PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF VALUES AND VALUE CONFLICTS
IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

A Dissertation in
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ABSTRACT

The literature addressing values and value conflict in the principalship examines (1) the espoused or demonstrated values of administrators and their impact on decision making, (2) the process of discovering personal values and ethical codes and their application to decision making and (3) how administrators work through value conflict and ethical dilemmas that arise in their daily work. This body of work identifies value conflicts and ethical dilemmas as important and frequent occurrences in the day-to-day work of principals and has inspired many to call for explicit training for educational leaders in ethical decision-making, ethical codes and frameworks, and value and moral recognition.

What remains unanswered is whether principals are cognizant of their values as underlying players in the day-to-day decisions they make and what impact values and value conflict have on the decision-making processes of principals in practice. The purpose of this study is to come to an understanding of this impact by addressing the following areas of inquiry: (1) the extent to which principals perceive awareness of their personal values and codes of ethics during decision-making processes, (2) the perceived impact of their personal values and codes on the decisions they make, and (3) how they perceive the resolution of the conflicts that arise when personal values conflict with those of the system, community or profession. This study identifies to what extent principals have wrestled with these concepts and argues that we might better prepare them through professional development or pre-service training to make decisions that are ethically sound and based on the best interests of the student.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................................. vi

Chapter 1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1

  Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................................................. 7
  Conceptual Framework ..................................................................................................................................... 8
  Significance of the Study ................................................................................................................................. 9

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature .................................................................................................................... 11

  Espoused or Demonstrated Values .................................................................................................................. 11
  Discovering Personal, Professional and Community Values .......................................................................... 12
  Value Conflict .................................................................................................................................................. 15
    Frequency of Conflict .................................................................................................................................... 15
    Arenas of Conflict ......................................................................................................................................... 16
    Dealing with Conflict .................................................................................................................................... 20

Chapter 3 Methodology ....................................................................................................................................... 26

  Rationale for Approach .................................................................................................................................... 27
  Research Design ............................................................................................................................................... 29
  Participant Selection ......................................................................................................................................... 30
  Research Strategies .......................................................................................................................................... 31
    Entry ............................................................................................................................................................... 31
    Management of Role ..................................................................................................................................... 32
    Ethics and Reciprocity ................................................................................................................................... 32
  Data Collection ................................................................................................................................................ 33
  Reliability and Validity ..................................................................................................................................... 36
  Data Analysis .................................................................................................................................................. 37
  Participants ...................................................................................................................................................... 39

Chapter 4 Results .................................................................................................................................................. 41

  A Tapestry of Values: Mentors and Experiences that Made Us Who We Are .... 42
  A Lifetime of Values ....................................................................................................................................... 43
    Mentors .......................................................................................................................................................... 43
    Situational Experiences ................................................................................................................................. 47
  Values and Decision Making .......................................................................................................................... 51
  Thick Skin: The Resolution of Value Conflict in Decision-Making ................................................................ 54
    Principal and Teacher .................................................................................................................................... 56
    Principal and Superintendent ......................................................................................................................... 62
    Principal and Community ............................................................................................................................ 66
    Whose Best Interest? ................................................................................................................................... 69
Chapter 5  Summary ........................................................................................................... 73

Discussion ......................................................................................................................... 73
Implications for Practice ................................................................................................. 78
Implications for Policy .................................................................................................. 78
Implications for Research ............................................................................................ 79

References ...................................................................................................................... 81

Appendix A The Three Interview Series Protocols ..................................................... 86
Appendix B Informed Consent Forms .......................................................................... 92
Appendix C Sample of Versus and Values Coding ..................................................... 96
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The literature addressing values and value conflict in the principalship examines (1) the espoused or demonstrated values of administrators and their impact on decision making, (2) the process of discovering personal values and ethical codes and their application to decision making and (3) how administrators work through value conflict and ethical dilemmas that arise in their daily work. This body of work identifies value conflicts and ethical dilemmas as important and frequent occurrences in the day-to-day work of principals and has inspired many to call for explicit training for educational leaders in ethical decision-making, ethical codes and frameworks, and value and moral recognition.

What remains unanswered is whether principals are cognizant of their values as underlying players in the day-to-day decisions they make and what impact values and value conflict have on the decision-making processes of principals in practice. The purpose of this study is to come to an understanding of this impact by addressing the following areas of inquiry: (1) the extent to which principals perceive awareness of their personal values and codes of ethics during decision-making processes, (2) the perceived impact of their personal values and codes on the decisions they make, and (3) how they perceive the resolution of the conflicts that arise when personal values conflict with those of the system, community or profession. This study looks at the extent to which 4 principals have wrestled with these issues and how we might better prepare principals through professional development or pre-service training to make decisions that are ethically sound.
In this study I employed a phenomenological approach to explicate perspective from the principal’s point of view. Using three semi-structured, open ended interviews, principals were asked to reflect on their lived experiences as practicing administrators that relate to values, value conflict and their impact on decision making. The analysis provides thematic descriptions of the phenomenon that present the what and how of all participants’ experiences. In my final reflection and discussion I use these themes to identify the impact of values and value conflict on decision-making processes.

The remainder of this introduction frames the background for the resurgence of interest in values and ethical leadership and illustrates the context in which value conflict arises in the principalship. With these understandings in mind, the purpose of this research was to illuminate the level of value cognizance principals bring to their work as they reflect on its impact on decision-making. Finally, I make an argument for a focus on explicit development of value cognizance and its potential decision-making through professional development for pre-service and practicing principals.

In October of 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration adopted the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders. This revised set of guidelines for the educational leadership profession is intended to help state policymakers “ensure that policies and programs set consistent expectations for educational leaders over the course of their careers, from initial preparation, recruitment and hiring, to induction and mentoring, to evaluation and career-long professional learning” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 5). Standard 2 of this document states “Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student’s academic success and well-being” (p. 10). To demonstrate competency in this standard the leader
must, among other things, (1) “act ethically and professionally in personal conduct, relationships with others, decision-making, stewardship of the school’s resources, and all aspects of school leadership”, and (2) “safeguard and promote the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community and diversity”, and (3) “provide moral direction for the school and promote ethical and professional behavior among faculty and staff” (p. 10).

The comprehensiveness of this standard suggests that the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (an aggregate of professional organizations representing higher education, public school administration, chief state officers and teacher accreditation) views issues of values, value conflict and their impact on decision-making as an important component in the preparation of new principals and the ongoing professional development of practicing administrators. In order to understand the importance of this standard in the educational landscape and the necessity of its origin, it is helpful to refer to the identified realities that educational leaders are confronted with in their current professional contexts and roles.

Begley and Johansson (1998) write that “administrators and researchers have become increasingly sensitive to values issues because of the increasingly pluralistic societies in which they live and work” (p. 401). Often the values of the members of these societies conflict with one another; schools perhaps more than any other institution are at the heart of these encounters (Ryan, 1999). Shapiro and Gross (2008) point out that in turbulent times such as these, educational leaders face “profound moral decisions regarding their classrooms, schools, school districts, and higher educational institutions in an ever-changing and challenging world” (p. 3). Bolman and Deal tell us that schools, as
political organizations, are coalitions of diverse membership and that this membership has differing values and beliefs. Further, the important decisions in schools will involve allocating scarce resources and this reality will ensure day-to-day conflict among the various stakeholders as they jockey for power (2008). Empirically, researchers point out that ethical dilemmas resulting from value conflict occur with increasing frequency, even daily in the work of educational leaders (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Norberg & Johansson, 2007; Roche, 1999). The writings of these scholars and the noted research usefully frame the values environment within which principals find themselves operating.

With these realities in mind I turn to the question of new principals’ preparedness to deal with the inevitable conflicts that arise between competing values of the various stakeholders in the field. Scholars have noted a dearth of ethical coursework in principal preparatory programs and call for a greater focus on morals, values and ethics beyond the typical peripheral treatment these important concepts receive (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 2004). Sergiovanni laments a myopic focus on the behavior of leadership instead of the action of leadership in the theoretical base. He notes “we have separated the hand of leadership from its head and heart” and “the process of leadership from its substance”. He also notes that the field of practice is ahead of the theory in recognizing the necessity for moral leadership (1992, p. 3).

With Act 45 of 2007, the Pennsylvania legislature passed the Pennsylvania School Leadership Standards which include three core standards and six corollary standards intended to drive the ongoing professional development of administrators completing the Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership training or PIL, a requirement of all principals hired or certified after January 1, 2008. Although these standards stop short of explicitly
mentioning morals, ethics or values in this guide for school leadership training, corollary standard 4 addresses advocating for students and operating in a fair and equitable manner (PDE, 2010). In their notable lack of moral and ethical language, the Pennsylvania School Leadership Standards water-down the NPNEA 2015 standard addressing values and ethics, advocating instead for a peripheral treatment, much like the typical coursework addressed above.

Echoing the sentiments of the NPBEA 2015, many scholars have called for explicit training of educational leaders in ethical decision-making, ethical codes and frameworks (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007; Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994) and also value and moral recognition (Begley & Zaretsky, 2004; Branson, 2007b; Ryan, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2004) in order to navigate the difficult terrain of the current educational landscape. Behind this call is the premise that this type of training would be invaluable for new principals in giving them a conceptual framework for dealing with value conflict, argued to be one of the most troublesome aspects of the principal’s role (Dempster & Berry, 2003).

Leithwood (1999) cautions against training educators in moral philosophies as these values tend to be developed over the course of a lifetime and such trainings are likely to have little effect on practice or change participants’ views. Likewise he contends that training in ethical behavior is questionable since there is little incentive to behave unethically as an educational leader unlike in the private sector where there is a clear “means justifies the ends” mentality (p. 26). To elaborate, he points out that the few instances of unethical activity evident in educational practice (i.e. sexual misconduct) are
not likely to be prevented by such a focus. Instead he promotes the idea of developing professional values such as caring, participation, knowledge, dependability, persistence and equity. These values are often missing from the repertoire of practicing administrators and can be developed through mentorship and on-the-job training (K. Leithwood, 1999).

Without a doubt, ethical dilemmas and value conflicts can be some of the more emotionally taxing and difficult hurdles to overcome as a new principal and it would be helpful to have some insight into how those in the field deal with matters of conflict they face. The literature reveals multiple studies of values, value conflict, ethics and decision-making in various classes of administrators (i.e. Catholic school principals, women in the superintendency, Australian, Canadian and Swedish principals). This empirical work examines (1) the espoused or demonstrated values of administrators and their impact on decision making (Lazaridou, 2007; Leonard, 1999; Ribbins, 1999; Roche, 1999), (2) the process of discovering personal values and ethical codes and their application to decision making (Branson, 2007a, 2007b; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1998; J. A. Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003) and (3) how administrators work through value conflict and ethical dilemmas that arise in their daily work (Begley & Johansson, 1998; Begley & Zaretsky, 2004; Dempster & Berry, 2003; Dempster, Freakly, & Parry, 2000; Grogan & Smith, 1999; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007; Norberg & Johansson, 2007; Roche, 1999; Ryan, 1999; Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1998).

Missing from the literature are studies that investigate principals’ perceptions of these issues and the impact values have on the decision-making process. Whether
principals would benefit from examining values and value conflict in the context of decision-making is better informed by an analysis of these perceptions. The purpose of this study is to begin to address this gap in the literature.

**Statement of the Problem**

Given the realities of practice and the work of scholars outlined above one could infer that new principals are at best ill prepared or at worst wholly unprepared to deal with the day to day value conflicts and resultant dilemmas that are part and parcel of the work of an educational leader. That they hold personal value and ethical codes is undeniable. As Beck (1999) states “Educational administrators already act out of a set of values and make many wise decisions” (p. 223).

Left unanswered is whether principals are aware of the personal codes and values underlying the decisions that they make and how they go about the business of resolving the conflicts that arise in their daily work. Do they look at the ethical dilemmas that crop up as fundamentally related to value conflict and use this information as part of their processing of the decisions they make? In other words, what is the impact of values and value conflicts on the decision-making processes of principals in praxis? The purpose of this study is to come to an understanding of this impact by addressing the following areas of inquiry: (1) the extent to which new principals perceive awareness of their personal values and codes of ethics during decision-making processes, (2) the perceived impact of their personal values and codes on the decisions they make, and (3) how they perceive the resolution of conflicts that arise when personal values conflict with those of the system, community or profession.
Conceptual Framework

Shapiro and Stefkovich’s Ethic of the Profession (2016) provides a useful theoretical framework for examining the complexities of values and their impact on the decision-making processes of principals. This ethical paradigm builds on the multidimensional ethical framework proposed by Starratt that develops “a tapestry of ethical perspectives woven of three themes: the theme of caring, the theme of justice and the theme of criticism” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994, p. 57). Starratt contends that each of these ethics depends on one another and argues that taken as a whole, the three ethics “complement and enrich each other in a more complete ethic” (p. 55). It is his intent that leaders should use this multidimensional ethic as each decision dictates by focusing on the particular dimensions or combination of dimensions that are most applicable.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) contend that by focusing only on the ethics of justice, care and critique Starratt’s model does not take into consideration the “moral aspects unique to the profession and the questions that arise as educational leaders become more aware of their own personal and professional codes of ethics” (p. 23). To fill in this gap they propose an Ethic of the Profession, a dynamic model that examines the convergence of personal, individual-professional, and professional codes of ethics with those of the community and the standards of the profession. It places students at the center of ethical decision-making.

The model recognizes that when educators develop their personal and professional codes using a multi-paradigm framework, a clash between codes may
develop. These clashes may occur between an individual’s personal and professional codes, between competing professional codes (i.e. when someone is prepared in multiple fields), between two individual leaders’ interpretations of codes and between the leader and the community. In circumstances where these clashes occur, the best interest of the student becomes the deciding factor in the final decision. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) state:

This ethic of the profession would ask questions related to justice, critique, and care posed by the other ethical paradigms but would go beyond these questions to inquire: What would the profession expect me to do? What does the community expect me to do? And what should I do based on the best interests of the students, who may be diverse in their composition and their needs? (p. 26).

