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Expanding Educational Leadership Theories through *Qualitative Relational Methodologies*

Expandiendo teorías de liderazgo educativo a través de metodologías relacionales cualitativas

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Abstract

Educational leadership is conceptualised through a relational framework and empirically understood through qualitative relational methodologies such as relational ethics, ethics of care and narrative inquiry. Empirical data from narrative interviews revealed that in many cases where the school principals honed values such as care and relational attributes in their daily leadership practices, learners were more likely to respond to such relational and caring practices, which they witnessed and experienced. It appears that relational methodologies can elicit relational leadership styles, which set caring and supportive examples for both teachers and learners, adding much worth to a favourable educational landscape.

Keywords

Leadership; qualitative analysis; relational leadership; relational ethics; ethics of care; narrative inquiry

Resumen

El liderazgo educativo se conceptualiza a través de un marco relacional y se entiende empíricamente a través de metodologías relacionales cualitativas tales como la ética relacional, la ética del cuidado y la indagación narrativa. Datos empíricos de entrevistas narrativas revelaron que en muchos casos en los que directores de escuelas pulieron valores tales como el cuidado y atributos relacionales en sus prácticas diarias de liderazgo, hubo mayor probabilidad de que los aprendices respondieran a esas prácticas relacionales y de cuidado, de las cuales fueron testigos y las experimentaron. Parece que las metodologías relacionales pueden generar estilos de liderazgo relacional que establecen ejemplos de cuidado y de apoyo tanto para profesores como para aprendices, aportándole mucho valor a un panorama educativo favorable.

Palabras clave

Liderazgo; análisis cualitativo; liderazgo relacional; ética relacional; ética del cuidado; indagación narrativa

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Introduction

This inquiry responds empirically to the research question of how perhaps a relational stance and relational ethics of educational leaders can assist in combating social and educational dilemma in schools. To this end, relational methodology and relational leadership with an ethics of care are invoked to interpret the empirical data and to expand both the theory and relational methodology for educational leadership. The literature on educational leadership dates back many years, dominated by the English-speaking axis of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the USA (Bush, 2018). This is evidenced by Tony Bush (2011) who offered some models of educational leadership including formal, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguity and cultural models. Another typology offered by Megan Reitz (2015, pp. 3-19) in organisational leadership studies speaks to the trait, style, contingency, transformational and non-traditional theories, which includes the work by Mary Uhl-Bien and Sonia M. Ospina (2012) on relational theories. Accordingly, Philip Hallinger and Thang Truong (2016) are the first scholars in educational leadership studies to bring in the notion of relational leadership into educational leadership, an approach relevant to school principals given their focus of working in relations with a host of different people. This inquiry therefore focussed on relational leadership accompanied with relational ethics and an ethics of care, which was deemed an appropriate approach for expanding educational leadership theories.

Theoretical framework: Relational leadership and care ethics for schools

Relational leadership for schools is slowly edging its way into the educational leadership literature. Scholars such as Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft (2011), Sonia M. Ospina and Mary Uhl-Bien (2012), Mary Uhl-Bien (2004, 2006, 2011a, 2011b), have written extensively on relational leadership, but not many authors have included relational leadership theory in the scholarship of educational leadership. Recent research by Hallinger and Truong (2016, pp. 677-690) offers a clear description of relational leadership for "effective leadership in managing relationships, preserving harmony in schools and teacher empowerment, acknowledging that leadership is socially constructed" (Hallinger & Truong, 2016, p. 677). Specifically, Mary Uhl-Bien (2006, p. 654) writes that "relational leadership theory has been defined as an overarching framework for the study of leadership as a social process of influence, and relational leadership and its practice are socially constructed through relational and social processes." A relational leadership style speaks to the quality of relationships that school principals have with staff, learners, parents, and the community at large. Such relationships form an integral part in schools, because of their effect on the "critical aspect of leadership, the ability to influence others to get things done" (Uhl-Bien, 2004, p. 1305). While the network of relationships, which include government, local authorities or the districts, labour market and even higher education departments are considered to be stakeholders, for this inquiry, I focussed only on the immediate school environment.

