

**The Pennsylvania State University**

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**AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF SECONDARY PRINCIPALS'  
PERSPECTIVES ON "THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE STUDENT" AS A  
VIABLE PROFESSIONAL ETHIC FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

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## Abstract

This study examined secondary principals' perspectives about the expression "the best interests of the student" as a viable professional ethic for educational leadership.

Additional features of professional moral reasoning were examined as well; which included principals' perceptions about the morally unique aspects of their work, principals' sense making about their own experiences and judgments where a plurality of values and situations embody competing and irreducible moral standpoints, and the meanings ascribed to professional moral practice.

An additional focus of this investigation was how secondary principals interpret the experience of leadership decision making as a moral activity in relation to a specific ethical decision making theory, the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). This study did not investigate decision making, per se, but rather focused on principals' post hoc reasoning and reflections about the decisions they made.

I was primarily concerned about principals' use of the expression "the best interests of the student" and its meaning and utility in professional practice, but I was also equally concerned about principals' ethical and moral deliberations and whether these experiences and the meanings ascribed to them either supported, modified, or disconfirmed aspects of the Ethic of the Profession framework and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests.

Data were acquired by qualitative-naturalistic inquiry based primarily on in-depth interviews. Data collection techniques that were explorative and generative in nature were best suited for my research questions. I used a general, modified phenomenological

perspective suited for an educational research context in order to capture eleven purposefully sampled administrators' perspectives about moral practice and decision making experiences.

Findings indicate that participants clearly articulated what they considered to be unique moral aspects of the profession of educational administration. The expression, "the best interests of the student" was employed by participants as both a professional injunction of special duty and as an intimation of personal dispositions deemed necessary in order to recognize, respond and address students' needs. Sometimes the phrase was used as a formal maxim, while more often the expression was "weighed" with a variety of other rules of actual duty, assortments of additional considerations and motivations, and situational and contextual variables in order to determine what value or set of values take(s) precedence while seeking to meet both individual and collective student needs.

A clash between personal beliefs and values and organizational/professional expectations was very real for participants. The experience was generally frequent, but varied from principal to principal (reports of daily to occasionally to several times a year). One basic principle driving the profession that stands as a moral imperative or ideal for clearing away moral discord between personal values and organizational procedures and policies or professional expectations was not evidenced in the data. A variety of approaches and strategies were used by participants to resolve the intrapersonal value clash experienced in their work.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose**

This study primarily examined secondary principals' perspectives about the expression "the best interests of the student" as a viable professional ethic for educational leadership. Additional features of professional moral reasoning were examined as well; which included principals' perceptions about the morally unique aspects of their work, principals' sense making about their own experiences and judgments where a plurality of values and situations embody competing and irreducible moral standpoints, and the meanings ascribed to professional moral practice.

An additional focus of this investigation was how secondary principals interpret the experience of leadership decision making as a moral activity in relation to a specific ethical decision making theory, the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). This study did not investigate decision making, per se, but rather focused on principals' post hoc reasoning about the decisions they made, or how they would have decided in a hypothetical situation. I was largely concerned with evidence of moral reasoning when participants were prompted to remember decisions they had made in the past and when presented with a dilemma. My intent, among other things, was to look at whether principals experienced particular aspects of the phenomenon of deciding ethically in one of several ways depicted in the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006).

I was primarily concerned about principals' use of the expression "the best interests of the student" and its meaning and utility in professional practice, but I was also equally concerned about principals' ethical and moral deliberations and whether these experiences and the meanings ascribed to them either supported, modified, or disconfirmed aspects of the Ethic of the Profession framework and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). This study examined secondary principals' perspectives and experiences about their work; namely: the meaning and utility of the expression, "the best interests of the student," the unique moral aspects attributed to professional practice within the field of educational leadership, and the phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord experienced as part of the process of deciding ethically when faced with difficult moral choices.

### **Significance**

For well over a decade there has been growing recognition of the need for educational leaders to be trained in moral decision making, and likewise, demonstrate knowledge, dispositions and behaviors that are regarded as ethical by the profession. This growing recognition is reflected not only in professional literature (whether it be theoretical or empirical), but also at the level of policy, professional licensing, and regulatory direction to states in their response toward "raising quality within the profession" (ISLLC, 1996).

There are several organizational positions and formalized expressions of what professional moral behavior for educational leaders should entail. Among these professional organizations are the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals statements of ethics, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure

Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for educational leadership and corresponding Educational Testing Service (ETS) School Leaders Licensure Assessment for aspiring school administrators, as well as state government and regional professional association codes, and in some circumstances, individual school district level policies.

Practicing administrators are generally aware of these various professional codes of conduct and standards whether articulated through professional work related associations or more formal statements in policy. In Pennsylvania, Title 22 PA Code § 235.1-11 *Code of Professional Practice and Conduct for Educators*, developed by the Professional Standards and Practices Commission in response to legislative act, serves to inform professional educators of their ethical and legal responsibilities as public servants.

ISLLC was established in 1994 under the guidance of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and although not an active project, ISLLC provided “a means through which states could work together to develop and implement model standards, assessments, professional development, and licensing procedures for school leaders” (CCSSO, 2006). ISLLC was “a consortium of 32 education agencies [including state departments of education and professional standards boards] and 13 education administration associations [practitioner organizations] that worked cooperatively to establish an education policy framework for school leadership” and set higher expectations for school leaders to enter and remain in the profession along with reshaping ideas about educational leadership (CCSSO, 2006).

The ISLLC Standards “were designed to capture what is essential about the role of school leaders” and these “essential aspects of leadership” were defined in relation to student success, that is, “providing experiences that ensure all students succeed”

(CCSSO, 2006). There are six ISLLC Standards of which Standard 5 indicates that: “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (ISLLC, 1996). Within this Standard an educational administrator should possess specific knowledge, dispositions and performances that constitute the basis of professional moral decision making. The knowledge, dispositions and performances of Standard 5 are currently being assessed by state departments of education using the ETS examination.

### **Future Direction of the Profession**

Administrative decision making requires more than the mechanical application of existing rules, regulations, and various levels of school and school-related policy. The essential aspects of school leadership are more than just possessing certain technical skills and ensuring effective and efficient management of organizational operations. The emphasis and preoccupation with bureaucratic scientism and management perspectives has given way to the importance of moral, value and ethical bases for educational leadership decision making. There is an increasing recognition that putatively value free administrative decisions and actions are actually “value-laden, even value-saturated enterprise(s)” (Hodgkinson, 1978, p. 122). This recognition, according to Hodgkinson (1978), is an “administrative logic” of a new order.

What is known currently in the field has much to do with how practicing educational leaders approach decision making along various ethical frameworks. We also know that behaviors of school officials are likely to be influenced by personal values or motivational bases involved in valuation processes, particularly “value groundings” that are rationally derived. In addition, we know that theory and research on values, ethics and

moral decision making in educational administration has called for ontological and epistemological changes in research and theory building that focus less on perspectives pertaining to logical positivism (naïve realism) and more toward paradigms that are naturalistic, post-positivistic, transactional and constructive.

My research focused on providing empirical insights into a more recently defined and theorized professional ethic for educational leadership. This professional ethic recognizes moral aspects unique to the profession of educational leadership and grounds the moral dimension of the profession on the nomothetic injunction to “serve the best interests of the student” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001) whereby “promoting the success of all students” (ISLLC, 1996) by focusing on the needs of children (Walker, 1998). More specifically, there is no empirical understanding of how the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006) is understood and practiced by school administrators outside specific university training programs.

Therefore, my intent was to take the theory to the field and test its explanations and definitions about professional moral practice against what practicing secondary school leaders tell us. My focus was on practicing administrators’ understanding of the expression “the best interests of the student” and additional aspects of moral practice and reasoning removed from classroom or seminar settings. Administrators who shared their experiences, meaning making, stories and insights along with their accounts of grappling over dilemmas and decision making proved to be informative when considering aspects that comprise an ethos of the profession.

### **Definition of Terms**

Because the primary focus of this study was on practicing secondary principals' perspectives about the expression "the best interests of the student" as a viable professional ethic for educational leadership and, in addition, closely examined other features of professional moral practice, such as principals' perceptions about the morally unique aspects of their work and reflections on ethical decision making, it is important to specify the meaning of terms used throughout this study.

### Ethics

The term *ethics* is used in a variety of ways to serve different purposes. For this study, ethics are meant to be the formal systems and analyses of moral philosophy (see Chapter 2). Ethics is the "study of underlying beliefs, assumptions, principles and values that support a moral way of life...a summery ordering of those principles, beliefs, assumptions and values into a logical dynamic that characterizes moral life" (Starratt, 2004).

Ethical systems attempt to convey the intrinsic logic of, and bring intelligibility to, what constitutes morality, and what does not, and why. Lewis (1967) indicates the importance of

distinguishing the senses in which we may speak of ethical systems....We may, on one hand, mean by an ethical system a body of ethical injunctions...[and] the differences [between ethical systems], from this point of view, are differences in content; but we also sometimes speak of ethical systems when we mean systematic analyses and explanations of our moral experience..., or a theory as to the origin, sanctions, or ultimate significance of those injunctions. (p. 203)

An ethical system is based on a paradigm, a set of basic beliefs that deal with ultimates or first principles (metaphysics), which represents a worldview. A worldview defines for its holder the nature of the universe, a person's place in it, and "the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 107). These basic beliefs are accepted on reason and faith with no certain "way to establish their ultimate truthfulness" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 107). Beauchamp, Childress and West (1984) indicate that in the process of moral reasoning

we appeal to different [grounds or motives] of varying degrees of abstraction and systemization...[and these] judgments...are justified by moral rules, which in turn are grounded in principles and ultimately in ethical theories. The particular judgment, the rule, and the principle may be grounded in an ethical theory...that for many people may be only implicit and inchoate. (p. 40)

### Morality

"Morality is the living, the acting out of ethical beliefs and commitments" (Starratt, 2004, p. 5). For Starratt, morality is "applied ethics" where a set of norms, constructed and chosen by members of a pluralistic, democratic society, are considered pragmatic, normative conventions useful for guiding behavior. Norms, and the virtues that coincide, bind communities "to a moral way of living because they seem both reasonable and necessary to promote...[both basic] human and civic public life" (2004, p. 6).

Lewis (1952) indicates that

morality...seems to be concerned about three things. Firstly, with fair play and harmony between individuals. Secondly, with what might be called tidying up or harmonizing the things inside each individual [different faculties, desires, motives,



etc]. Thirdly, with the general purpose of human life as a whole: what [humankind] was made for: what course the whole fleet ought to be on... (p. 72)

Therefore, we should consider all three “departments” when referring to morality: relations between people, the things inside each person, and the relationship between a person and their teleological beliefs about the universe. We all participate in some fashion with the first one, but disagreements arise with the second and become more pronounced with the third (Lewis, 1952).

### Values

The term value is defined by Kluckhohn (1962) this way: “Values are a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action” (p. 395). This definition, according to Begley (2000), remains robust and expands the definition beyond strict philosophical traditions “to allow [for] consideration of several other value constructs relevant to educational administration” (p. 235) including social ethics, rational valuation processes of leadership practice, as well as self-interest and personal preference. Values manifested by individuals can be distinguished from collective values of a group, profession, organization or society.

### Ethos

Ethos is the distinguishing disposition, character, sentiment, moral nature, guiding beliefs or fundamental values peculiar to a specific person, people, institution, culture or movement and involves thought processes characteristic of an individual or group.

### Professional Ethics

Practical and professional ethics are essentially the principles and standards that underlie one's responsibilities and conduct in a particular field of expertise. These principles and standards often appear in the context of a code adopted by a profession or by a governmental or quasi-governmental organ to regulate that profession. A code can be fashioned as a code of professional responsibility in order to dispense with difficult issues of what behavior is, or is not, "ethical." Some practical and professional codes have the force of law with prescribed remedies for violations while others are merely advisory (Wikipedia, 2006). "A prominent tenet in any definition of a profession is that it have an enforceable code of ethics" (Dexheimer, 1984), and such codes of responsibility and conduct within a particular field of expertise "are often not part of [a] more general theory of ethics but accepted as pragmatic necessities" (Wikipedia, 2006).

### Dilemma

A dilemma can be defined as a really big problem, or a case where a problem is not readily solved – a situation or circumstance that is really hard to figure out. There may be competing values at stake where a person really does not know what to do in a given situation, and if they do not choose wisely, others will be affected (N. A. Tuana, personal communication, June 7, 2006).

Another definition of a dilemma is a situation or circumstance that arises requiring a choice between options that seem equally unfavorable or mutually exclusive (Swedene, 2005). A dilemma, according to this view, is not a problem because it defies a satisfactory solution. Cuban (2001) indicates that "dilemmas are messy, complicated, and conflict-filled situations that require undesirable choices between competing, highly prized values that cannot be simultaneously or fully satisfied" (p. 10). In addition, a

dilemma is a condition where an agent “faces...mutually exclusive and morally competing act choices [that] cannot help but have some aspect of...ultimate choice go against [one’s] disposition” (Swedene, 2005, p. 47). Dilemmatic action typically results in negative self-assessing emotions such as guilt and agent regret. Specific settings, particularly within organizations, “where a plurality of values and a plurality of situations in which we much choose between actions that embody competing and irreducible values” (Swedene, 2005, p. 43) often result in entangled, ill-defined, insoluble and temporarily managed compromises (Cuban, 2001).

### **Delimiting the Study**

A consideration of professional and practical ethics at large is beyond the scope of this investigation. Ethics and the professions and even a history of professional ethics within the field of educational leadership would take this study out of the way of its primary purpose. Needless to say, these considerations are important to the profession by way of comparison and development.

### **Research Questions**

In this investigation I sought to verify whether or not educational leaders could identify moral aspects unique to the profession of educational leadership, relate experiences of discord between organizational policies and professional expectations meant to inform judgment, decision making and conduct and one’s own personal moral values, whether held privately or expressed publicly, and how the shibboleth “the best interests of the student” is defined and used in decision making.

My central research questions were:

1. Do principals have a sense of being “duty bound” to rules, policies, institutional procedures and professional expectations while conversely recognizing that these structures and role expectations are, at times and in certain situations, not good or morally right?
2. Is there a “clash” between what the organization or profession deems as ethical and what an administrator believes as right and good on a personal level? If so, how is this internal conflict solved?
3. Is there a guiding principle(s) that assists school leaders in making value laden decisions; particularly, does the notion of best interests of the student emerge as a guiding principle?
4. Do practicing secondary administrators conceptualize the maxim “the best interests of the student” in such a way that mirrors the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests’ definition of rights, responsibility, and respect?

Additional questions included:

1. How do practicing secondary school leaders define good moral practice?
2. Is good moral practice different from legal or policy obligations?
3. Can secondary principals make a distinction between a defined professional ethic in the form of codified statements of ethical principles, standards for the profession and organizational rules, policies and procedures and a more diffuse notion of an ethos of the profession?

4. Can administrators identify “a plurality of values and a plurality of situations in which [s/he] must choose between actions that embody competing and irreducible values...in cases where...[s/he] acts for the best (Swedene, 2005)?
5. Do principals actually believe they act for the best?

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1 orientates the reader to the purpose and significance of this investigation within the field of values, ethics and moral leadership studies in educational administration. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a review of the literature pertinent to understanding moral decision making, valuation processes and ethical leadership perspectives and practices in educational administration. Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical framework I used to inform this study. Chapter 5 describes research design and methodology. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are analyses of interview data. Chapter 6 is a scrutiny of the moral interworkings of the profession and moral considerations unique to educational leadership. Chapter 7 closely examines the use and meaning ascribed to the expression “the best interests of the student” as a moral/ethical consideration in decision making. Chapter 8 constructs a phenomenology of moral conflict between self and profession in decision making. The final chapter is a discussion providing conclusions and implications of this research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical Literature and Moral Philosophy**

The range of literature including empirical studies, theoretical arguments and frameworks, and organizational efforts that attempt to categorize and synthesize the field of values, ethics and moral leadership studies is exceptionally diverse. This review is restricted to the parameters of educational leadership studies that address moral practice, ethical decision making, and values and valuation processes – particularly for leadership and administration at the K-12 level.

This study falls within the realm of empirical research aimed at theory building pertaining to moral and ethical educational leadership. My intent was to engage in an empirical, descriptive inquiry that portrays and explains unique moral aspects of the profession, how the expression “the best interests of the student” is understood and used in practice, and the particular phenomenon of internal moral discord between personal values and organizational/professional expectations. There is a wide variety of literature that informs this study; and I would be remiss not to situate this investigation within traditional moral philosophy, the range of theoretical standpoints pertaining to moral and ethical practice within the field of educational administration and empirical studies that address questions pertaining to values, valuation processes, ethical praxis and moral leadership within the field.

This chapter begins with a general overview of traditional moral philosophy and transitions to current theoretical perspectives on educational leadership ethics and moral decision making. Two notable organizational frameworks that attempt to categorize and map out existing literature are presented. The primary focus of the two chapters that

address a review of pertinent literature will consider empirical studies addressing educational leadership ethical decision making, values and valuation processes, and moral dispositions as they relate to practice. The empirical literature informing this study is reported and considered separately in Chapter 3. This chapter addresses traditional and contemporary moral philosophy and also the various theoretical standpoints pertaining to moral and ethical practice within the field of educational administration in order to provide a more comprehensive backdrop for this study.

### **Moral Philosophy**

In order to provide a coherent frame of reference not only for this study, but for current theoretical perspectives on educational leadership ethics and moral decision making, a very brief outline of moral philosophy is warranted. Western moral philosophy addresses essentially three kinds of thinking that relate to ethics: 1) Descriptive, empirical inquiry which describes or explains the phenomena of morality. 2) Normative thinking that considers what is right, good or obligatory in particular circumstances or as a general principle and providing reasons and justifications for said judgments. 3) Analytical or critical studies that seek to answer logical, epistemological and semantical questions about the nature and meaning of morality (Frankena, 1973).

Within the sub-discipline of normative ethics there consists theories of obligation (rules and principles), moral value or virtue (dispositions or traits of character), and nonmoral value (the meaning of “good” and its senses, or what constitutes the good life). All three theories are significant for understanding ethical decision making and moral leadership practices. Since the concern for normative theories of obligation is to offer guidance in making decisions and judgments pertaining to actions in specific situations,

and this particular area of moral philosophy is related to my investigation, rule-based ethics will be discussed further.

Generally, there exist two major perspectives of obligation or duty: one consists of deontological theories and the other teleological theories. Deontological and teleological theories are of different kinds, but are typically qualified by the role given to general rules as an aspect of moral reasoning. It should be said that in addition to theories of duty and obligation (judgments about what we morally ought to do), there is another branch of normative ethics concerned with a theory of moral value that considers judgments about action as secondary to aretaic judgments about traits of character, dispositions, motives, qualities and intentions about agents themselves. This focus on the moral sense of what is good and bad in persons or groups of persons and their moral responsibility is referred to as an ethic of virtue. Virtue ethics will be discussed at a later point.

Teleological theories focus on the ultimate criterion or standard of what comparative good is produced or brought into being by particular actions and behaviors. In the most basic sense, an act is right if it, or a rule under which it is performed, will likely result in at least as much a balance of valued good over evil as available alternatives; and an act is wrong if it does not seek to accomplish a future balance of valued good over evil for oneself (egoist), a society or universally. According to this position, there is only one right-making characteristic which centers on comparative nonmoral value of what is intended as a future consequence of action.

Deontological theories, on the other hand, deny what is morally right and obligatory in terms of duty as a function of what nonmoral good, as valued by individuals or society, is promoted and produced. According to deontological positions, there are considerations



beyond the nonmoral goodness and badness of consequences that make an action, or a rule under which it is performed, obligatory. Therefore, certain features of an act itself, other than the value it brings into existence, possesses a moral rightness. According to this position, an action or rule of action is morally right and obligatory even if a balance of good over evil is not promoted and realized for oneself, a society or universally.

Actions or rules of action may be morally right because of their own nature or facts about them beyond any nonmoral value (or lack thereof) that transpires because of them.

To enumerate the many variations of perspectives within the two broad divisions of normative theory of duty and obligation would take this brief presentation too far afield. There are, although, specific considerations of the role given to general rules as an aspect of moral reasoning within deontological and teleological frameworks that will be addressed in order to provide clarification and context for a review of the pertinent literature in educational leadership.

A common perspective among teleologists is ethical universalism or utilitarianism. With the respect given to general rules, the ultimate standard of right, wrong and obligation, whether it be actions or rules of action, is the principle of utility. According to this viewpoint, the moral end sought is the greatest possible balance of good over evil (however good is defined in its many senses and given value) in the world. Act-utilitarianism appeals directly to the principal of utility in particular and specific situations as it pertains to a consideration of personal action and behavior on any given occasion. On the other hand, rule-utilitarianism emphasizes the centrality of rules and appeals to them rather than determining what particular action will have the best

consequences in any given situation in question. Rules are selected, maintained, altered or eliminated based on their buttressing of the ultimate standard of utility.

Deontological theories also have distinctions based on the role given to general rules. Act-deontologists emphasize that judgments about duty and obligation are particular and situation specific. This position states that general rules are usually unavailable, and determining what is right is to become clear about the facts of each unique circumstance and forming a judgment in order to act in some way. Conversely, rule-deontologists hold a non-teleological/consequential standard consisting of one or several rules which constitute right action. These rules are essentially absolute irrespective of situations or a consideration of a standard of utility or consequences as they relate to nonmoral definitions and meanings of good for oneself, a society or universally. Rule-deontologists (Ross, 1930) usually make a distinction between rules of prima facie duty (a duty or moral rule that holds without exception) and rules of actual duty (taking into consideration exception-less rules and weighing which takes precedence when they conflict). Typically, moral rules are few in number, abstract and highly general.

In addition to theories of obligation (decision making rules and principles), there is an area of normative ethics that consists of studies related to moral value or virtue (dispositions or traits of character). Deontic judgments that focus on the morality of actions or kinds of action, either being right, wrong or obligatory is complemented, supplemented, or replaced with aretaic judgments that focus on the qualities and traits of character that people possess and the moral value judgments ascribed to intentions, motivations, and dispositions that result in specific actions or deeds. This line of concern over the cultivation of certain traits and aspects of character is often referred to as an

ethics of virtue or being. Just as deontological and teleological theories are essentially free standing methods of moral reasoning; virtue ethics, *per se*, is an approach to understanding, interpreting and defining morality. As opposed to an ethics of rules that characterizes acts as right or wrong, permissible or obligatory based on correspondence with specified rules, virtue ethics is agent focused and centers on what is the inner character of the agent. Ethical characterizations are aretaic and rule following is derivative of motives, dispositions and inner traits that are noble or ignoble, praiseworthy or blameworthy, admirable or deplorable, and good or bad. It is important to note that an ethics of virtue, as characterized here, can and is considered an ethical theory where careful reasoning, the unification of inconsistency and paradox and economy of explanation are valued in an effort to “come up with some kind of *coherent* ethical view of things” (Slote, 1997).

Specifying what stands as a moral virtue, or specifying an overarching virtue in which all other virtues are subsumed is of considerable importance and debate within virtue theory. Agent focused, or even more precisely, agent-based perspectives condense all moral evaluations of actions on the inner life of a person. Within this context virtue ethics comes close to a morality of caring as a basis for ethical theorizing and posits particularistic benevolence as a viable candidate for an overarching virtue (Slote, 1997). An ethic of care figures prominently in educational literature and is considered in the next section of this chapter as a separate moral framework in the field of educational leadership.

In addition to virtue ethics there are other ethical perspectives that are not principle-based. Prominent perspectives are that of Dewey (1909/1975; Fesmire, 2003), Dancy

(2004) and Cady (2005). According to Dewey, there is no single correct way to reason about moral questions, and his approach to ethics is one of “pragmatic pluralism.” According to this perspective, you cannot “unproblematically apply an [abstract rule from an ethical theory] to the same situation twice” (Fesmire, 2003, p. 58). Therefore, pragmatist ethics do not focus on a rigid, systemization of rule following, but rather connect general moral principles (which are not framed as absolute) – needed for wise, reflective and intelligent dealing with moral action because of our tendency toward passion and habit – and connects them to the ordinary, situated, embodied experiences of life. Through imagination, empathy, emotion and deliberation tentative moral solutions are derived that can be tested in the real world. This process can be understood as disciplined contextual perception where “ultimate moral motives and forces are nothing more or less than social intelligence – the power of observing and comprehending social situations – at work in service of social interest and aims” (Dewey, 1909/1975, p. 43).

For Dewey, emotions and perspective taking play a role in pragmatic ethics, but rational problem solving and scientific-like reasoning take center stage. The ability to size up a social situation, ignoring what is irrelevant, gathering the various factors that demand attention, “grading” them, hypothesizing, and testing premises are the stuff of ethics in the real world. This approach is focused on feeling and reasoning toward what is moral and ethical in particular social/contextual circumstances that are not only complicated but unique from every other social/contextual circumstance encountered in life. According to Fesmire (2003), Dewey’s justification of the good of members within the common welfare of society as both an immediate value, and the ends achieved as a result of its promotion, are based on the fact that “humans rely on their sociocultural

environment for physical sustenance, for basic resources, and most importantly for meaning” (p. 100). And from this basis of moral thought and action Dewey explains:

We believe in moral laws and rules, to be sure, but they are in the air. They are something set off by themselves. They are so *very* “moral” that they have no working contact with the average affairs of daily life. These moral principles need to be brought down to the ground through their statement in social and in psychological terms. We need to see that moral principles are not arbitrary, that they are not “transcendental”; that the term “moral” does not designate a special region of portion of life. We need to translate the moral into the conditions and forces of our community life, and into the impulses and habits of the individual. (1909/1975, p. 57)

Abstract rules and principles, according to Dewey, do not serve us well in the course of everyday life, and morality and ethical positions are best determined by the careful commingling of sentiment and reason applied to specific context and circumstance.