The Ethic of the Profession provides a useful paradigm for this study by extending the examination of values and value conflict beyond the traditional multidimensional ethic of care, critique and justice. In establishing the role of professional and community values, the “best interests of the student” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016, p. 25) and clashes between codes in the decision making process, the ethic of the profession provides a more holistic perspective for uncovering the complexities of principals’ perceptions.

**Significance of the Study**

By investigating principals’ perceptions of the impact of values and value conflict on their decision-making processes, the field of educational leadership benefits in several important ways. This study expands the current knowledge base of the ways in which values impact the decision-making processes of school principals by adding to the body
of research already present. Also the field gains important insight into how principals reflect upon and use values in their decision-making processes, a view that has only been superficially examined in the literature.

The study benefits practice as it informs the professional development needs for developing the capacity in principals to deal with the competing values and inevitable conflicts that often arise in their work. It will provide further insight into curricular needs in developing principal training programs and verify or challenge the notions that these programs need to focus more on values and ethics training for aspiring leaders. It also helps principals frame the context within which these types of conflicts occur and provides useful perspective for dealing with them professionally and effectively. Finally, the study benefits policy as it serves to inform those who craft standards for principal preparation, induction programs and professional development of the impact values have on principals’ decision-making processes.

Begley and Johansson (1998) note that empirical studies into administrative values suffer from “methodological difficulties and a serious relevancy gap for practitioners” (p. 400). Despite this an increase in appetite has occurred among administrative circles for guidance in dealing with moral leadership and ethical decision-making (Begley & Johansson, 1998). As noted above, the increasingly pluralistic societies in which we live have created a moral landscape rife with potential conflicts in values that require new principals to act with moral and ethical integrity. The purpose of this study is to provide us a glimpse of the principal’s view of this landscape in a practical and relevant way.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature reveals multiple primary sources dealing directly with values, value conflicts and their impact on the decision-making processes of school principals. These studies investigate espoused or demonstrated values, the process of discovering personal, professional and community values and the ways in which leaders work through value conflicts. The literature informing this analysis is summarized below.

Espoused or Demonstrated Values

Notable in this category is an article by Ribbins (1999) that demonstrates the power of an espoused set of values that is at odds with those demonstrated in practice. This study points out the uncomfortable notion that administrators often find themselves choosing values that are opposite of those they claim to embody. Further, the members of an organization can actually prefer an administrator based on their espoused values regardless of whether those values actually appear in practice (Ribbins, 1999).

Leonard (1999) investigated the values of teachers, principals and their districts by asking members to espouse values and identify basic assumptions pertaining to the purpose of education. The study revealed that there are often inconsistencies between espoused and underlying values between the different levels and within levels of the organization. Surprisingly, these differences did not necessarily lead to conflict. The author explains that this is because the value commitments one espouses are not necessarily incompatible with those of the organization, but rather may exist to a lesser extent. It also revealed that most are consciously unaware of the values they hold and
how those values impact the decisions they make and the schools they create. Finally, the author suggests examining one's underlying values in bridging the gap between values theory and practice (Leonard, 1999).

In a qualitative study of 5 Australian Catholic school principals, Roche (1999) examined how they actually respond to moral and ethical dilemmas in their professional roles. As a theoretical framework the author identified four possible responses from a review of the literature: Avoidance, Suspending Morality, Creative Insubordination and Personal Morality. Principals in the study reported experiencing moral and ethical dilemmas on a daily basis, mostly interpersonal conflict. All four of the possible responses were seen in the principals' interviews. The author goes on to offer explanations as to when certain responses would be used and takes great care to state that just because a principal uses an avoidance tactic, it does not mean he is less than moral. Sometimes avoiding a difficult parent by giving into their wishes for a teacher assignment can mean greater peace in the long run even if it is ethically unsound. The author also identifies that incongruence between the articulated values of the respondents and their actual behavior was not uncommon. Though not meant to be critical, this points to the elusiveness of the respondents’ moral and ethical intent when confronted by real problems (Roche, 1999).

**Discovering Personal, Professional and Community Values**

Branson’s (2007a, 2007b) work with structured self-reflection to raise moral consciousness in educational leaders and improve leadership capacity typifies this category of research. Through self-reflection, the administrator focuses not only on the
objective and factual influences that impact choice, but also the subjective and personal influences as well (Branson, 2007b).

Langlois and Lapointe (2007) interviewed 47 Canadian principals regarding the implementation of a law guaranteeing instruction in French for native French speaking students. Using Starratt’s ethics of care, critique and justice as the theoretical framework, they found that principals with less experience tended to focus on the ethic of justice when applying the mandate, a posture that mistakenly promotes the protection of the language, arguably not the intent of the law. The authors explain that this suggests novice principals find rules, laws and policies reassuring. They also found that more experienced principals applied the ethic of care in conjunction with critique for a more accurate interpretation of the law that focuses attention on the needs of the child as a member of a culture rather than on the protection of the language itself (Langlois & Lapointe, 2007). They conclude with recommendations for practice: "educational organizations should create practice analysis groups in order to promote reflection, judgment and a sense of responsibility among their leaders" (p. 258); "organizations could implement learning activities that empower individuals in evaluating the ethical consequences of their actions" (p. 258); finally ethical training for educators should not only focus on deontological ethics but also on reflexive ethics (Langlois & Lapointe, 2007).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (1998) looked at their own personal and professional codes and those of the school leaders in an ethics course they were teaching at Temple University. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks used are the ethics of a liberal democratic viewpoint (Justice), a critical theory perspective (Critique) and feminist ethics.
(Care). The article is the seminal work that led to the Ethic of the Profession later identified in their 2000 book *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education*. Their methodology examined the writings of over 100 students in the course to inductively examine the values that make up their personal and professional codes of ethics. The authors conclude that the professional codes of ethics are greatly influenced by personal codes, and that exploring one's own codes and being exposed to others could be painful and lead to conflict. The clashes between personal and professional codes within individuals and between them represents the conflicting morals and values present in schools and society at large. Coming to grips with ethical codes is crucial for resolving "difficult dilemmas in an often morally polarized era" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1998, p. 139).

In their later work, Stefkovich and Shapiro (2003) built on "Dealing with Dilemmas in a Morally Polarized Era" by reflecting on the importance of community and the ethical dilemmas that arise in decision making in addition to the conflicts that develop between the personal and professional codes reported on in the earlier article. The authors asked their participants to define community and reflect on the communities they rely on when making important ethical decisions. Through this dialogue, they were able to illustrate how diversity in communities can cause dilemmas in decision-making processes. They point out that what may be acceptable in one community may be entirely taboo in another. Additionally they noted that some communities might completely ignore certain issues that they do not wish to deal with (rural) while others (urban) may openly challenge differences in values and morals. Finally, they note that the failure of certain communities to openly confront such dilemmas does not necessarily
mean that they are fundamentally uncaring in nature. In their conclusion they imply that a multi-dimensional (care, critique, justice and profession) ethic is required in dealing with ethical dilemmas related to community (J. A. Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003).

**Value Conflict**

Value conflict occurs whenever a leader is made to choose between two fundamentally irreconcilable positions. In these situations the administrator becomes less a problem _solver_ and more a solution _finder_ (Begley & Johansson, 1998). Over the past several decades the field of practice has slowly grown to accept that attending to values and value conflict are inescapable norms in the current multi-cultural, poly-valued environment of education (Ryan, 1999). As Dempster and Berry (2003) state:

> The goals of principals’ various endeavors are more difficult to articulate, ethical imperatives are more immediate and sometimes conflicting, and the often competing demands of various stakeholders are more difficult to resolve than they are in other professions (p. 461).

The literature addressing value conflict in educational leadership can be sorted into sub-categories reflecting the frequency that value conflicts present themselves, the context in which they occur and the ways in which administrators discover solutions to these conflicts.

**Frequency of conflict.** In an Australian research project (Dempster et al., 2000) examining perceived ethical climates of schools in Queensland, 25 principals were interviewed and 552 given surveys in which they were asked to reflect on the “climate, trends and difficulties surrounding ethical aspects of their decision-making” (as cited in Dempster & Berry, 2003, p. 462). The authors’ intent was to support the claim that the
ethical climate in schools has changed over the last fifteen years. In this study, 81% of respondents suggested that the frequency of complex dilemmas requiring ethical decisions has increased. Many stated that they face these dilemmas on monthly (25%), weekly (30%) or daily (14%) basis (Dempster & Berry, 2003).

Other studies in the literature support the claim that complex value conflicts are part of a principal’s daily work. Norberg and Johansson (2007) asked 50 principals and 35 newly appointed principals to articulate the dilemmas that they encounter on a daily basis. In this study of Swedish administrators, they were able to surmise that many of the daily issues principals deal with do not have easy answers and that the dilemmas they articulated dealt with matters of “daily practice” (p. 292). Roche (1999) interviewed five Australian Catholic school principals (two female and three male) about the dilemmas experienced in their roles and discovered that four of the five respondents perceived moral and ethical dilemmas on a daily basis with the fifth implying that this is the case through their discussions.

This data provides evidence that principals attend to moral and ethical dilemmas rather frequently lending credence to Begley and Johansson’s (1998) assertion that “Value conflict situations have become more common to the experiences of school administrators. One could go so far as to say they have become a defining characteristic of the role for most school principals” (p. 415).

Arenas of conflict. As noted above, scholars have found that value conflict is a frequent occurrence in the day-to-day work of school principals. Begley and Johansson (1998) state that these conflicts can occur within a person, between two people or they “may be outcomes of an incongruence or incompatibility among one or more of these value
arenas, that is conflicts occurring among the domains of personal values, professional values, and/or organizational values” (p. 403). To better understand the context within which these conflicts occur, it is useful to reflect upon the noted “arenas of conflict” in the literature.

In reflecting upon their data from an ethics course over a seven year period, Shapiro and Stefkovich (1998) identified three patterns of conflict: clashes between an individual’s personal and professional codes, between two peoples’ codes and between the codes of two different professions. They remark in their conclusion that the discovery of these clashes can be uncomfortable, but they are indicative of not only the culture of our schools but of society at large and as such are useful exercises to enter into. In a later work, they recommend that leaders “grapple” with matters of conflicting ethics (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016):

By grappling, we mean that these educational leaders have struggled over issues of justice, critique and care related to the education of children and youth and through this process, have gained a sense of who they are and what they believe personally and professionally (p. 23).

In the same volume, they note a fourth area of conflict clash that occurs when a leader’s personal and/or professional codes clash with that of the community (2016). Undoubtedly, this addition results from their work demonstrating how diversity in communities can cause dilemmas in decision-making processes (J. A. Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003). In this study they point out that what may be acceptable in one community may be entirely taboo in another. Additionally they noted that some communities may completely ignore certain issues that they do not wish to deal with (i.e.
rural) while others (i.e. urban) may openly challenge differences in values and morals (2003).

In their study of Canadian and Swedish principals, Begley and Johansson (1998) asked respondents to write about “critical incidents,” interpreted by respondents to mean a “situation that cannot be solved in such a way that everyone is pleased” (p. 416). It is notable that both sets of principals in the study cited interpersonal problems as the most difficult to solve. Consistent with these findings are those of Roche (1999) who found that Catholic school principals identified dilemmas dealing with teachers, parents, children and administrative authority as those that were named most readily by his respondents. These findings are consistent with those of Grogan (1999) whose portrait of women superintendents’ perspectives of moral dilemmas found that issues dealing with staff and students tended to be the most vexing to solve and Leithwood and Stager (1989) who found that principals name interpersonal conflict as the most difficult to solve.

In their study of Australian principals, Dempster and Berry (2003) found that respondents noted issues dealing with students, staff, finance/resources, and external relations as “most frequent and most troublesome” (p. 464). Issues of harassment, intimidation and bullying were the top student issues identified with 76% of principals citing them as the most frequently occurring ethical issues followed by 60% who named monitoring staff performance as a frequently occurring issue. The study provides further evidence of the pervasiveness of interpersonal value conflict in the principalship as a typical arena of conflict.

A unique investigation in the literature looks at how parent advocates use value conflict and confrontation deliberately to change administrative perspectives on the
educational requirements of students with special needs (Begley & Zaretsky, 2004). This study offers a focused look at the interpersonal conflicts that are present in the principalship as it highlights the oft-conflicting views of principals and parents of special education students. Through their findings, the authors highlight the value perspectives principals and advocates hold of each other and identify sources of common value conflict. For example, advocates may hold that principals de-valued their contribution to problem-solving processes or that they responded to such advocacy by displaying a fear of power sharing met with an unwillingness to listen. Principals reported that parent advocates tended to come to discussions acting on their own political agendas with little consideration of the principals’ contributions and often acted unprofessionally in meetings. These interactions resulted in participants choosing avoidance, withdrawal or more productively, problem-solving reactions when dealing with such conflict (Begley & Zaretsky, 2004).

The preceding overview of the arenas of conflict highlights the pervasive nature of interpersonal conflict in solving moral and ethical dilemmas. When considering the nature of values and morals, it may seem obvious that these types of conflicts occupy administrators more than others (i.e. policy, implementation of state guidelines, finance and resource allocation etc.). In this light it is important to note that administrators do not emphasize interpersonal conflict at the exclusion of all others. I would propose that we shouldn’t exclude these issues from the discussion as they certainly have a place in the work of principals and need to be dealt with in an expeditious manner just the same. To conclude this look at value conflict in the principalship, I will examine how principals
deal with conflicts as they arise and examine the types of frameworks these solutions have been measured against.

**Dealing with conflict.** In their study of Australian principals, Dempster and Berry (2003) found that when faced with ethical decisions, principals tended to rely on others for support and advice. They identified other principals (73%), senior department officers (55%), senior members of the school leadership team (51%) and spouses and partners (31%) as the top four sources of such support. Principals were also asked to cite the most important attributes of effective ethical decision-making. Respondents cited interpersonal skills, empathy, ability to recognize ethical features of situations, reason and logic and knowledge of ethical principles.