Ann L. Cunliffe and Matthew Eriksen (2011, p. 1427), in this context, propose that relational leadership is a way of being in the world together with practical wisdom, intersubjectivity, and dialogue. In this regard, they explain that "relational leadership requires a way of engaging with the world in which the leader holds herself/himself as always in relation with,

Article description | Descripción del artículo

Educational leadership is an important subject in the literature, and more attention can be paid to relational educational leadership practices, specifically in rural schools in South Africa, given the complex contextual challenges of poverty, inequality and socio-economic difficulties, which influence daily activities at schools. This research project (*Relational Educational Leadership for Rural Schools*) aimed to offer insight into how school leaders perceive and experience their work. To this end, the guiding research question was: How do school principals see and experience leadership and management work in their schools? Through inductive qualitative content analysis and by working observational and storied field texts into research texts, this inquiry traced the qualities that characterise a relational approach to educational leadership. We discerned attributes from the field texts that speak to the explanatory power of relational leadership, such as care, collaboration, vision, intuition and courage.

and therefore morally accountable to others and engages in relational dialogue.” This assumes an intersubjective view of the world to offer a way of thinking about who the leaders are. It also implies an understanding of the way leaders engage with the world. Reitz (2015, p. 5) asserted that “there is a growing interest in the process of leadership and how leadership is constructed dynamically in relation.” She also reported on the “discernable movement towards the leader-follower relational space and termed it a relational turn.” This approach is also referred to as the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory.

A more recent focus in the leadership literature is the process of leadership, which inquires into how and when people are in relationships, the phenomenon of leadership which is dynamically constructed. Such leadership is not restricted to hierarchical positions and focuses on processes and less so on the person. Uhl-Bien (2006, p. 662) explains that “processes such as dialogue and multilogue become the focus, which also implies a focus on different methodologies to access such processes.” It is for this reason that I promote relational research methodologies such as narrative inquiry to capture nuanced relational dynamics (see also, Fairhurst & Antonakis, 2012).

Relational leadership also involves relational integrity and responsibility. This sense of responsibility, to be responsive, responsible, and accountable to others in the everyday interactions proposes a moral stance of caring relationships and moral responsibility, which is embedded within relational integrity. This is evident in how principals treat their staff, learners, and the community, recognising their responsibility to act and relate in ethical ways. School leadership that focuses on social processes, rather than on leader actions and behaviours is relational, a position supported by Anna Elizabeth du Plessis (2017, p. 9). Such social processes are open, contested, and negotiated, and, indeed, relational, as they concern the processes of “being about others and the larger social system” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 664). Accordingly, relational leadership becomes a much-needed quality of the educational setting.

Jessica Nicholson and Elizabeth Kurucz (2017, p. 1) in this context propose that relational leadership is also essential for dealing with the increasingly urgent and complex social, economic, and environmental issues of society, to which the education sector must be added. The ethical understanding of relational leadership is limited and yet critical given the moral implications of relational leadership. Closely aligned to relational leadership is the notion of an ethics of care, which is defined “as the development of an affinity for the world and the people in it, translating moral commitment to action on behalf of others” (Regan & Brooks, 1995, p. 27). This ethics of care can help to illuminate the ethical dimensions of relational leadership. Accordingly, Jessica Nicholson and Elizabeth Kurucz (2017, p. 1) suggest that from a “caring perspective, a ‘relational stance’, or logic of effectiveness can be fostered through engaging in a reflective process of moral education through conversation”. Nel Noddings (2010, p. 390) writes “in care theory relation is ontologically basic.” Care ethics share a relational perspective, which assumes that two parties are involved. Leadership through a relational ethic of caring allows principals to listen attentively to others. Given the emphasis on the relation, the cared-for and the carer are responsive to the act of complete reciprocity (Noddings, 2010, p. 391). Principals and teachers need the response from the learners. Put differently, caring-for is located in relations that require address and response (Noddings, 2010, p. 392). Nicholson and Kurucz (2017, p. 3) note that “while ethics of care emerge from ‘relational feminism’, the caring

attitude formed from earliest experiences of caring and being cared-for, is universally accessible and is not restricted to men or women. A caring perspective prioritises the attitude and activities involved in caring as the fundamental human orientation toward, and relationship with, others and the larger society." Caring is the essence of education, and educational leaders remain in caring relationships over a period, nurturing the growth of learners and staff. Schools ideally want learners to be "prepared to care-for those they encounter directly and to care-about the suffering of people at a distance" (Noddings, 2010, p. 394). This can be accomplished through modelling and dialogue, a relational leadership stance, which displays care and concern for colleagues and learners.

