

Original Paper

Enabling Teachers as Front Liners in Maintaining Learners’ Emotional Well-Being during Covid-19 Context: Ubuntu/Botho as a Guiding Principle

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to theoretically present Ubuntu/Botho philosophy as a complementary approach to guide efforts intended to restore and maintain positive emotional well-being among African Basotho school going children and youth during COVID-19 and beyond. Research shows that COVID-19 pandemic has impacted badly on school systems, particularly teaching and learning process and school life in general. The central assumption driving this paper is that factors emanating from Covid-19 pandemic do not only contribute to the damage of learning process for many learners, but they also contribute to a mental and emotional health crisis, as a result of lost access to services that are naturally offered by schools. Informed by Ubuntu/Botho philosophy, the paper argues that schools have moral obligation to protect learners’ emotional health as a crucial variable for both their complete psychosocial well-being and academic achievement. It looks at maintenance of emotional well-being from the lens of Ubuntu/Botho world view. Ubuntu/Botho adoption as a theoretical framework is an effort to contribute knowledge and suggest practice that have their foundation on the experiences of people, informed by their own sociological and cultural constructs. Ubuntu/Botho as a guiding principle places values such as compassion, empathy, sharing, respect, solidarity at the centre of human co-existence, thus, has the potential to create school relationships and support systems that can restore and maintain positive emotions.

Keywords

COVID-19, enabling, Front liners, Maintaining, Emotional well-being, Ubuntu/Botho

1. Introduction

Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has been declared as public-health emergency of international concern (UNICEF, WHO & IFRC, 2020). Due to its impact on public health, governments across the world had to introduce social distancing, quarantine and isolation as strategies for curbing its deadly rapid spread. Although these strategies were considered as best options to save lives, they have, on the other hand impacted negatively on different spheres of work, and day to day activities. For instance, Schools all over the world had to abruptly close, necessitating sudden adoption of unusual online teaching and learning as a strategy for continuity in teaching and learning. In addition, schools closure and social distancing turned out to impact badly on students' academic lives, particularly those living in poverty (Terada, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; WHO, 2020). It is reported that many learners living in poverty contexts and vulnerable families cannot access resources needed for online learning (Terada, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; WHO, 2020). This means Covid-19 threatens to expose the existing underlying inequalities among school going population (Terada, 2020). For instance, while some students have been able to participate fully in online learning, others, from marginalised backgrounds have faced different forms of obstacles such as lack of smart phones, televisions and internet access (Schleicher, 2020). Understandably, this situation has a potential of not only damaging learning, it can also worsen the already existing reality of declining emotional well-being among school going population.

1.1 Aim of the Study

This paper attempts to respond to continuously reported challenge of declining emotional well-being among school going population, with specific focus on African Basotho schools, and others in similar contexts. The paper argues that the reality of emotional vulnerability experienced by many school going children in Lesotho and other countries in the Sub-Saharan region (Yamba, 2017; OSISA, 2012; UNICEF, 2007; MOET, 2012) particularly at this time of coronavirus pandemic, calls for schools to jointly engage in sense-making of the situation, look into their available assets and resources, and communally strive towards moderation of the impact of COVID-19 on learning and learners' emotional well-being. UNICEF and WHO (2020), show that even before COVID-19, there was already learning crisis in the country because of the worsening poverty in households where many learners come from. Essentially, when lockdown was initiated, the government of Lesotho with the support of UNICEF and other partners attempted to facilitate continuity in teaching and learning, and reach children through radio and TV programs. However, it soon became evident that these tactics were not sufficient to address the learning needs of majority of school going population (UNICEF & WHO, 2020). UNICEF and WHO (2020) estimate that only about half of children and adolescents have access to radio and only a third have access to TV. They report that learners in remote areas, learners with disabilities and those from poor families could not benefit from this approach. It is supposed therefore that the combination of missed schooling and increased poverty could negatively affect children for the rest of their lives if responsive majors are not taken (UNICEF & WHO, 2020).

