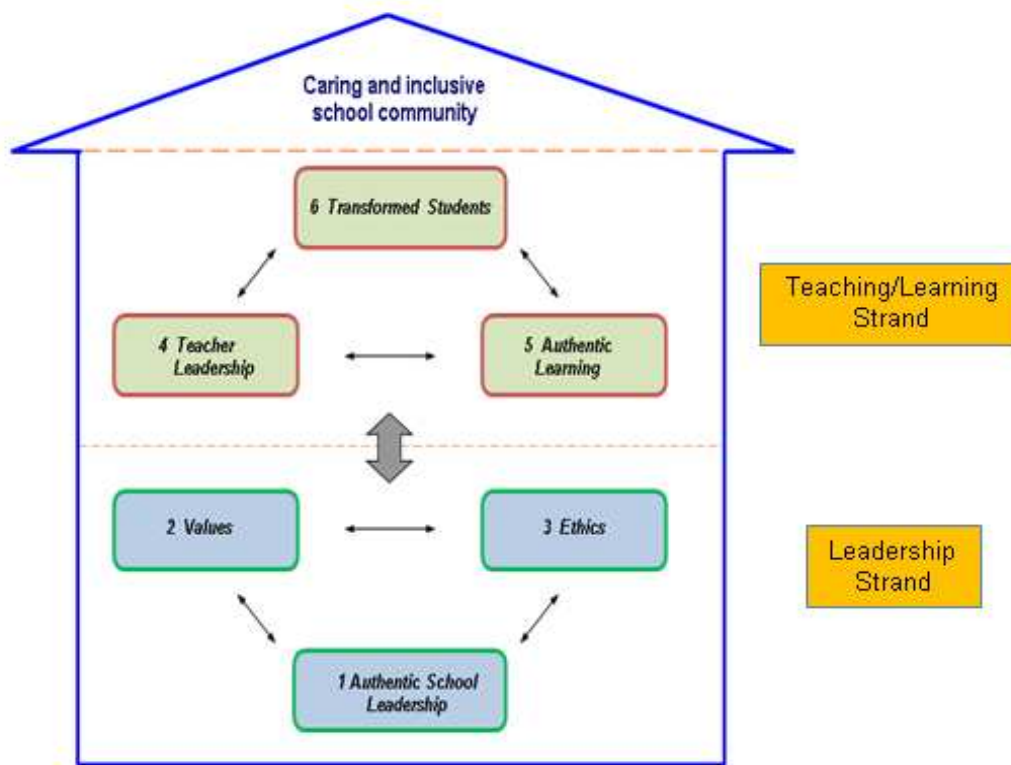
*Teacher Leadership* (Element 4), *Authentic Learning* (Element 5) and *Transformed Students* (Element 6) represent the 'teaching/learning' strand. Teachers, as instructional leaders, engage in authentic ways to create conditions for authentic learning of students so as to transform learning and eventually transform learners.

The framework's first concern and emphasis is on *Authentic School Leadership* which has been found in this study to be of utmost importance in driving all change and quality improvement processes. Authentic leadership is fundamentally concerned with professionally effective, ethically sound and consciously reflective practices in leading and managing educational institutions (Begley, 2007). As George (2004, p. 1) declares:

Authentic leaders genuinely desire to serve others through their leadership. They are more interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference than they are in power, money, or prestige for themselves. They are as guided by qualities of the heart, by passion and compassion, as they are by qualities of the mind.

The focus of such leadership is on establishing school learning as a moral activity, whereby the school leader elevates his/her moral reasoning and actions above mere pragmatics or expediency, and this is leadership that is informed by values and ethics (Starratt, 2004). Such leadership also encourages a culture that values multiple perspectives and diversity and inevitably entails distributing/sharing leadership responsibilities and accountability at all levels in the school organization so as to satisfy and exceed the expectations, aspirations and values of all stakeholders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006; Nemec, 2006).

The framework also captures a vision of *Transformed Learners*, identified in this research as the overriding focus and ultimate aim of schools, that can be attained by means of a series of behaviors in the authentic school leadership and authentic teaching/learning elements which are themselves value based and ethical. Hence, the vertical arrow in the centre of the framework links the leadership strand to the teaching/learning strand, and also indicates the direct relationship between *Authentic School Leadership* (Element 1) and *Transformed Learners* (Element 6), which is a key finding of this study.