Another closely aligned concept is relational ethics (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005; Clandinin, Caine & Huber, 2017; Denzin, 2017; Ellis, 2017) mostly used and understood in caring professions. Acknowledging and recognising educational leadership from a relational perspective together with an ethics of care, relational ethics appears to fit comfortably in the realm of leadership research in schools. Relational ethics as espoused by Carolyn Ellis (2017, p. 438), who cites Bergum & Dossetor (2005, pp. 3-4), and refers to "the 'way people are with one another' in their various roles and relationships from moment to moment." Put differently, "ethics is a way of being" (Gabriel & Casemore, 2009, p. 23). For the purpose of this inquiry, relational ethics will be further contextualised in the qualitative research methodology, specifically narrative inquiry.

Qualitative methodology: Relational ethics and narrative inquiry

Relational ethics in the context of qualitative research is well described by Lynne Gabriel and Roger Casemore (2009, p. 147 ff.), which speak to the "researcher-contributor alliance and the ethical challenges, tensions, and conflicts that can arise when conducting in-depth qualitative research interviews." Others scholars such as D. Jean Clandinin and Vera Caine (2008), D. Jean Clandinin, Vera Caine and Janice Huber (2017) argue for a relational ontology in a qualitative narrative inquiry. The relational in human relations and education is critical and equally important is the relationship between the researcher and the research participant (Clandinin, Caine & Huber, 2017, p. 419). Researchers and participants bring experiential knowledge to the phenomenon under investigation, and meaning is co-constructed. Clandinin and Caine (2008, p. 543) state that given that narrative inquiry has a relational research methodology, "ethical issues are central throughout the inquiry." These ethical requirements move beyond institutional requirements of privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. Wendy J. Austin (2008, p. 748) puts it slightly differently: "relational ethics is a contemporary approach to ethics that situates ethical action explicitly in a relationship," including research relationships.

These relationships demand attentiveness and responsiveness to our commitments to one another, recognising issues of power and vulnerability. Austin (2008, p. 748) also cites Vangie Bergum and John Dossetor (2005) who offer core elements of relational ethics for researchers, namely "mutual respect, engagement, embodied knowledge, attention to the interdependent environment, uncertainty and vulnerability" (Austin, 2008, p. 749). The standard guidelines for informed consent and confidentiality are important for the researcher, but according to Austin (2008, p. 749), these are insufficient from a relational ethics perspective. Many violations have occurred, and misconduct in the field has occurred which

often speak to the attitude that researchers have toward their research participants. Genuine respect is called for in research relationship, as a researcher should work “alongside” the research participant (Clandinin, Caine & Huber, 2017, p. 419). Clandinin and Caine (2008, p. 544) sum it up accordingly, “...as narrative inquirers come to know in a relational way, the inquiries also become an intervention, which requires the researcher to remain attentive to ethical issues long after leaving the field and composing final research texts.”

Fittingly, the design genre for this inquiry was a narrative inquiry (Clandinin, Caine & Huber, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Smit, 2017) with semi-structured interviews with school principals, to gather empirical data to respond to the research question empirically. This narrative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 67-74) enabled to understand the experiences of the leadership of a group of school principals, which allowed for in-depth exploration (Saldaña, 2011, p. 8). Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experiences from individual stories as well as documents and conversations. Herein lies a “collaborative feature of narrative research as the story emerges through the interaction or dialogue between the researcher and the participant(s)” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69). Narrative inquiry is also a research methodology. Essential of this investigation is that “narrative inquiry is marked by its emphasis on the relational engagement between the researcher and the research participants. Narrative inquiry, across various disciplines and multiple professional fields, aims at understanding and making meaning of experience through conversations, dialogue, and participants in the ongoing lives of the research participants. “The introduction of narrative inquiry as a research methodology has reshaped the field of qualitative research, especially with its close attention to experience as a narrative phenomenon and its emphasis on relational engagement that place relational ethics at the heart of the inquiry” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 541).

Carolyn Ellis in this regard suggests that a researcher should do “continuous ‘moral self-examination, which involves interrogating and trying to understand the other and honour the space and dialogue in between” (Ellis, 2017, p. 439). She elaborates (Ellis, 2017, p. 439), “we must explore our issues as we explore theirs, be willing to reveal ourselves and be vulnerable as they reveal themselves vulnerably, care for ourselves as we care for them, share our stories while they share theirs, because that is how relationships develop and that is what mutual respect means. We must be self-aware but not self-absorbed, all the while keeping the focus on them and their stories. In the process, we (researcher and participant) should have the possibility of coming to new questions and understandings about ourselves and each other, and our relationship, as well as the substance of our research.”