Actually, this paper does not aim at presenting empirical results associated with emotional difficulties

among school going population, how teachers can be enabled as front liners in efforts to restore and maintain learners' emotional well-being. Rather, it attempts to discuss these issues through the 'lens' of African Ubuntu/Botho theory and philosophy. The use of Ubuntu/Botho is an effort to contribute knowledge and suggest practice in protection and maintenance of emotional well-being in schools that have their "foundation on the experiences of people informed by their own sociological and cultural constructs" (Nkoane, 2015, p. 35). In addition, it is an escape from Eurocentric dominant discourse in psychology that have dominated the parameters for understanding realities (Nkoane, 2015) of emotional health and or problems in African school contexts. Related to this, Tlali (2018, p. 35) argues that African education should be guided by African philosophy of Education. That is, such philosophy should underpin African "perceptions of otherness, the universe around them, and the decisions and choices they make about every aspect of their lives, including decisions about education". Further, Tlali (2018, p. 35) postulates "If African philosophy has to contribute to the upliftment of the African people, it could equally be argued that African philosophy has to play an important role in tackling issues regarding education in Africa", such as the declining emotional well-being of large numbers of school going population due to ever increasing complex societal challenges (Boitt, 2016; Chiiran, 2016).

2. Literature Review

Research shows that 21st century schools are characterised by increasing numbers of learners with declining mental and emotional well-being due to the impact of ever increasing complexity of societal challenges on their lives (Nasilumbi, et al., 2016; Boitt, 2016; Chiiran, 2014). Terada (2020) points out that covid-19 pandemic is likely to worsen existing mental health problems and lead to more cases among children and adolescents because of the unique combination of the public health crisis-social isolation and economic recession. Additionally, Kakuje et al. (2020) write that, with the reduction of interpersonal contact and social activation due to introduction of quarantine and lockdowns, various psychological problems have emerged, and suicides are being reported. UNICEF (2020) explicitly put that social distancing, quarantine and isolation can have a significant effect on learners' emotional well-being. Further, it explains that having to adjust to new ways of learning while away from school can cause various forms of psychological and emotional difficulties such as anxiety, anger, sadness and stress among school going population.

2.1 Conceptualizing Emotional Well-being in Schools

Emotional well-being in schools is a construct of interest in this article. Generally, it is considered as a fundamental condition for academic performance (Berger et al., 2014). In fact, one of the main goals of education, internationally and nationally is achievement of positive emotional well-being (Berger et al., 2014; Eaude, 2009). Similar to other governments across the world, Lesotho government regards well-being of pupils as an important output indicator for the quality of education (MOET, 2012). This article therefore argues that schools cannot continuously, helplessly wait for the government to provide ready-made solutions for them whenever there is crisis that impact negatively on learners' emotions

and learning. The view point is that Principals and teachers need to appreciate that they are in a better position more than any other stakeholders to address learners' emotional needs, and that they have moral obligation to protect learners' emotional health since it is a crucial variable for their complete psychosocial well-being and learning (UNICEF, 2009). Ebersohn et al. (2015) claim that schools and teachers can act as protective resources for care and support. Hornby (2003, p. 2) attests "teachers are in an ideal position to support children with social and emotional challenges since they have extensive experience of children's development and ability to identify those who are experiencing difficulties". However, Makhonza et al. (2019) note that in attempts to address psychosocial needs for vulnerable learners, schools usually concentrate on provision of food, shelter and other material needs, neglecting their need for total wellness.

According to Sophie et al. (2017) the concept of emotional well-being is an umbrella term for psychological concepts such as life satisfaction, life purpose and positive emotions, all of which are shown to be associated with improved physical and mental function. Likewise, Langeland (2014) and Kakunje et al. (2020) agree that emotional well-being is a component of mental health that includes a positive balance of pleasant to unpleasant affect and a cognitive appraisal with life in general, including ability to handle one's emotions and all life activities. Understandably, emotional well-being means a state of positive mental health and wellness, involving a sense of happiness, confidence, optimism, vitality, self-achievement and having meaning and purpose and responding effectively to one's own emotions (Weare, 2020; Choi, 2018; Barry, Clarke, & Dowling, 2017; McLaughlin, 2008; Glazer-Zikuda et al., 2013; Eade, 2009).

Langeland (2014) adds that the strengths and virtues of emotional well-being function as a buffer against misfortune and mental health problems. That is, a person with emotional well-being "understands his emotions, learns and copes with all the negative situations, achieves and finds a positive emotional state which finally leads to success" (Kakunje et al. 2020, p. 4). Hudayah et al. (2016) show that student well-being covers six dimensions: positive attitude and emotion towards the school in general, positive academic self-concept, enjoyment in school activities, free anxiety feeling of school, complaint free of physical school condition and no social problem at school. In the same way, Cash (2017) says emotions are significantly intertwined in the learning process. That is how learners feel determines how well they learn. Evans et al. (2015) also, support that emotions influence learning by affecting our thinking, behaviour and memory. It can be inferred that positive emotions influence positive thinking, behaviour and memory and vice versa.