Many of these principals also felt that they could use professional development in the area of ethical decision-making. Areas for development included improving knowledge of laws, rules and procedures (74%), recognition of situational ethical features (73%), interpersonal skills (68%), reasoning and logical thinking (66%), ability to empathize (55%) and knowledge of ethical principles (54%) (Dempster & Berry, 2003).

While these data are informative, they don’t explain how principals actually solve conflicts in decision-making. For that information it is useful to turn to empirical studies that focus specifically on how principals react to these situations.

In their study of Canadian and Swedish school principals, Begley and Johansson (1998) sought to clarify which types of values principals tend to rely on in solving problems. They hypothesized that the work of previous studies relegating trans-rational and personal preference to the periphery were more a reflection of the failure of principals to articulate these values or the impact of the imposed expectations of Western
culture for the use of rational processes in decision-making than they were evidence that non-rational principles simply aren’t used.

The study confirmed that principals tended to favor the rational values of consensus and consequence when problem-solving and used non-rational principles and personal preference less frequently. They note that although trans-rational (ethics) and sub-rational (personal values) were less frequently used, they should not be removed from the discussion or dismissed as non-essential. They found that trans-rational principles were relied upon especially when the possibility of consensus was impossible and when two or more trans-rational principles were at stake, arguably a frequent occurrence in educational leadership. They conclude that while consensus and consequence remain the preference of principals in problem-solving, trans-rational and sub-rational values are employed when “knowledge schema is unavailable, ambiguity thrives or urgency requires” (p. 420). While Begley and Johansson (1998) look at the place of values in decision-making processes, others tend to view conflict through an ethical framework (Grogan & Smith, 1999; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007).

Langlois and Lapointe (2007) studied the application of Canada’s mandate for French speaking schools developed to protect the fundamental human rights of French speaking students as outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms adopted in 1982. Section 23 of this document guarantees Canadian students an education in their native language when numbers justify. The authors note that principals often misinterpret this mandate as an attempt to protect the language rather than the rights of the students. Specifically they looked at the confusion that often set in between protecting the language (French) and protecting the human rights of their students. In
order to examine principals’ application of the mandate, they adopted Starratt’s multidimensional model: the ethic of justice, the ethic of care and the ethic of critique (Starratt, 1994).

Using textual analysis of open-ended interviews, Langlois and Lapointe sorted principal responses and application of the mandates into four distinct classes. Classes 1 and 2 focused on the ethic of critique (with different textual themes), Class 3 focused on the ethic of justice and Class 4, a blend of the ethic of care and critique. They concluded that all but Class 4 focused on the protection of the language or the implementation of the law before the protection of student rights. The implication is that a balanced approach or multi-dimensional ethic focuses the leader on a correct interpretation of the mandate. By analyzing the membership of each class, they found that principals with less experience tended to focus on the ethic of justice when applying the mandate, a posture that mistakenly promotes the protection of the language, arguably not the intent of the law. The authors explain that this suggests novice principals find rules, laws and policies reassuring. They also found that more experienced principals applied the ethic of care in conjunction with critique for a more accurate interpretation of the law that focuses attention on the needs of the child as a member of a culture rather than on the protection of the language itself (Langlois & Lapointe, 2007).

Grogan and Smith (1999) interviewed 11 women superintendents through a feminist perspective to examine how they deal with moral and ethical dilemmas in a field historically dominated by white males. In the study, subjects typically demonstrate an ethic of care in their disposition of ethical dilemmas such as expulsion and personnel matters. Evidence of an ethic of justice is also present in some circumstances.
Acknowledging that it has been historically viewed as a feminine trait, the authors argue that an ethic of care is in fact a desirable trait in a superintendent regardless of gender and it complements the more common ethic of justice, historically masculine, displayed in a world (the superintendency) that is dominated by white males.

The article promotes an ethic of care as a positive addition to the field and that it should embrace the human quality this ethic brings to the practice of administration. They advocate for care as a desirable principle that can enhance that of justice so long as “care is predicated on respect for the other and on a humility that makes no assumptions about what it is truly like to be the other” (p. 286). The two preceding articles give us some insight into how administrators’ decision making-actions can be viewed through ethical frameworks and imply that a multi-dimensional ethical treatment often is applied in conflict situations. This notion is in line with the writings of several scholars in the field (Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994; J. A. Stefkovich, 2006).

Roche (1999) interviewed five Catholic school principals in Australia to determine how they respond to moral and ethical dilemmas in their professional roles. As a theoretical framework, the author identified four possible responses from a review of the literature: avoidance, suspending morality, creative insubordination and personal morality. Avoidance refers to consciously or subconsciously reducing problems of a trans-rational nature to rational or sub-rational levels thereby allowing ethical dilemmas to be solved with consequentialist and non-consequentialist solutions. Suspending morality occurs when a principal puts their own moral beliefs on hold and defers to the policies and procedures set forth by the organization. Creative insubordination occurs
when principals adapt policies to fit their own values. In this scenario the principal is usually operating out of a conviction that they are protecting teachers or the system from harm in a subterfuge that avoids detection from superiors as outright insubordination.

Principals display personal morality when they take a stand or a stance on an issue; it is usually preceded by a rational assessment of the likely outcome of taking such a position.

All four responses were evident in the study. Avoidance was noted for example when a principal chose to give in to a parent’s request for placement based on the long term effects on the relationship with that parent. Principals noted suspending their own morality when implementing statewide policy. One principal used creative insubordination by granting unearned sick leave to a teacher. Personal morality was used against teachers, parents and students more frequently than employers. It is helpful to note that in all applications of the four responses, the administrators acted out of moral responsibility even when the responses were in conflict with expectations or policy. He concludes by stating that principals exercise a number of responses when making decisions and that his findings remind us of the tentative nature of the “existing knowledge base in the values domain within educational leadership” (Roche, 1999, p. 270). To place the study in context Roche (1999) notes:

Perhaps the worth of this study may best be judged by the extent to which it inspires others to consider and re-consider the nature and influence of values, value orientations, and value conflicts on administrative practice (p. 270).

Begley and Zaretsky (2004) looked at typical responses to the conflict that develops between competing values of principals and parent advocates of special education students. During these interactions participants would exhibit: (1) aggressive
responses characterized by threats, intimidation and a sense that one needed to “win”, (2) avoidance responses or withdrawal from a solution and (3) problem-solving responses that used a framework to work out a mutually agreeable solution. The third solution is identified as the preference. They conclude the study by saying:

At the very least, dialogical interactions have the potential to promote the thoughtful critique of current practices and allow for the consideration of ways in which school leaders’ and parent leaders’ interactions might change to better support the equitable and ethical resolution of value conflicts in education (p. 653).

Finally, they assert, “the new reality of school leadership is responding to value conflicts. This has become the defining characteristic of school leadership much like instructional leadership was the dominant metaphor of school leadership during the 1980’s” (p. 653). The literature presented in this review certainly supports this claim as it investigates how frequently it occurs, in what arenas and how administrators deal with value conflict.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The field of educational leadership increasingly has come to realize that attention must be paid to issues of values and value conflict in the principalship. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders promote modeling ethical behavior, protecting the values of democracy, equity and diversity and considering and evaluating potential moral and legal consequences of decision making on the part of school administrators (NPBEA, 2015). Scholars have noted that a changing world has placed values and value conflict at the forefront of practice in the life of the educational leader (Begley & Johansson, 1998; Shapiro & Gross, 2008) and that schools are perhaps more prone to value conflict than any other institution (Ryan, 1999). Others have demonstrated empirically that ethical dilemmas resulting from value conflict are occurring with increasing frequency, even daily in the work of educational leaders (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Norberg & Johansson, 2007; Roche, 1999).

Despite the environment noted above, some have identified a lack of ethical coursework in typical principal training programs and point out that the concepts of morals, values and ethics receive a peripheral treatment at best (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 2004). Sergiovanni (1992) contends that the field of practice in educational leadership is ahead of theory regarding the importance of moral leadership. This reality has inspired a call for the explicit training of educators in ethical decision-making, ethical codes and frameworks (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994) and also value and moral recognition
Every principal brings to their work a set of personal values and ethical codes. Beck (1999) notes that many wise decisions are made by principals in practice. What remains unanswered is whether principals are cognizant of their values as underlying players in the day-to-day decisions they make and what impact values and value conflict have on the decision-making processes of principals in practice. The purpose of this study is to come to an understanding of this impact by addressing the following perceptions: (1) How do principals’ personal values and codes impact the decisions they make? (2) Are principals aware of their personal values and codes of ethics during decision-making processes? (3) How do principals resolve the conflicts that arise when personal values conflict with those of the system, community or profession?

Rationale for Approach

In this study I used a qualitative method of inquiry. In order to attend to matters of human experience as it is lived, one must look to the realm of qualitative inquiry or “human science” (Van Manen, 1990).

Colaizzi notes:

The method for the objective investigation of human experience cannot be the experimental method. It must be a method which neither denigrates it or transforms it into operationally defined behavior; it must be, in short, a method that remains with human experience as it is experienced, one which tries to sustain contact with experience as it is given” (1978, p. 53).
This study seeks to understand the impact of values and value conflict as experienced by principals and to reveal the impact they have on decision-making processes. Creswell (2009) states that “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” and that “those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation” (2009, p. 4). Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to “approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to do justice to that complexity, to respect it in its own right” and “assume that they will uncover some of that complexity” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 7). Owens says that the naturalistic paradigm is “based upon inductive thinking and is associated with phenomenological views of ‘knowing’ and ‘understanding’ social and organizational phenomena” (1982, p. 3).

McMillan points out that “Researchers using a qualitative approach believe that there are multiple realities represented in participant perspectives, and that context is critical in providing an understanding of the phenomenon being investigated” (2008, p. 271). This study will recognize the inseparable nature of context and perspective as it investigates the Lebenswelt or life world, a concept defined by Husserl initially (Van Manen, 1990) and referred to by many authors on the subject of phenomenology (Kvale, 1996; Moustakas, 1994; Valle & King, 1978; Van Manen, 1990). These authors contend that human experiences cannot be usefully extracted in an objective, quantitative manner that denies the importance of context on the interactions between humans and their world.
In its design, this study incorporates the five characteristics of qualitative research as outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). The study is naturalistic in its setting as I operate as the “key instrument” collecting descriptive data in the form of written words gleaned from extensive interviews in the field. The study demonstrates concern with process as it uncovers the meanings principals assign to their perceptions of values and value conflict. Data analysis was inductive as I engaged in a systematic process of mining the transcripts to distill meaning from the spoken word of the participants. And finally it develops meaning by investigating participant perspectives, an “essential concern to the qualitative approach” (1998, p. 7).

Research Design

Maxwell notes the importance of good research design in crafting a proposal for a qualitative research study. Great care must be dedicated to this step in the process (2005). In this study a phenomenological approach will be employed to explicate perspective from the principals’ point of view. “The purpose of conducting a phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the experiences of participants in order to understand the ‘essence’ of the experience as perceived by the participants” (McMillan, 2008, p. 291). Regarding essence, Van Manen states “phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” and that “A universal or essence may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experience” (1990, p. 10).

Using Seidman’s (2006) phenomenological based interviewing method this study produced a “particular rendering or interpretation of reality grounded in the empirical
word” that is “useful in understanding the human condition” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 25).

**Participant Selection**

In order to understand human phenomena, “one first has to know how someone actually experienced what has been lived” (Giorgi, 1985, p. 1). In a phenomenological study it is imperative that participants selected have actually experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). They must be “intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 107). Qualitative research uses what Creswell (2007) terms a “purposeful sampling strategy” (p. 125) meaning that sites and participants are selected based on their ability to inform an understanding of the phenomena under study.

To achieve a purposeful sample in this study, I used the research questions to drive the selection of participants by focusing on the actors (Miles & Huberman, 1984), in this case principals who can inform a dialog about values and value conflict. I made Initial email contact with professional acquaintances asking if they would consider being part of a study of values and value conflict. This first level interaction served to vet potential participants’ interest in learning more about the study. I contacted interested parties by phone and explained the intent of study in more depth. In this conversation I informed potential participants of the logistics of the three-interview model to give them a sense of how much time was required on their part to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria for this study included: working principals, 18 and older who identified an interest in uncovering the nature of values and value conflict and how these issues impact their decision-making processes, had experienced difficult ethical decision making as
professionals and were willing to uncover pre-reflective experiences through an open-ended three interview process.

By vetting potential participants in the study using the process noted above, a criterion sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of 4 participants was selected for the study. This strategy works well in phenomenology when “all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). Participants were given the option of meeting at a local school after school hours or at their private homes for interviews. Three of the four chose the former option and one the latter. One interview was conducted by phone because of scheduling difficulties.

**Research Strategies**

Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest that the qualitative researcher should “propose and develop roles that ease entry, facilitate receptivity of environments and participants, and offer rewards or benefits of some sort to motivate participants’ cooperation” and that “they will need to demonstrate that they can conduct the research in such a way that neither the setting nor the people in it are harmed” (p. 63). As recommended in their work, each of these issues is considered separately with regard to the study.

**Entry**

Marshall and Rossman contend, “Entry negotiation requires time, patience and sensitivity to the rhythms and norms of a group. Those who propose qualitative research must demonstrate their knowledge about the nuances of entry” (1989, p. 65). By choosing acquaintances, I found that participants were eager to be included in the study and intrigued by the idea of uncovering meaning together. Informed consent was
obtained from each participant and permission to use the local school was obtained from the superintendent. None of the participants were employees of the district, which was centrally located and convenient. It provided a quiet, neutral site for interviewing.

Management of Role

Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggest that “researchers benefit from careful planning of their roles—since most participants detect and reject insincere, manipulating people” (p. 65). Of greatest concern in this study was the issue of building a sufficient amount of trust with each participant and creating relationships conducive to a discussion about values and value conflict. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note that “Just as problem statements and interview questions evolve over the course of fieldwork, so too does trust. Trust needs to be developed before people can be willing to release certain kinds of information” (p. 35).