Eight school principals as research participants were purposively selected from the schools. Empirical data were analysed for qualitative content (Schreier, 2012) using descriptive, process and in vivo codings to theme the data (Bernard, Wutich & Ryan, 2017; Saldaña, 2016; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Data transcripts were imported into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) ATLAS.ti (Friesen, 2014; Smit, 2014) for ease of data management, coding, categorising and segmenting the empirical texts for verbatim citations in the article (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004, p. 105).

To ensure rigour and quality of the inquiry, trustworthiness checks, according to Sarah J. Tracy (2010), were deemed appropriate. These critical criteria for quality included a worthy topic, credibility, significant

contribution, ethics and meaning coherence. Matters of institutional ethical clearance by the university have been dealt with. Also, given the sensitivity of the educational leadership and educational challenges (Fahie, 2014), ethical measures were adhered to, considering appropriately the concept of relational ethics, which fit comfortably, theoretically and empirically. The inquiry coheres meaningfully considering that what was set out in the introduction, the theoretical framework, and the design, and methodology, interconnect with the interpretations of the findings (Klenke, 2008, p. 69).

Qualitative findings: Relationships of school principals with teachers and learners in the context of care

The first theme, which was developed from the data, speaks to the positionality of the headship and the accompanying relationships with teachers and learners. Theo (P2: 56-56)¹ remarks: "Leaders are placed in a position of authority, ensuring that the needs of the organisation are met; uphold good academic standards and meaningful relationships with the community it serves. Intertwined with the caring values of the school, is the ability of the leader to act with empathy and a real understanding of the needs of the people in the organisation. Ethics of care speaks to the leaders' ability to understand what is required to ensure that learners, parents, and staff feel valued and supported in challenging times, supported, and encouraged in their aspirations. I enjoy engaging with young inquiring minds. Teaching is an opportunity to learn from the children you teach. I am always reminded that engaging meaningfully is guided by the realisation that each child is unique because of their differences in family background, interests, and ability to learn."

Seemingly, leadership extends beyond the acts of the individual. Instead, it is a complex interplay of many interacting forces. Scholars like Linda Lambert, Diane P. Zimmerman and Mary E. Gardner (2016, p. 6) frame, for example, "shared leadership as a relational leadership process or phenomenon involving teams or groups that mutually influence one another and collectively share duties and responsibilities. This shared leadership manifests as layered relationships and networked interactions". They (Lambert, Zimmerman & Gardner, 2016) argue that leadership is evolving into an interdependence of relationships. In understanding relational leadership, school leadership and capacity

can be strengthened. Capacity here then refers to the school's ability to work in concert to solve challenging problems of schooling. Schools can unleash often latent leadership capabilities not only in principals but also in teachers and learners.

In this context, Vanessa (P8: 23-23) explains that she tries to be as democratic as possible when it comes to leadership of both the learners and the teachers. She tries not to make decisions on her own when it pertains to the whole school community. She describes her relationship with teachers and learners as follows: "I have developed the school's facilities to enhance teaching and learning; so that our learners perform in comparison to the district or provincial norm versus the pass rate per grade; I addressed the quality of our teachers and looked at the turnover of the teachers. I do believe that I am a successful leader as I see our learners leave our school and do especially well in the high schools and the matric results."

A relational logic of effectiveness centers on leadership activities that embrace the complexity in the working environment and encourage the emergence of right action within that particular context (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2017, p. 8). Accordingly, "the focus is not on the individual leader. Instead, leadership is viewed through connection, active and ongoing engagement with others and a mutual influence leading to the growth of all parties involved. This relational logic is centred on maintaining the quality of care relation as an ideal collective outcome" (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2017, p. 8).

A final remark by Bruce (P4: 32-32) is helpful: "I do not think that successful leadership is attributed to a single aspect, but rather adapting to the situation. There are times when one is called to step up and lead from the front, there are other times when leadership must be collaborative and participative, and yet other times, when it means allowing others to lead. In each of these circumstances, I ensure that I am always 'present,' sincere and deliberate in the task of taking the school 'somewhere'. At heart, leadership is about people. Schools are complex organisations. School leaders must always put the children first and build a stable, sincere, and lasting relationship with all stakeholders. I have prioritised the needs of the children and the building of community as a school leader."