This perspective on principles and rules is shared by Dancy (2004). His position is similar to Dewey, but far more to the extreme – that morality has no need for principles at all. This perspective attests that “moral thought, moral judgment, and the possibility of moral distinctions – none of these depends in any way on the provision of a suitable supply of moral principles” (p. 5). Interestingly, Dancy’s (2004) formulation of a non-principle based ethics conforms to an intellectual tradition of philosophical ethics that is characterized by argument, abstract theory, formal proof construction that follows the pattern of quasi-scientific reasoning. Unlike Dewey (1909/1975; Fesmire, 2003), Dancy (2004) gives scant attention to the emotive, interpretive and esthetic aspects of moral thought and action. These aspects of personhood are not rational in terms of the standards

of reasoning for the empirical sciences, or analytic and logical argumentation, but they are not irrational either; rather they are a different way of perceiving and knowing. Despite valid considerations of other ways of acquiring moral knowledge, Dancy (2004) provides a thoroughgoing and technical meta-ethical argument for the doctrines of particularism and holism. The former states that moral thought and judgment does not rely on a supply of ethical principles, and the latter states, in the theory of reasons, a feature of a situation that is a reason for moral judgment in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another case. Moral reasons are always contingent on basic facts which are also contingent or dependent on context where ethical judgment is grounded in a priori knowledge garnered from past experience and a posteriori knowledge acquired through empirical evidence of the senses.

In contrast to Dancy (2004), another non-principle based ethics is offered by Cady (2005) and comes closer to the ideas articulated in Dewey's ethics and does not conform to the traditional principle-based dominant positions in professional ethics or the scientific norm of rationality that is favored in argument and discourse. For Cady (2005) a different norm of rationality is required for a sphere of life that is not known simply by strict formal reasoning or the precision of quasi-scientific empiricism. In order to answer the question, "How are we to live?" we should not quickly assume, as a theorist would, that there is one "single criterion, a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, a formula from which we can derive a good life" (p. 11). Conceptualizing ethics or everyday morality as a "moral vision," Cady (2005) acknowledges that considerably more goes into moral reasoning than choice-guiding arguments. Moral vision or ethical perspectives

are influenced by a wide range of factors on a person's life and include the power of metaphor, allegory, parable, and the narrative life experiences of others.

What counts for ethics and what constitutes legitimate forms of moral reasoning and knowledge are not "academic conventions of reason modeled after textbook science," but rather broader influences on the moral life such as "emotional, aesthetic, cross-cultural and experiential contributions" that can serve to explain and defend behavior and perspectives (Cady, 2005, p.13). Moral decisions are made as extensions of who we are and reflective of our unique personal backgrounds including our culture, religion, family, experiences, convictions, and a wide array of other influences including sustained reflection on means and ends and encounters with "unsayable" nondiscursive articulate forms where metaphor and image stretches moral expression beyond what can be communicated in conventional language. Moral thinking is broadly and complicatedly normative and cannot be reduced to formal proofs and abstractions of metaethical systems.

Cady (2005) emphasizes that values are pluralistic rather than absolute or relative. Respecting diverse meanings in diverse contexts and attending to a variety of moral perspectives results in these partial views contributing to a progressing and fuller understanding, through collaborative work, of moral truth. Moral thinking "is an open-ended process involving ongoing interactions within and among individuals and groups, where disparate value frameworks, practices, and explanations stand in continuing review of one another" (p. 102).

At this point, the criteria used by both traditional and more contemporary ethicists to justify moral judgments or determine the meaning and reasoning behind normative moral

rule-making, virtue, or everyday morality is beyond the scope of this short review of moral philosophy. Suffice it to say, work pertaining to questions about the validity and logic of value judgments and moral reasoning comprise much of the contemporary interest among philosophers and other scholars in social science disciplines (Frankena, 1973; Moody-Adams, 1997; Cady, 2004). It is important to consider the morality of duty and principles, the morality of being and virtue, and the morality of everyday experience in a pluralistic world as complementary aspects of normative ethics.

### **Moral Frameworks in Education**

Moral philosophy provides a backdrop to situate and better understand the distinct theoretical perspectives of ethical and moral leadership within educational administration. There are primarily five ethical themes or standpoints considered in the field of educational leadership. These moral perspectives, typically articulated as theories of duty, guidance for individual ethical decision making, expressions of relational morality, or guidance for establishing moral school environments, comprise the basis from which much of the empirical literature exists. For this particular study, a separate consideration of each of the theoretical standpoints is important because it mirrors a central aspect of the theory informing this study, the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). The Ethic of the Profession addresses and incorporates the various traditions and conceptions of moral and ethical practice from the field of educational leadership and expresses them as a dynamic – a confluence of ethical perspectives that can inform and assist educational leaders in responding to and deciding about uncertain moral circumstances.

### Justice



A justice perspective, or what has been referred to in the literature and practice within the profession as an “ethic of justice”, is clearly expressed in the work of Strike, Haller and Soltis (1998). This perspective focuses on ethical concepts that constitute the foundational principles of liberal democracies. Taken as a whole, they can be described as a “civic ethic” where it is believed that all persons irrespective of culture, race or other defining categories possess the capacity for a sense of justice and the ability to conceptualize what is their own good. People have the capacity to critique their notion of justice and the good life and are capable of transcending cultural contexts in order to achieve analytic distance when testing principles such as due process, freedom, equality, and the common good.

There is a fundamental tension within the perspective of observing justice. Two broad schools of thought occupy the continued discussion over a civic ethic. One position places the individual person as an independent reality prior to social relationships. Individuals are motivated by self-interest and engage in social relations for their own benefit. Social contracts that support societies and governments are essentially individuals agreeing to surrender some liberty in return for amicable relations with others or protection from others’ self-interest. The basis for these beliefs appears to have emerged from two competing perspectives of public discussion in Western culture. One view held that everything people have – including political rights and freedoms – originates with God. Another view supposed that God had granted humanity the moral freedom to construct its own societies and that rights and freedoms are the result of social contracts based on human reason and experience. Regardless of the basis for these

beliefs, justice is viewed as contractual and legal engineering to bring about harmony between the needs and wants of self-serving individuals (Rawls, 1993).

The second position situates social relationships and society as a prior reality to the individual person. This perspective places the common good of the community, in toto, as a superior concern over individual self-interest. It is only through living in relation to others that personhood is achieved and moral lessons of communal protection and care are realized. The common good is accomplished by justice that emerges from a community's choice to act and govern fairly for all its members (Sullivan, 1986). Efforts to harmonize the two positions within the justice perspective are evident in the work of Taylor (1994). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993) express the tension another way by saying "Whether...ethical systems are understood as grounded in Natural Law (somewhat the way engineering principles are based on laws of physics...) or understood as socially constructed guides derived from pragmatic and humanitarian concerns and interests of the civil community is a question long argued by philosophers and social theorists" (p. 78).

### Care

A care perspective, or what has been referred to in the literature and practice within the profession as an "ethic of care", is clearly expressed in the work of Noddings (1988), Beck (1994) and Gilligan (1982). Interpersonal in nature, this moral perspective focuses on the demands of relationship from a position of unconditional positive regard, or described elsewhere as a deep awareness of "the other" as persons in community with ourselves as subjects. This position asserts that as human beings (and females perhaps, in particular) we have the capacity to feel deep respect or love for other people and

especially people different from ourselves. Our attitudes toward others “are determined in part by an understanding of who and what they are: in this case, that they are human beings, persons, and that as persons they possess an inner integrity, a self-determination, a capacity for free and spiritual activity that we also sense in ourselves” (Gilkey, 1997). This level of empathy and self-understanding applied to the other can become the foundation for treating persons as ends and not as means, and can, in large part, provide the inner basis of an outward social order.

To be in relationship with others where care, nurturance, respect, compassion and trust are the dominant characteristics is to be fully human. The integrity of human relationship and connection is paramount for this perspective; and consideration of rights, principles and laws are secondary to the primacy of beneficence for seeking resolution of moral issues. Acts, dispositions and thinking that are conducive to the well-being of others and a “commitment to receptive attention and a willingness to respond helpfully to legitimate needs” is the bedrock of moral striving (Noddings, 1996). Rather than restricting the moral domain to considerations of duty and obligation, an ethic of care asks a more foundational question, How shall we live? Care theory “is relation-centered rather than agent-centered, and it is more concerned with the caring relation than with caring as a virtue” (p. 2). Both relationship and virtue are acknowledged, but relationship is primary and “credits the cared-for with a special contribution, one different from reciprocal response as carer” (p. 2). The cared-for contribute significantly to relational morality, and “social” virtues are defined situationally within the space of personal interaction.

### Critique

A critique perspective, or what has been referred to in the literature and practice within the profession as an “ethic of critique”, is clearly expressed in the work of Foster (1986), Giroux (1992) and Apple (1982). These authors draw their arguments from critical theory and the body of literature derived from the Frankfurt School of philosophers. The critique perspective within educational leadership deals with issues beyond interpersonal relations and serves as a moral posture and examination of larger social and institutional dimensions of human life. Particularly, issues of competing interests, power, the nature and structure of bureaucracy, the influence and force of language, and redress for institutionalized injustice are the focus of critical concern as it relates to the legitimacy of social arrangements.

The disproportionate benefit of some groups over others as a result of political, economic, and judicial hegemony are moral concerns that transcend the naïve perspective that societal structures and properties are simply the way things are. Reasoning and acting ethically also entails the inherent paradoxes of leading and managing within an institutional position, on the one hand, and being an activist against practices and procedures that do not support democratic processes, freedom and social justice, on the other.

The moral focus of a critique perspective is concerned with making known and acting upon those circumstances that silence, oppress or discriminate. As Giroux (1992) states:

Leadership poses the issue of [ethical] responsibility as a social relationship in which difference and otherness become articulated into practices that offer resistance to forms of domination and oppression. This raises the need for a discourse on leadership that prompts a discriminating response to others, one that makes students,

for example, attentive to their own implication in particular forms of human suffering and to the oppression of others whose voices demand recognition and support. (p. 7)

### Community

A community perspective, or what has been referred to in the literature and practice within the profession as an “ethic of community”, is clearly expressed in the work of Furman (2003a, 2003b, 2004) and Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton (1985). According to this viewpoint, moral choices are best made in communitarian settings rather than a traditional focus on the experiences internal to an individual agent. Moving away from the Western notion of individual as leader and moral agent, community-building and communities of practice are emphasized. Community is not defined as an entity but rather an ongoing set of processes that include communication, dialog and collaboration. This position purports that being and acting ethically cannot be achieved without collective commitment to the constructive methods of communal process. The community rather than the individual person is the moral agent and educational leaders are obliged to practice and also engender communal processual skills in others taking part in the work of schools. The term “processual” is unusual, likely because it is a shift in ontological perspective regarding community. Community, within this tradition, is not necessarily a thing (“tangible entity”) but rather a “sense” achieved by “ongoing processes of communication, dialogue, and collaboration and not on a set of discrete indicators such as ‘shared values...’” (Furman, 2002, p. 285). Community is not viewed as a measured product or entity, but rather a continuous, ongoing process where moral weight is given to inspiring commitment to courses of interpersonal exchange over an end product or something tangible.

A commitment to the processes of community, continuous and recursive, that focus on interpersonal and group awareness, respectful listening, empathetic knowing and understanding of others, effective communication, partnering and working together, supporting and encouraging dialog in open and equal forums, is the foundational value to be internalized and acted upon. The practice of community is prior and foundational to the moral aims and purposes of schooling which include social justice, enactment of democracy, and learning for all children.

### Profession

A profession perspective, or what has been referred to in literature and practice within educational administration and leadership as an “ethic of the profession”, is clearly expressed in the work of Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005), Stefkovich and O’Brien (2004) and Stefkovich, (2006). This perspective argues for an ethical paradigm that considers the “moral aspects unique to the profession” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005, p. 18). The Ethic of the Profession considers the ethical frameworks of justice, care, and critique not as totally distinct, incommensurable moral reasoning, but as complementary – a “tapestry of ethical perspectives that encourages...rich human response to...many uncertain ethical situations” (Starratt, 1994, p. 57). The Ethic of the Profession, although informed by other moral theory, is distinct unto itself as a framework to guide and inform educational leadership as a practical and moral activity.

The Ethic of the Profession indicates that a disparity often exists between professional codes meant to inform decision making and conduct and the personal moral values of administrators that guide their judgment and behavior. An attempt to integrate professional and personal codes of ethics can lead to moral dissonance, or a “clashing of

codes.” In responding to this inevitable discord, the Ethic of the Profession is grounded in a reasoned consideration of the educational shibboleth “the best interests of the student” (Walker, 1998).

The student’s best interests are the focal point of the Ethic of the Profession. A model for determining the best interests of the student consists of a robust focus on the essential nature of individual rights, the duty of responsibility to others for a common interest, and respect as mutual acknowledgement of the other as having worth, value, and dignity unto themselves (Stefkovich, 2006; Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004). The Ethic of the Profession, and more precisely the best interests of the student model (Stefkovich, 2006; Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004), has been applied primarily to court decisions from case law pertaining to K-12 education. This application of theory to vignette serves as a helpful pedagogical tool for assisting aspiring and practicing educational leaders to reflect on their decision making and to understand how professional choices are informed by one’s moral reasoning and deliberation, personal values and beliefs and adherence to ethical principles.

### Virtue

In addition to the five ethical themes considered in the field of educational leadership, there exists a literature that speaks directly to aretaic judgment of character. These works articulate specific traits and dispositions necessary to think and act morally as an educational leader. Starratt (2004) suggests that becoming a moral school leader requires the development of traits of responsibility, authenticity and presence. Begley (2005), on the other hand, identifies the motivations and dispositions of reflective self-honesty,

relational sensitivity, and dialogical openness as indispensable qualities of character that are necessary to lead in democratic yet diverse school communities.

### **Organizational Frameworks**

Two notable organizational frameworks attempt to categorize and map out existing literature and serve to clarify the different perspectives and research directions within the field. These frameworks offer meta-theoretical and empirical analyses and seek to bring coherence to the study of values, ethics and moral educational leadership. Starratt's (1994) tripartite conceptualization of the perspectives of justice, critique and care is a familiar organizational framework and serves as a useful tool for thinking about ethical leadership practice. According to Starratt, the three "ethics" are not irreconcilable, but rather complement each other, and all three are needed for an informed and eclectic approach in building an ethical school. For the educational practitioner, the "ethics" of justice, critique and care are to be fundamental considerations in decision making and should be equally utilized when trying to frame problems, challenges and dilemmas encountered in school.

Starratt's attempt to develop "a tapestry of ethical themes" to engender "an ethical consciousness" (1994, p. 200) for the responsible practitioner also serves as a useful way of thinking about and organizing moral and ethical perspectives as it relates to research and theory building in the field of educational administration. Although Starratt's organizational framework is limited to theoretical perspectives, it serves as a useful conceptualization of distinct moral vantage points.

A more recent organizational framework has been proposed by Langlois and Begley (2005). The unique perspectives of theorists and researchers who study and write on



topics of values, ethics and moral literacy in educational administration has grown over time; and because of the increased interest in the field, Langlois and Begley have developed a working “omnibus conceptual framework” that serves as a map to guide theorists and researchers in knowing what the landscape of the discipline looks like.

Conceding to the fact that unraveling and mapping out the literature is a difficult proposition, this framework is essentially a two sided matrix with one axis depicting three levels of “grounding” which include: 1) theory building and epistemological focuses, 2) qualitative and quantitative descriptive research, 3) practice and social relevance literature. The other axis depicts four levels of “analysis” which include: 1) microéthique (individual), 2) mésoéthique (group or organization), 3) macroéthique (society or government), 4) mégaéthique (cross-cultural or comparative and international). The matrix places in context a large portion of the literature; and within twelve quadrants or “domains” a sense of clarity and accessibility is achieved for the area of moral leadership studies. The authors indicate:

The ethical conceptions which underlie the research models used by many...scholars are increasingly becoming hybrids or integrated versions of more traditionally and foundationally bounded approaches – perhaps indicating that we have made progress in the field towards consensus on at least some fronts. Our objective is to literally map out what there is in terms of theory and frameworks for inquiry in an integrative way. (p. 9)

## Chapter 3

### Empirical Research

The parameters for reviewing empirical literature will focus on inquiry pertaining to educational leadership at the K-12 level, a unit of analysis being the administrator as a moral actor, and inquiry objectives that describe and explore dispositions and attributes, moral tensions and contradictions, decision making, values and motivation, and the complexities of ethical leadership. Much of the research investigating values, valuation processes, ethical decision making, and moral practice of school administrators usually follows a descriptive path enumerating beliefs, attitudes, dispositions and values that are manifested by practitioners in general or under particular circumstances related to decision making and moral choice. The following literature is pertinent to my study on a number of accounts. First, some research addresses decision making and the value laden aspects involved in making moral choices as a school leader. Second, much of the research identifies aspects of the profession that can be interpreted as a professional *ethos* – personal qualities and job-related practices that are identified as important to the field. And third, some research indicates the nature and quality of moral discord experienced by practitioners as they carry out their work in schools and the special attention given to variations of the saying, “the best interests of the student.”

The literature is arranged in the following order: 1) studies with principals concerning professional qualities and behaviors; 2) general studies with educational leaders concerning professional qualities, behaviors and decision making; 3) studies with principals concerning values, motivation and decision making; 4) studies with

superintendents concerning value orientations, decision making and managing conflict; and 5) studies reporting on personal and group characteristics.

### **Studies with Principals Concerning Professional Qualities and Behaviors**

One of the most in-depth examinations of the principalship was an ethnographic study conducted by Wolcott (1973) that focused on a suburban elementary school principal. The study took great detail in describing and analyzing the work-life of one principal from a cultural perspective, taking into account not only the participant's behaviors and perspectives but also his relationships with others both in the work setting and beyond. With regard to personal and professional qualities and behaviors exhibited by the principal, and other's views about those qualities and behaviors, a composite portrait of a typical principal was constructed. Among the many analyses and findings in this study was how a principal can both "epitomize the insensitivity of [a] bureaucracy [the lack of "interface" between the organization and its clients], and at times ameliorate it, and at times overcome its (usually unintentional) insensitivity and replaced it with a human sensitivity." A principal's *vigilance* in maintaining the quality of institutional responsiveness to its clients was noted as an important characteristic of those who hold the office. An aspect of vigilant responsiveness was illustrated in the approaches the principal took when dealing with student discipline issues and in the perspectives that teachers held about their school leader. One teacher in the study indicated that,

'I think he's very dedicated and believes in everything he says....He's always questioning himself and his motives and his philosophy. He's always wondering, 'Am I really doing the right thing or thinking the right thing?' Almost always when we get into a discussion, Ed pulls us back to the fact, 'Well, what's best for the

youngster?’ Not what’s best for the teacher, what’s best for the principal, or what’s best for the parents[?] What’s best for the youngster[?]’ (p. 290)

Greenfield (1991), using ethnographic research methods, studied the micropolitical behavior of an urban elementary school principal. By interviewing and observing school participants, Greenfield identified what he calls a “professional style” of leadership that solicits compliance and full participation of those vested in the work of the school at a moral level of shared norms, values, ideals and beliefs. Those invested in the school were encouraged by the principal, in a cooperative and collaborative fashion, to think and act in an effort to serve “children’s best interests” (p.183). This kind of moral focus on shared values and beliefs helped those involved in the work of the school to believe their actions were the right thing to do, and fostered the most potent sources of leadership power.

In an investigation focused on producing rich description about the role of a principal as symbolically influencing the development of school culture, Reitzug and Reeves (1992) provide insight into ethical and moral leadership practice by focusing on the principal’s role of managing meaning and articulating vision. This case study of a rural elementary school (800 students) that was part of a large, urban school district (100,000 students) utilized a variety of data collection techniques and included interviews with all 41 teachers and additional professional staff, including the assistant principal.

Participants clearly articulated cultural beliefs, values and assumptions, but a closer analysis of principal behavior revealed both manipulative and empowering symbolic action. In this case study, leader empowerment and manipulation of faculty were intertwined as symbolic actions but interpreted as ethical. Even though the means of

particular leader behavior lacked straightforwardness, it provided enabling opportunities for faculty; and outcomes that attained personal ends for the administrator also improved subordinates' educational situations. For instance, the administrator in this study, would on occasion, put an "out of order" sign on an operating photocopying machine so as to force teachers to consider alternative means of instructional delivery.

Reitzug (1994) conducted a case study of one 37 year old, male, elementary school principal with the intention of providing a field-based example of empowering principal behavior and to explore the distinctions between empowering and manipulating leadership behavior. Based on a critical theoretical perspective, this research explored the premise that ethical leadership does not entail manipulating and managing a school culture, but rather empowering individuals within an organization in order to evaluate collective goals that are deemed important and considerations viewed as helpful and supportive for organizational purpose. Case study data were collected through direct observation, interviews, documents, archival records and journaling maintained by ten teachers describing their interactions with the principal. The principal was selected in a purposive manner – a leader who was perceived to be effective by outsiders (those not employed in the school).

The findings of this study are organized around three themes, or types, of empowering leader behavior: support, facilitation and possibility. These types of empowering behavior generally centered on epistemological issues dealing with examining the validity of knowledge claims rather than political empowerment for teachers. Support for an environment of critique that results in long-term organizational characteristics such as communicating trust, the facilitation of specific acts of critique such as asking pointed

questions and requiring justification of practice, and leadership behavior that provides tangible resources to teachers for advancing the interests of students, are posited as essential, but not fully inclusive, field based categories of leadership empowerment. The ethical issues involved in unequal power relationships between principal and teachers (principals telling subordinates how to practice – prescribing substance) is partially rectified by a principal’s daily consideration of critically empowering behavior.

Marshall, Patterson, Rogers and Steele (1996) studied the practices of career assistant principals, and demonstrated, from secondary extant data, how this category of school leader did not operate from traditional administrative management paradigms, but in fact worked from the perspective or ethic of care. A sample of 50 assistant principals from nearly half the states, including schools from rural, suburban and urban settings, representing a wide range of years of experience, at all educational levels and from districts serving students with varied demographic and economic characteristics, were interviewed and observed to determine their training, values, motivations and satisfactions. Findings indicate that career assistant principals consistently asserted that by working hard “to create nurturing, empowering, and community-building environments in their schools” (p. 289), their chances or desire for upward mobility through the educational administration hierarchy were limited. A variety of caring attributes were evident across the qualitative data. There was an emphasis by career assistant principals to engage in open-ended dialog with active listening and thoughtful responding, be persistent yet flexible and build and maintain trust through expressions of concern and sensitivity with varying contexts and unique needs of people.

Marshall (1992) researched school administrators' values by clarifying specific situations they considered to be ethical dilemmas and identified the principles that guided them in making moral decisions. She interviewed twenty-six principals who were considered atypical in the sense of not conforming to a white, male, risk-avoider norm. Her sample was composed of five male minorities, nine female minorities, eight white females and four white "risk-taker" males from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Although the findings of this study do not address issues of race, gender, district policy or regional differences with any thorough analysis, the cataloging of experienced dilemmas resulted in four broad categories.

Principals in this study were able to provide rich descriptions in recalling dilemmas. They felt obliged to exhibit loyalty to the system and uphold its rules, hierarchy and policies while conversely exhibiting personal authority and professional commitments to colleagues. Other common dilemmas described during the interviews were in the areas of supervising and evaluating teachers, helping children at the expense of school structures and policy, and responding to different forms of parental pressure. A revealing aspect of the study is that during data collection, principals frequently articulated their view of themselves as ethical administrators and moral human beings; and when asked "what guided them when faced with dilemmas in their work, they never referred to a professional code of ethics or professional training" (p. 376). In fact, according to this study, participants indicated that professional norms and organizational rules were often culprits in making a situation dilemma laden because there was no clear guidance available from policy or professional codes and expectations. "The phrase 'judgment call'

kept recurring in their talk as they described their management of ethical dilemmas, and they kept referring to religion and family background [as] providing guidance” (p. 376).

Administrators were willing to state, quite willingly, their core values which formulated a pattern of statements that reflected fairness, caring, openness and sharing, and respect for the community and its involvement with the school. The strongest value that emerged from participant statements was a “concern for the individual student” (p. 381).

### **General Studies with Educational Leaders Concerning Professional Qualities, Behaviors and Decision Making**

Harkness (2000) conducted an exploratory study examining the ethical principles educational leaders use to make decisions when faced with moral dilemmas. A national sample of state school board members, state directors of special education, local school board members, local district superintendents, personnel directors, local special education directors and school principals served as subjects and were questioned using the Educational Leaders Decision Making Survey. Respondents were asked to identify which of four named principles they believed they used in their decision making when responding to four hypothetical moral dilemma vignettes. The four ethical principles that were named as options for decision making, based on the lowest to highest stage of moral development, were justice, autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence. The four vignettes addressed the use of genetic technology and information when dealing with two student issues and two employee issues.

Results indicated that the 113 subjects applied the principles they stated they used most of the time when responding to the four vignettes. The principle of justice, or



following policies and established rules, was the most frequently referenced principle. This finding lends support to the interpretation of a “socialized bureaucracy” in mass schooling where no significant differences were found for those in varying leadership positions, those possessing different levels of education, males or females and between policy developers and policy implementers. Also, subjects were just as likely to use the same ethical principle for student issues as for employee issues.