Sufficient research show that students experience a variety of emotions in academic settings, that influence their perception and behaviour (Glazer-Zikuda et al., 2013; Weare, 2020; Choi, 2018; Barry et al., 2017; McLaughlin, 2008). While some of the emotions experienced by learners may be positive and enhance learning, some are negative and may badly affect learners' cognitive resources, motivation, academic self-concept, self-regulation, learning strategies and academic achievement (Glaser-Zikuda et al., 2020; Hudayah et al., 2016). During this time of COVID-19, it is reported that many learners

already are at a risk of experiencing negative emotions, which are likely to affect their well-being in general, their academic journey and school life in general (Terada, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). This suggests that schools, particularly those with many learners from marginalised backgrounds are likely to experience increased numbers of emotionally troubled learners since these learners are disproportionately likely to receive mental health services exclusively from schools (Terada, 2020; UNICEF, 2020).

2.2 Schools as Conduit for Learners' Support Provision

Schools are generally considered as unique settings within which young people's social and emotional well-being can be promoted (Weare, 2020; Choi, 2018; Barry et al., 2017; Mclaughlin, 2008; Glazer-Zikuda et al., 2013). Hence, many education systems have increasingly incorporated a more holistic focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) alongside cognitive development in the school curriculum (OECD, 2015). The Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (2012) support promotion of health in schools as it writes that teaching and learning environments will be safe and health promoting. In addition, it commits that care and support for vulnerable children and teachers in the educational setting will involve establishing age, gender, culture, language and context sensitive mechanisms to address the psycho-social needs of individuals (MOET, 2012). In my view, COVID-19 pandemic, serves as a wakeup call for all those involved in education to strive towards collective meaning making of how schools can effectively strengthen and utilize available resources such as teachers' basic guidance and counselling skills to respond to the challenge of declining emotional well-being among learners. This requires that teachers themselves have to possess positive well-being (Jonathan & Anthea, 2019). According to Jonathan and Anthea (2019), positive well-being in teachers enhances the quality of teacher-student relationships, student well-being and teacher performance. Weare (2020) argues that it is hard for teachers to be genuinely motivated to stimulate emotional and social well-being in others if they feel uncared for. This means it is important for school authorities to find ways in which they can protect teachers' emotional well-being and their own, if they are to protect that of learners.

2.3 A Call for Teachers' Enablement as Front Liners in Maintaining Learners' Emotional Well-being

Several scholars concur that even though teachers are resilient (Hiver, 2018; Brouskeli et al., 2018), used to new and uncertain situations, COVID-19 pandemic has thrown a whole set of complex and unexpected challenges (Varadharajan, 2020) that have impacted on their well-being (Bintliff, 2020). Varadharajan (2020) explains that major disruptions to teaching and learning, such as having to abruptly shift to unusual online teaching have widespread ramifications on teachers' mental and physical health. Henebery (2020), Cann (2020), Bintliff (2020) and Porter (2020) share the same sentiments that competing demands that come with the pandemic have a potential of causing stress and anxiety among teachers.

It is for this reason that this article calls for teacher's support, that can maintain their resilience and enable them as front liners in restoring and maintaining learners' emotional well-being. It is believed

that naturally teachers have the aptitude to sustain effective functioning regardless of threatening conditions (Hiver, 2018). According to Hiver (2018), their resilience implies that they can maintain balance and a sense of commitment, agency and moral purpose and obligation to support troubled learners. Porter (2020, p. 2) posits “as the world undergoes the extraordinary experience of living through the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders can support teachers by introducing teacher well-being strategies that establish trust, ensure safety, include teacher voice, empower teachers to make choices that improve both their teaching experiences and their students’ learning environments, and increase collaboration among teachers, school leaders and students and their families”. In his view, cultivating teacher well-being can work positively on creation of healthier and sustainable school systems that foster relationship building and restore wellness to all when schools reopen.