The next theme addresses the understanding and experiences of ethics and care in schools. For example, Claire (P7: 39-40) appreciates that: "At her school, the Catholic ethos brought the focus of empathy and care. It is not without its difficulties, but teachers, in particular, have a deep need to be cared for too. She remembers of her previous school that it was hard to cultivate care as the relationships were

1 Pseudonyms for research participants used throughout with line numbers from the empirical data.

fraught with fear, and anxiety, which was driven by the pressure of parents' expectations. It trickled down to the learners."

Accordingly, Noddings (2010) asserts in this context that caring ought to be a principle for making ethical decisions emanating from the point of view that care is fundamental in the lives of human beings. Moral significance binds caring relationships, and the ethics of care theory strives to maintain relationships by encouraging the welfare of the ones giving care and those receiving it while networking social relations.

Theo (P2: 97-97) is mindful of care ethics in his school as he cares for his learners and for his teachers, not only when they are at work, but also when they are not at work. Theo (P2: 45-45) sees his "teachers as a valuable asset to the school and an important partner in creating a positive learning environment. They are unique individuals who have unique talents and should be allowed to be authentic in their engagement with the children they teach. I enjoy engaging with young enquiring minds. Theo is in an environment where he feels empowered to increase his circle of influence in areas of wellness and advancement. I drive the transformation and development programme, facilitate parenting workshops, and interact with the staff at all levels of employment. Social cohesion and social justice lie close to my heart and being aware of the needs of the students, parents, and staff affords me the opportunity to influence policy and practice. I prefer a collegial environment; I thrive on diversity, diversity of ideas. I seek consensus, look for collaboration."

Furthermore, his approach to teachers has always been to see how he can assist them to be the teachers they want to be; celebrate achievements and look for stretch projects." Furthermore, he sees his "teachers as a valuable asset to the school and an important partner in creating a positive learning environment. They are unique individuals who have unique talents and should be allowed to be authentic in their engagement with the children they teach."

Relational ethics was founded in the feminist thought of Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings (2010). They have argued that relationships are fundamental to the human condition and that moral actions always take place in relationships with others, attending to the needs of others, responsibility, understanding of contexts, competence and responsiveness on the part of those who receive care. Relational ethics assumes that humans would act out of concern for others, evident in Theo's reflection. According to Cheryl L. Pollard (2015, pp. 362-367) professionals should be able to identify the unique needs, talents and abilities of their staff to create a moral, educational space where responsiveness and responsibility can be enacted. Lisa Pace Vetter (2010, p. 8) puts it like this: School leaders who regard care as a political, moral and ethical imperative, are committed to 'making a difference' in the lives of their learners.

The last theme from the empirical data shows a clear link between relational leadership and an ethics of care. Bruce (P4: 44-44) explains this link between relational leadership and an ethics of care clearly: "I see the ethics of care as a deeper manifestation of relational leadership. This will often be context specific, and it is that 'out of school expectation' that the leader demonstrates the leadership relationship. For example, visiting a sick child in the hospital. In short, it is interest and involvement. The learners respond well when interest and support are demonstrated. They want to feel noticed and that they belong. I work hard at being present, both as a school leader, in the classroom and the sport and cultural programme."

Undoubtedly, relational ethics is concerned with how humans ought to treat one another and in educational leadership. This is considered how school principals interact with their teaching staff and learners in their care in their school. This may also include the broader school community and parents. Attention is therefore given to the moral space or the relationship between self and others. "Because this space is where morality is enacted, relational ethics assumes that ethical practice is consistently situated in relations," (Moore, Engel Prentice, 2014, p. 32) with teachers, learners, and parents. Relational ethics can thus provide a relevant framework for educational leadership, which can be dovetailed to relational leadership, complimenting each other for the educational enhancement in schools.

The final reflection by Bruce (P4: 34-34) appropriately describes his relationships as follows: "I work hard at getting alongside teachers, being present and leading by example. I do set high standards and communicate these. I find that teachers thrive when leaders pay a genuine interest in what they are doing and being supportive. A large part of my work is mentoring the School Leadership Team. It is all about connecting with them building a sense of common purpose. School principals have role power. However, I work at reducing power hierarchies by building relationships. Being in a position of authority places me in the unique, yet in the highly responsible position, of building relationships that do not exist because of a leader-follow power relationship, but rather because of quality appropriate for inter-personal relationships."