Edmonson, Fisher and Polnick (2003) surveyed 85 graduate level students taking coursework in educational leadership. They assessed perceptions of what exemplified an ethical administrator in order to derive a descriptive portrait of such a person. Master and doctoral level students were asked to define and describe both behaviors and characteristics of ethical administrators. The open-ended survey was distributed to a wide variety of students with different characteristics including time spent in program course work, practitioner experience level, ethnic background and gender. The most frequently mentioned behaviors were being fair, respectful, open, student centered, a listener, a facilitator and a model. The most commonly mentioned administrator characteristics were honesty, positive attitude, caring and considerate, fair, professional and knowledgeable, trustworthy, consistent, respectful, open-minded, friendly, a listener, a setter of high expectations and accessible. Fairness, both as a behavior and a personal attribute, was ranked highly by students.

### **Studies with Principals Concerning Values, Motivation, and Decision Making**

Ashbaugh and Kasten (1984, 1986) conducted several early empirical studies examining the role of values and ethics in educational administration. The first of these studies focused on conflicts faced by school principals and to what extent leaders were

cognizant of the values they used in making decisions. Interviews were conducted with nine elementary and ten secondary principals from a large Midwestern school district and six surrounding suburban districts. Participants were selected by nominations from other administrators and university faculty based on reputation and experience as articulate and reflective school leaders. The most difficult, conflict-ridden decisions identified by administrators were, in order of highest to lowest frequency, issues related to personnel (teacher technical competence, unprofessional behavior and violations of institutional and community norms), students (applying district policy and procedures) and school – community relations (pressures from parent and community groups).

Personal convictions that principals drew upon in dealing with conflict and making decisions were described and classified as: “personalistic values” (ideographic), “organizational values” (nomothetic) and “transcendent values”. This tripartite typology makes distinctions between values that are based on generalizations from personal experience and conventional wisdom; organizational expectations and professional norms; and broad, universal codes of behavior having their derivation in philosophy or religion. With respect to “organizational values”, Ashbaugh and Kasten (1984) write:

A conviction voiced by so many of those interviewed and so central to the ethos of the principalship that it deserves a subcategory of its own is the belief that the interests of children should be *preeminent* [italics mine] in the organization. The phrase “what’s good for kids” [is] used to summarize a variety of similar statements (p. 199)...The statement is genuine and appears both to justify and explain behavior, but it has little use as a guide to action unless it can be made operational and delimited. Few respondents had a conscious method for doing that. (p. 205)

Principals had difficulty articulating the forces that shaped their convictions and approaches to decision making. Although religious influences, professional training and role models within and outside formal education settings were named as important sources, most principals indicated a composite of their total life experiences as informing their value sets.

Leonard (1999) examined the value orientations, variations in value orientations and value conflicts of administrative leadership by using an instrumental case study approach to provide insight into value theory and leadership practice. Two administrators were interviewed as part of a single school study examining beliefs about the purpose of education from a range of teachers and constituents. Her findings suggest that distinctions between espoused values (basic and popular assumptions) and core values (foundational beliefs about the aims of education) did not generate conflict within the school setting, and that professional educators operated on common deep-seated educational beliefs even though divergent espoused values were articulated within the school setting.

Professional educators, in this study, could unwittingly express and articulate one set of values while being firmly committed to another set. For instance, participants held a wide variety of pronounced positions about the appropriate qualities of formal education (e.g., not imposing dominant societal values on diverse cultures, helping students to “fit” into society, preserving class structures and national culture, helping students lead productive lives, promoting and supporting cognitive development), yet there were few reported value conflicts because all of them held a core belief pertaining to educational purpose. This foundational belief was a transmission “meta-orientation” that emphasized

the acquisition of basic skills, mastery of content, facts and the perpetuation of moral and social values.

An international comparative study conducted by Begley and Johansson (1998) employed an action research approach with practicing administrators to examine and dialog over value laden situations. Elementary and secondary principals in Canada and Sweden were asked to narrate “critical incidents” experienced in their work as educational leaders. These narrations were categorized as case-situation responses and were self- and peer-analyzed along Hodgkinson’s (1978) motivational dimensions of personal preference, consensus, consequence, and principle. Their findings indicate that trans-rational ethical principles or sub-rational personal preferences play a limited and specific role in administrative practice. Specifically, principles or ethical rules served to provide structure for problem solving when principals lacked relevant information or when the situation encountered was unique. Principals generally responded to value conflict situations by way of rational motivations that include consequence (focus on desirable outcomes) or the achieving of some kind of nonmoral good, and consensus (conformity to group norms, peer pressure, or expert opinion).

These findings support an earlier study by Begley (1988) that examined the influence of values on principals’ problem solving processes. Fifteen principals, primarily from one school system, were interviewed to determine valuation and decision-making processes related to the adoption of computer technology in their respective schools. Most principals in the study based their decisions and responses to computers as a technological innovation on values of consensus and consequence. Those administrators who were initially motivated to make decisions about the adoption and use of computers

in their schools at the valuation level of personal preference or principle appeared to be swayed over time toward the center of Hodgkinson's (1978) value hierarchy, adopting a "conception of the desirable" that influenced decision making in the realm of consequence or consensus. Begley (1988) indicates:

Two principals among the fifteen appear to have initially adopted computers based on personal preferences [sub-rational]. After accumulating some experience with the innovation, they rationalized the continued use of computers in terms of values of consequence [future benefit]. On the other hand, two...principals rationalized their initial adoption of computers on the basis of principle [informed by rule], but lowered the level of grounding to values of consequence as they gained experience with computers and observed the outcomes of their use in schools. (p. 16)

Moorhead and Nediger (1991) analyzed the observed influence of values identified within the activities and decisions of four secondary principals – one being female and all four leading schools that spanned a variety of community types. This mixed methodological study revealed a wide disparity between principals' values, educational beliefs and practices. Their data suggest that it may not matter what particular values and beliefs are emphasized and acted upon by principals as long as there is congruence or "fit" between those values and beliefs and those of the community and school system. Even though the four principals in the study held contradictory values, they were considered highly effective by their respective faculty and students.

Leithwood and Stager (1989) interviewed 22 elementary principals and analyzed their responses to hypothetical problems in order to identify the central elements in school principals' problem-solving processes and the differences between "experts" and typical

or novice colleagues. In a series of two separate interviews, data were collected on different kinds of structured (clear) and unstructured (unclear) problems based on the course of action to be taken in order to manage the given problem from the outset. Five “grounded components” of problem solving were evident in principals’ responses: interpretation (understanding and defining), goals (purposes to be achieved), principles (fundamental laws, doctrines and assumptions guiding thinking), constraints (understood barriers and obstacles to possible solutions), and processes (solution path and related actions).

Findings indicated that expert school leaders considered slightly more principles (moral rules of action or values that are described as enduring preferences) than did typical or novice school administrators who rarely mentioned or referred to them in a problem-solving context. Experts used principles as a basis for determining long-term goals whereas typical school administrators did not. Principles served several closely related functions in problem solving: 1) Assisted administrators in interpreting the various problems at the outset and provided tools for finding solutions that were not contained within the problems themselves, 2) Assisted administrators in structuring problems with unclear solution paths where long-term goals and context for future decision making could be made, 3) In some cases assisted administrators in specifying the specific solution steps they would use in solving problems. Principles were an important feature, although not numerous, among the five “grounded components” of administrators’ problem solving, and were particularly useful for expert principals.

Campbell-Evans (1991) conducted research addressing the place of values in administrative decision making. She interviewed one female and seven male elementary

and elementary-junior high principals from a small, urban school district in Alberta, Canada. Data were collected from each principal on three separate occasions with a total interview time for each principal averaging six hours. Three phases of data collection included open-ended interviews, simulated decision tasks and structured interviews. Participants made multiple references to three of the five value categories from Beck's (1984) values framework which includes basic human values, moral values, social and political values, intermediate-range values and specific values. Particularly, when it came to participants' school based decision making, basic human values, moral values and social/political values were dominant categories with fifteen individual values delineated. Principals were asked to identify the influences on their decision making, and a set of six primary influences emerged, three internal and three external. The internal influences of concern for students, the effect of a decision and commitment of others to a decision were articulated. The external influences of time, money and factual information were identified as the most important influences on participant decision making.

Using a mixed methodological research design including survey and interview data, Klinker and Hackmann (2003) investigated the ethical decision making of 63 state secondary principals of the year. The survey instrument consisted of three narratives each aligned to specific dispositions under Standard 5 of the ISLLC Standards, followed by four action choices, one of which was aligned to the disposition being tested, and concluded with a series of scaled justification statements for why a particular action was chosen. Follow up interviews with ten respondents were conducted to further explore why morally appropriate action choices were or were not supported by accurate justifications.

No statistically significant differences were found regarding gender, ethics training or building enrollment and the selection of appropriate action choices. There was a statistically significant difference between years of experience and the appropriate action choice for one of the three narratives dealing with teacher evaluation. Approximately one third of the principals surveyed selected inappropriate actions for two of the three narratives. Qualitative findings indicate that distinct common themes emerged from conversations with participants about their justifications for particular decisions and courses of action. Participants indicated an “internal fortitude necessary to consistently believe in the value of human growth and to make decisions regarding that belief” (p. 20). Principals also demonstrated a desire to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number, but with high regard for how utilitarian results would conform to a notion of the common good, or how general conditions that were equally beneficial to everyone could be maintained in their decision making. Principals discussed the importance of sensitivity to differing perspectives and rational fact-finding, yet paradoxically, relied on “gut feelings” or a level of emotion to affirm or disconfirm their suspended judgment. Surprisingly, participants struggled to define their ethical beliefs – “the very thing they considered vital to their reputations, career, and selection for State Principal of the Year” (p.25).

An additional finding that emerged from the qualitative data included confusion in the use of language and its meaning.

The difficulty in the language confusion is further illustrated by the phrase, “what’s right for kids,” and variations of it that *permeated* [italics mine] the interviews. No one, however, defined the term “right.” This statement, “do what’s right” was always



made with conviction, a sense of purpose, and with the tacit understanding that everyone would know what “right” meant. (p. 25)

Kirby, Paradise and Protti (1992a), through the use of a questionnaire, asked 23 principals to provide anonymous responses to prompts that elicited a recounting of professional experiences involving moral conflict and their deliberations in attempting to resolve dilemmas. Based on participant responses as compared to a developmental model of ethical reasoning based on Kohlberg’s (1976) stages of moral development, most principals appeared to function on a moral level of institutional or societal orientation. These principals indicated, by responses to their lived moral dilemmas, that decisions based on the expectations of supervisors and institutional guidelines or a concern for the general welfare of the community at large were the motivating forces behind their actions. In addition, most principals who were surveyed and operated in the institutional and societal moral decision making orientations displayed signs of empathy and an appreciation for deliberation in order to determine an ethical course of action.

From this initial research, Kirby, Paradise and Protti (1992b), selected three of the 23 reported dilemmas to summarize and modify with descriptions of four to five alternative courses of action. Alternative courses of action were constructed to represent varying levels of ethical reasoning for each of the three dilemmas. Twenty additional school administrators from a university-sponsored principal center were asked to respond to the three dilemma situations by selecting the one course of action they would take and provide a brief explanation for their decision and/or reason behind their preferred action. In addition, administrators were asked to share how they would perceive the “typical” principal in their school district responding to the same problem scenarios.

Kohlberg's (1976) theory of the stages of moral development referred to in this study include: Stage 1) Punishment – actions based on rules to administer reward or punishment; Stage 2) Institutional – actions based on expectations of supervisors and organization guidelines; Stage 3) Societal – actions based on an overriding concern for the general welfare of society or the community by maintaining cultural norms and winning approval; Stage 4) Individual – actions based on concern for the client over legal, professional or societal norms; and Stage 5) Principle – actions based on a personal, self-chosen and internalized code of ethics. Most principals in the sample operated at a societal orientation level of ethical reasoning. Also, respondents reported their choices and actions would differ dramatically from other administrators and consistently indicated functioning at higher levels of moral reasoning than perceived among their peers. When asked to give an explanation of why colleagues were perceived to be operating at a lower level of ethical decision making, principals indicated an adherence to institutional procedures (both formal and informal) over other considerations as the primary factor for their peers' actions. Additionally, it was not evident in this study “that the reasoning of administrators becomes more complex with increased experience” (p. 186).

Storey and Beeman (2005) conducted structured interviews with 16 high school administrators representing both the private and public sectors in order to investigate educational administrators' awareness of their own values-informed, decision-making process and the influences that contribute to those values. Participants were enrolled in a doctoral program at a private, southern state university in Tennessee. Half the participants were male and half were female ranging in age from 35 to 45 years old. Findings clearly

indicate that, overall, high school administrators were aware of their own values-informed, decision-making process and could clearly articulate their conscious values and “the dimensions that influenced the development of those values” (p. 21). The large majority, eighty per cent, of interviewees emphasized moral and ethical integrity as an essential requirement for their role as a school administrator. Statements indicate a “profound depth of reflection” using perspectives that are aligned to justice, care, critique and profession principles. Participants’ statements indicate their “strongest concern [was] for the individual student in the school and the school culture experienced by that student” (p. 22).

When asked about the influences that contribute to their values-informed, decision-making process, principals could articulate many “dimensional influences.” Data suggested that academic, professional, social and political influences, tended to be viewed as extrinsic sources of value by administrators, although social influences on decision making were viewed both as extrinsic and intrinsic to self. Storey and Beeman (2005) indicate:

All of our respondents specified that moral and ethical behavior was important in decision making and they traced back their primary influences to faith, family and early education, i.e. intrinsic code. Few [respondents] referred to the influence of their academic training or [a] professional code. (p. 23)

The majority of participants indicated that early personal experiences, rather than later professional experiences, grounded their values system. Decision making, for these school leaders, was guided by moral principles inculcated by religious faith and family – sources that were intertwined and in many ways inseparable.

There was evidence in the interviews of a strong spiritual dimension where values were developed around moral and ethical codes, and likewise, these same values played an equally important part in making work-related decisions. Almost a third of the participants indicated a conflict when their own values were not aligned with the organizational expectations of their school systems. Some participants suspended personal morality for the sake of policy implementation or organizational imperatives, while others lived with personal conflict over not adhering to institutional rules or were overtly defiant of organizational policy and “stuck to...beliefs irrespective of the self harm” (p. 26).

In research exploring the moral and ethical dilemmas of Catholic school principals, Roche (1999) interviewed five elementary school principals (two female and three male) from an Australian diocese. Interviewees were presented with four hypothetical scenarios in order to elicit deliberated responses to ethical dilemmas. The two-stage semi-structured interviews focused on participant responses to hypothetical situations and also probed for retrospective aspects of actual events in the participants’ lived experiences with specific reference to managing moral dilemmas. General findings indicated that principals spoke with surprising candor and demonstrated experience with critical and personal reflection.

Although these qualities were interpreted as positive, principals essentially “agonized” over achieving fair, just and moral solutions. Specifically, Roche explains that “incongruence...lay between the respondents’ articulated values and their actual behavior, idealistic intentions suffering greatly at the hands of practicality” (p. 261). Moral and ethical intent was easily expressed, but proved to be elusive in application. Typical responses to ethical (transrational) value conflict were avoidance or buying time

until decisions could be made at a rational value level, suspending personal morality for the sake of policy implementation or organizational imperatives (similar to the findings of Storey and Beeman (2005)), creative insubordination which required some level of dishonesty, and overt personal moral stances which were far less frequent and short-lived. Although principals in this study are described as being persistently adherent to a “professional role ethic to do ‘what’s best for kids’” (p. 267), it was the repeatedly rational application of this policy or procedure, once based on a level of espoused value (conscious ascription), but over time and through experience, that became taken for granted and subsumed into unconscious assumption (assumed value).

### **Studies with Superintendents Concerning Value Orientations, Decision Making and Managing Conflict**

A study by Ashbaugh and Kasten (1986) explored routine external and internal school district conflicts as occasions to examine school superintendents’ value orientations. Ten school superintendents were interviewed and asked to respond to four hypothetical problems by describing how they would handle each conflict. Findings indicate that most superintendents valued action by preferring to head off conflict, saw themselves as enlightened and able to operate with different criteria for determining truth, valued reasonableness and being open to reason, believed they must try to bring about change in other people, valued participative decision making with the understanding that individual rights are constrained in the process. Superintendents were aware of, and could articulate, their personal values, but several explicitly separated their personal values from their responses and stated actions (espoused values) in managing hypothetical conflicts.

Kasten and Ashbaugh (1991) examined the criteria of values espoused in superintendents' work. By interviewing a convenience sample of fifteen white, male superintendents from large and small districts surrounding a Midwestern metropolitan region, they discovered that chief school leaders became so socialized into the cultures of their communities that they ceased to experience significant tensions between their own values and those of the community they served. In addition, superintendents placed a high value on subordinates' human relation skills and possessing conventional wisdom in running a school.

Sherman and Grogan (2003) studied superintendent responses to student achievement gaps as measured by state level standardized tests within their own districts. Fifteen Virginia superintendents with a range of experiences were purposefully selected and interviewed. Findings indicate that all of the superintendents, even though concerned about the white-black discrepancies in test score data, only a few were willing to act in some manner to reduce the gaps by targeting and supporting minority students. Most superintendents in the study operated from a bureaucratic ethos. Superintendents were reluctant to bring the issue of a test-score gap to public scrutiny for fear of losing their jobs. Examining participant statements from three ethical frameworks, the authors suggest that most responses to the achievement gap were morally inadequate at best. There was some evidence of determined action to remedy issues of inequity, but this stance was overshadowed by lack of awareness or inaction because of potential community dissatisfaction.

In a study examining the a priori definitions of "ethical" as articulated by senior educational administrators, Walker (1994) surveyed 188 participants within the province

of Saskatchewan, Canada on the meaning of “ethical” and ethical decision making. He followed this data collection with two interviews conducted with each of twenty randomly selected directors of education to discover, explore and elaborate on participant survey responses. Sources of “ethical” authority were viewed as either objective (external to self), subjective (internal to self) or the creative combination of sources through harmonizing and blending the two distinct ways of understanding. Ethical was defined in a variety of ways which reflected the diverse moral sense of educational leaders. Various meanings of ethical, as articulated by participants, were not necessarily in conflict, but clearly indicate that educational leaders are “relatively untouched by the sophisticated and technical nomenclature of moral philosophy” (p. 32). In an effort to succinctly condense the voicing of school leaders’ own understandings of the notion of ethical, Walker indicated:

Accordingly, the ethical [educational leader] was considered to be law-abiding, child- and education-oriented, people-friendly and virtuous in regard to others, a conformer to community mores and a rational-altruist. Each of these orientations provides a slightly distinctive color and texture to the meaning of the word ethical for the leaders who expressed their understandings. (p. 31)

Walker and Shakotko (1999) conducted research on the place of value-based pressures in the work of Canadian superintendents. A survey measure was sent to a random sample of eight hundred superintendents to solicit information concerning the ethical challenges and pressures that impinge on their work. In addition to the survey, a cross-Canada set of semistructured interviews were conducted with fifty-two superintendents in their respective districts comprising a broad range of demographic settings. Their analyses of

surveys and interviews resulted in a categorization of six challenges or pressures experienced and articulated by respondents. These categories were not distinct and unrelated, but rather over-lapping, ill-defined and complex and included the challenges and pressures of “ethical constraints.”

Approaching the research field with the guiding question of “What are the ethical challenges and pressures that impinge on the work of superintendents of education?”, Walker and Shakotko (1999) presumed that the work of superintendents is fundamentally values-oriented and within this value orientation, ethics as a subset, plays an important role. Their descriptive results indicate that “executives clearly find themselves in the middle of increasingly complex webs of values” (p. 310). These values come from a wide variety of social system sources and wrestling, balancing, and managing the multiple value claims is a central part of the work while simultaneously providing value-based, visionary and strategic leadership. Superintendents in this study articulated the piece of advice, principle or perspective they found most helpful in making ethical decisions.

Responses included: 1) the best interests of students; 2) personal integrity or authenticity; 3) the greatest good for the greatest number; 4) the golden rule; 5) honesty and openness; 6) consult and get advice; 7) be fair and just; 8) show respect and concern for others; 9) document and get the facts. An additional finding in this study revealed that those superintendents who “claimed not to have a personal set of rules or principles or were uncertain did not differ from those who did” (p. 302) in their responses to questions pertaining to the kinds of ethical guidance they followed, articulating a personal morality or describing the problems they dealt with the most using a value-based approach.



Leithwood and Steinbach (1991) studied the problem-solving processes of eight chief education officers (superintendents) based on information processing theory and results from previous research with school administrators. Participants had an average length of six years as a CEO. They worked with system sizes ranging from 10,000 students to one of the largest in Canada. Two of the eight participants were women. Individual interviews with participants involved simulated problem-solving scenarios. The results of this study identify the processes used by CEOs in relation to five aspects of problem solving. One aspect of problem solving addressed in this study is the nature and role of values in problem solving. Statements coded and classified as “values reflected” were arranged in four categories based on previous research by Begley and Leithwood (1989), Campbell (1988), and Leithwood, Begley and Campbell (1989). The four categories consist of basic human values, general moral values, professional values and social/political values.

For CEOs in this study, the category of professional values was dominated by their sense of specific role responsibility with most participant statements being accommodated within the four a priori categories of values. As compared to building level principals in the aforementioned studies, CEOs demonstrated a similarly strong commitment to social and political values: participation; sharing; loyalty, solidarity and commitment; and helping others. But unlike principals, CEOs focused little on professional consequence based values whether for students, parents, staff, community or society at large. For the most part, CEO’s value based problem-solving relied heavily on their personal understanding of role expectations and responsibilities within the occupied position of the organization.

In a study examining the values and beliefs of public and parochial system CEOs, Holmes (1991a), distributed an eighteen page questionnaire to 116 participants across Ontario along with a comparison survey to the general public. Seventy-five percent of the surveys were returned for statistical analysis. CEOs were asked to rank order six different philosophies of education among other questions pertaining to political and religious affiliation and voting patterns. Ontario CEOs strongly adhered to a progressive philosophy (child centered, where schooling is a staging area for opportunity rather than an imposition of a prescribed set of desired outcomes) in contrast to the general public. CEOs were generally more liberally centrist in their political views, and identified religious affiliations that were different from the public survey. Not a single CEO surveyed was a member of a Jewish, Baptist, Pentecostal or fundamentalist Christian congregation. Data indicate that CEOs were quite unrepresentative of the Ontario public. In a follow-up study with six of the CEO respondents, Holmes (1991b) examined the relationship between educational philosophy and practice. By interviewing the purposefully sampled CEOs and two of their administrative associates, he found that all six participants found ways to express their philosophy, whether progressive or not, through their working lives. These expressions of professional educational beliefs and values were interpreted as running counter to pluralistic, public sentiments and views where consensus was not realized.

Langlois (2004) studied the decision-making process of six Canadian superintendents when resolving complex problems and dilemmas. Three female and three male participants were interviewed using both a semi-structured interview questionnaire and ten open ended questions that probed the basis of ethical reflection in decision making.

Superintendents were asked to recount a complex problem they encountered, and in detail, specify the thinking, acting and feeling components involved in reaching a resolution. The processes employed by superintendents when resolving complex problems can be deemed ethical because each incorporated sustained reflection, in a time-consuming process often lasting more than a year, and considered both the personal and professional values that influenced the normative aspects of their work. Langlois continues by saying,

These individuals seem to be aware of the fact that the inherited norms that encompass their professional practice do not, in and by themselves, guarantee a solution. To rely solely on political, administrative or legal logic to solve a complex problem seems even to constitute for some decision makers, a form of torture that sometimes leaves a bitterness in their working environment. In order to overcome such, it seems that the exercise of moral judgment is rooted in an axiological reflection which materializes in their ethical practice. (p. 89)

The individuals in this study drew upon their “personal ethics” rather than externally imposed ethics, even though participants were historically influenced and molded by a Roman Catholic religious heritage. Themes of authentic free will and responsibility toward the school community revealed virtues and values tied to a contemporary reality and “a professional ethic that builds upon itself” (p. 89).

### **Studies Reporting on Personal and Group Characteristics**

Research literature dealing with the relationship between individual characteristics and ethical decision making practices of building level administrators is limited. Social categories of race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, religion and physical location have not

been closely and systematically examined in relation to values, moral choice and action of building level leadership. Empirical findings in the previously reviewed literature indicate that age and experience working as a principal may, or may not, have an influence on moral decision making (Kirby, Paradise and Protti, 1992b; Klinker & Hackmann, 2003). Several empirical studies are worth reporting at this juncture.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001), in their qualitative work with practicing and aspiring administrators, indicate that "...in considering themes of diversity, we found that no one characteristic of students (e.g., race, gender, age, religion, professional experience, etc.) resulted in a monolithic view of ethics. Rather students' views of ethics emanated from a combination of diverse factors..." (p. 6). In reporting on the perspectives of their students and the espousal of particular ethical paradigms it became clear that "...more likely a confluence of factors [demographics, culture, age, gender, race/ethnicity, religion, social class, disability, sexual orientation, learning style, and professional experiences] may influence the paradigm one prefers" (p. 7).

Kasten and Ashbaugh (1988) developed a questionnaire based on value categories from previous research conducted with building level administrators (Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1984). They surveyed 202 graduate students and practicing administrators to compare differences in respondent groups in their perception of values used in making a difficult personnel decision. Six factor-based scales were identified and used to construct a profile of values in educational administration. Generally, respondents favored two scales reflecting specific organizational values and one reflecting transcendent values.

The organizational values of prudence (considering all reasonable decision alternatives) and precedent (relating decisions to tests of the past) along with the

transcendent value factor including principles of honesty, integrity and regard for human worth were favored values in leadership practice. Statistically significant differences between practicing administrators' values and general education graduate students' values were identified; and these results support the notion that value differences exist between teachers and principals. These differences were that principals were more likely to ascribe to an organizational decision-making value of precedent test and personal interpretations of reasonability in making decisions.