Developing a trusting relationship with the study participants was paramount in this study because of the nature of discussing their values. Because they were acquaintances and because of the three interview method which evolves over a period of weeks, participants came to trust me in a short amount of time and felt free to discuss their life experiences openly and in great detail. Each participant commented on numerous occasions that they appreciated the questions, the opportunity to uncover things they “never get to talk about” and one referred to it as “principal therapy” when we ended the final interview.

Ethics and Reciprocity

The necessary approvals were obtained from the Institutional Review Board before any data was collected or participants contacted (See Appendix B). Through the
process of informed consent, each participant was assured of his or her anonymity and the importance of confidentiality throughout the research process. I was completely forthcoming with the intent of the study when seeking participants. All participants were sent transcripts and resultant distillations of the in-depth interviews and were reminded of their right to drop out of the study at any time. All participants received a $10 gift card to offset any travel costs incurred.

Qualitative research is intrusive and requires participants to give of their time and of themselves (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). For these reasons it is important for the researcher to address the issue of reciprocity. Kvale (1996) notes that “an interview is a conversation in which two people talk about a theme of mutual interest” and that a “well-conducted interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee” (p. 36). As suggested by Moustakas (1994), the chosen participants shared an interest in understanding values and value conflict through an empirical study. This shared professional curiosity proved to be of great benefit to the participants as they were given the opportunity to reflect on their own lived experiences. Each participant took the time to note that they found this study to be an enriching exercise that helped them to understand themselves and their professional work.

**Data Collection**

In qualitative studies the researcher performs the role of lead investigator obtaining information directly from the participants in the study. Other observers and quantitative measuring techniques are often eliminated as options as they impinge on the closeness to the data desired in a qualitative study (McMillan, 2008). In a phenomenology, the primary source of information is gathered through in-depth
interviews (Creswell, 2007; McMillan, 2008; Moustakas, 1994) used in an effort to “describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it” (Creswell, 2007, p. 131). Kvale (1996) proposes that the qualitative interview is a “construction site for new knowledge” and is “literally an interview, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 14). Moustakas (1994) portrays the phenomenological interview as an informal, interactive process utilizing open ended comments and questions. He offers further clarification of the process:

Often the phenomenological interview begins with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere. Following this opening, the investigator suggests that the co-researcher take a few moments to focus on the experience, moments of particular awareness and impact, and then to describe the experience fully (p. 114).

This study will employ what Kvale (1996) calls semi-structured interviews that are “neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire” (p. 27).

Seidman’s (2006) three interview method represents a process intended to uncover the life experiences of participants over a period of one to two weeks. The first interview, The Focused Life History, “establishes the context of the participants’ experience” in light of the topic. The second interview, or The Details of Experience “allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. In the third, Reflection on the Meaning, participants are encouraged to “reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them” (Seidman, 2006, p. 17).
In this study, three semi-structured interview protocols were developed around this method (See Appendix A). The planned questions were supplemented by unplanned follow-up, probing and specifying questions designed to extend the participants’ responses as necessary. The protocol provided space for my written responses to interviewee’s comments, including key points, future follow-up questions and initial interpretations. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews comprised the single data source for the study; no follow up interviews were required. I conducted all interviews and performed all transcriptions in an effort to remain close to the data (McMillan, 2008) and provided the participants copies of the written transcriptions.

Moustakas (1994) refers to Husserl’s concept of *epoche*, or the process of putting aside one’s own preconceptions of the phenomena as an important attitude in conducting a transcendental phenomenology. This mental position allows the researcher to approach the phenomenon “freshly and naively” (p. 47) and is a “process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time” (p. 85). Others refer to this process as bracketing (Creswell, 2007; Valle & King, 1978; Van Manen, 1990). Some have pointed out that there are problems with the concept of bracketing (LeVassuer, March 2003; Lopez & Willis, May 2004; Van Manen, 1990), specifically the impossibility of completely separating oneself from these preconceptions.

I followed Kvale’s (1996) suggestion to utilize *deliberate naïveté* or “exhibiting an openness to new and unexpected phenomena” (p. 31) when interviewing to describe the “lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena” (1996, p. 30).
Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of a qualitative study rest on what has been called the credibility or believability and trustworthiness of the data, data analysis and conclusions of the study (McMillan, 2008). Several authors point to procedures that can be incorporated into qualitative studies to enhance the credibility of the results. These include member checks, prolonged data-gathering on site, triangulation, thick description, and peer consultation among others (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2005; McMillan, 2008; Owens, 1982).

In his discussion about interviews, Kvale (1996) recommends avoiding questions that may inadvertently influence answers, carefully transcribing interviews for accuracy, and accurately coding the data as practices that will improve reliability. He also states that validation is “moved from inspection at the end of the production line to quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production” (p. 236) and contends that “validation comes to depend on the quality of craftsmanship during investigation, continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (p. 241). He finally notes:

Ideally, the quality of the craftsmanship results in products with knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they, so to say, carry the validation with them, like a strong piece of art. In such cases, the research procedures would be transparent and the results evident, and the conclusions of a study intrinsically convincing as true, beautiful and good. Appeals to external certification, or official validity stamps of approval, then
become secondary. Valid research would in this sense be research that makes questions of validity superfluous (p. 252).

I approached the study with deliberate naïveté by ensuring that the questions were not designed to lead participants in any direction with their responses. I aimed to build a sense of trust with all of the participants in an effort to collect authentic data through the interview process. The three-interview structure furthered this trust and the neutral site I chose for the interviews gave participants assurance that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Throughout the data collection and analysis phases, member checks were used to verify the accuracy of the data. The method of analysis triangulated the data as it converged the perspectives of multiple participants’ responses into themes to discover meaning about the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2009). Finally, I strove for a “quality of craftsmanship” (Kvale, 1996, p. 241) throughout the data collection and analysis phases by critiquing and questioning my findings and interpretations.

**Data Analysis**

Data for this study were comprised of 12 separate, one-hour interviews that I transcribed verbatim. Analysis of the data occurred over the span of several weeks in which I took the time to study the transcripts and begin the process of analyzing, interpreting and making meaning. Using Seidman’s (2006) technique, I reduced the text by reading and marking with brackets passages that were interesting to me. These passages were then coded using two first cycle methods, values coding and versus coding (Saldana, 2016).
In values coding, the analyst codes passages of interest as values, attitudes or beliefs. In this method, a value is the “importance we attribute ourselves, another person, thing or idea”, an attitude is “the way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, thing or idea” and a belief is “part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world” (Saldana, 2016, p. 131). This method helped to distill the values present in the interviews and served as a first attempt to categorize participants’ experiences into themes.

Versus coding identifies in “dichotomous or binary terms the individuals, groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, processes, concepts, etc. in direct conflict with each other” (Saldana, 2016, p. 137). These codes served to identify the value conflicts that were present in the interview transcripts. For an example of the first cycle coding methods in this study see Appendix C.

After completion of first cycle coding, significant statements in the text were isolated and sorted into 2 themes that honor the qualitative tradition by reducing the data “inductively rather than deductively” (Seidman, 2006, p. 117), allowing the data to speak for itself.

The first theme, A Tapestry of Values: Mentors and Experiences that Shaped Who We Are, developed around the life experiences of participants as students and educators that contributed to the values they hold as applied to their work as principals. This theme also addresses the level of cognizance the participants have of their values as they are applied to decision-making and whether they consciously apply them in making decisions or if they exist in the background as contributing agents.
The second theme, Thick Skin: The Resolution of Value Conflict in Decision-Making, reveals the value conflict participants shared by relating critical incidents from their work as principals. This theme also looks at the resolution of these conflicts and forms the basis for my argument that principals should actively reflect on the underlying values that lead to conflict as they seek to make decisions that are in the best interest of their students.

Participants

The participants in the study represent a broad range of teaching and leadership experiences. One of the participants was initially trained in the criminal justice field and later entered education all others are lifelong educators. The following brief profiles are presented to place their experiences in context. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

Denise

Denise is the principal of two K-5 elementary schools in rural Pennsylvania. She received a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from a small private college. Her initial certification area was K-8 Elementary Education. She received a master’s degree as a reading specialist and later another in educational leadership. Denise spent a total of 29 years in the classroom before taking her first position as a principal. She was interviewed during her 4th year as a principal. She has one assistant principal.

Erin

Erin is also the principal of two K-5 elementary schools in rural Pennsylvania. She received her bachelor’s degree from a mid-sized state university in elementary and special education. She received her initial master’s degree as a reading specialist and
later completed a principal certification program at a state university. Erin spent a total of 17 years in the classroom at various school districts and taught at the high school and elementary levels. She was interviewed in her 2\textsuperscript{nd} year as a principal.

\textbf{John}

John is the principal of a small rural high school in Pennsylvania. He received his bachelor’s degree in elementary education from a large state university. His master’s degree in educational leadership was obtained from a small private school. His certification area is K-12 elementary education and his teaching experiences are in grades 6-8. John spent a total of 8 years in the classroom after which he took his first position as an assistant principal at a middle school. After 5 years in that role, he accepted his current position and has been in that capacity for 10 years. John was interviewed in his 15\textsuperscript{th} year as an educational leader.

\textbf{Andrew}

Andrew is the principal of a small rural elementary school in Pennsylvania grades K-6. His initial field of study was criminal justice in which he received a bachelor’s degree from a small private university. He spent 8 years working in juvenile corrections before returning to school to complete a teaching certification program. His areas of certification are 7-12 social studies, history and K-6 elementary education. He received a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction with a certification in educational leadership. Eric spent a total of 7 years as a secondary teacher and was interviewed in his 4\textsuperscript{th} year as a principal.
Chapter 4
Results

This study seeks to understand whether principals are cognizant of their values as underlying players in the day-to-day decisions they make and what impact values and value conflict have on their decision-making processes. The purpose of this study is to come to an understanding of this impact by addressing the following areas of inquiry: (1) the extent to which principals perceive awareness of their personal values and codes of ethics during decision-making processes, (2) the perceived impact of their personal values and codes on the decisions they make, and (3) how they perceive the resolution of the conflicts that arise when personal values conflict with those of the system, community or profession. This study looks at the extent to which 4 principals have wrestled with these concepts and how principals might be better prepared through professional development or pre-service training to make decisions that are ethically sound.

From 12 verbatim transcripts over 100 significant statements were highlighted in the data. Through inductive interpretation these statements were then organized by grouping them into two themes. The first theme, A Tapestry of Values, is comprised of data that addresses the first two research questions in the study, answering (1) how participants’ values impact their decisions and (2) whether they apply their values directly to the process. Theme two, Thick Skin, uncovers the value conflicts the participants related and how they were resolved in the end; it addresses the final research question.
A Tapestry of Values: Mentors and Experiences that Shaped Who We Are

“I definitely realized later before I graduated high school that I had some really great, I’d say, life coaches.” – Erin

Participants related many transformative experiences that shaped who they are and how they approach their roles as decision-makers. The values they identified form a tapestry woven over a lifetime of experiences as students, teachers and principals. Each value is a thread in the larger tapestry that develops in their earliest experiences and is evident throughout their professional careers. The first theme addresses these experiences and uses them to answer the first two research questions of the study.

In examining my first research question, “How do principals’ personal values and codes impact the decisions they make?” I found direct evidence to support a claim that the values principals develop over time impact their decisions in profound ways. The data show that principals can recall important lessons they have learned from their mentors and the experiences they have had throughout their lives. These in turn are present in the way they approach decision-making in their roles as principals.

By investigating my second research question, “Are principals aware of their personal values and codes of ethics during decision making processes?” it became clear to me that the participants did not consciously measure their decisions against their values, rather they operate in the background as part of “who they are”. Even though they did not directly articulate reflecting on their values, they demonstrated that doing so might help them in difficult decisions. Participants articulated feelings of uneasiness and
a lack of guidance during these times that could potentially be remedied by bringing their values to a conscious level when difficult decisions must be made.

To summarize, the data illustrate the life experiences of participants that shaped their values, attitudes and beliefs and made them who they are in their roles as principals. Secondly, it demonstrates that principals are not directly cognizant of their values when making decisions. Finally, it forms the basis for my argument for the application of ethical principles in the decision-making process.

**A Lifetime of Values**

**Mentors.** One important thread in the data set is the importance of mentors as role models in developing values. Each participant mentioned both positive and negative role models, stating that they have learned as much from people they don’t want to emulate as those they do. Bozeman and Feeney (2007) defined mentoring as:

> A process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face to face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience [the mentor] and a person who is perceived to have less [the protégé] (p. 731).

When this definition is applied to participants’ life histories, it is evident that the informal mentors they recalled had a profound effect on their professional decision-making practices as well as their adult growth and development in general (Merriam, 1983). In relying on the informal mentors they have had throughout their lives, the
participants indicated transmission of knowledge as it applies to decision-making at both a conscious and subconscious level.

At the conscious level, the values of their mentors sometimes served as barometers for decision-making. John discussed reflecting on his parents’ values when he needs to make important decisions,

I think, my values come from always trying to make mom and dad proud, trying to do the right thing, and what would make them proud is helping others. Doing what’s right for others, keeping yourself in the background. So I think I live my professional life like that, I think I live my personal life like that, at least I try to. I certainly try to but I make a lot of mistakes too.

John recognizes the values of selflessness and the importance of being a good person. Later in the interviews he revisits this idea when he recognizes that he believes it is important to “do what’s right by other people” in decision-making. Andrew echoes this sentiment when he describes his decision-making as following a “moral compass” to do what’s right. In his interpretation, following this precept has never let him down even when he’s made some very challenging decisions.

At other times the mentor’s impact was evident at a more subconscious level. While they were not directly conscious of the mentor’s role in their decisions, the values they learned from them are evident in the decisions themselves. Andrew’s experiences uncovered how his high school teachers engrained in him a strong work ethic by demonstrating they believed in him and would not give up on him. This value appeared later within months of his hiring as a principal when his superintendent’s contract was not renewed and he was left as the key decision maker for the elementary level in his district.
The district was in upheaval yet he didn’t shy away from the challenge. Discussing how he and his secondary principal approached their new roles he said,

We’ve got a mess to cleanup. We have to clean up the mess that was left from other people but we also have to keep moving forward. We have to make decisions that are going be in the best interests of the overall district, our individual schools and the teachers and students in those schools. We’ve got to make sure this is done right because there’s nobody else; it’s us.