Fittingly, Margaret Grogan and Charol Shakeshaft (2011, p. 6) state that relational leadership is about being in relationships with others in a horizontal rather than a hierarchical sense, which means that, relations produce power in a flattened organisational structure. "Leaders who develop coherence around shared values are likely to deepen the sense of community with an organisation—a sense of being in a relationship with others who are striving for the same goals" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 47). Consequently, accomplishing goals usually takes place with and through others; power is conceptualised differently emphasising that power of everyone should be expanded. Power is conceptualised as something that is shared, and therefore school leaders seek to expand everyone's power. This supports a view of how power and relationships are perceived as closely aligned, and how power facilitates the strengthening of relationships, as opposed to controlling them.

Expanding educational leadership theories through relational qualitative methodology

The moral compass of a school using relational leadership needs the guidance of caring leaders, teachers, and parents. Educational challenges happen in social relationships, and therefore, it must be dealt with relationally, initiated by the school principal, and adopted by teachers and learners themselves. Social networks and social connections are relationships with constructive and destructive forces, which need to be handled with knowledge, skills, and care (Rodkin, 2011). Some of the principals offer some advice on advancing relational leadership. This process starts with an attitude of reflexivity. John (P5: 37-37) reflects that he should have "started sooner at building a relationship with myself." He suggests, to "make time to be reflexive and for self-reflection. I would have been less harsh on myself, take a few more moments to reflect on the success stories and accept that no person or institution is perfect. My advice to young school principals is to ensure that you understand where you stand philosophically and to

allow this belief to drive your decisions and actions and to act with integrity at all times.”

Tom (P1:72-72) realises, “When looking back I struggled to build the school, most of the things I had to fight for myself as the school principal, there was not enough induction, which I think, if I were to do things differently today. I would introduce an induction programme for school principals. It would be of help to initiate an induction course to assist the new principal with policy matters, issues of finances, and then the issues of curriculum delivery where sometimes there is a bit of confusion; people do not always understand their job description. An induction programme would assist young principals to settle for better, learning what is expected of them.”

Mary Uhl-Bien (2006) believes, however, that educational leadership programmes as induction programmes are not enough. What is needed instead are programmes that develop leaders with more knowledge about the importance of relationships, and upskilling of the abilities of leaders, recognising “relational sensibilities in everyday life of a leader” (Giles, Bills & Otero, 2015, p. 750). Brigitte Smit and Vanessa Scherman (2016) have argued that school leadership that is relational focuses on social processes, rather than on leader actions and behaviours. The focus is therefore not on the leader per se, but on the staff, the learners, and the parents who interactively define and negotiate leadership as a process of organisation. What is essential, therefore, is that relational leadership becomes a quality of the educational setting.

Transference to theory, practice and research

Theoretically, this inquiry contributes to the field of educational leadership and qualitative relational methodology. It adds to the current literature of relational leadership, relational ethics and relational qualitative research methodology. The intent of expanding theories for educational leadership may benefit school leaders and those who inquire into leadership practices with the intention to transform and change leadership practices. This can be done through the collaborative stance of narrative inquiry as relational qualitative research methodology, which assumes a collaboration between the researcher and the research participants in the co-constructing of field and research texts. Not much research has been conducted from this relational perspective of educational leadership and may require more research and rich data specifically for diverse school communities with challenging and problematic contexts, that insist on transformation and educational change. While relational ethics has been understood mostly from care professions, educational leadership,

teaching and learning have strong relational settings which may benefit from understanding relational ethics and add an ethically sound school environment based on harmony and respect.

Practically, relational leadership for educational leadership could help to understand how leadership effectiveness ultimately depends on the quality of relations between school principals and teachers and learners and community. Also, the language we use creates our reality, and perhaps a new “language” for educational leadership policy could include relational ethics and an ethics of care, offering, supplementary conceptualisations for the practice of relational educational leadership. New questions should be posed, such as what is it like to be in relationships where school leadership is constructed. Such experiences should be written up.

And lastly methodologically, Reitz (2015, p. 18) argues that limited methods have been employed which have lead to little conceptualisation of the quality of relationships which are advanced by relational leadership theory. It is for this reason that relational methodologies are advocated to fill the gap of making relational leadership visible in educational contexts.

About the author

Brigitte Smit is Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management, in the College of Education at the University of South Africa. Current research interests include, qualitative research methodologies in educational leadership, relational and responsible leadership, female leadership and rural educational leadership.

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