Grogan and Smith (1999) studied female superintendents' identification and resolution to moral dilemmas. Their guiding questions focused on whether there was one right way, a bottom line or a decision rule that was followed in order to resolve morally complex situations that were likely to have far-reaching consequences. Sixty-minute interviews were conducted with eleven superintendents from two U.S. states. A "feminist framework" was used to analyze the interview data. Their findings indicate that a common course of action was articulated by female superintendents as a way to solve a variety of dilemmas.

Superintendents summarized their options [to solving dilemmas] as child centered.

They stated repeatedly that the children they serve were at the very core of every consideration. Whenever the dilemma pitted children's concerns against adult ones, there was no doubt in the participants' minds as to where their priorities lay.

According to the participants, most of their options were dictated by a strong sense of student priority. But this perspective is not one that simply places a disembodied notion of 'children' in the foreground. It is a very particular one. (p. 279)

Superintendents' responses to dilemma situations were overwhelmingly guided by a sense of care and empathy. They articulated an understanding of relational interdependence of all members of the organization, and at times moved from a dominant moral orientation of care to one of justice. Participants expressed a "healthy respect for following policy," but the dilemmas they identified were managed outside the purview of strict administrative guidelines and revealed other ways of reasoning that relied on local knowledge of particular people and the capacity to imagine another person's situation based on personal experience.

Investigating the attitudes, values, perceptions and life experiences of female educational leaders, O'Rourke and Papalewis (1989) interviewed nine white, female administrators in a rural school district in California. Using ten open-ended questions derived from literature on women in leadership, participants shared their thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding the unique qualities of their leadership. Findings indicated a clear set of shared beliefs and values among participants. Sensitivity and perceptiveness in service of personal intuition was a common theme. Other values enumerated in the study were specific qualities that facilitate the transition of simply having a vision into making it a reality; namely: honesty, caring and understanding, being open and listening, making decisions collaboratively, patience, acceptance and authenticity. Participants expressed sharing power by "open[ing] a lot of things up to group problem solving...in a personal and caring way." Being authentic involved having knowledge, being competent, maintaining visibility, being tenacious and determined rather than "bluff[ing] their way through."

Reeves and Jones (1993) surveyed 25 school administrators holding a variety of formal positions within one southern state county to determine the difference between legal and ethical “forces” in decision making. Data were collected and analyzed using frequency distributions, percentages, paired sample t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). A questionnaire posing fifteen complex and conflict-laden dilemmas with a forced response format yielded findings that indicate when both ethical and legal conflicts existed in decision making, an ethical, but illegal decision pattern dominated. There was no significant difference found among administrators when considering characteristics of age, gender, race, educational degree, administrative experience and teaching experience, but significant difference in ethical/illegal and legal/unethical choice patterns were evident based on variation in ethics preparation (formal coursework) and income.

A study examining the ethical decision-making process of public school superintendents in Virginia explored the extent to which 134 school district leaders’ responses to a series of ten scenarios involving moral dilemmas varied based on the AASA code of ethics. Wenger (2004) scored each survey based on the percentage of appropriate responses. In addition, superintendents were asked to answer 14 demographic questions. Demographic variables were correlated with the derived ethics scores from surveys using multiple correlation regression (MCR) procedures to identify significant relationships between variables. Findings indicated a great variation in how superintendents responded to ethical situations. Years of experience as a superintendent, years of experience in education and the manner of school board selection were all significant demographic variables related to appropriate ethical responses. The

combination of all three variables was the best predictor of a superintendent responding ethically – a superintendent who was new to the position, had many years of experience in education and worked in a system where the school board was appointed was the leader most likely to respond ethically.

### **Conclusion**

The empirical literature reviewed in this chapter informs the specific inquiries of this study. Research addressing the rational decision making processes of school leaders indicates the importance of both personal and professional value influences as part of addressing conflict and managing dilemmas. Much of the research identifies aspects of the profession that can be interpreted as a professional *ethos* – personal qualities and job-related practices that are identified as important to the field. These qualities and practices that are already known can serve as a backdrop for findings in this study. The moral discord experienced by practitioners when faced with dilemmatic situations is clearly apparent in the literature, but not explored in depth. And frequent use of the expression, “the best interests of the student”, and its variations, raises further questions about the special function and meaning of the phrase within the profession of educational leadership.



## Chapter 4

### Theoretical Framework

#### Ethic of the Profession

A central focus of this investigation was how secondary principals interpret the experience of leadership decision making as a moral activity in relation to a specific ethical decision making theory, the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). I was primarily concerned about the ethical and moral deliberations experienced in professional practice and whether administrators experienced and constructed meaning over their decision making in such a way that either supported, modified, or disconfirmed aspects of the Ethic of the Profession framework.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) have argued for an ethical paradigm that considers the “moral aspects unique to the profession” (p. 18). The Ethic of the Profession considers the moral and/or ethical themes of justice, care, and critique not as totally distinct, incommensurable moral reasoning, but as complementary – a “tapestry of ethical perspectives that encourages...rich human response to...many uncertain ethical situations” (Starratt, 1994, p. 57). The three moral perspectives referred to by Starratt (1994), which are commonly referred to as “ethics” within the field of educational administration, have been addressed in more detail in the Chapter 2. The Ethic of the Profession, although informed by other moral theory, including an additional perspective on the significance of community, is distinct unto itself as a framework to guide and inform educational leadership as a practical and moral activity.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) indicate that even taken together, the various moral themes or ethical perspectives of justice, critique and care do not provide a complete picture of the dynamics and plethora of factors that must be taken into account when school leaders endeavor to make decisions within educational settings. The Ethic of the Profession model focuses justice, critique, care and community considerations to specifically address those moral aspects unique to the profession of educational leadership and seeks to address the variety of questions, value differences and insights that surface as administrators “become more aware of their own personal and professional codes of ethics” (p. 18).

Professional ethics, of any sort, have been viewed as situated within a justice paradigm; likely because expressions of professional ethics are often equated with, and formulated as, codes, behavioral statements, principles or rules that correspond efficiently with traditional concepts of justice (Beauchamp & Childress, 1984). A number of professional education and education-related organizations have developed their own professional codes of ethics. These statements of role morality for members of a particular profession, the code as it were, are not ethics in a purse sense of the word. Clark (1983) has suggested that *ethos* is a more accurate word that describes the criteria of professional ethics or standard statements in the form of codes promulgated by associations, organizations or the states. “Ethical codes set forth by the states and professional associations tend to be limited in their responsiveness in that they are somewhat removed from the day-to-day personal and professional dilemmas educational leaders face” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

The Ethic of the Profession views professional ethics not as formalized codes and standards that are designed to account for specialist behavior. Codes can serve as guideposts and articulate ideals of the profession, but sometimes we can expect too much from them. As Campbell (2001) indicates, there is a difficulty, if not impossibility, of applying professional codes, or moral and ethical statements of role morality, to actual situations “in any professionally or ethically satisfying way [and that] moral dilemmas...are potentially resolvable only by communities of educators internalizing and applying principles of ethics [such as benevolence or service to the common good], not formalized codes or standards” (p. 395). To this end, The Ethic of the Profession views professional ethics “from a broader, more inclusive, and more contemporary perspective” when considering moral decision making (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 20).

Therefore, the concept of professional ethics for educational leadership, as defined by the Ethic of the Profession, a unique, and eclectic moral paradigm, includes: 1) ethical principles from justice, critique, care and community perspectives; 2) codes of ethics for the profession, as established by the professional community, embodied in the justice perspective; 3) professional judgment and decision making processes; 4) personal values (“personal codes of ethics”) based on life stories and critical incidents; 5) personal or internalized professional codes, unique to the individual, based on experience and work expectations; 6) community expectations and consideration of context values where the leader works; and 7) approved and appropriate customary standards of the profession, or what could be referred to as its culture or ethos, written or otherwise.

The Ethic of the Profession is a theoretical perspective developed over the span of almost fifteen years of work with graduate students and practicing administrators in

seminar settings, in addition to supporting qualitative research, writing and the teaching of ethics coursework by the theorists. Prior research that informs this ethical decision making model is based on first hand accounts of educational leaders' "grappling" with the many features of the Ethic of the Profession, particularly their struggle over issues of resolving what they perceive, personally, to be right and wrong, good or bad with what the profession deems as appropriate, good or moral practice and decision making (Stefkovich & Shapiro, 1995; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1997, 1998; Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003). By contemplating issues of justice, critique and care in relation to the education of children and youth from diverse backgrounds, in addition to defining personal and professional values or "codes of ethics", administrators gained a new awareness of who they were and what they believed and came to recognize the inevitable "clashes that may arise among ethical codes and making ethical decisions in light of their best professional judgment" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 22). These leadership insights were based, according to the framework, on an understanding of oneself and others and the necessity of reflection and dialog. This understanding was achieved in part by explicitly defining ones own set of beliefs, values and morality (personal code of ethics) and then subsequently marking out a "professional code of ethics" based on experiences, work-life expectations, community standards and mores, and personal values.

Although the Ethic of the Profession recognizes that school leaders are strongly influenced by their own personal values (Hodgkinson, 2001; Begley & Johansson, 1998; Willower & Lacata, 1997), these values are co-mingled with, and are co-influenced by, internalized professional codes, approved and appropriate customary standards of the profession and codified statements of ethical principles established by professional

associations or government agencies in the form of policy. For some school leaders, there was difficulty separating personal beliefs and values from professional values and expectations prior to sustained reflection, while for others there was a “clash among codes”. A variety of possible clashes were identifiable, but a key conflict was the one experienced within the administrator as value incongruity between the personal and organizational/professional.

This disparity often exists between professional codes and expectations meant to inform decision making and conduct in work and the personal moral values of administrators that serve to guide their judgment and behavior. An attempt to integrate professional and personal “codes” can lead to a repetitive and sustained moral dissonance, or “clashing of codes”. Accordingly, there arises within the moral actor, and in this case the educational leader, an internal moral disagreement emerging from two competing sets of values, one personal and one professional, that, in some sense, manifests itself as an internal struggle because of a lack of value correspondence. In responding to this inevitable discord, and ultimately either resolving or conditionally satisfying the internal moral struggle, the Ethic of the Profession suggests grounding ethical decision making in the needs of children. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) indicate:

Not all those who write about the importance of the study of ethics in educational administration discuss the needs of children; however, this focus on students is clearly consistent with the backbone of our profession. Other professions often have one basic principle driving the profession....In educational administration, we believe that if there is a moral imperative for the profession, it is to serve the “best interests of

the student.” Consequently this ideal must lie at the heart of any professional paradigm for educational leaders. (p. 23)

This focus on the best interest of the child, their well-being as a fundamental value, is reflected in professional association codes, ethical paradigms of care and critique, standards of the profession set forth by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), and the empirical and jurisprudential research of Walker (1994, 1995, 1998). All of these sources support the reasoned consideration of the educational shibboleth “the best interests of the student” as a basis for mediating value conflicts and ethical decision making.

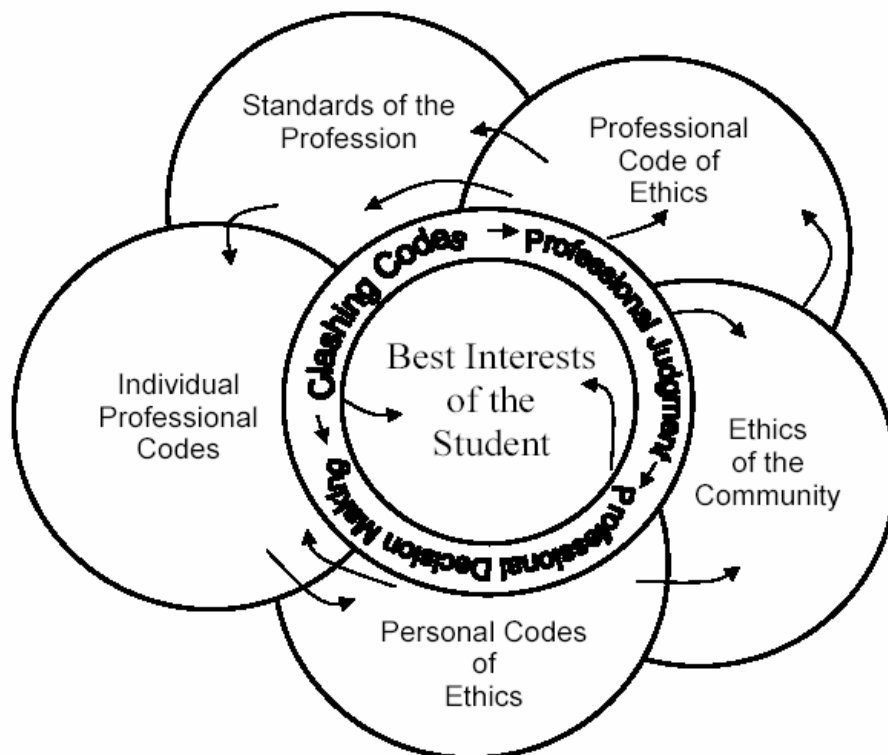
The student’s best interests are the focal point of the Ethic of the Profession. Frequent encounters with situations that rise above typical administrative problem solving, to complex scenarios involving a plurality of values in which choices between actions embody competing and irreducible conceptions of the desirable, increasingly involve a variety of student populations, parents, and communities comprising diversity in broad terms that extend to categories of . . . race and ethnicity, religion, social class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation as well as individual differences that may take into account learning styles, exceptionalities, and age. (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 23)

These individual categories often cannot be ignored and therefore educational leaders must formulate and examine their own “ [internalized] professional codes of ethics in light of individual personal codes of ethics [personal values], as well as standards set forth by the profession, and then call upon them to place students at the center of the ethical decision making process” (p. 23). With this said, the Ethic of the Profession is

dynamic, multidimensional and eclectic, asking questions related to justice, critique and care perspectives, examining the influence of community, but in addition, asks what the profession would expect; especially, What is in the best interests of the student?

Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the Ethic of the Profession and is used here with permission from the author and publisher (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.). Circles represent factors that converge to create the professional paradigm. Other factors playing a part in the model are located within the circular band surrounding the center circle that depicts the best interests of the student. Arrows indicate some ways the factors might interact and overlap with each other.

Figure 1. Ethic of the Profession Model



### **Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests**

From the Ethic of the Profession emerges an explanation of what are a student's best interests. What does "the best interests of the student" mean? What are those best interests and how are they afforded to students? Walker (1998) has provided several working definitions for the expression "the best interests of the child/children," but a more formal treatment and representation of what constitutes a student's best interests is offered by Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004) and Stefkovich (2006). The focus of this model is in concert with Walker's (1998) depictions of the various meanings ascribed to "the best interests of children" and the position that "the best interests of children... taken to override conflicting interests[,] may be considered both a safe and essential ground for educational decision making" (p. 300).

This theory of what constitutes a student's best interests serves to inform school leaders' case specific determinations and judgments. Along with a variety of other personal, community, professional, organizational and cultural interests, educational leaders should be "determinate" and take a "major practical and ideological role in mediating values and asserting...jurisprudential and ethical perspectives...with respect to the best interest of children" (Walker, 1998, p. 299). In reviewing what all the best interests of children doctrines suggest, at least implicitly, Walker indicates that "the interests of children supercede the interests of all other interests" (p. 299). Of course, Walker admits that it may be very difficult to know with precision and appositeness what the best interests of students might be.

There is no singular right, good, or virtuous pattern for all children. The fallacies of determinism, rationalism, and relativism must be displaced with jurisprudentially and



ethically defensible expressions of the best interests of children. These defensible expressions should be based on a distillation and application of principles that a leader can confidently claim are critically warranted by responsible conceptions of justice and caring. (Walker, 1998, p. 300).

In addition, even though the best interests maxim can carry great potential as a measure of good, right, and appropriate policy and practice, it has the same potential to cover non-action, self-interest, expediency and detrimental choices regarding the quality of children's lives (Walker, 1998). Children get their best interests represented by adults, and in many instances the interests and perspectives of adults determine the interests of minors. So careful attention should be given to minors who do have the ability to speak for themselves and can ascertain what is in their own best interests (Mitra, 2004).

To that end, the Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests first recognizes that adults possess a great deal of power in determining students' best interests and it is "incumbent upon school leaders to make ethical decisions that truly reflect the needs of students and not their own adult self-interest" (Stefkovich, 2006, p. 21). The framework seeks to provide a jurisprudentially and ethically defensible expression of what is in a student's best interests and to assist educational leaders with understanding that self-reflection, open-mindedness and sensitivity are necessary qualities, and that "making ethically-sound decisions profoundly influences others lives" (p. 21). The expression, the best interests of the student, most obviously consists of a robust focus on the essential nature of individual rights, the duty of responsibility to others for a common interest, and in addition, respect as mutual acknowledgement of the other as having worth, value, and dignity unto him/herself.

Research uncovering the term “best interest(s) of students” in the popular press, news articles, trade and professional journals, case law and law review articles published over a ten year period revealed no clear or consistent definition (Stefkovich, O’Brien & Moore, 2002) and these findings support Walker’s (1998) analyses of Canadian legal cases. Considering the lack of clarity found in a wide variety of extant literature and the frequency with which the expression is employed, a “more robust model in determining the best interests of the student when making various types of ethical decisions” is offered in a “new conceptualization of the three Rs” – rights, responsibility and respect (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004, p. 202).

This model intentionally refers to the best interests of the student (one) as opposed to the best interests of students (group, all or many). Research revealing the use of the expression found few distinctions between the use of reference to one child or a group of children. The theory does not recognize this difference and purports that

if the individual student is treated with fairness, justice, and caring, then a strong message is sent to all students that they will be treated with similar justice and caring and that they should treat others similarly. Thus, rights carry with them responsibilities, so much so that the rights of one individual should not bring harm to the group. (p. 18)

Individual persons possess inherent worth and dignity unto themselves and they need not strive to maintain their value. With this said, educational leaders must first decide if the individual is acting responsibly in asserting his or her rights. If not, there are opportunities to teach responsibility, which is challenging and requires vigilance, but the

potential is great for students to share responsibility for their own development. The (individual) student's best interests are at the center of the Ethic of the Profession.

The Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005) and more precisely the Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004; Stefkovich, 2006), has been applied primarily to court decisions from case law pertaining to K-12 education. This application of theory to vignette serves as a helpful pedagogical tool for assisting aspiring and practicing educational leaders to reflect on their decision making and to understand how professional choices are informed by one's moral reasoning and deliberation, personal values and beliefs and adherence to ethical principles. Although the model serves as a heuristic for training purposes the intent is that it can be used as a guide to manage and direct administrative problem solving.

### Rights

The Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests acknowledges rights as essential in determining a student's best interests. The model recognizes the existence of certain fundamental rights as universal such as survival, full development, protection from harmful influences, protection from abuse and exploitation, participation in family, cultural and social life, dignity and protection from humiliation, education, and freedom from bodily harm. These rights are expressed in political philosophy, past and present, the United Nations proclamations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights (Stefkovich, 2006).

### Responsibility

Individual rights are not unfettered. Rights are incomplete if considered without accompanying responsibilities. According to Aristotle (trans. 1989) persons who are capable of making decisions are moral agents, and with this agency comes responsibility whereby persons are worthy of being praised or blamed. The portrayal of responsibility for this model is based on the prescription that those who receive protection from society owe benefit in return. By the mere fact of living together, we are compelled to follow conduct that serves a common interest – we must yield to conditions that we require of others. This perspective provides a basis of union and social compact where we all place ourselves under the same conditions and enjoyment of rights. Decisions based on fairness and equity are decisions rational persons would make when faced with the value uncertainty of moral dilemmas (Rawls, 1993). Kohlberg (1987) indicates that rational, principled responsibility is one of the highest stages of moral development.

Therefore, although there are enumerated rights afforded to a student, s/he also has a duty to exercise those rights responsibly. Conflicts can and do exist between a student's rights and a group's rights, but according to the framework, this tension is ameliorated "when viewed through such a rights-responsibilities lens" (p. 32). Rights center on equality and fairness, balancing the claims of oneself with others, while responsibility centers on the principle of equity. This gives rise to notions of compassion, care and empathy where "the so-called 'golden rule' ...[provides us with] a role reversing instrument...to determine what the response or effect might be from the other's perspective" (Walker, 1998, p. 300). It is not that we treat others exactly as how we want to be treated, but that a student gets and gives what s/he needs or senses as needs in

others. Students “want different outcomes, treasure different values, and express different needs” (Noddings, 2002, p. 149).

### Respect

The concept and enactment of respect takes on a variety of meanings and expressions. Respect for persons as rational agents is central to moral theory (Kant, 1785/1998). Respect can come in the form of obligations we owe each other, or responding to others in normatively appropriate ways. But, as articulated in the best interests of the student framework, respect is conceptualized as positive, mutual interaction that focuses on the individual person in relationship to others. Respect is commonly depicted in a hierarchical fashion where expressions of veneration, admiration, high regard and approval are the typical qualities conveyed. This is not the meaning of respect here. Respect is mutuality, symmetry and empathy in all forms of relationship. The basis for such an understanding is articulated by Gilkey (1997). We possess fundamental existential acquaintances with self and nature and these acquaintances comprise our certainty of the reality of the world, self, and other persons, and their necessary interconnections....We are aware of ourselves in a real environment, in a community of persons, and in a world that moves in temporal process but is nonetheless structured, held in place in a certain orderly way....The histories of religion and philosophy show these forms of our thinking to be general and pervasive intuitions of nature and later of reality as a whole. (p. 37)

The pervasive traits of human awareness, fundamental modes of experiencing, or what might be termed prehension, or creative intuition, are always present and constant throughout *all* experience and consist of with-ness with the body through which we are

self-conscious or know ourselves as an organic unity (we are aware of ourselves “from the inside” – we are aware of our participation in existing and aware of our awareness as a thinking and willing being), the awareness of “the other” as persons in community with ourselves as subjects, a comprehension of continuous and pervasive passage and yet of continuity with and conformation to the immediate past, a sentiment of aims and of intentions for the immediate future, the impression of the universality of change, the all-encompassment of order, continuity within time, the appearance of novelty, the importance of aims and values, the reality of purposes and responsibility, and the intimation of hope or trust that “value characterizes the farthest depths of actuality” (Gilkey, 1997, p. 64).

Therefore, our actions toward others, even toward ourselves, are in part determined by our attitudes toward them.

If we feel deep respect for other people, especially people different from ourselves, we are likely to treat them with the openness, courtesy, and tolerance that is their due. In turn, our attitudes toward them are determined in large part by our understandings of who and what they are: in this case, that they are human beings, persons, and that as persons they possess an inner integrity, a self-determination, a capacity for free and spiritual activity that we also sense in ourselves....It is such self-understanding applied to the other that can become the foundation for treating other persons as ‘ends’ and not as means...and that can in large part provide the inner basis of an outward social order characterized by equal rights, justice, mutual respect and accommodation. A humane society – in fact, civilization – depends on a mutual recognition of the other person, of their “reality” as spirit. Thus actions toward other

beings depend on our attitudes toward those beings, and, in turn, those attitudes depend directly on our understanding of the reality of those beings, that we “know” them to be. (pp. 79-80)

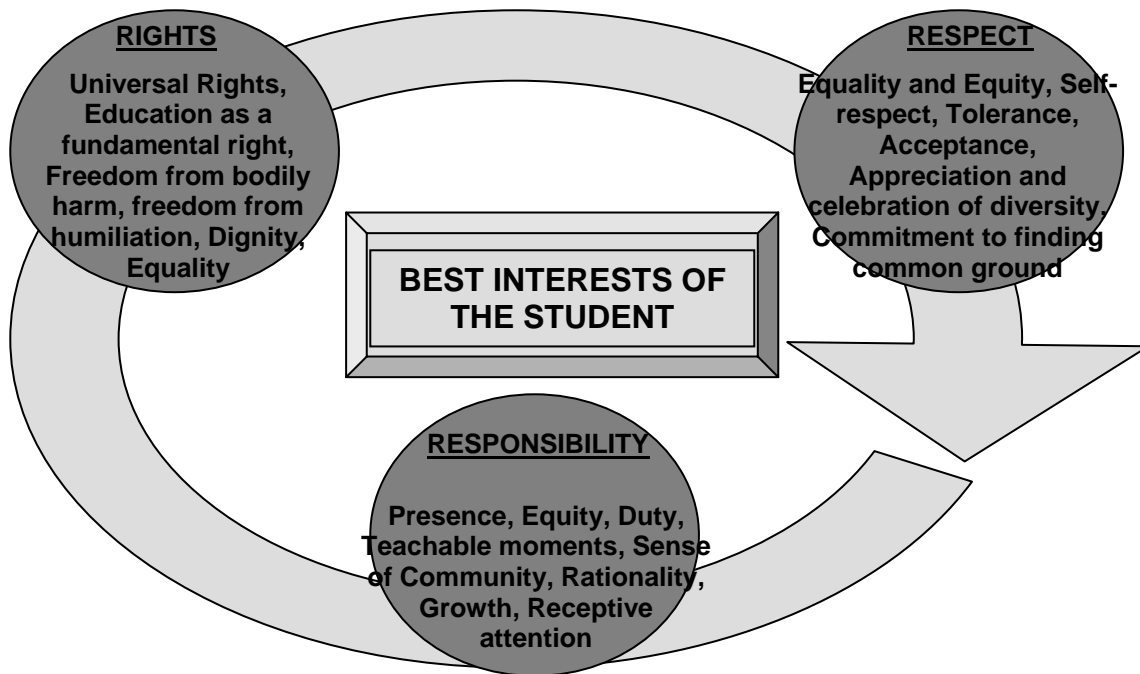
There exists an interrelation or interdependence of action, attitude, and understanding or “knowing” the other’s reality – therefore value has its basis in nature’s disclosure and humanity’s prehension of order, life, power, and unity. Herein, respect focuses on “equity as well as equality, tolerance, self-respect (which includes an acceptance of one’s own as well as others’ frailties), an appreciation...of diversity, and a commitment to finding common ground in...[a] multicultural, pluralistic society” (Stefkovich, 2006, p. 36).