During this time, the school and district had to move forward; the tenacity with which he forged ahead can be linked to the teachers who taught him to never give up. This attitude pervaded his decision-making throughout the interviews.

John demonstrated this same tenacity after his father died. Several of his mentors told him to “get his ass in gear” when encouraging him not to give up on his college career. This encouragement could very well explain why he later pursued a career in leadership and is working toward licensure as a superintendent, both despite his claims that people from his childhood are often are shocked to find out he is a school principal. The possibility of success his mentors opened up to him engrained in him the tenacity needed to achieve his professional goals.

In still other cases, the participants spoke about mentors that they strive to emulate directly in their work. Erin describes a former principal of hers that she recalls being very “present”. From this one individual, she learned some key values that she strives to reflect in her work as a principal,

He was that principal that knew about our lives, knew about the kids, was in the hallway, was very visible. I think making those personal connections made a
difference, sending a personalized note. When I do walk-through evaluations I leave a note behind about something positive I saw in the room so they get that immediate feedback piece. So I think of him being very present.

Erin revisits the value of presence several times throughout her interviews in discussing her work with teachers and students. Whether she is attending student assemblies, monitoring bus duty or sitting on curriculum panels with her teachers, she actively attempts to be “present” in her everyday work.

Denise speaks similarly about her role as an instructional leader. Whether it’s leading teachers in day-to-day practice or guiding them through their mistakes, she believes her role is to be an active part of the lives of her teachers and students and incorporates this value in her decision-making processes.

The data show that the participants’ mentors have inspired them to set high personal goals for value based decision-making that benefits their schools and the teachers and students who work in them in positive ways. The impact of the mentor in decision-making occurs in conscious and sub-conscious ways with principals either directly linking their decisions to the values of their mentors or indirectly as shown by the decisions themselves. Participants also cited mentors as people who they attempt to directly emulate in their day-to-day decision-making. In all cases, these mentors have contributed much to the values tapestry that guides their work as principals. Next I would like to turn to the situational experiences that have contributed to building the participants’ values.
**Situational experiences.** The situational experiences that participants shared comprise a second important thread in the data as they taught valuable lessons to the participants in respect to how their decisions affect the students and teachers in their buildings. The notion of learning through experience is supported in the literature by Kolb’s (1984) experiential model which defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38).

By recalling their life histories, participants’ data reveal the important lessons learned through experience and demonstrate how participants applied their knowledge in decision-making as principals. As in the mentorship thread, participants noted that there were lessons to be learned from both the positive and negative situations they experienced.

To illustrate how a situation can influence the values of a principal in advocating for students, I’ve chosen this story John related to me from his second year of teaching,

One memorable moment was a bad moment where a young lad was not paying attention to me and he was testing me. He had his head on the table and I went and grabbed his book bag, and said “hey come on let’s go, pay attention,” and he got up and clocked me. Right in the chin! I spent most of the day in the office getting ready to press charges and then I found out through the authorities that this young man’s sister was just molested by the father, so he had a lot of anger built up. It taught me a lot about learning what kids are going through.

John’s experience in this situation can be described as “fighting for the underdog.” He never did press charges, instead he used it as an opportunity to demonstrate to the student that he was valued and his experiences outside of the school
context are important. John learned as a relatively new teacher that their home environments impact students and this impact easily spills into school. Taking the time to understand this student’s situation helped him to decide his course of action given the circumstances.

Later as a principal, John described his decision to approach two physical education teachers about a student grade. The student was failing because he refused to dress for class, even though he participated actively. John appealed to the teachers and convinced them that changing is the last thing they should be worried about. The student had a history of sexual abuse and issues changing in front of other boys. His advocacy paid off as the teachers’ understanding of the student was deepened and the grade was adjusted.

John’s story demonstrates how situational experiences can have a profound impact on the approach taken in similar events in the future. Taking the time to understand what the student was going through in his personal life taught him to be cognizant of those who cannot advocate for themselves in his work as a principal.

Denise demonstrated a similar approach to fighting for the underdog throughout her career as a teacher and mentioned that her favorite students were the ones that were the toughest to work with. Whether they demonstrated cognitive or behavioral concerns, she viewed making school a safe place that they looked forward to attending as a goal. Later as a principal, in handpicking teachers for a faculty counsel that gave even the quietest member of her faculty a voice, her advocacy for the underdog was evident at the principal level as well. Both John and Denise illustrate the value of advocating for those
who are unable to advocate for themselves, a value that was recurrent across all participants’ experiences.

Another common value related through experience was that of having a sense of humility or the ability to admit when they have made a mistake. Andrew related an experience where he attempted to adopt a new method of signing out students at the end of the day during parent pick-up. He borrowed the method from a neighboring school. After angry parents waited 45 minutes to sign the sheet on the first day, he realized that the method could not work for his school given their level of staffing. He spoke about the importance of being able to admit, “yeah, I screwed that all up”.

Here, Andrew relates his approach to working with students and teachers and shows the importance of his lessons in humility over time,

You know we tell the kids that all the time it’s ok to screw up, it’s ok to be wrong, you don’t have to be perfect. You have to learn from your mistakes and move on from them and try to do better next time so. Every kid that comes through my office, it’s ok that you screw up. It’s not ok to do the same thing over and over again and not learn from it. So you know I think you’ve got to lead that way too. And teachers need to see that and they need to also have the ability to say, “you know I’m not always right either”. So I think it starts with me.

In taking ownership of developing a sense of humility in his faculty and student body, Andrew attempts to use his own mistakes to demonstrate that it is ok to fail, as long as you learn from it. He leads by example. In an earlier quote regarding his decision-making John implies this value when he says “I certainly try to (do what’s right) but I make a lot of mistakes too.” Here we see participants that are willing to admit their
mistakes and grow from them, recognizing the importance of demonstrating humility in front of staff and students. This value was evident in three of the participants’ life experiences.

Erin related experiences from her elementary school that made her “love school” and were the original catalysts for her to become a teacher. One of her teachers, who was also the principal, used to pretend to fly across the room when she would sneeze in class. Regarding the principal she described as “present”, she remembered he was often in the halls giving out pencils to students for good deeds. He also took the time to write to all of his first year teachers’ parents to let them know how good they were at teaching. This type of relationship development in her life history taught her the importance of being a principal that valued building strong bonds with her students and teachers. In her work as a principal, she applies the same construct in rewarding students in her school.

I just did a hot cocoa party with the kids for our positive behavior supports and we pulled several names from each grade level and I played some music. I later went around to my teachers and they said “Erin, my two girls won’t stop talking about this hot cocoa party” and “kids are saying it was the best day of their life”, and I’m like wow! To me it’s just a hot cocoa party, but I’m glad it made a positive impact!

Even though she was able to reveal her life experiences as a student and teacher vividly, Erin was surprised by the impact her hot cocoa party had on her students. This suggests evidence of building strong relationships in her school, even though the direct relationship between experience and practice is something she had not reflected on.
Andrew echoes this same value when he said “If you’re a teacher, your student has to love walking through your classroom every day if they’re going to accomplish something of real value in your classroom.” Here again it was not evident that he was making a conscious connection with the mentor teachers that taught him the importance of this sentiment although their impact on his attitude is certainly evident in his practice.

By revealing the experiences and mentors that helped to shape the values of my participants, I am able to demonstrate that the important lessons learned throughout their lives are evident in their decision-making processes. Next I will turn to the second research question and examine whether the participants are cognizant of the values they apply when making decisions.

**Values and Decision-Making**

Whereas the data reveal evidence that principals make decisions based on the values they have developed throughout their lives, less evident was whether they are directly cognizant of them during the process. This finding is in line with Leonard’s (1999) study that revealed principals to be consciously unaware of their values and their role in decision-making. It also supports Begley and Johansson’s (1998) observation that principals tended to favor rational processes in decision making over trans-rational (ethics) and sub-rational (personal values) principles.

When Andrew was a new principal without an acting superintendent, he felt unsupported without a supervisor acting as his mentor. During this period he said, “I think I had probably more self-doubt than I’ve ever had in my life”.

Andrew lacked the mentorship most principals can rely on in their first year on the job. Referring to his first year and his self-doubt, he had this to say about his decisions:

Every day I would just have to follow my gut and hope that I was doing the right thing. But I do think that initially I was maybe second-guessing myself or challenging myself a lot more because I wasn’t sure if I was doing the right thing or the wrong thing.

Andrew’s unique experiences working without a mentor revealed that he was unsure whether he was making decisions for the right reasons. Lacking is the confidence that his decisions were based on sound values. This is not to say that he didn’t rely on his values in moving forward, only that they were not a conscious part of his decisions.

Moving forward he reflected that he probably relied on his own “moral compass” in an effort to do what’s right in his decision-making. Regarding this period he said:

I had to trust that it was not going to lead me astray, and you know it didn’t for the most part. So I’ve become much more confident in my own intuition as a result of that because it didn’t fail me when I had nothing else. And now I have lots of experience and different time working with lots of different situations that now also help guide that direction.

Over time, Andrew has learned to rely on intuition and experience. By doing this, he has discovered that he can justify his decisions to anyone who challenges him. His confidence has developed through trial and error over a period of three years. I suggest that this element of confidence could be built into the early work of a principal by
empowering him to reflect openly on his values and apply them directly to his work as a decision-maker.

John, the most veteran participant with 15 years experience, noted the importance of making the right decision rather than the expedient one. He has discovered that making rash decisions based on what you think is right at the time doesn’t always lead to the best decision. Regarding this concept he said,

You have time to reflect, it’s not necessarily always the best decision. If you go back on who you are as a person, if you have time to take a step back and reflect before you act, that’s usually the right decision.

John implies using a values-based approach to making decisions, but does not directly frame it as such. Here again, even a veteran principal would benefit from conscious reflection on the values he holds when important decisions must be made.

At the core of their hard earned experiences as decision makers, John and Andrew demonstrate sound values based decision-making. Lacking in the discussion was a guiding principle that they could consistently rely upon during this process. Elements of uneasiness and a lack of confidence were evident in all participants’ experiences regarding critical incidents. Consider this final quote from Denise’s last interview regarding values and decision-making, “It’s hard to stand behind your values, it truly is, you have to be brave in order to do that. And you have to be willing to fight some animosity.”

Throughout the interviews, the data reveal that participants haven’t consciously considered their values along side the work that they do. In each case, it became clear to me that “who they are” was partly determined by the mentors and experiences they have
had throughout their lives. While this research study does not set out to prove that to be the case, it does set out to determine whether principals would find value in the discovery of their values within the context of their work as principals.

Dempster and Berry (2003) found that principals long for professional development in ethical decision making. I found this to be the case when reflecting with the participants informally after the recorder was turned off. They mentioned the idea of “principal therapy”, expressed that they have never been given the opportunity to reflect on their work in this way and they found it to be a useful exercise. By bringing life experiences to the conscious mind, little by little they began to understand how their values developed and how they might impact the decisions that they make as principals.

While the values outlined above clearly develop over a lifetime of experiences, the specific ones related by the participants in my study demonstrate that it is possible to identify them in their work and the impact they have on the decision-making process. The data show that they are evident and serve as underlying guides in the decision-making process at a subconscious level. Whether discussing the mentors or situational experiences of the participants, it is clear that they act as “life coaches” forming the basis for values based decision-making.

**Thick Skin: The Resolution of Value Conflict in Decision-Making**

“Ultimately you want to be popular, you want to be liked by your staff, you want to be liked by the community, but those critical incidents are the ones that give you thick skin.” - John

In the second theme of this study, I will present data that reveal the types of conflicts the participants shared and how they resolved them in addressing the final
research question. Finally, I will investigate the role studying values might have in helping principals wrestle with decisions that lead to value conflict.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) noted four areas where school leaders may experience clashes in competing ethical codes: between personal and professional codes, clashes within ethical codes, clashes between educational leaders and finally clashes between personal and professional codes and the community. They define community as “either the professional community, the school community, or the community where the educational leader works” (p. 24). When coded using the versus method in the data analysis, it was evident that three of these clashes were present in many of the participants’ responses; clashes within ethical codes, as in when someone is prepared in two different fields, were not thematic in the data set.

Participants related many critical incidents in their practice that illustrate the value conflict inherent in their roles as decision-makers. Begley and Johansson (1998) state that these conflicts can occur within a person, between two people or they “may be outcomes of an incongruence or incompatibility among one or more of these value arenas, that is conflicts occurring among the domains of personal values, professional values, and/or organizational values” (p. 403). The purpose of this theme is to share some of the participants’ critical incidents and the resulting conflict to elucidate the importance of encouraging principals to rely on values in their decision-making processes.

My third research question asks, “How do principals resolve the conflicts that arise when personal values conflict with those of the system, community or profession?” In discussing critical incidents and their resolution, the participants revealed conflict
occurring in four distinct arenas: between the principal and teacher, the principal and other leaders, the principal and the community and between two clashing opinions of what is in the best interest of the student. The data revealed evidence that the participants had not viewed opposing values as the origin of these conflicts. These arenas provide the structure for this theme.

**Principal and Teacher**

The most common arena for value conflict in participant responses was between the principal and the faculty. Many of the incidents related by the participants revealed conflicts in which the principal’s vision differed from that of the teachers’. One area where this type of conflict occurred was in enacting an agenda for school reform. Three of the four participants revealed value conflict resulting from such initiatives. The experiences they related left participants lonely in their positions as building leaders trying to affect change and move their schools forward. John, the most tenured principal, did not relate conflict in this area. His case will be treated separately.