Essentially, research supports the importance of relationship between principal and teachers in terms of teachers’ professional well-being (Carnevale, 2016; Henbery, 2020; Cann, 2020; Sepieri, 2020; Yildirim, 2014; Brouskei, et al., 2018). Carnevale (2016) postulates that administrative leadership of the school controls multiple variables that can assist in preventing teacher stress. She specifically points out that administration can alleviate stress by providing support for teachers. On top of this, Kourkoutas and Giovazolias (2015, p. 4) posit that “a positive relationship with teachers may significantly reduce children’s behavioural and psychological difficulties and promote school adjustment”. I agree with Porter (2020) that when schools fully reopen, school leaders have an obligation to create positive environments that can boost teachers and learners’ well-being and improve academic achievement. This denotes the need to focus on relationship building, collaboration and allowing teachers voice in formulation of strategies to mitigate challenges that come with COVID-19 (Porter, 2020; Varadharajan, 2020; Boruskeli et al., 2020). Ubuntu/Botho as a theoretical framework that underpins maintenance of learners’ emotional well-being and teachers’ enablement puts precepts of solidarity, respect, care, empowerment, compassion and empathy at the centre of communal efforts intended to bring a positive social change that benefit all.

Despite scarcity of literature on teacher support as front liners in Lesotho, literature from other Sub-Saharan and many other African countries reveals the tendency of lack of enabling school leadership and administration in matters related to learners’ support. The findings of several studies done in Sub-Saharan countries, reveal that lack of support for teacher counsellors by school leadership and administration is one of the major blockades for efficient utilization of teachers’ basic counselling skills (Mushaandjaa, 2013; McIntonch, 2013, Boitt, 2018). It is reported that both selected and volunteering teacher counsellors often find themselves working in isolation, with no clear direction, purpose and ethical orientation. It makes sense therefore that teacher counsellors often feel disempowered and inadequate as a result. In one study by Adebawale (2012), for instance, it is reported that the school counsellor is perceived as someone who performs magic to change the student. In another study carried in Namibia, Mushaandja et al. (2013) report that teacher counsellors are called to be accountable and demonstrate that they are effective and efficient in their work, while they did not

receive support from the administration in the first place. This paper therefore stands firm that it is essential for principals to adopt Ubuntu/Botho as a guiding principle for formulating strategies that can enable teachers as front liners. Ubuntu/Botho orientation and expression in schools is said to promote social coherence in many ways including psychosocial wellness (Makhonza et al., 2019).

Makhonza et al. (2019) point out that caring teachers are likely to be those who subscribe to the concept of Ubuntu/Botho. This paper supports Makhonza et al. (2019) argument that before teachers could relate psychosocially with vulnerable children, they might have to be Ubuntu/Botho oriented. From their point of view, positive relationships and emotional connections with troubled learners could easily expedite quality of life in schools. Like many other scholars, I appreciate that schools are not just centres of learning, they are also networks most reliable to address learners' emotional needs (Caan et al., 2015; Patalay et al., 2017; Cowburn & Blow, 2015). Patalay et al. (2017, p. 2) writes that schools "work towards well-being oriented goals such as building friendships...extensive supportive networks of their students comprising of peers, teaching staff, other professionals and parents". Cowburn and Blow (2015) claim that schools offer the best environment for supporting good emotional well-being and identifying at an early stage behaviour of concern. From my point of view, there is a necessity for strong school leadership that focus on relationships, and cultivate a sense of collective responsibility.

Actually, UNICEF and WHO (2020) call for Lesotho education system to commit to building of better and safer schools and education system that ensure equity, inclusion and promote resilience, where every Mosotho child, every teacher, every parent voice is allowed, and ideas of how to make their schools better are considered. This paper responds by appealing to education authorities and schools to pay attention to aspects that serve as protective factors for emotional well-being-a crucial dimension in learners' academic journey and a protective factor for overall well-being. The article also responds by arguing that principals have a responsibility to ensure that teachers are enabled as front liners in ensuring attainment of resilient schools. Apart from teaching, teachers are answerable to learners' emotional well-being. At this time of COVID-19, Henebery (2020) says teachers are at the forefront in the community, parents expect them to be unflustered and have all the answers. This means, despite their own vulnerability and anxiety about getting it right (Henebery, 2020), they are expected to rise above situations, restore and protect their learners' emotional well-being.