**Figure 2.** A conceptual framework for continual quality improvement in schools.

Since school change and improvement initiatives can be regarded as a continuous search for quality improvement in the system and in all educational processes in the quest to transform the learning of students, the six elements focused within the two strands in the framework are connected by two-headed arrows and illustrated as a cyclical process, for that accommodates the spirit of continuity. The two-headed arrows also indicate the importance of feedback in an effective schooling system.

Appropriately, reflecting the change from the traditional hierarchical organizational structure and top down decision-making to the TQM scenario in which principals lead and manage from the bottom up, the *Authentic School Leadership* element is placed at the bottom of the framework and the *Transformed Students* element is positioned uppermost.

This conceptual framework might therefore be described as encapsulating the moral purpose of schooling by elaborating and making explicit the values and ethics dimensions which might facilitate the work of school leaders and teachers in enhancing authentic (transformed) learning for students. As Gurr (2001, p. 2) states:

[W]e need to continually rethink our views of leadership. In educational settings, the exercise of leadership will need leaders throughout the organization who: attend to core purposes of learning and teaching; work well with people; help construct a positive and caring learning environment and educational community; are reflective about themselves and the organization; are forward thinkers with enough knowledge and understanding to develop common purpose and direction; exercise leadership within a moral framework; promote inclusive leadership; are responsive to changes in both the internal and external organizational environments.

The framework provides an original attempt to dedicate synchronised attention to the moral dimension of schooling and to the leadership and teaching/learning behaviors which they underpin, and to make meaningful connections between them, thereby attempting to fill a perceived literature gap.

## Implications for Further Research

Future research can improve upon the findings of the present study by using larger samples of principals and raters other than principals. Not only the formal school leader counts, not only the moral dimension of his/her behavior is important, but also that of the other stakeholders of the organization (González & Guillén, 2002). This type of research can potentially triangulate the findings of the present study, provide more comprehensive findings about successful school leadership practices and offer a richer and more accurate description of leadership reality.

It should also be acknowledged and emphasized that most of the findings were strictly theoretical in nature. To confirm the veracity of principals' views and suppositions regarding their actual practices could be the focus of another research agenda, including individual and focus group interviews with other stakeholders.

Finally, the conceptual framework for continual quality improvement in schools (Figure 2) emerging from the present study is necessarily tentative. It is the result of the thinking that arose out of conducting this research study and it may provide some helpful signposts for future researchers or resultant discussions concerning improving Mauritian schools. Its simplicity is intended as an overview and visual model of the school improvement process in the pursuit of the vision of transformed learners, but does not prove sufficient for an understanding of the *practical* ways of realizing and sustaining such a vision. Therefore our future research agenda aims to translate Figure 2 into and complement it by a set of guiding principles, which will describe each of the elements in more detail and provide additional insights into such practical processes.

## Conclusion

An objective of the research focused on assessing, from principals' perspectives, the current quality status in Mauritian primary and secondary schools and investigating whether current school leadership practices have elements in common with the tenets of TQM. A second objective was to uncover principals' views about the usefulness or otherwise of TQM-related ideas in implementing and sustaining school improvement initiatives and bringing about the transformation of Mauritian schools. The final objective was to discuss implications for school leadership and school improvement based on principals' responses.

Given the findings and outcomes of this research, the objectives have been achieved. However, quality management is not a quick fix or a simplistic recipe for success. Achieving quality is a never-ending journey and not a destination (Bonstingl, 2001; Mukhopadhyay, 2005). The Mauritian educational system will have a way to travel if it pursues the TQM paradigm. Whilst critics might point out that TQM is an ideal which is hard to achieve, it precisely serves the purpose of an ideal: that is, to provide a benchmark and goal against which to measure progress. Significantly, it is an original attempt to relate TQM, morality and ethics in educational leadership, thus addressing a perceived literature gap.

By and large, principals' responses in this study indicate that TQM discourses are accepted and even applauded, but their fulfillment in practice will require considerable adjustments to current implicit leadership theory and practices. However, education authorities reaffirm the government's vision of Mauritius as a world player in the vanguard of global progress and innovation and to make the Mauritian economy more internationally competitive, and hence a systematic initiative for quality improvement is required even though its implementation may be difficult. The journey must go on if the government's aim of 'world-class quality education' is to be achieved by using TQM as an organizing management tool.

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