When Andrew assumed his role as principal, he worried that his lack of knowledge about the new district would make it difficult for him to make too many changes in his first year. Taking a “wait and see for a year” approach, he purposefully avoided forcing too many changes in that first year. After evaluating the instructional climate in the school, in year two he “hit the teachers and school with quite a few fundamental changes for how they have traditionally done business.” Despite taking this time to observe before reforming, he still experienced resistance from many of his teachers. Opining the speed with which these initiatives were rolled out, teachers voiced
their concerns to him. To illustrate the sense of urgency he experienced in moving forward at full speed he shared this,

My opinion and people might disagree with me, when I stepped into that role we were at least 3 if not 5 years behind where we should’ve been at that point when it came to realigning and looking at where the changes were to be made. I kept telling them “the train’s moving, it’s not going to slow down and if we don’t get on we’re going to miss it. What do you want me to do here? We can’t waste time, we can’t.” that was the criticism I got.

Andrew recognized that his building had fallen behind instructionally. In enacting reforms to bring them into alignment, he met resistance from faculty who were used to doing business as usual. One crucial turning point in his agenda came when the state assessment results supported his claim that there was need for improvement.

Regarding the precipitous drop in scores he said:

They were horrified, they were used to their students being proficient and advanced on the benchmarks and all of a sudden they have 80-90% basic and below basic on these benchmarks, and they’re just completely horrified at what they were seeing and that was really actually valuable to them.

Andrew used this reality check to demonstrate to his teachers that business as usual wasn’t meeting the needs of the school and its students. His steadfast commitment to holding teachers accountable in realigning curriculum and instruction to the standards met resistance at first, but when the school data spoke for itself, most of his teachers were convinced of the need for change. Two years into the reforms, Andrew is “feeling good about where we’re at, but we still have quite a ways to go.”
Erin related similar struggles when her vision conflicted with that of her teachers. In an attempt to create a school environment that gives teachers a voice in decision-making, she held one-to-one conferences with them to share their opinions about the direction of the school. When a faculty representative implied the meetings were burdensome by referring to them as “one more thing,” even though Erin touted the benefits of these meetings for school planning, she was left feeling that “I think sometimes it’s a catch 22”.

Later she recalled sharing with her faculty the changes that were made following the first round of such meetings in her first year. She mentioned that they were not quick changes, but some of the suggestions of the faculty were adopted over the course of her first year. Erin discovered that even though her teachers claimed to want a voice in decision-making, they were loath to give the time necessary to share their opinions. Even if the representative only spoke for a minority, she was frustrated in the resistance she experienced as a “catch 22”.

Both Andrew and Erin experienced the frustration of bringing a faculty’s values in line with their own. In each case, it took a fair amount of time and confidence to bring their reform initiatives to fruition. Both noted that their buildings are now moving in a forward direction, but the road has not been one easily traveled. In the process, both have discovered that the conflicts they experience with their teachers are directly related to the values they hold and over time perhaps the values of their faculties and their own will come more into alignment.

Another area where conflicting visions were identified is when teachers are forced to give up long standing perceived rights of autonomy leftover from previous principals.
This struggle seemed especially tenuous and a source of great frustration for participants. Again, John was the exception to this rule.

Denise described her teachers as “a very, very difficult faculty to deal with” because,

Not only did they have the same principal for 23 years, he also allowed them to run the building, so they’re just so “put off” some times when I make the decisions. Like they should be the ones to make the decisions. It’s very interesting.

This exchange highlights the conflict that can occur when the values of a principal are different from those of her faculty. Not only is her impression that the teachers enjoyed a very high level of autonomy under her predecessor, she is also left feeling that the former principal’s way of doing things is very deeply engrained in the building’s culture. Changing this cultural attitude of unmitigated teacher autonomy will take time. When asked if this has changed at all since first accepting the position in a follow-up question, she said “It’s changing (long pause), slowly changing.”

Denise’s experience wrangling teacher autonomy is echoed in Andrew’s account of working with his teachers. In his building, he recognized early that the more veteran teachers were more resistant to change overall. In fact, he mentioned this as an indicating factor in his choice to take a year to examine the culture of the school before making any major changes.

I knew I was walking into a situation I think a lot of new principals do. You are now expected to be an educational leader of people that in a lot of cases have an awful lot more years of educational experience than you. So it wasn’t going to be
a matter of going in and telling them how to do it, it was going to be a matter of
letting them do what’s working and kind of guiding them towards some different
ways of doing things that weren’t working.

Andrew’s recognition of the veteran teachers’ reticence to change their ways did
not get in the way of observing and evaluating their practice in planning for reform. His
“wait and see” approach was designed to build trust over time. He said “when year two
came, and I really did start pushing, the vast majority of people trusted what I was doing
even enough to at least go along for the ride.” Andrew’s impression of his faculty’s feelings
about change speak to the value of taking some time to let his teachers learn to trust him
and his motives for change. If nothing else they were willing to take a “leap of faith” in
supporting his initiatives, it is unclear if this would have been the case had he started
making major changes in his first year.

The experiences with staff resistance to reform and the issue of teacher autonomy
were vastly different for John. In his experiences as a principal, he spent considerable
time discussing the trust his teachers have for him. This is demonstrated by their
willingness to implement the iPad reform initiative he referred to in his interview. In
discussing this reform, John mentions conflicts in a different light, that of older teachers
struggling with newer technology. Missing were the conflicting values that the other
participants noted, perhaps further evidence of the trust he perceives from his staff.

In terms of autonomy, John articulated that he would prefer to return to a time
when teachers enjoyed much greater freedoms in their instructional decision-making.
Citing the iPad initiative and other recent district initiatives, John openly worries about
creating “a society of teachers that are robots.” In this next quote, we learn that his perception of trust in the building is reciprocal in his trust of his faculty.

I trust my teachers are going to come every day and work hard and do whatever they can to get it across to the kids. Do I need this model to do that? Do I need that model to do that? Or is it, hey guys do your job however you see fit.

John’s opinions of autonomy are more indicative of conflict with the values of the professional and school community, which will be addressed later. It is notable here in its variation from the experiences and perceptions of his fellow participants. The trust he perceives from and has for his faculty has developed over the ten years he has been their leader. This can be compared to what Bryk and Schneider (1996) call relational trust defined as “an environment where individuals share a moral commitment to act in the interests of the collectivity” and on that “sustains an ethical imperative among organizational members to do what is right and good, broadly defined” (p. 34).

I suggest that over time, the values of John and his teachers have been normed and they have discovered how to work together as a building. This is not to say that there is no value conflict in his building. In the first theme we saw John fight for the underdog by appealing to his teachers to place a student’s home life in context when grading him. It does demonstrate that John and his teachers have come to understand over time how to resolve situations when values do conflict. At the center of this process is the best interest of the student.

The other three participants are relatively new to their buildings (and the principalship), and work with teachers who have not yet aligned themselves with the
visions of their new leaders. There is still much work to do to come to a point of stasis, as their values are normed.

**Principal and Superintendent**

The second conflict arena that was common among the participants was that of the principal and other leaders. These incidents occurred when principals did not agree with the decisions of their peers in the hierarchy and when there was disagreement between principals and their superintendents. The latter was especially poignant in all four participants’ responses and will be analyzed here.

Roche (1999) examined how principals actually respond to moral and ethical dilemmas in their professional roles. As a theoretical framework he identified four possible responses: Avoidance, Suspending Morality, Creative Insubordination and Personal Morality. The first three of these responses were evident in the way my participants worked through such conflict with their superintendents.

The experiences participants shared regarding conflict with their superintendents in some cases caused them to make more decisions at the building level (avoidance). In others they have aligned with the values of their superintendents, even if they did so begrudgingly (creative insubordination and suspending morality). In either case, the participants have learned that self-preservation requires a commitment to compromise, even if they don’t agree with the values their superintendents hold.

When Andrew’s superintendent was dismissed early in his tenure as a principal, he was on his own to run his building throughout the search for a new superintendent. Lasting multiple years, the search gave him much more autonomy than a new principal would typically enjoy. He noted that the period was difficult for him because he had
little direction in his work. Over time however, he forged ahead with his reform initiatives and felt that he had made significant progress with his school.

When the district eventually hired a superintendent, he found that the work he had done was not completely aligned with the vision of his new leader. Referring to this conflict he spoke about getting defensive when he feels like his superintendent is challenging him.

I do get defensive after working as hard as I have to make sure these things are being done and done correctly and done in the best interest of my school and the school district. It does take a lot of will power to be able to sit back. And, it’s hard to then be questioned or challenged about how things are being done and saying, “well I’m going to do things differently now.” You weren’t here for the last three years.

Even though Andrew is staking a claim to his autonomy, this exchange illustrates the difference between taking a “wait and see” attitude as he did, and that of a new superintendent who knows he has a short period of time to prove himself in the eyes of the board and the community. There is not a sense of trust in the relationship yet for him to “go along for the ride” as there was with his teachers who were at least willing to suspend their autonomy and trust his leadership.

Andrew will need to adapt to the reforms of his new superintendent and give up some of the autonomy he is used to enjoying if he is going to thrive, but this won’t come easily. He stated “So I’m feeling kind of pushed on that right now and I’m not willing to give it up really quickly either because I invested way too much in this”. As he continues
to work with the new superintendent the values they each hold will become normed and hopefully, they will find that there is room for compromise in their initiatives.

Denise related a belief that her superintendent expects her to officially discipline teachers far more often than she feels is necessary. Viewing her role more as a teacher of teachers, she explained that in many cases a conversation or simple email would suffice and that an official reprimand is unnecessary. She explains the internal conflict she has with this practice:

Sometimes we jump right to “they have to have a letter in their file.” I don’t think that when you do that to people you gain anything. You don’t change culture through fear. But sometimes, you kind of have to do what the people above you think is the right way to handle it.

Denise understands these matters very clearly as a fundamental difference in leadership style, yet she also understands that she must comply with what is expected of her. To resolve the conflict she often chooses to officially document matters in memos that do not have long-term effects on the teacher, but serve as the first point in possible official discipline in the future. She has found that “write them up” can be interpreted in a way that is at peace with her own set of values as a principal and satisfies her superintendent’s expectations.

Teacher discipline was a topic in Erin’s discussion about her superintendent as well. Regarding personnel issues, she stated, “I leave from the same personnel investigation and I have a totally different read on that person.” She also perceives the leadership style of her superintendent to be in conflict with her own regarding the way she addresses faculty. Regarding an incident in which she perceived that her
superintendent overstepped her bounds in chastising her faculty and the resultant aftermath of mistrust that developed between Erin and the teachers, she stated “that definitely was hard to watch, it’s not a leadership style I’m used too even in the poor leaders that I’ve had. It’s not my leadership style.” As this situation illustrates, Erin has found that her values are fundamentally at odds with those of her superintendent. This position is one that will need to be rectified either by accepting the leadership style of her superintendent, find ways to be creatively insubordinate such that her values will come into compliance with the expectations of her supervisor or choose to leave the district for one that is more in alignment with her own values.

To further illustrate the difference in their understanding of what justifies discipline of a teacher and what does not, she stated this:

If there was justifiably (participant’s emphasis) a reason why we would need to address a teacher, don’t get me wrong I don’t mind having those tough conversations, but if it’s because they superseded the chain of command. That crap I don’t care for.

As in Denise’s case, Erin needed to find a way to bring her values into compliance with those of her superintendent in order to thrive in her school. Instead of using creative compliance however, she chooses to keep many of the issues that come up “off the superintendent’s desk” in order to avoid unwanted intrusion into the day-to-day workings of her school. Erin has learned that if she doesn’t bring light to every situation that comes up, she has more freedom at the building level to make decisions on her own. The hierarchy and standards of her district support principal autonomy and she has discovered it through trial and error.
John illustrates the conflict he has with his district’s support of programmatic teaching methods that remove teacher autonomy as instructional professionals.

Regarding one of these methods he said,

And that’s really hard for me to be a loyal member of the administrative team or a loyal member to my superintendent. To go out there and say (this program) is the greatest thing since sliced bread, cause I don’t think it is. If you asked my teachers, they would think that I think it is the greatest thing. It’s important to be loyal but it’s difficult because I don’t believe in that. I believe that there are so many teachers that have so many strengths.

John demonstrates compliance and the importance of following through with district level reform initiatives at least in appearance. Admittedly, he also recognized that when it comes to teacher evaluations, he allows a lot of flexibility in accounting for all of the elements the programmatic method requires. In this way he passes some of the decision-making to his teachers in support of his belief in their autonomy, despite the hard and fast line drawn by his superiors. He has found a way to creatively comply with the initiative that is in line with his own values.

**Principal and Community**

Less evident in the data set, but important nonetheless, were the conflicts that occur between the principal and the community. The conflicts reported occurred between principals and the local, the professional and the school communities.

Denise found internal conflict with the values of the professional community when she violated one of its sacred tenets. By indentifying the source of an anonymous tip to a parent, she was formally disciplined by her superintendent. At the heart of the
matter for her was the value of telling the truth versus keeping a secret from a
disheartened parent. In the end she felt that she wouldn’t be truthful, a deeply held value,
if she didn’t reveal the source. By veering from the expectations of the profession and
her superintendent however, she learned that sometimes you must put your personal
values to the side when making decisions, a hard learned lesson.

John’s opinion about standardized teaching models is in direct conflict with the
expectations of the professional community at large and those of his superiors in the
school community. He perceives that we are developing “robot teachers” as the
profession matures, and cites this perception as one reason why he would not want to go
back into the classroom. It is his belief that professional teachers should retain the
necessary autonomy in making instructional decisions. His trust for his teachers to get
the job done in their own unique way is a hallmark of his leadership style. During his
interviews he mused about conducting an experiment if he were superintendent,

“This year we’re going to do something different, you’re going to teach kids the
way you want and you’re not going to be questioned unless I see you not
teaching. Just do it the way you think is right.”

This statement demonstrates his opinion of the professional community’s move
toward the standardization of teaching practice and the directive from his superiors to
implement these reforms. In the end, he complies with the reforms, but as mentioned
earlier, he does this in his own creative way.

Conflict with the local community was evident when Andrew’s school district
experienced a major bus incident that quickly got a life of its own in the local papers and
TV news. At issue was the decision made at the district level not to inform the police of
a potentially impaired bus driver. Because of the decision, people in the district office lost their jobs.