### **Conclusion**

The Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests provides both explanations and tools when considering and encountering moral and ethical decision making from an educational leadership role. The two frameworks can, and do, serve as a guide in determining factors to be considered in making ethical decisions. “In sum, if there is a moral imperative for educational leaders, it is to act in the best interests of students” (Stefkovich, 2006, p. 27).

Figure 2 provides a diagrammatic representation of the Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests. Aspects of the model are depicted and include rights, responsibility and respect. Mutuality (reciprocity) is an integral component of the model.

Figure 2. Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests





## **Chapter 5**

### **Methods**

#### **Restatement of Research Purpose**

This empirical investigation focused on principals' perspectives about the expression "the best interests of the student" as a viable professional ethic for educational leadership. Also, I was interested in other aspects of professional moral reasoning and practice; particularly principals' perceptions concerning what is morally unique about their work, the meanings ascribed to professional moral practice, and principals' sense making about their own experiences and judgments when trying to decide and act ethically.

In addition to the study's primary focus, I was interested in knowing how secondary principals interpret key aspects of a specific ethical decision making theory, the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). My intent was to examine participants' perspectives about their own decision making experiences – the ethical and moral deliberations experienced in professional practice. More specifically, I wanted to understand what meaning was ascribed to the experience of deciding morally or ethically, and what sense participants had of the plurality of values and situations in which choices between actions embody competing and irreducible moral standpoints (Swedene, 2005). Ultimately, I focused on whether practicing administrators experienced and constructed meaning over their professional work, including decision making, in such a way that either supported, modified, or disconfirmed aspects of the Ethic of the Profession framework and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006).

This study examined secondary principals' perspectives and experiences about the moral and ethical nature of their work. Based on the research questions guiding this study I focused on the meaning and utility of the expression, "the best interests of the student," the unique moral aspects attributed to professional practice within the field of educational leadership, and the phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord experienced as part of the process of deciding ethically when faced with difficult moral choices.

### **A Phenomenological-Like Research Method for the Educational Context**

Quantitative measurement, correlation, prediction and causality were not the investigative goals of this inquiry; rather my primary concern was with description – rendering an accurate account and interpretation of the experiences of educational leaders. My goal was to express empirically derived knowledge for theory building and bring conceptual clarification to what constitutes moral practice and ethical decision making among practicing school administrators while being informed by a specific paradigm. My aim, in studying human experience and the social phenomenon of moral decision making, was to uncover, among other things, the inherent logic of such an experience or phenomenon – the way in which moral and ethical choice was conceptualized and made understandable by participants (Dukes, 1984). Data of this kind were acquired by qualitative-naturalistic inquiry. Data collection techniques that were explorative and generative in nature were best suited for my research questions. I used a general, modified phenomenological-like perspective suited for an educational research context in order to capture administrators' perspectives about ethical practice, moral decision making experiences and the meanings attributed to those experiences. As Patton (1990) indicates:

A phenomenological perspective can mean either or both (1) a focus on what people experience and how they interpret the world (in which case one can use interviews without actually experiencing the phenomenon oneself) or (2) a methodological mandate to actually experience the phenomenon being investigated (in which case participant observation would be necessary). (p. 70)

My focus was on the essence of shared, common experiences and the meaning ascribed to those experiences from the participants' perspectives. Particularly, I was interested in participants' moral understandings in search of a commonality of basic elements in human experience and meaning making. This kind of phenomenological perspective applied to educational research is formally based on the philosophical works of Husserl (1913/1962; Kockelmans, 1967). Basic concepts of Husserlian phenomenology are important considerations when preparing for field research. Although there is no standard methodological mandate for phenomenological procedures and techniques, general and specific guidelines exist that guided me in research preparation, data collection and analysis. It is important to note that a phenomenological study within the educational research context involves "studies of schooling [that] elicit the meanings that participants in the educational process assign to themselves and what they are doing" (LeCompte, Millroy, & Preissle, 1992, p. 850). Therefore, this psychological research tradition is primarily situated within the structural-functional paradigm of sociological theory where the researcher is obliged to understand and faithfully report the depictions, perspectives and interpretations of participants, or the emic, without necessarily providing a thoroughgoing analysis or explanation of participants' experiences and views.

From the phenomenological perspective, human experience is intelligible and makes sense prior to interpretation and theorizing. The sense or logic of experience “is [part of] an inherent structural property of the experience itself [and] not something constructed by an outside observer” (Dukes, 1984, p. 198). The goal of this kind of research is to uncover the inherent meaning of human experience and faithfully articulate this understanding without distortion. This methodological frame of reference allowed me to understand a part of the lived experiences of secondary school principals when they recounted the times they were presented with difficult ethical and moral circumstances that required choices and action. An understanding of participants’ experiences and the meanings they attributed to them was ultimately achieved by integrating the stories and descriptions of participants which included perceptions, thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas, and both personal recollections of past situations and reactions to a contrived circumstance within the interview context in the form of a dilemma vignette.

A clear methodological distinction was made between individual subjective experience and participant experiences as related to me within the interview context. The former is the personal, private, arbitrary mental processes of the individual and the latter is “neither private or arbitrary, but [rather] publicly accessible experiences belonging to a [participant]” (Dukes, 1984, p. 198). This methodological perspective posits that publicly accessible experiences are modes of being “whose logic or sense is invariant for all persons who live them, across time and culture” (Dukes, 1984, p. 198). A transcendental, psychological phenomenological perspective informed the approach I took when planning for data collection and entering the field. This perspective tells us that human

experience, in all cases, has a particular discoverable structure regardless of the unique facts of varying circumstances.

Sources of data for this methodological approach primarily rely on interviews. As stated by Seidman:

A researcher can approach the experience of people in contemporary organizations through examining personal and institutional documents, through observation, through exploring history, through experimentation, through questionnaires and surveys, and through a review of existing literature. If the researcher's goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry. (1998, p. 4)

Statements from participants, that were essentially descriptions of the experience and meaning making being investigated, served as the "brute data" of the lived world of people – publicly accessible information consisting of beliefs, attitudes, feelings, values, and ways of thinking. These "brute data" came from "collecting...words and marks of people given in response to questionnaires and constructed interviews or, in some cases, by recording their overt nonverbal behavior" (Polkinghorne, 1983). Participant descriptions of their experiences and the meaning ascribed to those experiences, in the form of interview data and reflective memos pertaining to observations made within the interview context, allowed for a systematic and rigorous interrogation of personal responses pertaining to how practicing administrators think about their work as being morally unique, the meaning and use of the expression "the best interests of the student,"

and the phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord when faced with difficult ethical decisions.

Without engaging in detailed description of phenomenological theory, concepts and processes; a summary description of the general methodological approach informing this study is outlined here and elaborated in separate sections within this chapter. A phenomenological research perspective applied to an educational context is derived from a combination of distinct methodological approaches as articulated by Moustakas (1994), Giorgi (1984) and Polkinghorne (1989).

The general guidelines that assisted in informing this investigation and that address the requirements of an organized, disciplined, systematic and rigorous study include: 1) Initial Preparation – investigate a topic and question rooted in human experience constituting autobiographical meanings and values as well as having social implications of significance, and conduct a literature review; 2) Data Collection – construct criteria to locate and select participants, develop questions and topics to guide face-to-face interviews, provide participants with information about the nature and purpose of the research and establish an agreement that includes informed consent, and conduct lengthy interviews with participants that focus on a specific experience; and 3) Organizing and Analyzing Data – transcribe audio recordings of interviews into individual participant records, read and study each transcript in its entirety, divide transcripts into units or blocks that express self-contained meaning, code statements relevant to the research topic and questions with simple language that express dominant meanings, list or cluster meaning units into common categories or themes that represent the words of participants, develop textural descriptions of experience from thematically organized meaning units

using the participants' own words, and integrate and synthesize textural descriptions into a structural description, or a composite portrait, of the essence of the experience being investigated.

### **Research Strategy and Preparation**

The Pennsylvania State University's Institutional Review Board granted approval for this research in June 2005. This was a necessary step in justifying my research methodology so that rights of human participants would be protected and known risks would be minimized (Creswell, 2003). Confidentiality and anonymity of participants was a necessary and ethical component of this investigation. Participants' names and identities were masked throughout the study, however identification of participants by position, personal and social characteristics and institutional-type affiliations were necessary and important data in this research (Creswell, 2003).

Participants in this study will not be identifiable by the reader, but participants who have requested data and findings may be able to identify other participants depending on their knowledge of identifying features of position, social characteristics and institutional-type affiliation. This identification is unlikely. All participants were given an informed consent form, authorized by the Office of Research Protections, clarifying confidentiality issues and explaining that no information that would identify the participant or their school district and school would be published.

The process of developing a series of questions and topics to guide the face-to face interviews with all participants involved several steps. After identifying an adequate and appropriate topic of investigation, conducting a preliminary review of theoretical and empirical literature and assembling specific research questions pertaining to human

experience and meaning making, I developed a set of questions designed to elicit participant responses about ethical decision making and professional moral practice.

Prior to identifying and recruiting participants, I conducted a formal protocol test with three practicing school administrators. Piloting the protocol served to test the substance and language of interview questions, gauge the time required, and suitability, for essentially two separate interviews within one setting, and the ability to tap the experiences and capture the meanings ascribed to moral and ethical practice by participants. Administrators who helped in piloting the protocol were not part of the formal study, but provided feedback to me about the workability of the protocol and the time required to conduct phenomenological interviews with busy secondary school principals. Of particular interest to me in piloting the interview protocol was the utility of using a two-interview sequence format that essentially involved two separately distinct interviews within the space of one day.

The first interview asked pilot principals to respond to an ethical dilemma. The intent of this part of the interview was to provide both an entrée to further discussion and a common “experience” for all participants so that I could compare responses to a hypothetically enacted decision with personal experiences and recollections. The primary purpose for the first interview process was to get participants to think out loud about how they arrived at a decision within the context of the dilemma. The first interview posed an ethical dilemma similar to other interview methods used by Kohlberg (1981), Gilligan (1987), and Kasten and Ashbaugh (1991). The selected vignette came from a collection of dilemmas used for education leadership training in *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education* (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).



Prior to the selection of an appropriate dilemma for use in the first interview, four preliminary vignettes were selected for their potential usefulness in this study. These vignettes dealt directly with student related issues within a school setting. Some modifications to the four pre-selected problems were necessary in order to achieve maximum utility within an interview context. After modifying the length, readability, and some minor content of the dilemmas, all four were piloted and judged by professional colleagues to determine which dilemma was likely to elicit a significantly reflective and sustained response. An expert review by practicing and aspiring building level administrators resulted in a clear and overwhelming interest in one complex scenario dealing with the issue of student testing, accountability, and curricular responsibility at the secondary level. The topic areas of three vignettes not selected dealt with special education students placed in the regular education classroom, student confidentiality as it intersects with school and community services, and minority student access to upper-level, academic and college preparatory coursework.

The second interview comprised more direct questioning pertaining to the principals' own professional experiences. These questions were developed to explicitly inquire about key points in the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Stefkovich, 2006). Protocol questions were closely aligned with the major research questions of the study (Maxwell, 1996). I asked participants questions about their personal experiences with moral conflict over specific incidents in their professional role as a school principal. More specifically, at the end of the protocol the expression, "best interests of the student", was introduced (if not already mentioned by the participant in previous conversation). I inquired into the meaning and importance of this concept

and/or principle in moral decision making. In addition, I explored whether or not participants had experienced any critical incidents or crystallizing experiences, either personally or in their professional practice, that informed their ethical decision making or steered their moral choices as an educational leader. Also, explicit questioning about rights, responsibility, and respect as a guiding framework for moral decision making and behavior, what is the centerpiece for the Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests at the heart of the Ethic of the Profession, was included in the protocol, as well as specific inquiries into the moral considerations and judgments of participants that are unique to the profession.

Additional assistance with question arrangement that made the protocol more effective – by wording that elicited more participant response, direct questioning patterns that were relevant to the study, setting aside specific probes tied to the theoretical framework that informed the study until the end of the interview, and alignment of inquiry with the requirements of a naturalistic investigation – were offered by colleagues during the research proposal defense. The final interview protocol went through several iterations before an established set of questions was taken to the field (Maxwell, 1996). See Appendix A for the final, fully developed dilemma vignette and protocol used for interviewing participants.

The careful development of an interview protocol for this investigation was necessary in order to elicit the inner perspectives of potential participants. This methodological step was important to the entire study. As Patton (1990) indicates,

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind.

The purpose for open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind

(for example, the interviewer's preconceived categories for organizing the world) but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed. We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe....The fact of the matter is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions....We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about these things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 278)

My assumption as a researcher, within a phenomenological perspective, is that the perspectives of others are knowable, understandable and able to be made explicit through intersubjectivity and empathy.

### **Data Collection**

The primary data collection strategy in this study was participant interviews by means of purposeful sampling. Participants were public school administrators and particularly those educational leaders responsible for the daily operation of a school. Because a principal's daily activities are replete with decision making activity and s/he is organizationally situated within school systems where student contact is most likely high, this leadership position was an important point of investigation when considering moral judgments pertaining to students' best interests. In an effort to be consistent with institutional roles and job expectations, I did not include career assistant principals, deans or formal disciplinarians in this study. Although the perspectives of these people would be of interest, the parameters of participant selection focused on the central person responsible for the operation of the school.

The Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals (PAESSP), the state affiliate of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and the Pennsylvania Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (PASCD), the state affiliate of the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), served as starting points in locating my population. Through strategic contacts with the offices of the current Executive Directors of PAESSP and PASCD, a working list of active core constituency provided leads for initial contacts when arranging entry into the field. This initial contact with the offices of the current Executive Directors of PAESSP and PASCD was expedited and facilitated by a research fellow distinction awarded to me by the Pennsylvania Association of School Administration. The designation of research fellow was awarded to me after formal application to PASA and provided a means of access for making preliminary contact. Specifically, I asked the Executive Directors for initial recommendations of secondary principals who would be thoughtful and reflective participants capable of articulating personal beliefs and relating professional experiences that involved ethical, moral and value-laden decisions.

Based on the Executive Directors' leads, I accessed two comprehensive sources for existing state level directory data on building leadership personnel. These data were available in two convenient sources: the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) website link EdNA (Education Names and Addresses) and the annually published Pennsylvania Education Directory available in paperback text. Both of these sources were used to find names, addresses, administrators, and related information about the educational entities served by PDE.

Both Executive Directors provided me with a short list of names, and this was the starting point for gaining access to, and securing the cooperation and assistance of participants. I made initial contacts with several principals from each of the lists provided by the Executive Directors. Based on these initial contacts and subsequent interviews, I asked participants for recommendations of other principals they knew who fit my interview criteria and might be available for an extended interview. In this process, one participant led to another based on my specific inquiries during face-to-face interviews. Principal recommendations were, at the time given, considered credible leads, and after placing initial telephone calls to potential participants, I made the determination to pursue each lead (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The initial purposeful sampling of participants and later use of a “snowballing” strategy in locating additional appropriate participants provided for the identification of “information-rich cases.” As Patton (1990) indicates, snowball sampling “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information-rich, that is, good examples to study, good interview subjects” (p. 182).

Eleven principals from school districts in central and south east Pennsylvania were interviewed. Of all thirteen possible participant leads, the majority demonstrated a willingness to participate in the study upon my introduction and explanation of the nature and purpose of the interviews. Participants were purposefully selected by determining accessibility and willingness to participate in an extended, in-depth, two-interview sequence format, representativeness of those persons who occupy the position of building level administrator, and whether including specific participants met the study selection criteria as explained below.

Participants who were selected were willing volunteers. I sought a range of people occupying the position of secondary school principal. This range of participants constituted a broad variety of individual and contextual factors and backgrounds. Some of these factors and backgrounds consisted of participants selected from large comprehensive high schools to small rural secondary settings. Other participant selection criteria included representation of gender, race/ethnicity, length of time in the position of building principal, and community type (rural, suburban/metro, urban). Although not an explicit criterion for participant selection, it was important to consider religion as a potentially important factor because of the influence of faith-based beliefs on morality.

Previous empirical studies within the values, ethics and school leadership literature have used populations of similar size (Kasten & Ashbaugh, 1991; Marshall, 1992); with some being larger and some a single case involving one participant. Phenomenological studies typically enlist a comparable number of participants (Seidman, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Dukes, 1984). Sample size was determined by first securing and conducting interviews that represented a range of perspectives and meaning making from interviews as they were conducted over the space of five months. As participant interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed, along with my memos of individual encounters, observations and preliminary analyses, data emerged that informed the core conceptual boundaries of this study and allowed me to explicate common themes and critical variations as they became apparent. An important consideration in determining sample size for this investigation was sufficiency and saturation of information which will be described later. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants involved in this study and the individual and contextual characteristics attributed to each.

Table 1. List of Participants and Corresponding Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Race Age	Community School Type	Enrollment	Years in Profession	Religion
Principal 1	Male	White ~ 50	Suburban Senior 9-12	900	Principal: 5 Career: 27	Catholic
Principal 2	Female	White ~ 45	Suburban Middle 6-8	800	Principal: 4 Career: 13	none specified
Principal 3	Male	White ~ 45	Suburban Senior 9-12	1000	Principal: 4 Career: 25	none specified
Principal 4	Male	White ~35	Sub./Metro. Senior 9-12	1400	Principal: 5 Career: 15	Protestant
Principal 5	Female	White ~ 50	Sub./Metro. Senior 9-12	1400	Principal: 13 Career: 28	none specified
Principal 6	Female	Black ~ 45	Sub./Metro. Senior 9-12	1000	Principal: 6 Career: 11	none specified
Principal 7	Male	White ~ 55	Urban Senior 9-12	2200	Principal: 14 Career: 32	Catholic
Principal 8	Male	Black ~ 45	Urban Middle 6-8	500	Principal: 6 Career: 20	Protestant
Principal 9	Male	White ~ 40	Urban Sec. Altern.	80	Principal: 2 Career: 12	Protestant
Principal 10	Male	White ~ 35	Rural Senior 7-12	250	Principal: 7 Career: 13	Catholic
Principal 11	Male	White ~ 55	Rural Senior 9-12	650	Principal: 19 Career: 29	Protestant

I gained access to the principals who took part in the study by placing telephone calls to potential participants and establishing rapport. Relationships with participants were negotiated by first calling participants, introducing myself by following a standard introduction that explained who I was, how they were referred to me, the purpose and intent of my research, and a formal request to participate as informed and valuable contributors. I sought to establish immediate trust with participants by communicating my own professional background as a building principal, ensuring that I would take a nonjudgmental stance as an interviewer, indicating the confidential and anonymous nature of personal disclosure within a formal research relationship, and maintaining a

flexible and cooperative approach when arranging interviews at the participants' convenience (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Once face-to-face interviews were arranged with participants, I conducted the interviews in a uniform pattern that followed a regular procedure from start to finish. All interviews were conducted from July to November 2005, using a standard protocol and identical recording techniques. Upon confirmation of a participant's willingness to be a part of the research, I immediately established an interview date, time and place at the participant's convenience. All participants, except one, arranged interviews at their place of employment. One participant arranged to be interviewed at a local restaurant near his work because it was a convenient time and setting between the end of the school day and a district board meeting later that evening.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant using both the dilemma vignette and follow-up questions and the more extensive protocol designed to elicit descriptions of personal and professional experiences and the meanings ascribed to moral and ethical practice. In order to achieve this kind of personal reflection as data, both open-ended and prefigured questioning techniques were used to guide the interviews. Even though a standard protocol was referenced during each interview, some variation in questioning occurred as a result of the varying responses of participants. Because of the nature of this investigation, a measure of flexibility was needed to elicit, what appeared to be for some participants, challenging self-reflection and sustained ruminations about personal and professional experiences and their meanings.

I began the interviews by first introducing myself and explaining, for a second time, the details of the study and providing a brief research description. Because appointments



were arranged by telephone, it was important for me to point out specific items within the informed consent form before participants authorized themselves as willing volunteers. I explained to each participant the procedures to be followed in conducting two distinct interviews in one site visit, the anticipated time involved in interviewing, his/her right to ask questions, not to answer specific questions or to discontinue the interview at any time. After a review of the conditions for inclusion in the study, each participant signed an Office of Research Protections Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research and a photocopy was made for his/her records. See Appendix B for the Informed Consent Form used in this research.

All participants in the study agreed to be audio taped. At each interview setting I quickly tested the digital voice recorder and immediately commenced with the interviews. My first step involved collecting background information including how long the participants served as principal, a summary of their career in education, professional associations they belonged to and characteristics about their school and district. Most participants were happy to oblige me with several hours out of their day. Some participants appeared to be more concerned about time than others, but all blocked off sections of time within the course of one day. Some participants wanted to sit through the two interviews back to back, while others chose to interview at different times during the day. The average length of the first interview for all participants was about 40 minutes and the average length of the second interview for all participants was about 55 minutes. Some combined interview sequences lasted just over two hours. One combined interview lasted approximately two and a half hours.

The central interview tasks involved participants reading the dilemma vignette, my questioning and probing for participant responses, audio recording those responses, observational notes taken in and around the interview times and some reflective-analytic journaling based on my interview experience. A considerable amount of clarification, rephrasing and participant response checks were part of the conversational nature of the interview. These moves were helpful for me to understand precisely what was being said and what was meant by participants when they were talking (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). At the conclusion of each interview setting, I thanked the participants for their generous contribution and provided my email address if follow up and clarification were needed.

### **Monitoring and Management of Data**

Data consisted of participants' words and my observational notes and reflective memos. Data collection proceeded as interviews were scheduled and conducted with identified participants. Voice data recordings were downloaded from the recorder to a personal computer with identifying information of each participant masked with an alphanumeric tag. Digital audio recordings were subsequently transcribed and data were cleansed by listening to audio files while reading the corresponding transcripts in order to ensure the accuracy of documented conversations. Observational notes taken during each interview were included as relevant and important data as well as reflective memos containing preliminary analyses (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Digital audio files and transcriptions were stored in a secure location throughout the data collection and analysis stages of this study. My research questions and observational foci did not change throughout data collection. Some reflective memos and analytical notations assisted me in rephrasing some questions and nudging participants for more

detailed explanations and experiences. Ongoing preliminary analyses and periodic checking of data collection and storage provided for careful quality control of data and justification for the continued direction of this study.

Interview transcripts, observation notes of the interview process, and reflective memos were cataloged together as one participant record. I collected and managed all the data as participant records, and as interviews proceeded, new records were added to the data file until all interviews were completed. This organizational process facilitated efficient storage and retrieval of data sources within participant records and the analysis of data across participant records.

Additional and ongoing data management tasks included taking notes and making memos to myself while I transcribed the interviews. Some emerging themes were identifiable during the initial writing and reading of raw data. This pre-analysis activity provided a basis for comparison of my notes and memos made during or around the time of interviews. This concurrent process of data collection, subsequent transcription and memoing provided some insight into the data as they were collected and maintained – some initial emergent themes and common meaning making among participants could be identified (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

### **Validity, Credibility and Trustworthiness of Data**

Close attention to methodological design, including my research questions, empirical tradition of investigation, theoretical stance, access and entry to appropriate participants, fair, ethical and effective population sampling, data collection, verification and management of data and transparency of data analysis all contributed to the issue of validity for this study. In addition, Owens (1982) has suggested that:

in order to avoid unreliable, biased, or opinionated data, the naturalistic inquirer seeks not some “objectivity” brought about through methodology, but rather, strives for validity through personalized, intimate understandings of phenomena stressing, “close in” observations to achieve factual, reliable, and confirmable data. (p. 10)

A level of flexibility and empathy was required of me in order to capture authentic and reflective responses from participants. Given the temporary and artificial nature of formal interviewing, particular care was given to establishing a mutually open, sensitive and confidential relationship (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Of particular importance was the posing of questions that carefully elicited principals’ descriptions of personal and professional ethical discord, the meanings ascribed to the experience of deciding morally or ethically and the sense participants had of the plurality of values and situations where choices and consequent actions embody competing and irreducible values. Carefully worded, presented and sequenced questions helped me to explore whether principals possessed an understanding of what “the best interests of the student” means for their work in schools, and the meaning(s) attributed to defining what is a student’s best interests including their consideration and deliberation over issues of rights, responsibility, and respect when faced with making an ethical decision (Stefkovich, 2006, Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004).

The trustworthiness of interview data was strengthened by gathering multiple perspectives from a wide range of persons who occupy the position of secondary school administrator. Given the nature of this study, it would be difficult to find more reliable data than the participants’ own words about what they experience in their professional work. These multiple perspectives derived from a two-interview sequence format

(dilemma vignette interview and in-depth, personal interview) contributed to a broad and deep understanding of the meanings ascribed to a single moral decision making “incident” (within the context of hypothetical dilemma) and the personal and professional experiences of participants (within the in-depth, personal interview).

As stated earlier, a considerable amount of clarification, rephrasing and participant response checks, or “member checks” (Owens, 1982), were part of the conversational nature of the interview. These moves were helpful in understanding precisely what was being said and what was meant by participants when they were interviewed. Additionally, by using the same interview process with all participants (all eleven took part in the two-interview sequence format) along with standard contact, protocol and observation procedures, I was able to secure thorough and consistent information. I followed a comparable data collection procedure across participants and there were no dramatic differences in my approach or with the interview context for any of the participants. This gives credibility to the data that were obtained and allows for cross-participant analysis.