3. Framework: Ubuntu/Botho as a Response to a Call for Maintaining Emotional Well-being in Schools

Ubuntu/Botho, is an African philosophy of care and support- for purposes of promoting and maintaining well-being for all. Hence, it is appropriate to guide efforts intended to moderate the negative impact of COVID-19 on emotional well-being in African schools. Scholars agree that Ubuntu is a longstanding philosophy and way of life that has for many centuries sustained the African communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, and in Africa as a whole (Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020; Nzimakwe, 2014; Letseka, 2013; Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015; Whitworth & Wilkinson,

2013). In addition, Mabovula (2011), Bolden (2014) and Letseka (2013b) concur that Ubuntu is an African moral philosophy that is borne out of the worldview that community strength comes out of community support, and that dignity and identity are achieved through mutualism, empathy, generosity and community commitment. Dolamo (2013, p. 1) explains, “Botho in the Sesotho languages, that is Sepedi, Setswana an (Southern) Sesotho, or Ubuntu in the Nguni languages, that is isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele and isiSwati is a Southern African way of expressing a way of living that is universal”. In addition, Mahlatsi (2017) clarifies that “Ubuntu” and “Botho” means the same thing and can be used interchangeably.

The use of Botho as a conceptual framework reflects an understanding that “Africans must be the primary and principal communicators of African experience” (Nkoane, 2015, p. 40). Botho is an African Basotho world view and approach to life that focuses on positive relationships, governed by principles of humanity, care, harmony, hospitality, respect and responsiveness that expresses the fundamental inter-connectedness of human existence (Nzimakwe, 2014; Mahaye, 2018, Mahlatsi, 2020; Lefa, 2015), Research shows that positive relationships characterised by these values are essential for promoting positive emotions. For instance, Dolamo (2013, p. 2) explains that Botho “does not compartmentalize the human person, but situates a person’s well-being within a web of relationships and the source of the web is in the Supreme Being”. Basically, the concept of Botho bears that a human being is generally defined with the maxim “Umuntu ngu muntu ngabantu” which in Sesotho means “Motho ke motho ka batho”. In English this means that “to be a human being is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others...establish human relations with them” (Mahlatsi, 2017, p. 94). Essentially, Botho “stresses the act of being positive to other people and ensure their well-being” and entails “culture of contributing to people’s needs so as to alleviate human suffering” (Makhonza et al., 2019, p. 13525). Understandably, its infusion in schools means a more “integrated thought process that examines educational issues from African perspectives in accordance with universal thinking to arrive at solutions” (Mahaye, 2018, p. 4) suitable for African school contexts. In the absence of psychologists, social workers and professional counsellors in African Basotho schools, Botho encourages schools to mobilize available resources, to pool all their talents for a common cause (Dolamo, 2013) such as promotion and maintenance of emotional well-being.

Moreover, Botho in African communities and schools assumes human beings like to peacefully co-exist with one another, are committed to utilization and sharing of locally available resources for individual and collective gain. Its infusion in school leadership has a potential of elevating principals, teachers and learners’ awareness that they are persons through other people, and their emotional well-being depends on their reciprocal relationships of harmony, empathy, respect, tolerance, care and support. Whitworth and Wilkinson (2013) posit that Botho philosophy is distinct from liberal conceptions of citizenship in that it is based on the emotional and relational bonds within which, in school context, the principal, teachers and learners depend for emotional strength in order to fulfil their own potential. Lefa (2015) similarly argues that in schools Botho implies that the principals care for themselves, teachers, and

learners, irrespective of their background or circumstances. That is, in his view, “sustainable well-being depends on harnessing the energy of the majority, working together with community, staff and learners to practice Ubuntu/Botho”. Actually, the relevance of Botho as a guiding principle in this context is supported by the fact Lesotho philosophy of education is derived from Botho philosophical statements of social justice, equality, peace, prosperity, participatory democracy and mutual co-existence (MOET, 2009).