Even though the decision was not his, this experience taught him that making a decision that is in conflict with the values of the community could bring about major repercussions. Speaking about this lesson he said, “It certainly forced me to realize that it’s a very thin line, there’s a balance there and you can really tip the balance the wrong way if you’re not careful.”

John related his own experience with the local community through a story from his first year as the principal in his school. One day early in the year, a flyer was placed in every paper tube on a main road that implored the community to get rid of him because he is ruining the school. He described a community impression that he was “turning the school into a prison.”

Recognizing that this was likely pushback from tightening up student discipline, he took the time to find the source of the flyer and attack the conflict head on. He found the source to be a student and invited her into his office to discuss her concerns. He recognized the incident as an opportunity to teach the student and discuss his goal to make the school safer for the students. When the student graduated, she gave him a hug when she walked across the stage.

John and Andrew’s experiences demonstrate the importance of recognizing and responding to the values of the local community when making decisions. As both realized, there is a community out there that keeps a close eye on their work as building leaders. Keeping their values in mind when making important decisions helps in avoiding the type of outcome Andrew’s district experienced in the bus incident.
Whose Best Interest?

The final arena of conflict evident in the data set was when two opposing sides claimed “the best interest of the student” in their argument. This type of conflict occurred between the principal and faculty, faculty to faculty, and when there was question about whose best interest was being served, the students, the teachers or the school community.

In educational administration, it has been proposed that “the best interest of the student,” just like medicine’s “first do no harm” and law’s principle of “zealous representation,” should serve as the one guiding principle of the profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Regarding her best interests model, Stefkovich warns that “it is incumbent on school leaders to make ethical decisions that truly reflect the needs of students and not their own adult self-interests” (2014, p. 22).

In the dataset, John gave an interesting example of this type of conflict. A student approached him with information about another student selling marijuana on campus and offered to help catch the student by performing a “drug buy”. Elated by the opportunity to catch a drug dealer on campus, John eagerly set up the sting with local police, obtained permission from the student’s parents and set a date for the operation. Certainly getting a drug dealer off campus would be in the best interest of his students.

John was conflicted however. In the interim between setting up the sting and the morning it was supposed to happen, he began to question whether the drug buy was really in the best interest of the student who volunteered to by the drugs. Specifically he was worried that the student would face serious repercussions for being a “snitch”.
It was just something that was weighing on me and I started thinking. OK if this was my own kid, would I put my own kid through this? So I told my assistant principal Thursday morning we’re not going to go through with this. I just told him why and said I just can’t do this to this kid.

Ultimately, John made the decision to forgo the drug buy because in his heart, he knew it wasn’t in the best interest of the student he was using to purchase the drugs. He rationalized it by saying of the drug dealer, “we’ll get him”. To him, the need to protect this student from unanticipated harm trumped his own adult self-interest to remove a drug dealer from campus.

Participants also mentioned mediating conflicts when two faculty members claim they are doing what is in the best interests of the students. Andrew provided this example from working with his regular education and special education teachers. Recognizing that each faction had their own goals for the students they served, the former academic growth and the latter behavioral growth, he said that neither party understood “the perspective of the other.” Working through this conflict required him to rectify this problem. He said,

It’s conflict because they both have the best interest of the kid based on their perceived end goal for that kid. So it’s not like it’s a conflict based on a bad thing, but it’s just a difference of opinion on what needs to be done and they both have a legitimate point. It’s a matter of finding that common ground that at least they come out with an understanding that they’re both essentially doing the same thing, but with different goals and different means of doing it.
Andrew demonstrates a solid footing in resolving an issue from a best interests viewpoint by refocusing his teachers on the needs of their students to succeed rather than their adult need to demonstrate their effectiveness as teachers. While both Andrew and John ultimately made decisions that satisfied their understanding of what the best decision was, both would have benefited from the clarity the Stefkovich’s (2014) best interests model brings to decision-making.

Throughout the interviews it was clear to me that participants had not previously considered that conflicts they experience during decision-making often originate when the underlying values between two parties are at odds. In some cases the principals second-guessed themselves or had difficulty making decisions without a solid understanding of the values that were at stake.

It is my assertion that the participants would benefit from working through such conflict using a model such as Shapiro and Stefkovich’s (2016) ethic of the profession. Viewing conflict in this way provides a more objective stance for principals, offering them the opportunity to reflect on the values in conflict before making their decisions.

It was evident that as participants grew in their leadership roles, they became more confident in their decision-making even though they were unable to identify consistent guiding principles that developed over time. The data show that there is some uneasiness in the role of principal as ultimate decision-maker. As one participant asked of me, recognizing my own years of experience in the role of principal, “does the conflict ever get easier?” This question illustrates the powerful nature of conflict and the need for principals to be able to wrestle with complex dilemmas in a safe way that allows them to identify their own values and shows them how to sort through difficult decisions with
confidence and authority. I propose guiding principals through this process through pre-service and in-service training. The experience will benefit them greatly when real decisions must be made in their roles as principals.

John, a fifteen-year veteran principal stated, “critical incidents are the ones that give you thick skin.” I would argue that we can buffer the sting of conflict in a much more concerted way by ensuring principals have the tools they need to address it objectively and professionally without waiting for time to “thicken the skin.”
Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

This study seeks to understand whether principals are cognizant of their values as underlying players in the day-to-day decisions they make and what impact values and value conflict have on their decision-making processes in practice. It does this by looking at the extent to which 4 principals have wrestled with these concepts and how principals might be better prepared through professional development or pre-service training to make decisions that are ethically sound.

By addressing the following areas of inquiry: (1) the extent to which principals perceive awareness of their personal values and codes of ethics during decision-making processes, (2) the perceived impact of their personal values and codes on the decisions they make, and (3) how they perceive the resolution of the conflicts that arise when personal values conflict with those of the system, community or profession, the study examines how principals apply their values to the decision-making process.

Discussion

The data revealed, through principals’ life experiences, a rich tapestry of values that developed in their early years and throughout their educational lives as students and professionals. Through the examination of these experiences, especially the “critical incidents” they shared from practice, it was evident that the values they related to me were impactful on their decision-making practices in positive ways.

Participants revealed through discussion the underlying values that impact the decisions they make although it was also evident that participants do not consciously look to them when making decisions. This is not to say that values do not impact their
decisions directly, rather, it shows that they exist in the background as subconscious guides in decision-making.

By sharing their “critical incidents” the participants revealed that they do not view the conflict in their roles as decision-makers as often originating when their values are in conflict with those of the opposite party. These conflicts were present in each of four arenas in line with the work of Shapiro and Stefkovich’s (2016) Ethic of the Profession. The arenas I found were principal and teachers, principal and other leaders, principal and community and when two parties claim the best interest of the student.

In resolving conflict in each of these arenas, participants often felt uneasy, found themselves second-guessing their decisions and wondered if they were “doing the right thing”. It was apparent that over time, these feelings subsided as more experience was gained, yet even the most veteran principal in the study mentioned making rash decisions that he later regretted.

Andrew is an especially poignant example of a new principal making decisions almost entirely on his own. Because he was without a superintendent for the first three years of his career, his experiences stand out as occurring in a vacuum where he was the ultimate decision-maker in all things applicable to the elementary level.

His experiences with the uneasiness of “doing the right thing” offer a clear indication that the conflicts that arise in decision-making are often emotionally taxing and a source of self-doubt. As a new principal, it was evident to me that Andrew would have been well served by viewing his decisions during this tempestuous time through a values framework that places the best interest of the student at the center of its structure. In order to do this, a process of coming to understand his own values and how they impact
his decisions is necessary. A careful examination of the underlying values in conflict during decision-making would help sort out the complexities that create discord. Using a best interests approach, the needs of the student drive the decision-making process rather than adult need (Stefkovich, 2014).

In general, participants referenced the best interest of students, but it was not articulated to be an underlying guiding principle in their decision-making processes with any consistency. Instead, they mentioned the importance of doing what’s right, seeking to understand, and leading with integrity as guiding principles in their work.

Scholars have called for explicit training of educational leaders in ethical decision-making, ethical codes and frameworks (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007; Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994) and also value and moral recognition (Begley & Zaretsky, 2004; Branson, 2007b; Ryan, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2004) in order to navigate the difficult terrain of the current educational landscape. It is argued that this type of training would be invaluable for new principals in giving them a conceptual framework for dealing with value conflict, argued to be one of the most troublesome aspects of the principal’s role (Dempster & Berry, 2003).

Leithwood’s (1999) argument that this type of training would have little effect on practice by citing little evidence of unethical practices in educational leadership represents, in my opinion, a myopic view of the importance of the principal as a human actor with emotions and self-doubt about their work. Sergiovanni states, “we have separated the hand of leadership from its head and heart” and “the process of leadership from its substance” (1992, p. 3). By avoiding a focus on underlying values in a conscious
and clear way, we essentially remove them as potential guiding principles that lead principals toward value-based decisions.

As demonstrated in this study, participants felt a sense of uneasiness and often questioned whether the decisions they make are the right ones. In examining the value conflicts participants related to me, it became clear that a consistent guiding principal like Stefkovich’s (2014) Best Interests Model and Shapiro and Stefkovich’s (2016) Ethic of the Profession working in conjunction would bring much clarity to the work of these participants, particularly when they are dealing with “critical incidents” or “situations that cannot be solved in a way that everyone is pleased” (Begley & Johansson, 1998, p. 416).

There is evidence in the data to support that principals at all levels of experience would benefit by coming to an understanding of values-based decision-making through reflective processes like the one used in this study. These processes, however defined, would bring value cognizance into the decision-making process and give principals the confidence they need to trust they are acting in ethical ways in line with the literature.

The data showed that over time, the values of principals, their teachers, their leaders and their communities come to a point of stasis as each party comes to understand them at a deeper although subconscious level. This process of value-norming was directly evident in all participants’ experiences, each at a different point along the process. If viewed as happening along a continuum, it is helpful to see how the different actors work to make sure that their own values are applied in ways that are acceptable to others when conflict occurs.

I propose that careful reflection on individual principals’ values and how they impact their decision-making would put them in a better position to reflect on those of the
school communities they work in, forcing the process of value-norming to occur as a conscious process. This perspective would prove useful to new principals in understanding what the expectations their teachers, leaders and communities have of them.

By doing this, some of the missteps experienced by my participants perhaps would have been avoided. This information could also serve as a guide to principals as they decide whether a school or school district is a good fit for them from a values perspective. Knowing before hand how ones values are incongruous with their school community would give principals some insight as to where they need to adapt, plan reforms or choose not to invest their time.

As Beck (1999) noted, this study demonstrates that principals make many wise decisions that are based on solid values developed over a lifetime of experiences in education as students, teachers and principals. It also demonstrates that principals are not directly aware of their values when they make decisions regarding “critical incidents”, and in effect are not aware of how they are often in conflict with those of their teachers, leaders and communities. As a result, principals deal with value conflict in a subconscious way that leaves them wondering if they are making wise decisions.

I argue that the individual values of principals should be brought to a cognitive level and that principals should be given the tools necessary to evaluate critical incidents as they unfold from a values perspective. By doing this, principals would have a conscious understanding of where they can expect conflict to develop, and reason through their decisions based on what is in the best interests of their students first.
Shapiro and Stefkovich’s (2016) Ethic of the Profession and Stefkovich’s (2014) Best Interests Model used in conjunction would be useful in this regard.

Implications for Practice

This study supports the claims of scholars who have called for explicit training of educational leaders in ethical decision-making, ethical codes and frameworks (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007; Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994) and also value and moral recognition (Begley & Zaretsky, 2004; Branson, 2007b; Ryan, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2004) in order to navigate the difficult terrain of the current educational landscape. By preparing principals better in the recognition of these elements that are always at play in the role of the administrator, it stands to reason that a solid grounding in understanding these elements is appropriate.

There is also evidence in the data to suggest that the idea of taking a year to learn about the school or district as a new principal might have a greater place in the pre-service training than just a loose suggestion or an adage. Evidence of the pitfalls of not taking this time is present in the data set as well as that of the positive outcomes when it is taken. It is impossible to treat this as the case given the limited number of study participants, but it is an intriguing idea worth mentioning.

Implications for Policy

As mentioned earlier in their notable lack of moral and ethical language, the Pennsylvania School Leadership Standards (PDE, 2010) water-down the NPBEA 2015 standard addressing values and ethics, advocating instead for a peripheral treatment. The results of this study and others add to the evidence that perhaps a greater focus on the
place of values, morals and ethics should become part of the discussion in determining leadership standards. This in turn will drive a more appropriate level of attention toward their impact in the work of the principal in Pennsylvania and any other state with a noticeable gap.

Besides addressing values through standards of principal preparation, policy makers would benefit from an understanding of the importance of values in the daily work of school principals when evaluating principal preparation programs. By adding course requirements to principal pre-service training and in-service training for working principals, policymakers would guide the field toward a greater understanding of how conflict develops and can be resolved through reflective practice.

Implications for Future Research

Value-norming is an avenue for future research uncovered in this study. Examining the efficacy of taking a period of time to “value norm” when a principal is assigned to a new building or district would be useful in understanding the process of reform. Such a study might explore whether adding the “don’t change anything in the first year” adage to the field as a matter of practice could be a potential benefit. Further, a study into value-norming might provide insight as to why some relationships between principals and their school communities are incongruous and guide the field toward preparing leaders to better understand how values impact their daily work and relationships.

Additionally, this study could be expanded in terms of the number of participants and participating schools to observe whether the findings hold up in a larger study. Alternatively, different approaches of looking at values and value conflict might be better
conceived given what was learned in this study. In this way the volume of literature supporting explicit value, moral and ethical constructs might be better represented in the guiding standards for the training of pre-service and practicing principals.