The two-interview sequence format allowed me to make comparisons between what was stated in the first interview with what was stated in the second interview. The interview design incorporated statement checks that helped me to verify consistencies and discrepancies between what participants said with respect to self report data involving recollections and what they said they would do within the context of a hypothetical moral dilemma that required some level of ethical reflection and decision making. Asking for similar information in both interviews, particularly how participants went about meeting the demands of a difficult moral problem, allowed me to cross-check responses for both regularities and shifts in perspectives for each individual participant.

As stated earlier in the chapter, “if the researcher’s goal...is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (Seidman, 1998, p. 4). Statements secured from participants within the interview relationship were the descriptions of experiences, thoughts, values, beliefs, and feelings associated with ethical decision making and professional moral practice. These statements were the brute data of the lived and experienced world of secondary principals. With this being said, by carefully collecting information from a variety of individuals and settings, being cognizant of the reflexive nature of my relationship with participants, and using a limited number of additional techniques such as observations, note taking and reflective memoing, the risk of systematic bias and the limitations of just one method of data collection were reduced (Maxwell, 1996).

An important consideration in determining not only sample size, but also the credibility and trustworthiness of data for this investigation was the sufficiency and saturation of information collected during the four months of participant interviewing. The sufficiency concern pertains to having an adequate number of participants involved in the study. Eleven purposefully sampled secondary principals reflected a range of participants and sites that could, in my estimation, allow the reader to connect with the experiences of those who participated in the study. I believed, after the eleventh interview, that sufficient data existed to confidently narrate and depict how principals understand and define their professional moral activity. “The method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience

similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants” (Seidman, 1998).

With respect to information saturation, it became apparent to me that I was hearing similar reports from participants. I witnessed, by the eleventh interview, a pattern of verbal expression across participant interviews where common themes of experience and interpretation coalesced. In addition, preliminary coding and analytical note taking revealed redundant participant statements, and as data coding ensued, the boundaries of participants’ explanations, experiences and reflections took shape. I examined the data for general duplication of core themes and concepts by a constant comparative review of coding notes and audio files toward the end of the data collection process (Guba, 1978; Creswell, 1998). This process indicated to me that additional participant involvement would unlikely yield additional relevant variation in acquired data.

Sampling ended at the conclusion of the eleventh interview based on a substantial amount of information acquired through lengthy discussions with participants. The practical exigency of time and resource constraints, balanced against the potential for expanding the boundaries of participants’ shared understandings of their work in schools, indicated to me that data collection was complete (Merriam, 1998). The data collection and analysis process rendered, in my estimation, a faithful and accurate account of participants’ views and perceptions, based in large part on the fact that all participants had generally experienced similar structural and social conditions within middle class schooling bureaucracies. My ultimate criterion for trustworthiness was the ability to narrate rich description in the data analysis chapters – the detailed accounting of participants’ perspectives, experiences and judgments.

I made every effort to maintain an audit trail of my research. I wrote notes and memos, drew pictures and diagrams, and communicated with colleagues about the research on an ongoing basis. I regularly communicated with the co-chairs of my dissertation committee and others interested in this work.

### **Data Coding and Analysis**

As indicated in the Management of Data and Trustworthiness of Data sections, preliminary analysis of interview information occurred during the field work stage of this research. These analyses included the coding of interview notes, memos during transcription, and the rough formulation of central categories and domains of experience.

Formal analysis after data collection began with a careful reading of each of the cleansed transcripts. Each participant record, including interview transcript, corresponding observations and analytical memos, were read and studied in their entirety. At this point an analytical approach to organize the data was pursued.

First, I divided the transcripts into units or blocks that expressed, or appeared to express, a self-contained meaning. Early work with protocol construction proved to be beneficial during the gross chunking of data. Sometimes I blocked data by specific questions and other times divided participant records by meaning units that transcended specific responses to protocol probes. My goal was to identify recurrent patterns in participant records and cross-participant themes embedded within transcripts. This initial approach with these data was appropriate since the proposed research was guided by central questions from a specific theoretical perspective. As Patton (1990) indicates,

...cross-case analysis means grouping together answers from different people to common questions or analyzing different perspectives on central issues. If a



standardized open-ended interview is used, it is fairly easy to do cross-case or cross view analysis for each question in the interview. With an interview guide approach, answers from different people can be grouped by topics from the guide...[and] the interview guide actually constitutes a descriptive analytical framework for analysis. (p. 376)

Although variations and differences within individual records and between participants informed this study, and as a result required both case and cross-case analyses, the primary focus was analyzing multiple perspectives on common and central experiences pertaining to professional moral and ethical practice.

After this initial task of organizing text, meaning units were listed and clustered into common categories or themes that represented the words of participants. See Appendix C for the concept map that was used to lie out, chunk and categorize data into units of meaning and central themes. Central themes included: 1) awareness of personal value vs. professional value, 2) co-influence of personal and professional value, 3) duty boundedness (work expectation/obligation), 4) special, professional moral considerations, 5) discord or clash between personal vs. professional values, 6) resolving discord or clash, and 7) defining “best interests of the student.” Meaning units were further broken down into smaller sub-sets of words and ideas and these classifications were essentially derived by searching for finer grained regularities and patterns in the words of participants. When I identified regularities and patterns in the data, I wrote down key words and phrases, and this kind of shorthand notation became the “coding categories” I used to sort all the data I collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). At first blush, I applied codes deductively by dividing data into “piles according to their congruity with the principal concepts

informing” the study (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 47). See Appendix D, Data Display for Deductive Categories and Corresponding Codes, for six separate data displays with related codes corresponding to six of the seven central themes or meaning units depicted in the concept map. One of the central themes derived from the theoretical framework, co-influence of personal and professional value, was not evidenced in the data.

A working theory, expressed in the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006), provided a useful lens and an initial organizing framework for understanding the words and meaning making of participants. My interview protocol was designed to elicit participant responses that relate to key points within this ethical decision making model; hence, this top-down approach to coding the data began at a high level of inference where codes were not clearly operational. Codes that were sorted, tabulated, arranged and classified by theme, category, domain and/or principal concept eventually became clearer over time and proved to be helpful in conveying and interpreting participants’ words and viewpoints. Codes and categories of codes became clearer by using a concept map. The map provided a useful visual aid and assisted me in grouping data into broad categories aligned with key points within the theory. Patton (1990) calls this process the sensitizing of concepts. Findings from this analysis are reported in Chapter 6.

In addition to using a theoretical framework to initially inform this study, it became important to utilize the established practices of constant data comparison, analytic induction, and searching for discrepant evidence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data examined along major components of the theoretical model I was using did not align

perfectly. Participants' words indicated experiences and conceptions that extended beyond what the theory would allow. At this point, original domains and categories of tabulated codes were adjusted by either completely abandoning the initial deductive coding derived from the theory or collapsing deductive codes into new, re-conceptualized themes and categories. This process served as a secondary analysis of the data that pertained to the statement "the best interests of the student." Where the data did not fit the theory, a secondary analysis provided a way to contrast practicing principals' views against the theoretical explanation.

The building up of meaning from data proceeded to conceptual conclusions by a process of "data reduction" that involved breaking information down into isolated, specific items or elements (words or phrases) that related to my specific research questions pertaining to the expression "the best interests of the student" (Riessman, 2002). This level of analysis involved identifying within the interview transcripts, observational notes of interviews, and reflective memos those items and elements that needed to be coded before they could be identified, measured and included in the inductive research process. After data were reduced and broken down in code, information could be re-conceptualized and put back together in thematic categories that best fit the text. The secondary data analysis provided a way for me, once again, to identify common themes and differences between participants in the study and also served to alert me to competing explanations pertaining to my research questions and guiding theoretical focus. Thematic categories that emerged from the data relating to the use, understanding, meanings and utility of the expression "the best interests of the student" were: 1) relational consideration by context, 2) moral supervision, 3) personal –

professional dialectic, 4) policy and professional expectation response, and 5) school and community connection. These emergent categories and associated codes were derived inductively. The deductive codes from previous conceptual categories (reported in Appendix D) that pertained or related to student centered “best interests” were collapsed into the five new emergent categories. This coding process can be found in Appendix E in the form of a tree diagram.

Just as I had used a concept map for deductive data analysis, I used a taxonomy guide or tree diagram as a data display tool for organizing coded text for inductive data analysis. This process, in turn, assisted me in visualizing and re-conceptualizing thematic categories that *emerged* from the raw data. Findings from these analyses are reported in Chapter 7.

Putting coded information back together in thematic categories that best fit the text, a bottom-up approach that began at a low level of inference, was similar to the procedure I used for sorting and coding data for the phenomenological exploration reported in Chapter 8. Within several of the original central themes (awareness of personal value vs. professional value, duty bounded-ness (work expectation/obligation), discord or clash between personal vs. professional values, and resolving discord or clash), developed deductively, and representing notable concepts found in the theoretical framework, I took clustered meaning units and developed textural descriptions of participants’ experiences using their own words, including verbatim examples. This process followed a data analysis procedure for a phenomenological-like investigation and concluded with my effort to reflectively examine and accurately capture the experiential components of

intrapersonal moral discord experienced by principals as part of the process of deciding ethically when faced with difficult moral choices.

The final step in data analysis, specifically as it relates to the phenomenological perspective in Chapter 8, was taking the separate meanings and understandings of individual participants (in the form of textural descriptions of experience as it relates to moral discord) and synthesizing those descriptions into an isolated expression, or structural description. The resulting structural description provided a depiction of the essence of intrapersonal moral discord when faced with difficult moral choices. Evidence from first-person reports of life experience were reduced to meaning units, substantiated by textural descriptions, and organized into a coherent description of the most essential constituents of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994); or in other words, a composite portrait of professional moral discord as experienced by participants.

This final stage of analysis called for a particular task known as “imaginative variation.” Imaginative variation required me to seek as many possible meanings of articulated experiences through the use “of imagination, varying frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 97-98). Imaginative Variation enabled me to derive a structural theme from textural descriptions, where, as explained by Husserl (1962, pp. 50-51), I found by fantasy (my own subjectivity that constitutes sense and being), “the potential meaning of something that [made] the invisible visible” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98).

## **Limitations**

Qualitative studies are not embarked upon with the intent to generalize to a larger population. As opposed to quantitative and positivistic approaches to acquiring knowledge, favoring specification of variables, control and prediction, this study was a journey of another kind. I make no claims of strict generalizability beyond what was investigated, although results and analysis of findings can contribute to our understanding of educational leaders' professional moral deliberation and inform theory. Judgments can be made by those who wish to apply these data to their own circumstances, research or situations (Kennedy, 1979), and readers will ultimately make a decision about the information's usefulness for other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

As stated earlier in the chapter, part of my goal was to derive a composite portrait of professional moral discord between personal beliefs and values and organizational expectations through publicly accessible experiences that are modes of being "whose logic or sense is invariant for all persons who live them, across time and culture" (Dukes, 1984, p. 198). So in a phenomenological sense, I do make claim to depicting some aspects of a transcendent quality in educational leaders' professional moral decision making, irrespective of the unique facts and varying circumstances of participants contributing to this research.

The methodological procedures and techniques detailed in this chapter serve to address issues of research limitation. Regardless of this fact, my research does not formally consider sociological factors such as a particular organizational climate or the institutional characteristics of mass schooling that could, and clearly do, influence the values, decision making, choices and behaviors of individual actors. Moral agency, from the onset of this research, was understood as situated within the individual person and not

the community. Although values, beliefs, and morality are products and processes of socialization, my interest was in the psychological activity (mind, will, and emotion) of individual persons – both their common and unique understandings and interpretations of the morally unique aspects of the profession of education administration, the expression, “the best interests of the student,” and intrapersonal moral discord experienced when faced with value incongruity between oneself and the organization or profession.

The nature and scope of this study was basic research. By focusing on an empirical contribution to fundamental knowledge and theory within the field of educational values, ethics, and moral leadership, the study was limited in scope. Application of findings and specific policy implications were limited based on my focus in making an empirical contribution to theory development. Also, this study is not a philosophical analysis of moral theory or an argument for or against a particular overriding value within a formalized ethical structure or perspective.

Another very important limitation that I clearly recognize is one specified in the work of Coles (1991, 1986) as he documented the moral and spiritual life of children. Studied at great length by Blasi (1983, 1990), the specific problem is the relationship between the interplay of mind, will and emotions and subsequent behavior. Coles (1986) shares a comment from Carol Gilligan addressing the issue: “The point of a body of psychological research, she pointed out, has to do with an analysis of moral thought, of moral judgment and moral values; and moral behavior, indeed human behavior, is by no means necessarily a direct consequence, in anyone, of ideas” (p. 286). Yet, as Coles (1986) explains, “Kohlberg, especially, has tried to straddle these two worlds; he has tried not only to explore ‘thinking’ but to have an influence on behavior...”(p. 286). Hence the

dilemma: research, the production of ideas and the generation of knowledge and yet the realization that “Pascal’s old division between mind and heart was no mere pre-modern superstition, but an important piece of psychological information that probably scares many of us a great deal” (Coles, 1986, p. 287). I certainly want to know about what is involved in principals’ moral and ethical reasoning and their perspectives about the decisions they have made, but this knowledge does not speak to whether they indeed do or have done what they have said.

In addition, the nature of my research questions and the kind of data collected and analyzed made it difficult to determine an adequate or sufficient sample size. The consequences of using a limited sample of this type include geographic, cultural, and religious distinctiveness, although every effort was made to address these issues in purposeful sampling. Also, this was a study involving secondary school leaders in a public school setting. Whether the findings of this investigation are pertinent for understanding school leadership at the elementary level and non-public sector is open to question.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Findings**

#### **Moral Considerations Unique to the Profession**

The following chapters contain the findings of interview data, observational notes and reflective memos. Findings specifically address the central questions that guided this research and report on secondary principals' perspectives and experiences about their work; namely: the meaning and utility of the expression, "the best interests of the student," the unique moral aspects attributed to professional practice within the field of educational leadership, and the phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord experienced as part of the process of deciding ethically when faced with difficult moral choices.

Chapter 6 is a rendering of the moral interworkings of the profession and moral considerations unique to educational leadership and is primarily based upon a working theory, expressed in the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). Analysis of data in this chapter aligns with central explanations in the theory pertaining to professional life and practice.

Chapter 7 closely examines the use and meaning ascribed to the expression "the best interests of the student" as a moral/ethical consideration in decision making. Analysis in this chapter moves beyond explanations offered by the theory at hand and are based on discrepant data derived from participants' own words when depicting events, experiences, explanations, meanings and personal interpretations and understandings.

Chapter 8 constructs a phenomenology of moral conflict between self and organization/profession in decision making. The Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro &

Stefkovich, 2001, 2005) makes reference to, and elaborates upon, this characteristic of professional moral decision making. The analysis of participants' words indicates experiences and conceptions that can serve to inform and extend the theory.

### **The Moral Interworkings of the Profession**

The Ethic of the Profession attempts to provide an explanation of the various moral considerations that are part of professional decision-making practice and how these considerations converge and are processed by a school leader. By attending to a variety of value sources and reflecting on how multiple and diverse perspectives influence and modify one's own professional moral disposition, knowledge and practice, the Ethic of the Profession framework suggests that moral considerations be grounded in the *prima facie* principle: Serve the best interests of the student. This principle is affirmed as a moral "ideal (that) must lie at the heart of any professional paradigm for educational leaders" (p. 23). Additionally, The Best Interests of the Student Model endeavors to define more precisely what the best interests of the student means for educational leaders.

Participants in this study clearly articulated moral considerations unique to the profession of educational administration. Although several principals had difficulty comparing the moral aspects of their work with the work of other professionals by direct questioning, after some sustained thought and rumination, all could express some moral distinctiveness in their work. Participants' explanations and stories communicated within the space of multiple interview settings provided a picture of professional moral practice. Among the various features of their work deemed to be moral in nature were a set of required virtues (character qualities and dispositions) in order to do the work of school

administration, relationships with professional teaching staff, relationships with students and relationships with administrative staff.

After further consideration, participants indicated that a morality *unique* to the profession consisted of specific practices such as “answering” to and “balancing” the requests of many constituents by negotiating compromises, being a role model under close public scrutiny in and outside the work environment, leading and supporting the moral enterprise of teaching and learning, and special dispositions of feeling committed, or duty bound, to work-life expectations, and possessing a commitment for assuming particular responsibilities to children and youth.

Many principals talked about virtues, or characterological aspects of self, they felt were necessary features of personhood in order to accomplish their particular kind of work in schools. These named virtues were more relational rather than intellectual or self directed, although the latter were cited as well. The virtues mentioned by participants were fairness, honesty (integrity), kindness, respectfulness, empathy, generosity, patience, love, tolerance, genuineness (consideration), humility (recognize mistakes) (do what you ask of others), knowing oneself, perseverance, hard work, risk taking, seeking advice, wisdom (knowledge and judgement), experience, and vision. In describing good moral practice, one veteran administrator described the combination of integrity and perseverance this way: “Follow through. I think a lot of administrators get nailed because they don’t follow through. Part of that [is] resolve – this is the job. It is the combination of those things. Don’t give false impressions.”

In specifying what was meant by integrity, another participant indicated, “When I say integrity, [I mean] just you’re willingness to do the right thing, even when people aren’t

looking.” Integrity figured prominently as an important disposition and was characterized this way by a black, female school leader of a suburban/metropolitan high school:

Integrity. I’ve just kind of grown up that way. My mother always said, ‘the best thing that anyone could say about you – she says she’s gonna do it, she’s gonna do it.’ You can’t buy that. So integrity is really important.

In addition to possessing certain dispositions or virtues, relationships with the professional teaching staff, administration and students were also seen as important moral considerations in the profession. Based on which relationship a principal was referring to would determine the appropriate moral response. In many respects, principals felt responsible to the professional teaching staff and students in their respective buildings; and while this responsibility took different forms as relationships were described, all were centered on the participants’ obligation to establish relational trust and meet specific needs. Relationships with administrative staff took a different form – one of collaboration, negotiation, persuasion and a commitment to processes resulting in compromises.

### ***A Unique Professional Morality***

#### Role Model

A unique moral aspect of the profession, as expressed by most of the participants, was the constant feeling of being in the spotlight when occupying the position of secondary principal. It was not that participants felt like they could never make a mistake or they had to be robotically pure, but that public scrutiny and careful inspection of their motives and actions were constant aspects of their working lives. Most participants expressed this

feature of their work as having a moral dimension – almost like a continuous public malfeasance check. One participant expressed that if she were

cutting corners or doing something incorrect, or immoral, or unethical then that opens the door for everybody to think, ‘she can do it, so can we,’ and you’re a role model – you don’t do those things. You stay human, but you just try to ride that line of doing the right thing for the right reasons.

Every principal expressed an obligation to the broader community rather than just to the immediate work environment. This obligation to a wide constituency took different forms, but a primary aspect of this particular duty was a continual reference to being a morally upright public figure. As one administrator stated, “I think you make some sacrifices in this profession that you don’t necessarily have to make in some other professions. I think it just has to do with spotlight. We’re under that 24/7. Another participant expressed this moral aspect of the profession a bit differently:

You know we’re in the constant limelight and there are very few hidden features....In reality, I’m telling you this is like the open book, this is the public, I don’t [want to] say a public spectacle, but I’m telling you what, I mean there’s not too many things with the role of the principalship that goes unnoticed – whether it be by kids, teachers, the (central office), or just the general community person. I mean it’s a pretty open book situation and it’s really amazing. And if you don’t really have any kind of integrity, and when I say integrity, just your willingness to do the right thing, even when people aren’t looking, you can very easily be devoured by the system itself.

Participants clearly saw themselves as public figures required to uphold community values, mores and expectations whether in rural, suburban or urban settings. A few depicted the experience of being “under the microscope”; particularly while conducting themselves at school. In addition, principals viewed themselves as special role models for teachers and students. This sentiment was expressed in several different ways, but essentially involved holding themselves to a “higher bar” and being attuned to the immorality of a double standard. One participant stated that “you have to be able to get your hands dirty, you have to be able to do what [you] expect the infantry to do if you [are] truly going to be the leader. So in that sense, that’s a quality you [got to] have.”

This attitude was common among participants and expressed in different ways. One male principal from a suburban/metropolitan region stated that “you...set high standards for your teachers and you ask them to work hard and do extra things – well you better be strutting that tune yourself.” The moral aspect of being a special role model to staff was clearly expressed by a young principal new to his first assignment at the high school level.

I think I hold the bar higher for myself...I would like my staff to get there, but again, they haven’t selected to go into this, they’re in that teaching realm, they’re in that model realm, but they’re not in that leadership realm. So, for me, I hold myself to a different criterion than what I hold them. I’d like them to aspire to that.

A few principals also talked about their responsibility of being a role model for children. Although this idea was not prevalent, it was mentioned as a moral consideration by a few leaders who viewed being a role model as fulfilling students’ needs – particularly by way of the principals’ relationships with students.

### Teaching and Learning Enterprise

Another unique moral consideration of the profession was principals' clear emphasis on their obligation as leaders to encourage, support and expect high quality teaching methods of standards based content that includes rigorous thinking demand for *all* students. Principals saw their moral obligation as "pushing people into areas beyond their comfort zone." A central part of their job was ensuring pedagogy and programs were in place so students had the best possible learning opportunities and experienced the positive results of academic achievement. Part of the moral push was working with teachers to fully accept the mission of public education and engender a "willingness to teach all students, not chosen students." Interviewees accepted the premise that "all kids can learn" and it was their responsibility to push faculty in finding ways to address the unique learning needs of students. A black, female participant from a suburban/metropolitan school district explained her expectation for the faculty:

It's their job to realize that they're doing it [teaching] only one way and they need to do it several ways so they can reach the diversity of learners in their classroom.

That's certainly...moral and ethical work because everyone does not think and learn the same way.

This moral stance involved principals preaching accountability to their respective staffs and setting the expectation that they were looking closely at instruction and how student achievement had been impacted. Principals acknowledged the importance of a clear, unified curriculum aligned to state standards, and even though most expressed misgivings about the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind legislation) and its student achievement thresholds for 2014 that mandate one

hundred percent academic proficiency from all students, every principal, except one, believed that strict accountability was merited. One principal stated that accountability “has forced us to take a hard look at our instruction. It’s an assessment of learning. Philosophically, you can’t argue with the fact that we should produce kids that can read, write, and do math. You can’t argue that.”

A black, male principal in an urban middle school felt very strongly about the moral imperative for high quality teaching methods and rigorous thinking for students in his socially and economically diverse school setting. He stated:

We have to be responsible for some things, and what is the harm exactly with being responsible for implementing standardized tests, results, scores. I think there needs to be some kind of impetus that spurs on the movement of change, no matter how uncomfortable people become. We can be dormant about it and not address the problems, but does that necessarily mean that the children are going to be any better in their lives while I’m neglecting this. I think that’s our job. If we’re solely into education there should be a side of us that we want to provide the best instruction, and that we want to push the best instruction that we possibly can knowing that they’re [going to] be better for it. I don’t see anything wrong with requirements.”

It was clear that principals believed the business of education is teaching and learning and the enterprise has profound moral implications. Some principals indicated the moral imperative as a “hard core response”: “teaching hasn’t happened if learning hasn’t occurred.” The moral pressure of accountability was expressed in a different way by another participant:



Is the teacher accountable? Yes they are. Do they know I expect that when I visit their classroom? Absolutely. Is it hard, was it hell? Yes. Good things are hard work, and there are a lot of teachers, they'd tell you they hated it, but I think the majority of teachers here will say, 'you know what, I'm probably a better teacher now.'

By focusing on instruction, principals acknowledged their "charge to do a job" where everyone benefits – students, teachers, schools and ultimately society.

One principal had a different view about strict accountability in the form of state standardized testing. He believed that, for his students, testing did not meet their needs or provide any useful or lasting purpose for their education. This principal, who leads an alternative education school said,

I think ultimately we lost something when somebody says this is the one test, this is the one tool that answers all of our problems. And it's just not there. It doesn't exist. And I think that we want to make a test that says this proves this. It might prove that for that day, but it may not have proved that overall. I would be really cautious about how heavy we look at snapshots. I think it's better to look at the movie than just a couple frames here and there.

For this principal, working with students who are "at risk" of not only dropping out of school, but of incalculable other risks such as substance abuse, addiction and death by homicide, getting "kids to care about the test...doesn't have much end to it." According to this administrator, testing for accountability might have some benefits for communities who can say they have good schools, but he doubts there is much benefit for his students.

Additionally, one principal of a large comprehensive urban high school, who recognized the importance of "teaching to the rigors of the curriculum", indicated that

accountability and responsibility are two distinctly different aspects of the moral quality of teaching and learning. He stated the matter in concise terms:

I think accountability – that’s a paper word. That’s bean counter talk, whereas responsibility is something within the relationship with the student. And we can never lose sight of the fact that when we’re working in schools, we’re working with relationships, more than we’re working with beans.

#### Professional Commitment and Obligation

Interviewees talked at length about being duty bound to laws, policies, rules, institutional procedures and professional expectations. This sense of obligation permeated our discussions about moral and ethical decision making. Within the context of both responding to a vignette depicting a moral dilemma and conversations with participants’ about their own stories and experiences, principals were sensitive to administrative directives within the “chain of command.” Following policies was important for younger principals, while more seasoned leaders indicated taking, what they described as, morally motivated liberties where policies would be massaged or outright violated based on personal discretion, their own view of what was right so as not to violate their conscience, or satisfying the demands of a hard compromise within a particular circumstance.

One participant, a black, female school leader in a suburban/metropolitan region with strong spiritual beliefs indicated she was duty bound “literally to [her] own morals and values, something [she was] not [going to] go against.” Although she indicated she would, without trepidation, go to court for the consequences of her actions based on her personal beliefs, she qualified this stance by indicating that being a good leader requires a

measure of “practicality.” She said that “a lot of times practicality doesn’t go along with your morals and values and that’s the truth.” Unless an issue constituted a major value or philosophical difference, for this participant, it was better to temporarily suspend her own perception of right and good and any action that might follow until there was an appropriate time to respond. She explained that,

we bring how we were raised and all that into whatever job we do – it comes with you. You bring you with you, and so sometimes you can’t dig that deep, you just have to do what is the right thing as far as the practical thing to do.