In the context of COVID-19, where many people, particularly learners are negatively affected by additional challenges that come with it, it is important that school leadership re-think of better ways that schools can provide emotional support. I support Burns et al. (2015, p. 131) that “In order to find to solutions to the complex problems that we face as a global society, we need active citizen leaders who can collaboratively restore our sense of community and actively engage in transforming our current social, political, economic and ecological realities”. In this context of COVID-19 pandemic, that threatens learning and learning ecologies, school leadership characteristic of Botho is crucial. Botho tenet of solidarity permits leadership for sustainability, that recognizes and empowers the leader that “inherently exists in each person, and fosters strong, healthy, sustainable, and just change through collaborative and creative means” (Burns, 2015, p. 134). This kind of leadership as supported by Burns et al. (2015, p. 135) acknowledges that “today’s challenges are complicated, interconnected, and will need everyone to work towards creating a more sustainable future”. In the same way Smit and Scherman (2016, p. 1) proposes leadership that focuses on relationships and “speaks to the quality of relationships that school principals have with staff, learners, parents and the community”. As such, Botho precepts of compassion and care should be appropriated in educational life.

Conscious infusion of Botho in school leadership can heighten principals and teachers’ cognition of Basotho principle of “metse ho cha mabapi” reflected in: “your pain is my pain, my wealth is your wealth, your salvation is my salvation” (Johnson & Quan-Baffour, 2016). The African believe and saying that “it takes a whole village to raise a child” and “Any child is my child” (Johnson & Quan-Baffour, 2016, pp. 1-2) are central to Botho view of child care and support, and more relevant at this time of COVID-19. Therefore, Botho should be used as a shared philosophical basis to remind education authorities and school principals of their leadership role to cultivate the culture of collective responsibility, mobilization of available resources such as teachers’ basic knowledge of psychosocial support and basic counselling skills, for a common purpose of protecting learners’ emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Lefa (2015) writes that “Ubuntu/Botho in education is considered to be the cultural capitals that provide indigenous knowledge which is actually important for integrating into our African conception of inclusion which in turn promotes inclusivity, equality and social justice in our education”.

4. Conclusion

Any initiative that aims at positive social change calls for leadership that focuses on social cohesion. Botho should therefore be adopted as a guiding principle in school leadership and administration. Botho, epistemologically cultivates leadership style build on the principle and understanding that “bohlae ha bo haele ntlo nngoe” (recognising multiple intelligences and perspectives, permitting social and cognitive spaces for creating solutions for problems faced by communities and schools). School leadership orientated in this principle can influence those involved in education to understand that in times of emergencies, there is always a way in which they can formulate solutions drawing from their own intelligence. Botho permits African Basotho schools to emancipate themselves, from the usual traditional forms of leadership that are hierarchical, rigid and disempowering to teachers, learners and parents. This article encourages schools to strive for creation of spaces for new dialogues, to re-position themselves such that they become responsive in times of crisis, other than totally depending helplessly on ready-made solutions from authorities above.

In addition, Lesotho schools need to draw from Basotho principle of “Letsoele le beta poho” (unity is strength) which in the context of this paper denotes the world view that more than ever before, there is a need for collaboration and sharing of knowledge and experiences for construction and re-construction of knowledge if schools are to sufficiently respond to challenges posed by emergencies such as COVID-19 pandemic. Botho leadership denotes that schools’ outcomes such as learning and maintained emotional well-being are influenced by Botho values of caring, sharing, empathy, compassion, respect, tolerance, harmony and equity. That is, where there is Botho, schools are in a better position to communally formulate solutions for their problems, by first drawing from their own local knowledge and resources. Hence, this paper intent to encourage those involved in education to protect learners’ emotional well-being by shifting from total dependence on Eurocentric epistemologies that for a long time have proved to be dominant and regarded superior in knowledge production. Botho as a framework in this paper serves to encourage validation, emancipation and empowerment of teachers as front liners in protection and maintenance of learners’ emotional well-being, particularly in the context of absent psychologists, professional counsellors and social workers working closely with Lesotho schools to ensure protection and maintenance of positive emotions and general mental health. For teachers to be able to continuously respond to learners’ emotional needs, their own emotional needs have to be met by introducing teacher well-being strategies that establish trust, ensure safety, include voice and empower teachers to make choices that improve both their teaching experiences and their students’ learning environments. Botho leadership can cultivate teachers’ enthusiasm to participate in collective efforts to formulate strategies to ensure efficient utilization of teachers’ basic counselling skills and other approaches to maintaining learners’ emotional well-being. Ensuring application of Botho tenets of respect, solidarity, care, empathy and compassion can promote positive relationships which have a positive impact on children’s well-being. The principal in collaboration with staff could create social and cognitive spaces, where everybody feels safe and at the centre to share views during

discussions of difficult topics such as COVID-19, its impact on emotional well-being, and how schools can position themselves to respond to some of the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic.

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