Finally, a cohort of participants could be trained in the process of recognizing values and value conflicts in decision-making using The Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016) and the Best Interests Model (Stefkovich, 2014). A study could then be done on the impact this training has on practice as leaders deal with critical incidents in their work as principals leading to a better understanding of values-based decision-making.
References


Appendix A

The Three Interview Series Protocols

Title of Project: Principals’ Perceptions of the Impact of Values and Value Conflict on Decision Making Processes
Interviewer: Charles Smargiassi
Interview #: 1; Life History
Interview with: 
Date: 
Time: 
Location:

Getting started:
1. Ask if the participant minds if I record the session.
2. Thank person for willingness to participate.
3. State that this will be about a 60 minute interview.
4. Explain that this interview is for my dissertation
5. Gain informed consent
6. Inform participant that they can opt out of the study at any time.
7. Inform participant that they are not to share any identifiable information about individual students when sharing information about critical incidents and any other relevant questions.

Opening Questions:
1. Where did you receive your bachelor’s degree?
2. In what area(s) are you certified to teach in Pennsylvania?
3. For how many years did you teach?
4. Where did you receive your Master’s degree and principal certification?
5. How many years have you been a principal?
6. Have you earned any other advanced degrees? If yes, in what area(s) and from which university(ies)?

Questions:
During this first interview I’m going to ask you to recall key points in your life experience as a student and educator. My purpose in asking these questions is to try to understand how you arrived at your current position as a school principal.

1. What was school like for you as a young student?

Listen for/prompt:
   a. Positive/negative experiences
   b. Feelings about school
   c. Possible connections to future track
2. What was your experience like in high school?
   a. Positive/negative experiences
   b. Change in attitude from early schooling
   c. Possible connections to future track

3. When did you know you wanted to pursue a career in education?
   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Earliest experiences that inspired their career
   b. Individual teachers’ or principals’ impact
   c. The way they were made to feel by educators positive or negative

4. When you were teaching, what were some of your most vivid memories of interacting with students? Other teachers? Your principals?
   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Impact on students
   b. Impact of principals on participant
   c. Interactions with teachers positive or negative
   d. Positive/negative influences

5. What inspired you to become a school principal?
   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Critical incident, situation
   b. Always a career goal
   c. Value differences, “I can do better”

6. The transition from teacher to principal can be an eye opening experience. Part of this process involves being exposed to ideas or ways of thinking that might contradict your own. Can you describe your experience coming to grips with other educational philosophies that may or may not have differed from yours as you studied to become a principal?
   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Value conflicts
   b. New ways of viewing education
   c. Change in values
Title of Project: Principals’ Perceptions of the Impact of Values and Value Conflict on Decision Making Processes
Interviewer: Charles Smargiassi
Interview #: 2; The Details of Experience
Interview with: 
Date: 
Time: 
Location: 

Getting started:

8. Ask if the participant minds if I record the session.
9. Thank person for willingness to participate.
10. State that this will be about a 60 minute interview.
11. Remind participant that they can opt out of the study at any time.
12. Remind participant that they are not to share any identifiable information about individual students when sharing information about critical incidents and any other relevant questions.

Questions:

Today I’m going to be asking you about what some have called “critical incidents” in decision-making. These can be defined as situations that cannot be solved in a way that everyone is pleased. These are the decisions and situations that are “difficult to leave at the office” when you go home at night.

1. Can you tell me about what you might think of as a critical incident involving the implementation of an innovative idea designed to improve instruction in your school?

   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Who was aligned with your ideas
   b. Was there resistance, if so who?
   c. How did the implementation turn out

2. Can you recount a specific situation with a student or group of students that required you to render one of these “difficult to leave at the office” decisions?

   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Was expulsion involved?
   b. Police involvement
   c. Parent reactions
d. How were other students involved?

3. As principals, we often encounter critical incidents that impact our faculty either individually or as a whole. Can you recount such a decision involving your faculty?

   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Was a career in jeopardy?
   b. How was the union involved?
   c. What was the outcome?

4. At times, we find ourselves implementing directives from the district office or the department of education that don’t fit in with our philosophy of education. Can you recall a time when you had to implement one of these directives?

   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Compliance, creative compliance
   b. Pushback from faculty
   c. Don’t shoot the messenger, different when PDE vs. District?
   d. Protect faculty from outside intrusion

5. We often hear about the importance of developing a school-community relationship, but sometimes the decisions we make can put this relationship in jeopardy. Can you think of a situation that you have encountered that put you at odds with the expectations of the community?

   Listen for/prompt:
   a. What were the issues?
   b. How was it resolved?

6. If you had to reduce your leadership philosophy to one statement, what would it be?

   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Focus? (Student, instruction, other)
   b. Best interests of the student
   c. Ethic of the profession
Title of Project: Principals’ Perceptions of the Impact of Values and Value Conflict on Decision Making Processes
Interviewer: Charles Smargiassi
Interview #: 3; Reflection on the Meaning

Getting started:

13. Ask if the participant minds if I record the session.
14. Thank person for willingness to participate.
15. State that this will be about a 60 minute interview.
16. Remind participant that they can opt out of the study at any time.
17. Inform participant that they are not to share any identifiable information about individual students when sharing information about critical incidents and any other relevant questions.

Questions:

During this final interview, I’m going to ask you to reflect on the discussions we had in the first two interviews.

1. Regarding your history with education from student to principal, which elements of your experience have carried over and are part of your daily work as a principal?

   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Early experiences as a student
   b. Later experiences as a student
   c. Experiences as teacher
   d. Experiences as a graduate student studying to become a principal

2. In the second interview, we discussed “critical incidents” or decisions that cannot be solved in a way that everyone is pleased. How do you think these “critical incidents” have directly affected or shaped your work as a principal?

   Listen for/prompt:
   a. Have they served to change your thinking in any way?
   b. How do you make sense of the conflicts that can arise from these decisions?

3. Given what you have said about your life before becoming a principal and what you have said about your experiences dealing with “critical
incidents”, how do you understand values in your work as a principal?

Listen for(prompt):
- Thoughtfulness, reflection in decision making during “critical incidents”
- Awareness of values

4. What are the values that define your work as a principal?

Listen for(prompt):
- Student focus
- Instructional focus
- Parent focus
- Employee focus

5. How do these values impact your decision-making?

Listen for(prompt):
- Cognizance of hierarchy of values to inform decision-making
- Conflicting values and their role in decision-making

6. Before we wrap up, are there any other thoughts on values or value conflict that you have that might inform our discussion?
Appendix B

CONSENT FOR RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Principals’ Perceptions of the Impact of Values and Value Conflicts on Decision Making Processes

Principal Investigator: Charles Smargiassi

Address: 6 Meadowlark Lane, Danville PA, 17821

Telephone Number: (570) 854-5204

Advisor: Dr. Jacqueline Stefkovich

Advisor Telephone Number: (814) 863-3779

Subject’s Printed Name: ___________________________

We are asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information about the research. Whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to take part. You can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you. Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you and take your time to make your choice.

1. Why is this research study being done?
   We are asking you to be in this research because you have indicated having an interest in the impact values have on decision-making in the principalship.
   
   This research is being done to find out how principals perceive the impact of values on their decision-making.
   
   Approximately five people will take part in this research study in Central Pennsylvania.

2. What will happen in this research study?
   During this study you will participate in three separate interviews on three different occasions across the span of approximately one week at a location of your choosing. These semi structured interviews will ask you to reflect on personal experiences leading up to and during your work as a principal. You may opt to skip or any question you would prefer not to answer. The interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recording device and the recordings will be transcribed by Charles Smargiassi. You will have access to these transcriptions when they are complete. The data from these interviews will be
analyzed using a process that will distill your perceptions into thematic descriptions. You will be asked to verify that these descriptions are accurate and truly reflective of your perceptions. Only you and the principal investigator will have access to the transcriptions of the interviews and your name will not be attached to any published results. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and identifiable information will be removed before publishing results. You will have an opportunity to review the final results before completion and publication of the study.

3. What are the risks and possible discomforts from being in this research study?

The risks for participation in this study are minimal. The interview questions will ask you to relate personal experiences in your work as they relate to your values which may cause some discomfort.

Every effort will be made to minimize your privacy, legal or economic risks by removing any identifiable names or scenarios that might reveal your identity in the published results.

There is a risk of loss of confidentiality if your information or your identity is obtained by someone other than the investigators, but precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. The confidentiality of your electronic data created by you or by the researchers will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

4. What are the possible benefits from being in this research study?

4a. What are the possible benefits to you?

The discussion of values through an interview process can be personally rewarding as you come to understand their impact on your work as a principal. This study will potentially inform your work as a principal.

4b. What are the possible benefits to others?

The field of educational leadership will potentially benefit from your shared perceptions of how values and value conflicts impact your decision-making.

5. What other options are available instead of being in this research study?

You may decide not to participate in this research.

6. How long will you take part in this research study?

If you agree to take part, it will take you about one week to complete this research study. You will be asked to return to the research site three times to participate in three (3) interviews with each estimated to last one hour. After the interviews you will be asked to verify the distilled descriptions as being an accurate reflection of your perceptions which should take approximately one to two hours of your time.
7. How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you decide to take part in this research study?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and sharing of your personal research information to people who have a need to review this information.

- Audio recordings and transcriptions of the three interviews will be stored digitally on the Principal Investigators laptop hard drive for the duration of the study. These data will be encoded with a pseudonym to protect your personal identity. The PI’s laptop is password protected.

- A list that matches your name with your pseudonym will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the Principal Investigator’s residence. Only the Principal Investigator will have access to this list. No electronic version of the list will be maintained. No other person will have access to this list, which will be destroyed at the culmination of the project.

- The interview recordings, transcriptions and resultant data will be stored on the PI’s laptop hard drive throughout the study. At the conclusion of the study, all data will be burned to an encrypted DVD, removed from the hard drive of the researcher’s laptop and stored separately and securely in the researcher’s home in a locked filing cabinet only the researcher will have access to. These data will be maintained for three years along with signed and dated consent forms.

In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

We will do our best to keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may find out about your participation in this research study. For example, the following people/groups may check and copy records about this research.

- The Office for Human Research Protections in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
- The Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) and
- The Office for Research Protections.

Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you. Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private. However, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

8. What are the costs of taking part in this research study?

The only cost to you will be your travel expenses to the site of your choice.

1. Will you be paid or receive credit to take part in this research study?
   
   A $10 gift card will be provided to you to offset any travel expenses incurred.

10. What are your rights if you take part in this research study?

Taking part in this research study is voluntary.
- You do not have to be in this research.
- If you choose to be in this research, you have the right to stop at any time.
- If you decide not to be in this research or if you decide to stop at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

11. If you have questions or concerns about this research study, whom should you call?
Please call the head of the research study (principal investigator), Charles Smargiassi at (570) 854-5204 if you:
- Have questions, complaints or concerns about the research.
- Believe you may have been harmed by being in the research study.

You may also contact the Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775, ORProtections@psu.edu if you:
- Have questions regarding your rights as a person in a research study.
- Have concerns or general questions about the research.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to offer input or to talk to someone else about any concerns related to the research.

INFORMED CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

**Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

Your signature below means that you have explained the research to the subject or subject representative and have answered any questions he/she has about the research.

_____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Signature of person who explained this research  Date  Printed Name
(Only approved investigators for this research may explain the research and obtain informed consent.)

**Signature of Person Giving Informed Consent**

Before making the decision about being in this research you should have:
- Discussed this research study with an investigator,
- Read the information in this form, and
- Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the research and those questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

**Signature of Subject**

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily choose to be in this research and agree to allow your information to be used and shared as described above.

_____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Subject  Date  Printed Name
Appendix C

Versus and Values Coding Example

with. I have a lot of respect for Dr. _____________. He was transitioning in/sup

 superintendent. So he wrote me a nice letter of
recommendation and when I came back to the area in
2008, I remember going to him cause he was one of
the few administrators still in position. I was
impressed with his district report card, evaluating
himself and his district and his five-year plan. I could

go to him and get the pulse of the area. I just actually
sent him a congratulating message because he was
recommended as superintendent of the year. Mrs.

__________ you know she would meet with us
periodically during our internships. Her style is
definitely about appreciating and valuing staff. Totally
different style than my current superintendent now.

But she I definitely see that in __________ She has, can

you remember some of the things she does for
teacher appreciation? I remember the cake pops the
ice cream scoops, the orange, I can remember her
first in-service with all of us that first opening day?

Cause I could remember with Mr. __________ people
being in tears for how they felt that first day. I can
remember the first day of Mrs. __________ and
people being in tears because it was totally different
acknowledging people’s accomplishments. I can
remember Mrs. __________ was recognized for
top test scores at that in-service. I can remember her
pencil thing she did with pencils all at the top some
sharpened some not and did an analogy with that, I
remember minute to win it. When I went to practice
with her to interview, she said don’t be afraid to stand
out, I gave mints to people I interviewed with. And

Mrs. __________ totally respect her, totally different
style but I learned some great things and I worked
with her so closely because of doing curriculum work.
So.

CS: So it sounds tome you take a little bit of learning
from everybody good or bad. Would you say that
ends up becoming part of your own style?
VITA

Charles Smargiassi

Education

Ph.D. Educational Leadership Penn State University; May 2016
MS Educational Leadership Wilkes University, Wilkes Barre, PA; August 2007
MS Instructional Technology Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA 17815; May 2005
BS Music Education Millersville University, Millersville, PA 17551; December 1996

Papers

Smargiassi, C. (2016) Principals’ perceptions of values and value conflicts in decision making. Dissertation

Professional Interests

Organizational learning and leading systemic change.
Design and implementation of alternative programs for at-risk youth that address behavioral, social and academic success.
Design and application of innovative technology solutions to improve student learning in the school setting.
Instructional Design and Learning Theory as they apply to the educational environment using traditional and technology based methods of instruction.

Experience

Principal: Danville Middle School; Danville Middle School. 401 East Front Street Danville, PA 17821 2009-Present
Assistant Principal: Danville High School; Danville High School. 600 Walnut Street Danville, PA 18721 2007-2009
Choral, Percussion and General Music Teacher Danville Area School District, 600 Walnut Street Danville, PA 17821; 1997-2006