She gave an illustration of a student wearing inappropriate attire in her school and how she could either respond to the student’s dress by disrupting his instructional day and moralizing to him in her office based on her own sense of values or take a practical stance and patiently wait until the right opportunity presented itself in order to express her values and expectations about appropriate and acceptable dress during school.

Although this psychological suspension of personal morality was referenced by additional participants, all eleven principals either directly stated or processed the interview dilemma with a clear eye toward the “bottom line,” which necessarily meant responding to directives. The sense of obligation to policy and professional expectation was not depicted by participants as blind and uncritical “doing what you’re told.” One principal of a rural high school with significant experience said, “There’s always room for flexibility, for patience. I feel duty bound if that’s what you have to do. I think you can be flexible on your application sometimes and your interpretation.” And a young principal of a rural high school explained his expectation of what professional commitment should be: “no one’s in a leadership position just to be a robot to carry

things out. There has to be a trust. I would definitely question myself why even be in that district if we're not on the same page, honestly.” Another principal expressed his duty as being a critical thinker. He said:

My superintendent I have now says, ‘I pay you to think. There’s exceptions to every rule...every policy, I pay you to think.’ When I first started in this business I thought I was doing a great job because somebody told me to do it, I did it – right, wrong, black, white, this was the rule this is the policy, boom, done. I’m not sure I was a good administrator.

Several participants were quick to note that experiencing a sense of professional commitment and duty goes far beyond responsibilities to staff, organizational and bureaucratic rules and procedures, parents, the local community or the profession itself. The whole notion of what the “profession” expects was viewed by some as open to wide interpretation, but one thing was certain, especially those who indicated religious or spiritual influences in their lives – there is an intrinsic, personal obligation to the work principals engage in on a daily basis. Even those who did not reference religious or spiritual influences in their personal lives indicated in some manner or fashion that the job “chose them.”

This duty was described as “a calling” by several participants and they labor as school leaders because “this is what [they] were made to do.” One participant said, “I think as I’ve developed [over time] I’ve sensed my own calling to this – my internal preparation, the experiences in my life, preparing me for administration, in particular public schools.” This sentiment was reflected in other similar expressions by principals who believed they

were especially obligated to their fellow man and neighbors and derived a sense of deep fulfillment from responding to an “indebtedness” to others. One interviewee said,

anybody can be duty bound and kind of a manager, but it’s a different scenario to be an obligated leader, in other words, there’s almost an intrinsic kind of worth or value there, that it’s more than the job, you do it because part of it is who you are, and you recognize an obligation or an indebtedness that you owe to others.

The weight of obligation that goes beyond carrying out policies and directives while accomplishing the daily technical and administrative tasks of running a school was expressed as “going deeper.” School administrators described themselves as educators, counselors, parents and “a lot of things to a kid,” who will, as community leaders, “bend over more,” not necessarily self-sacrificingly, but who will take a giving posture that exceeds other professions. This sense of duty transcends competing, and in many instances, irreducible values, circumstances and milieus. A belief in something due our neighbor or an indebtedness to human kind was expressed this way: “We’re all here in this particular environment as Americans, and we believe that there is a certain level of expectation for education for all of our kids.”

This special obligation, unique to the profession of the principalship, was expressed by one administrator as specific student training in “acquiring a sensitivity to mankind.” Participants viewed the purpose of education as training beyond the intellect to using intellect “to help society or mankind wherever you are”, and by focusing on this kind of “productive and purposeful endeavor,” ideals of character are potentially instilled in children. Two middle school principals were especially attuned to this moral obligation, and one expressed this opinion:

There needs to be some character, and I think part of the academic rigor we provide actually brings about maturity and character. I believe in experiences like that.

Character [means] doing the right thing when nobody's looking. The whole idea about persevering when there's difficulties – what do you do when you fail? These are the ideals that we push.

### Negotiating Compromise

Principals expressed a moral requirement to negotiate compromise and manage intractable competing moral values. The very nature of their work demanded they take upon themselves a mediational stance, or act as a “buffer” between competing aims, goals and purposes among a wide variety of constituents. Participants readily talked about trying to balance claims and interests in many different situations. One participant noted that there are

many constituencies that you have to answer to...the administrative staff, the professional staff, the support staff. And when I say answer, I mean those are part of your considerations. Those are the circles that you're dealing with – to the students themselves, to their parents, to the community.

Principals noted that lots of people have different competing values, and you can't do the work alone, so therefore you must make an effort to “find that middle ground” which, in many cases, is not common to anyone. Negotiation is to bring about “palatable” conditions in a flux of competing value claims. As one principal from a large urban high school noted:

I try to do what is right for a variety of people. I try to maintain that balance between what's right for the student. [What] I think [is] right for the parent with that student in

conjunction with the school. I think we try to do what's right within the school setting for the people of the school as well...I try to do those things, and balance those things out. That is a very difficult situation sometimes.

Other principals expressed a similar attitude where compromises are negotiated over children, families, the school and community. "Educating the child isn't done in isolation" and there are "so many different interest groups [that] just go on and on..." I was told by participants that part of professional expectations is to "smooth the problem[s] out and make it (whatever 'it' might be) work." One principal went as far as to say, "for lack of a better word, manipulate the environment and the situation to somehow – I don't mean placate or satisfy – but somehow bring about positive compromise for outcomes.

This is not to say principals were not value motivated toward consensus (or consequence as well); they were. One experienced principal of a rural high school honestly stated that:

Sometimes when I sense and feel that I'm forcing the decision based on what will make other people happy, be it a student being bad, or [an issue] with a teacher...[decisions] may be more hard than they are moral, but they are moral dilemmas because there's a moral choice of meeting a consensus or expectations of others [or] following [your] own personal expectations of what's right.

What is striking about the overall responses of principals is the moral weight given to negotiating compromise, what is called "satisficing" (Simon, 1957), rather than necessarily being motivated to derive consensus in determining the will of the majority or motivated to judge and act for a desired future outcome (consequence). This particular

aspect of leadership calls for managing repetitive instances of value conflict that require judgment, and that judgment is gray. Framing, interpretation and not “just looking [for issues] to be black and white” are necessary practices that rise to the level of moral competency. One middle aged principal of a large suburban high school, who once was a strict rule follower, said, “the longer I sit in this chair, the greyer I get.” He meant by this statement that making ethical decisions was not always easy, clear cut or derived with moral certitude because of the mix of values operating between people and circumstances. Another veteran principal of an urban high school indicated a similar sentiment:

As you move through the administrative ranks, you do this quicker because you go from an area where things are somewhat black and white to now there’s gray – gray areas. The farther up the ladder you go administratively, the more gray there is and the less black and the less white, until you get to be superintendent and baby it’s all gray. I mean everything is relative and movable and politicized. So there is right, and I think that we strive to do that, but unfortunately we are hampered by a series of things that keep us from doing the right things sometimes. And we’re hampered through well meaning folks.

The act of weighing and balancing value claims was described as a frustrating process for school principals – one aspect of their work they didn’t enjoy very much, but nevertheless part and parcel of their moral practice as a responsive and effective school leader.

### Special Responsibilities to Children and Youth



Overwhelmingly, principals indicated a commitment for assuming particular responsibilities to children and youth. This unique moral dimension of the profession is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7. Special responsibilities to students were expressed in a variety of ways by each participant. Most expressed both a personal and professional obligation to work with the kids. As one female high school principal stated, "I want to do what's best and right for them (students)." A special responsibility to children was described as "providing", "guiding" and "helping", along with educating on intellectual, social and emotional levels. This unique responsibility to children was, more often than not, viewed as fiduciary. Principals saw their relationships with children as having a special legal status that obliged them to build trusting relationships on the belief that all students have "value" and "worth." Several participants depicted themselves as a dad or mom responsible for making "decisions and creating opportunities for experiences that are in line with [students' needs]." This required "knowing and having enough information about...kids to be able to do that for them."

One participant shared insights about his morally unique relationships with students: "Students are special and no matter how they appear [to] resent [my "corny" interest], they kind of like somebody to be excited about their education. A lot of it is based on relationships. You know when I was talking about care, you're told that you're unique, somebody cares for you – that relationship. If you walk in this building right now you'll see people engaged. Yeah, we got our problems, this is a hot bucket for problems, but in other areas we are growing."

Obviously, this special status of substitute parent has been recognized in the courts for decades as the doctrine, *in loco parentis*, and although frequently invoked, many courts

and legislatures have restricted its applicability – particularly when the principle connotes issues of school official power and authority over students. The doctrine of *in loco parentis* has weakened over time as a result of the courts’ recognition of students’ constitutional rights while attending school. Despite this fact, participants strongly believed “the law...put [them] on an upper plane – in the role of a substitute parent” where “the safety, welfare and education of students” is a priority. Stated with force and candor by a senior, long-time high school principal:

Bottom line is they’re kids and they’re here for us to help guide them and take care [of them] while we are with them, and help show them what’s best for them at this particular point, much like being a parent. And that’s what the phrase *in loco parentis* means, and I still strongly believe that – that’s why we’re here, to guide them as a parent. They don’t always need to understand why we do things. It goes with the territory. There’s a reason. Schools are run by adults, kids attend the schools. I have no adults attending my school, I have kids attending my school. I structure the rules for kids; I structure the guidelines for kids. I structure all of that for kids. Adults run the school, hopefully adults run the homes, and they’re doing the same things for kids in homes. I unfortunately know in reality that’s not necessarily so, but that would be a perfect world.

## **Conclusion**

Participants clearly articulated what they considered to be unique moral aspects of the profession of educational administration. All expressed, what they believed to be, the moral distinctiveness of their work. The explanations and stories of participants revealed various considerations they deemed to be moral in nature including required virtues

(habits of character and dispositions) in order to do the work of school administration, relationships with professional teaching staff, relationships with students, and relationships with administrative staff. Morality *unique* to the profession consisted of specific practices such as “answering” to and “balancing” the requests of many constituents by negotiating compromises, being a role model under close public scrutiny in and outside the work environment, leading and supporting the moral enterprise of teaching and learning, and special dispositions of feeling committed, or duty bound, to work-life expectations, and possessing a commitment for assuming particular responsibilities to children and youth. These characterizations constitute a defined and clearly evident professional ethos.

The following two chapters address additional themes that emerged from participant interviews. Of particular importance are principals’ conceptions of the meaning of the expression, “the best interests of the student” and the unique relational and obligatory role they have with students. These findings are reported in Chapter 7. Additionally, Chapter 8 constructs a phenomenology of internal moral conflict between participants’ personal values and the organizational or professional values and expectations they were to adhere to as part of their professional decision making. The Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005) makes reference to, and elaborates upon, this characteristic of professional moral decision making. The goal of Chapter 8 is to illuminate and make more explicit the process and structure of internal moral discord experienced by secondary school principals when faced with, what was for them, challenging, value-conflicting circumstances.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Findings**

#### **Where Virtue and Obligation Meet: The Best Interests of the Student**

This chapter closely examines the use and meaning ascribed to the expression “the best interests of the student” as a moral/ethical consideration in decision making.

Analysis in this chapter moves beyond explanations offered by the Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006) and are based on discrepant data derived from participants’ own words when depicting events, experiences, explanations, meanings and personal interpretations and understandings.

The Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005) attempts to provide an explanation of the various moral considerations that are part of professional decision-making practice and how these considerations converge and are processed by a school leader. By attending to a variety of value sources and reflecting on how multiple and diverse perspectives influence and modify one’s own professional moral disposition, knowledge and practice, the Ethic of the Profession framework suggests that moral considerations be grounded in the prima facie principle: Serve the best interests of the student. This principle is affirmed as a moral “ideal (that) must lie at the heart of any professional paradigm for educational leaders” (p. 23). Additionally, the Ethic of the Profession’s Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests (Stefkovich, 2006) endeavors to define more precisely what the best interests of the student means for educational leaders.

As stated in Chapter 6, principals overwhelmingly indicated a commitment to assuming particular responsibilities to children and youth. This unique moral dimension of the profession involved special responsibilities to students as expressed in a variety of ways by each participant. Most expressed both a personal and professional obligation to work with kids. A special responsibility to children was described as “providing”, “guiding” and “helping”, along with educating on intellectual, social and emotional levels. This unique responsibility to children was, more often than not, viewed as fiduciary. Principals saw their relationships with children as having a special legal status that obliged them to build trusting relationships based on the belief that all students have “value” and “worth.” Several participants depicted themselves as a dad or mom who were responsible for making “decisions and creating opportunities for experiences that are in line with [students’ needs].” Having knowledge of and information about students in a compulsory setting placed the principal, in many participants’ views, on a higher legal plane as substitute parent, and this special status has been recognized in the courts for decades as the doctrine, *in loco parentis*. If the special legal standing was not directly referenced as that of a substitute parent it was expressed by participants as one of trusting supervision and control.

The courts have acknowledged in the past that, for many educational purposes, school officials should act *in loco parentis*, which connotes power and duty to inculcate manners of civility in schoolchildren. And as mentioned in Chapter 6, the doctrine of *in loco parentis* has weakened over time as a result of the courts’ recognition of students’ constitutional rights while attending school; particularly that schools’ power over children and youth is formally different than what might be delegated by parents. School

officials are state actors who exercise a form of parental power, but that power is subject to constitutional constraints.

If participants did not speak directly of their obligation as a substitute parent, they clearly made reference to their custodial or tutelary role of providing supervision and control of students (*Vernonia v. Acton*, 1995). When it came to issues of health, safety, welfare, education and enforcement of rules, principals, under no uncertain terms, viewed their role as supervisory and necessary since “schools are run by adults and kids attend the schools.”

### **Students’ Best Interests and Vignette Responses**

The first interview conducted with each participant, within a two-part interview sequence procedure, required principals to read and respond to a dilemma vignette about a high school principal dealing with dictates from his superintendent pertaining to curriculum and instruction issues in order to meet accountability measures by way of student achievement testing. Principals’ responses to the dilemma were surprisingly similar, especially when responding to issues about uniform academic standards and accounting of students’ standardized test scores. Most principals favored such practices and believed them to be in their students’ best interests. They were not blindly uncritical of testing policy, but generally they embraced accountability practices and felt that setting high academic standards and expectations for students, and equally high performance standards for teachers, were serving the needs of students, their respective communities and society at large. For many principals, serving the best interests of the student was focusing on the central work of schooling, teaching and learning, and sustained academic rigor for all students. In addition, prior to any direct questioning

about the meaning and utility of the expression, “the best interests of the student” principals used the saying readily in responding to questions about the dilemma vignette.

When participants were asked, “What is the protagonist, Charlie’s, ultimate responsibility?,” or “What would the profession expect Charlie to do in this case?,” the overwhelming response was “do what’s best for the students.” This kind of response was articulated long before direct prompts and questioning about the phrase “the best interests of the students” occurred toward the end of the second interview within a two-part interview sequence procedure. All but one principal framed the best interests of students as responding creatively, in some fashion, to the accountability dictates from a dissatisfied school board and superintendent as depicted in the vignette. In their views, serving the interests of children and meeting their needs was closely connected with a curriculum aligned to state academic standards that offers high thinking demand and that sets students up for success for state accountability assessments. One suburban high school principal put it this way: “That’s why you’re here, for the kids and you want the kids to be successful. And if they’re not successful, that’s an issue for them.” Principals overwhelmingly believed they were not helping kids or the community by neglecting the hard work of improving student academic achievement and responding to ever stiffer accountability requirements. “Making sure children are up to par” in order to “produce better performers, better thinkers” was a common sentiment.

#### Focusing on Teaching and Learning

Participant responses to the vignette indicated general support for policies that encourage high academic achievement expectations for students, the curricular modifications necessary to reach those expectations and the continuous instructional

improvement required to serve all students as unique learners. Even though standards and accountability policies at the federal and state level were viewed as a one size fits all expectation for student performance, all participants, except one, believed that rigorous academic demands and the accounting of student performance by standardized testing was an appropriate and even necessary way to serve students' best interests. All the participants, after reading the vignette, sympathized with the protagonist, Charlie, and his plight of immediately responding to curricular and instructional dictates from the central office. Participants were disturbed by the ultimate motivation of improving the school district's image with the community when it came to student performance on state tests. Principals were certainly not naïve about the political and public relations aspects of student performance, but their overwhelming concern was for student benefit in their immediate context. Practices such as teaching to state academic standards, expecting most students to meet or exceed those standards, and testing students to ensure they are indeed academically proficient were entirely suitable and important aspects in serving the best interests of students.

Many principals talked about what was in a student's best interest as "being happy, being successful and getting an education." Getting an education entailed a number of priorities, but succinctly expressed by one young high school principal who said:

Ultimately the accountability rests with us. People who benefit are the kids.

Ultimately, that's who it's going to benefit. We're working for the kid to get them to a level that we perceive they're going to need no matter where they're going, whether it's a two year [college], four year [college], directly into the workforce, [or] skill based trade. We need to get them to wherever they're going.



Principals believed that accountability for student achievement is important because “students are our clients and customers.” Serving the best interests of students was viewed as providing a quality education so the future benefits of academic and intellectual skills, along with habits of productive citizenry, are developed in students before they graduate from high school. A black, female school administrator indicated that curricular and instructional change and improvement is not immediate, but “it’s like keeping your eye on the sparrow: making sure that you provide as many productive students that leave your establishment to society.” A middle aged, suburban high school principal indicated that although there are plenty of politics involved with federal and state accountability mandates, “the fact that we’re holding our instructors accountable, that they’re raising the standards for our kids to read, write and do math, and the fact that we’re expecting the kids to meet higher standards – you can’t argue with that, that’s a good thing!”

The “bottom line” for many principals was putting programming in place that “will help students perform.” A black, male middle school principal in a city school system had some of the strongest views about accountability policies and rigorous academic programming. He spoke passionately about the importance of setting high academic and behavioral expectations for students and firmly believed that what is in the best interests of students is a curriculum based on academic standards, excellent instructional practice, and being accountable for student achievement. He also indicated how he served as a buffer or shield against those within and without the profession who dispute or outright reject standards-based accountability for students, teachers, schools and districts. In expressing his ultimate responsibility in “doing what’s best for the students” he said:

We have to...look at the practices that the state is actually dictating. Now some people want to debate about the logic or the potential success [of policy]; and you know personally, I don't get caught up with it in that sense. I'm thinking about what good instructional practices we can implement in order to help these students perform better. That's where I'm at with it. I regularly deal with naysayers, whether it's in the community, whether it's from other educators, and I waste very little time with that because to me it's useless. I know we've been charged to do a job, and I don't think it's a bad idea about standardizing instructional content, or having a baseline saying that this child needs to be able to perform, or that this child should have acquired these skills by such and such grade level. I don't see anything terrible about that. I think that in reality there needs to be some kind of academic development guidelines.

The majority of participants held the same or similar view about teaching and learning in a policy environment focused on accountability and testing. Many principals spoke about "the profession demanding they be who they are" as educators by focusing on the academic performance of students. Many talked about some of the school-based procedures and practices they established in order to increase student achievement including creating and implanting policies and working with teachers to improve instruction. Principals, by in large, indicated assuming responsibility for accountability practices in their schools and viewed those practices as positive and constructive "opportunities" for children.

According to participants, the best interests of students were served by designing homework make-up policies that force teachers to do more than put a zero in their grade book, requiring out of school time instruction for students who do not demonstrate

proficiency in reading and mathematics, working diligently with central office personnel to ensure a curriculum aligned to state standards and then monitoring the teaching of that curriculum, standardizing lesson plan formats for academic departments, developing a master schedule based on student academic needs rather than teacher preferences, and observing, supervising and developing teachers, particularly as these leadership practices pertain to instruction and its impact on student achievement. According to one participant, “If you’re going to be a good, effective principal today you have to be able to offer exciting curriculum and also be able to meet standards.” This sentiment was reiterated by another principal who said:

I think that’s our job. If we’re solely into education there should be a side of us that we want to provide the best instruction, and that we want to push the best instruction that we possibly can knowing that they’re [students] going to be better for it.

The belief that teachers benefit from accountability practices was evident in participant responses to the vignette. Working with teachers to improve practice and emphasizing the moral quality of the teaching and learning process was part of principals’ understanding of what’s in the best interests of students. Even though this aspect of serving the needs of students was prevalent, participants were careful to qualify what they meant by accountability, especially when it comes to instructional improvement. As one female middle school principal stated:

We need to be accountable, and accountability has a double edge to it. It depends to what degree you’re going to take accountability. Are you going to use it as a weapon or are you going to use it as a measuring gauge? A measuring gauge is wonderful; to use it as a punishment tool, I think is wrong.

Measuring teacher effectiveness and improving instructional practice involved, for several participants, reminding, encouraging and challenging teachers to think about and respond pedagogically to the moral imperative of their work with students.

A common sentiment among principals was “every kid is teachable, every kid is reachable; you just have to find how.” By no means did principals abrogate their responsibility to teachers; rather they felt it was important to care for, support, motivate and lead faculty and those who deal with students directly. Whether support was in the form of resources, information, or professional development, by principals taking a caring, motivating and leading stance, the best interests of students could be realized in their schools. Some of the work of participants involved teaching their own lessons about being willing to instruct all students not just chosen students, changing beliefs about how students should be treated, sensitizing teachers to the unique characteristics of learners in their classrooms and the responsibility they have to provide support and adaptations for individual student needs. This philosophy of serving clients as educational experts was expressed by many participants and was a central focus of their response in serving the best interest of students.

Principals expected their teachers to embrace and use best instructional practices, and they signaled to teachers that they were accountable to their own practice and the academic achievement of their students. As one male suburban high school principal noted, “It’s my job to show them [teachers] the big picture and at least try to have them understand that we are here for the kids, we are responsible for them and we are responsible for their wellbeing.” More often than not, the wellbeing of students translated into rigorous thinking demand, intellectual growth and academic achievement. Principals

indicated that in their work with teachers they tried to emphasize the moral obligation of pressing students toward their intellectual and academic potentials. For one urban middle school principal the work involved instilling a “vision of what the purpose of schooling is about.” He goes on to say:

I’ll tell you what, every time I walk into a house and see the circumstances that kids live in that reminds me of my obligation. One of the things I talk about is they [students] may not be able to change today, but their education might help them to have an impact on their future. They can overcome some of those circumstances.

Several principals were skeptical about the ultimate objectives of federal and state policies; particularly the expectation that all students be academically proficient at their respective grade levels by the year 2014. Principals believed this mandate was unrealistic, even though they were broadly supportive of accountability practices including curriculum modification, challenging coursework, academic standards, measuring student and school performance, state level standardized assessment, and teacher supervision and professional development.

One female high school principal indicated that even though the benefits of school accountability practices go to the student, the “standardized testing component is a small piece of the pie...testing is part of a whole package.” For this principal, “serving the best interests of students by providing a quality education,” was a belief constructed over time by working in an alternative education school. She believed that part of being accountable was creating programming and changing the school environment for students who could not manage the regular school day. This perspective was reiterated by a principal of an alternative school. His perspective about testing, standards and

accountability policy was dramatically different from the other participants in the study. In fact he believed, for the children he served, accountability practices in general were not in the best interests of students.

By no means did this principal consider his responsibility to students limited to basic health, safety and welfare issues, although they were weighty considerations for him. He was sensitized to communications from the school district central office on how students attending his school performed on state level standardized tests and felt the obligation to address student achievement. But his perspective ran counter to other participants in the study mainly because of his individualized focus on students who are “at risk” not only of dropping out of school, but of any number of life obstacles, challenges and misfortunes. In the only counter example among principals interviewed in this investigation, a cautious and critical view of ever increasing high stakes assessment led this principal to reject the validity of yearly, one-time, isolated, single-measure quantifications of student achievement. He forcefully stated that:

We are so different as human beings...and there is a beauty in that, otherwise we'd all be the same. That's a reason why I'm not a big proponent of standardized testing.... I'm not a huge supporter of a standardized test that the entire state must teach to. I kind of hate it, especially in my background here. Trying to get these kids to care about their test scores is pretty much [like] trying to teach a blind man how to decorate a house – it doesn't really have much end to it....If our kids meet yearly progress or yearly proficiency, have they benefited from that? I don't know.... I think ultimately we lost something when somebody says this is the one test, this is the one tool that answers all of our problems.... I think that it is important to make sure that

some discretion is ultimately used in the accountability...I think that we want to make a test that says 'this proves this;' [and] it might prove that for a day. I would be really cautious about snapshots. I think it's better to look at the movie than just a couple frames here and there.... So anyway, the accountability thing...if it's working well the community benefits.... Communities can say we have good schools and therefore people will move there, and real estate values go up, and businesses grow,...but I can't say that the individual student [benefits].

For this principal, and the rest of the participants, education was more than just formal teaching and learning. Education was viewed as being responsible and responsive to the entire student and not just the academic or intellectual side of the person.

### **Personal Meanings and the Nuances of “Best Interests” Beyond the Vignette**

With a clear focus on the primacy of teaching and learning, principals were mindful that education was more than just classroom instruction and academic achievement. Education included the participants' responsibility to address and respond to the “whole child,” and this responsible response was achieved by either coordinating or encouraging close relationships between children and school staff or with the principals themselves. Many participants spoke about taking a holistic perspective when working with students and that serving the best interests of students demanded that they respond to the entire person in their own uniqueness. This perspective was common among administrators at both the middle and high school levels.

Direct questioning about the meaning and utility of the expression “the best interests of the student” occurred toward the end of the second interview within a two-interview sequence procedure. Responses varied as to the meaning of the phrase and each

participant provided a nuanced perspective on his/her understanding of the expression. By in large, principals indicated that the best interests of the student included “many facets” and was based on circumstance and context. One principal noted that, “to me education is more than just reading a book, this whole experience is straight up education. We’re educating them socially, emotionally, how to interact appropriately with people, how to comply [with] rules, regulations and expectations.” This view was reiterated many times as “the bottom line is the students,” “the students are what we’re here for,” and “this profession is not about me, it’s not about teachers, it’s about the clientele that walks through our door everyday.” One female high school principal put it this way:

The best interests of the student means looking at them as entire human beings – academic, career aspirations and future orientation, social and emotional needs, and especially now, achievement. You can’t get to maximum achievement until you get rid of the rest of the baggage. It means working with the whole child...to meet those needs.

When principals thought about the best interests of students they thought holistically – “the complete person” comprising social, emotional and intellectual needs, unique to the individual student, and the services provided to meet those needs, including expert classroom instruction.

Principals focused on the entire health, safety, welfare, education package as constituting the best interests of students. They viewed this package as their responsibility in service to children, parents and their communities. For many administrators, the best interests of students involved decision making and action that create opportunities and experiences “that are in line with where that student is,” or



“looking at what their needs are and what their current level of ability is” and figuring out how to respond to and address those needs and ability levels. Good moral practice was viewed as, among other things, “being able to do what’s best for students” and “even if we’re doing great, we should still be doing something to help them be greater.” One school leader reiterated this perspective by explaining how a concerted focus on high quality teaching and learning and setting high academic expectations for students results in much more than just intellectual growth and achievement. He explained:

[These are] some of the traits we try to gear to the students. There’s a right way [and] there’s a wrong way to do things. There’s definitely, I believe, a part of...education that your intellect isn’t the sole purpose, it’s not just totally about intellectual ability, but it’s almost like acquiring a sensitivity to mankind. Think about it, there’s been some smart people, but virtually they’ve been like dictators or sadists or whatever the case, but if you can use your intelligence perhaps to help society or mankind wherever you are, that’s a...more effective, productive person; [a] purposeful kind of endeavor. There needs to be some character, and I think part of the academic rigor we provide actually brings about maturity and character. I believe in experiences like that – doing the right thing when nobody’s looking, persevering when there are difficulties, [and knowing] what do you do when you fail.

By framing the best interests of the student as responding to “the complete person,” participants’ assumed for themselves a unique responsibility for either coordinating or encouraging close relationships between children and school staff and/or establishing relationships with students themselves. This kind of relationship was characterized by many principals as always “erring on the side of the kid” or measuring their interactions

by asking the question “Is this good for kids [or the kid]?” As principals told their own stories about working with students and faculty, they provided many illustrations of what it meant to serve the best interests of students; and with their responses to direct questioning, a depiction of the responsible, responding relationship emerged as one of personal investment.

Every participant expressed a moral viewpoint that reached far beyond formal professional obligation. Personal investment in students was described in many ways but primarily centered on being sensitive to students’ needs, expressing care in a way that demonstrated genuine concern for children’s wellbeing and assuming responsibility for relationships that emulated parental guidance and direction. Participants believed either the expression, “the best interests of the student,” or their descriptions of the special responsibilities they had to children and youth involved possessing relational qualities and dispositions, characterological aspects of themselves, that afforded the recognition and response of what was in a student’s or the students’ best interests. Most principals used and described the expression “the best interests of (the) student(s)” as a principle or rule, but not only as such in order to make decisions. Every participant interpreted the best interests of students as a way of responding morally by being who they were as people. One male, suburban high school principal illustrated the disposition of personal investment this way:

I have a personal obligation to try to get every kid in this school, as a senior, a high school diploma – a professional obligation, but at the same time, I take it personally. Those kids, that’s my job. If there are 20 kids that aren’t meeting our graduation project requirement I call every single kid in that’s not meeting that requirement and I

meet with [them], yes, personally....It's my obligation to get them through. Our graduation project is stiff...it's one of the toughest in the state. If they don't get through, we have very few kids here that don't graduate, but if they don't, I personally know that I did everything I could do to help them get to where they had to go. I'm not going to do their coursework for them, I'm not going to do their studying for them, I'm not going to do any of that. But I can tell you I've met with every single kid since I've been here, personally, sat them down, talked to them: 'What can we do?,' 'Do you understand what the requirements are?' [I] got inside their heads a little bit; and I don't know if you can do more than that. Yes, it's professional and personal.

For most administrators, interest, concern and love for children was expressed on a personal level, and being invested meant responding to the needs of one or many students irrespective of group consensus or personal consequence.

Recognizing and responding to individual students' uniqueness and worth was not always depicted by participants as following a principle or rule, but rather by *being* considerate and *having* consideration. As one school leader noted, "Students need to know, as an administrator, that you value them." Good moral practice was described as a way of being in addition to citing the injunction "do what's best for kids," or using the expression "the best interests of (the) student(s)" as a formal rule. Moral practice meant being and acting a certain way. Several of the virtues enumerated in Chapter 6 were used by principals to define what they meant by the phrase, "the best interests of the student," in response to question 13 toward the end of the second interview protocol. The virtues most frequently mentioned or illustrated were: responsibility, love, care, patience,

integrity (being truthful, honest, genuine), and fairness. A male urban high school administrator described an important way of being in order to achieve, what was for him, the best interests of the student:

I believe that someone who is an administrator needs to have a sound basis in integrity – operating under truth, with truth, for truth. I have a three sentence statement that I say to almost every kid when I’m doing an intake interview. It’s like this: ‘I won’t lie to you, I won’t lie about you and I won’t lie for you. So whatever we do, let’s keep it truthful together. Even if you’ve done something wrong, tell me the truth, and you cannot believe how much easier it will make things’ .... If I violate that once, I can expect that kid will probably have a very long time before he’ll ever what to believe in something. So even though I like it or dislike it, I have to be truthful about it. If I’ve screwed up, if I crunch a kid for something and I found out that was based on something that was wrong, I damn well better own up to it, and own up to him personally and fully. If I don’t do that then what am I? I am nothing but a middle-aged white boy trying to control everybody’s lives, and I don’t want to be that. You got to have integrity, consistency...integrity will say a lot about you as a person.

For many administrators, possessing moral dispositions and qualities of character was just as important as consideration, reasoning and decision making about policy, procedures, and guidelines, or even trying to follow moral rules of thumb such as, “Treat people the way you would expect to get treated,” or “How would I want my kid to be treated in this situation?” In fact, most principals articulated a morality that was a blending of personal virtue, following right-making rules or principles, and reflective

openness to the unique aspects of circumstance. A female middle school principal expressed the sentiment this way:

I always think you need to keep your heart, and your hand and your head involved. I don't think you could use the one without the other. I think your heart has to be there, you have to be empathetic and feeling, I think you have to have hands on experience, and you've got to have the head – the knowledge, thinking through the whole situation. I don't think you can separate it. I think if you used any one approach you're doomed for failure. I think you need to be a true person and connect.

Several administrators told stories of courage, determination and administrative savvy in order to “present and represent” the best interests of students to those above them (within the organizational hierarchy of the school district) or around them (teachers, parents and community members). These efforts involved “administrative discretion” in which principals manipulated, massaged or outright violated school district policies or procedures, bought time by waiting out circumstances, took risks with the cost of organizational sanction or lied in order to achieve what they believed to be in the best interests of a student. Some of the behaviors principals described in order to achieve a particular student's best interests were less than virtuous, normatively speaking, but were viewed by participants as justified in order to preserve their invested relationships and serve the needs of particular students.

The disposition of personal investment was described as a dominant virtue for serving the best interests of students and was a prominent feature in my conversations with principals. Several principals noted the reciprocal nature of a responsible, responding relationship with students. One participant said that “kids today, if they get that

perception that you're invested, they are going to return that," while another principal said, "we invest a lot in students....Part of the investment, our relationship with them, enables us to hold them accountable. In other words, they're going to hold still for us – a compliant kind of discipline." A male suburban high school principal expressed his conviction this way:

I think you have to demonstrate that you care about the people that you're going to lead, and the kids. Now that doesn't mean you can't scold them, that doesn't mean you can't hold them accountable, but I think *somehow you have to develop that* (and that somehow is in a lot of things you do). It's not just in one campaign or program, somehow they have to feel that they do matter to you.

This attitude was reiterated by a male principal of an alternative secondary school who explained what personal investment meant to him and how powerful the virtue of personal investment can be in ensuring the best interests of a student. He explained:

Mutual respect is huge here – it is a pillar; and that's what I want them [students] to feel. I think it's very necessary that a kid feels that I'm willing to look at every single thing about him as an individual to try to make my decision: These are all the things going on in your life, but I'm trying to give consideration to all [of them] when I try and help you through your problem.

### **“Best Interests” as a Principle or Maxim for Decision Making**

In my conversations with participants, in both the first and second interview sequence, the expression “the best interests of the student” was used as a rule or principle to assist administrators in decision making. As stated earlier, responses varied as to the meaning of the phrase and each participant provided a nuanced perspective on his/her

understanding of the expression. Most principals indicated that the best interests of (the) student(s) included “many facets,” was based on circumstance, context, and timing, but in addition, the expression provided a rationale and justification for the decisions they made.

A male suburban high school principal, after sharing many stories and illustrations about decision making commented that, “you have to put those students needs first because that is an underlying principle that you have...it’s [principle] there, but it’s not something I verbalize on a daily basis.” Almost every principal, throughout both interviews, used the “best interests” phrase as a rule or principle when I asked them questions such as: “If you were Charlie, how would you go about making a decision?”, “What’s Charlie’s ultimate responsibility?”, “Do you have a particular approach or principle you try to follow when faced with, or making, difficult decisions?” and “Does your understanding of the expression, ‘the best interests of the student,’ assist you in making ethical choices in your work?” Without being prompted, principals readily used the phrase to indicate a priority consideration when choosing courses of action and deciding on important school matters. Two principals did not use the expression or make reference to it until I directly questioned them about the maxim’s meaning and usefulness, although one of these principals did state early on in his first interview, “I think it’s his [Charlie’s] job to make sure that programs...and pedagogy are all in place so the kids have the best opportunity, and that you’re offering those things...so students can have what they need.”

Principals, when affirming the use of the phrase, “the best interests of the student,” as a rule in decision making, or as a high priority consideration when making choices, made reference to the language as if it were the “bottom line” for them or as an achievable ideal

when balanced with a variety of other considerations. One principal said, “that statement in itself, that’s like the rubber meeting the road. To me, that’s the finality. Is this practice going to be good for students? And then you weigh it.” Another participant, referring to a decision-making principle he uses when dealing with important school matters, said:

Whatever decision I make, regardless of whether I think it’s the right one for me or for the teacher; it has to be the right decision that’s in the best interests for that student. What’s good for kids? May not always be what’s best for the teacher, or for me, or for the lunch lady, or the janitor. What’s good and right for kids is what really should drive us.

When it comes to weighing other considerations in the decision-making process, one high school principal told a story about how the “best interests of the student” rule assisted him in defending his choices and actions when dealing with a student. For this principal, weighing out a variety of situational variables and coming to a place of decision and action was gauged against the moral criterion of what was best for a specific student within a unique social circumstance. The standard expression “the best interests of the student” was used as a criteria for moral judgment, but the meaning of “best interests” will, according to this participant, change in direct relation to serving particular and unique needs of individual students. He explained:

For instance, a special education kid had been suspended for assault and extortion – fine. He comes back a day early. Now, could I have called his mother and had his mother come pick him up, take him home and finish his suspension? Sure, but by bringing him back a day early allowed him to be here. I met with him, talked with him, had his teacher come up and talk with him, [and] I sent him back to his



emotional support classroom because in that way several things happened. It's better for the kid to get him back in the game because he's missed some time. His temperament wasn't horrible so we could get him back in the game that way. It is a situation where he needed to see that I could cut him some slack because we've had a rough couple weeks with him, and finally the last thing is, and I know this is a bureaucratic thing, but it saves me a day of suspension...that I know I will use later because the kid's a thug. So as a result, I have to weigh out what's best for that kid. Now the staff might look at me and say, 'Hey you brought this thug back a day early. What were you thinking?' But in my mind, in doing what's best for that kid, at that particular time, I can defend all of those things.

The situational nature of what is in a/the student(s)' best interests was a common theme throughout my conversations with secondary school administrators. Their understanding of "best interests" as a rule was situation specific and based on manifold issues tied to circumstance, place, timing and whether the topic under discussion was one student or many students.

Contextual considerations figured prominently in determining what was, either in one student's best interests, or what was in the best interests of students at large. Several principals talked about how a definition of what was in a student's or students' best interests in one school would not be the same thing in another school, or how the characteristics and needs of one child, and consequently their best interests, can be so different from another student's or that of an entire student body. Timing, the manner of approach and interaction with students and the people involved in any number of student related issues or problems played a role, according to every participant, in determining

what was in a student's or students' best interests. Principals expressed their desire and obligation to decide and act in a student's or students' best interests, but those interests were defined by each unique circumstance and situation. This perspective was explained as,

taking each thing individually, weighing it, and then you act upon it – you do what is right for this child at this given time. You take each one, in increments, and make a decision....One decision you make one day might not be the same you would make the next day. It's very unique to each given [situation]. In this position we probably make a million decisions a day without even knowing that we're making those decisions, but I think each one passes through a filtering system and is weighed out and is made.

Another principal clearly described the contextual nature of what is in a student's best interests, and counter to the institutional nature of public schooling that seems to force every student into the same mold, the virtuous response of personal investment requires sensitivity and judgment in order to treat students differently based on what they need.

He explained:

There are [a lot] of students, and each student is different. I think in public education we have assumed that one system is right for every kid. We have to look for what's best for that particular student at that particular time. There are times that what's right for that student is to have a hug, there are times when that particular student might need a 'swat,' there are times when that particular student might need a little caring and understanding, there are times when that student might need a stern word. But each student, you do what's best for each student at the time, within the confines that

you have, and as much as you can. If you err on doing the right thing for the student, as much as you can, you'll be in good shape.

Because of the highly situational nature of making decisions in a student's best interest, two high school principals indicated that the expression really had no meaning for them and could not serve as a principle or rule to assist them in decision making. One young principal and one veteran principal, both heading up high schools in rural settings were doubtful of the maxim's meaning and utility. Either the phrase was empty of any relevant educational meaning or the phrase was used to justify personal preferences or relieve one of personal responsibility for a specific student or group of students in general. One principal said,

I think a lot of folks lasso that statement and kind of use it as their escape: 'Well, we're going to do it because this is best for kids.' You know, you hear a lot of that, 'what's best for kids.' You know, we'll run against a wall because it's good for kids. I think we have to be careful with that, we don't over use that, use it as our crutch.

The other perspective was similar:

It's a generic response, typically used when you don't have anything better to say, or any better explanation. If you're going to say that, you need to be able to back it up with a specific plan or idea – a rationale as to why it's the best interests of the student. I think it could be a principle – using the term in that capacity; although I'm not sure what it means. It would need to be defined. To just say it's in the best interests of the student doesn't mean a whole lot to me, other than you haven't defined what it would be.

In addition to situational factors that must be taken into consideration when weighing the particular best interests of individual students, and determining their unique needs, administrators were quick to convey frustration with organizational constraints and managerial demands when trying to balance the best interests of all students whether or not those interests were figured individually or corporately. One high school principal said, “There’s lots of students, and what might be in the best interests of A, may not be in the best interests of B, C, D and E; and my job is to run a school.” This attitude was present across participants irrespective of gender, race, age, religious background, community type, or school size. The bounded rationality of institutional life was expressed as bounded morality when school leaders talked about policies and directives, resources, time and the actions of other employees that were inhibitive to a student or students’ best interests. One principal expressed the impediments of organizational life, when he responded to whether the phrase “the best interest of the student” could be used as a principle in making ethical choices, this way:

Absolutely, there’s no doubt..., and on the flip side of that, it can cause great turmoil for us also in that we want to run this X program for this group of kids, but [because of] budgetary issues, it’s going to be whacked. When you’re looking at, gees, we’ve done this, we’ve done this, and we now want to do this, [but] budgetary wise it’s not there. Now you set yourself up for contradiction: ‘Well, aren’t we doing what’s best for kids?’ So, it’s sort of that double edged sword too, especially for your nay-sayers...you know that bottom 25% [of teachers] that shouldn’t be here. You know, they should’ve went into something else, but that gives them...that ammunition for when it’s, [a] crunch. ‘If it’s still over the best interest [of students] we’d be fine

now!' And they're correct, but bottom line is there's still that [financial/budgetary] reality. Then you have to come back with creativity. What do we have that we can still try to meet that [need] or offer another opportunity or experience elsewhere?

Another high school principal, when he was responding to questions early on in his first interview about the dilemma vignette, gave his opinion about the protagonist, Charlie, and his ultimate responsibility. His perspective rings true about what other participants identified as a tension between wanting to do what is best for the students, right down to the individual level, and the inhibiting quality of administrative rules, policies, limited resources, time and, in this case, do or die central office directives. He said:

Professionally, you would like to hope that he [Charlie] would do what's best for kids, and listen to the staff, and try to go back and do what's best for the kids. But also, being in a hierarchy and a system where there are protocols, you understand that he's up against it. In his own position where he is, he has to do what he's told to do because if he's not going to, someone will be replacing him that will, which makes for a rather ugly career.

Achieving some level of moral satisfaction in meeting individual students' needs and serving their best interests was either courageously accomplished at the expense of organizational life, or never fully realized because of frustrating school or district related factors that seemed, according to participants, to divert their time, energy, attention and focused intention to do the morally correct thing on behalf of one or more students.

Administrators were not overwhelmingly discouraged or overtly angry about some of the moral limitations imposed on them by organizational life, but rather viewed their role as a challenging opportunity to do right on behalf of a student or group of students, to the best

of their ability, under unique and varying circumstances, despite other organizational factors at play that could potentially assuage their moral quest.

Because of the focus and stamina required to lead an entire school organization, every participant indicated in some fashion a sharp distinction and clear difference between the best interests of one student and the best interests of students as a group. The distinction administrators made was markedly different from the conceptual framework guiding this study. They viewed the work of deciding and acting in the best interests of the student body as being qualitatively different than working with students on an individual basis. Balancing the two priorities was difficult, but essential, within the confines of a bureaucratic institution.

In their daily work, most principals thought about the best interests of students in general, as a corporate body, and when issues came to their attention they would alter their perspective and focus on unique, individual student needs. This pattern of thought was prevalent and consistent across participants (see Table 2). A female high school administrator explained:

I think of the student body as a whole, and when I need to, I deal with students individually, or when it's appropriate or time to do that. You get enough of those, you get enough of the individual, yes you do. You have to think that way because I'm one administrator.... When you have them, dealing with them individually, you have to think of the student's best interests at the individual [level], and where to meet the students' best interests as a whole, as a group. It's kind of like a spiral in a wheel, but the core in the middle of the wheel, you want to keep that in mind, but you may have to deal with individual spokes.

A young, male high school principal put it this way: “You look at each situation, and I think [about] mak[ing] a decision [this way:] How many kids can I impact versus how many may I not impact, across the board?” A similar attitude was expressed by a veteran, high school administrator, but a little differently. He said:

I think there are times when you have to do things in the collective best interests.

There is no question you have to do things sometimes that *a* student may have to have an issue sacrificed for the benefit of the entire student body, or for the safety of the student body, or for a variety of reasons. And because we do work within a system, we’re not working in a private setting where we can handle each student individually; we’re working in a system where we have to handle the entire global group. So yeah, people are sometimes, I hate to say people are sacrificed, but their issue may be sacrificed for the benefit of all. That’s a bureaucratic issue.

There was one principal who communicated the view of focusing primarily on individual student needs and best interests as specified in the Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests (Stefkovich, 2006) when he explained that “given certain circumstances, you can send a message to the entire student body based on what happens to an individual.” Although he believed focusing on a case by case treatment of individual students can have some affect on the best interests of the entire student body, this level of individual interaction was not sufficient for ensuring a complete consideration of the best interests of all students under his supervision.

Although principals’ first order of business was considering, deciding and acting in the best interests of students as a group, they were not ignorant of the potential danger of the distinction, especially when they frequently had to “just give people what they

need[ed]” at an individual rather than a group level. The perspectives participants held about balancing what was in the best interests of one student as opposed to an entire group was diverse. Some believed that public schooling was becoming more and more individualized and student centered with planning and interventions designed to address the needs and talents of every student, whereas other principals expressed their frustration with public education and organizational life where “political correctness” and a “one size fits all approach” dictated how to respond when addressing students’ needs or seeking to serve their best interests. The two contrasting views, one of student centered discretion, and the other, a one size fits all way of doing business was fueled by the same source – special education mandates and the provisions of IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act [reauthorization of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975]) and NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act [reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965]).

Several principals were high on IDEIA and the direction public education was going. A female, high school principal indicated that, “what’s best for all is not necessarily what’s best for the individual. Education these days is working toward the needs of each child, [such as] differentiation of instruction and curriculum in the classroom. This is a good thing.” This view was held by a young, male, rural high school principal who imagined that public education will eventually remake itself into an endeavor centered on serving individual student needs, promoting each student’s success and attending to “best interests” at an individual/personal level. He said:

I think we’re always going to make [decisions for] the best interests of the whole.

That’s been the direction of education, but then we are prescribing more of what is in



the individual best interests of certain students, and it's likely to continue on that track. I think we're going to be doing more of that now....Everyday we think about our services for special education; what we're doing in special education. I think we've got to service kids. I think we're obligated to do that, [but] I think we're overprotective of special education. I think it's a cop out when we put the responsibility to work with low achieving or special needs kids on special education teachers. I think it's everybody's responsibility to work with those special needs kids, [and]...I think there'll be a point where, I mean people keep laughing about this, and they've been laughing about this 10, 15, 20 years ago when they said, 'Every kid is going to have an IEP' [Individual Education Plan]. I think we're headed that way, I really do. We're headed in a direction where we're really individualizing a lot of decision making and the way things are being done.

Other principals took a completely different perspective on the "direction education was headed." One middle school principal believed that the balance between the individual and the group was skewed more toward the group, particularly in instructional matters. He expressed having a major problem with this kind of attitude and indicated that uniform treatment of all students did not achieve the goals and purposes of public education. He said:

I think we have a philosophy in education today that we believe that one size fits all....There needs to be more recognition of the uniqueness of mankind and individual needs in that one size doesn't fit all – people haven't sensed that uniqueness or that special-ness in a sea of numbers. And I think that sometimes we lose masses because that's not occurring.

Expressing this position in a more critical tone, a veteran high school principal did not mince words about his viewpoints when it came to the restrictions placed on him by special education policy when desiring to make decisions in, what he honestly believed to be, the best interests of students. He spoke mostly about student discipline and how the balance between individual and group is skewed because of the standards of uniform treatment he must comply with based on federal, state and district policy. His frustration was about treating every student in a protected class the same way, or within the parameters of restrictive policy mandates, without being granted the administrative discretion and decision making necessary to respond to students in their best interests. He made a sharp distinction between what he called the “right thing,” “the legal thing” and “the nice thing,” and lamented about a system that tries to be everything to everyone. He indicated that:

Public education dictates to you what you can and can't say, or do, or feel, or be; because you are all things to all people – that's the nature of public education. And a result of that, being all things to all people...[m]y own personal positions are inconsequential for the most part, unless it's a major philosophical issue. There are many things that are [a major philosophical issue], but because we live in a politically correct world, we cannot deal with things that are actual..., and so as a result of that, we cannot act on what we know to be true, we have to act on what the public perceives to be acceptable, so that is a dilemma sometimes.

He illustrated the tension he feels when complying with special class protections and his desire to respond morally, decide and act ethically, and deal with students as individual persons. The extended quote that follows brings to light the importance, for this principal,

of engaging and responding to students on a personal and individual level rather than being forced to decide and act in the best interests of students as a group. According to this participant, there is a moral danger in dictated and uniform prescriptions for attending to and managing students as a group that essentially ignore or do away with administrative discretion.

I have special education questions every single day. What's best for the child? Well in this building we have 470 special education students. So there's a large group, and I think the moral questions come everyday: What's right for those particular students? I think, in weighing that [question] out [it] combines with [another:] What's right then for regular education students? You look at them as separate tracks. Clearly the moral dilemma is there: How can I treat two people who do the same thing totally differently and still acquire some integrity of fairness? The answer is you can't. So you do the best you can. [K]nowing the fact that if I have a special education student sitting here, he has a knife on him; he's OK to have that knife on him because he is a special education student. And I have a regular education student with the same knife on him, and I have to expel him for a year and this [other] kid doesn't get anything because it's OK – that's a moral dilemma for me. It's a moral dilemma for me when I have a special education student extort money from a student in the hallway, and I have a regular education student extort money in the hallway, and I have to suspend one or expel one and not the other. It's a moral dilemma when...I have a special education student punch a teacher in a fight and a regular education student punch a teacher in a fight [and] one's expelled for assaulting staff, the other one gets nothing because the parent won't agree to a suspension. That's a

moral dilemma for me – that’s a problem for me, because that’s wrong. No matter how you cut that up in my mind that’s wrong. I know there’s somebody in Harrisburg [state capitol] somewhere that could cut that up in their own mind and make that right. I can’t do that, and I’ve not been able to do that over 32 year’s time – pretty sure it won’t change in the next five or ten.

The turbulent intersection of policy, professional ethics and personal morality became evident as participants talked about working with students on an individual basis and how they wanted to be fair, tried to be fair and celebrated the times they achieved, what was in their minds, a fair outcome for a student or students. Serving the best interests of the student meant being fair and acting fairly, and in the eyes of participants who talked about fairness as a principle or virtue, the rule or quality was immensely important. But fairness required responding with personal investment to each student based upon their unique needs, not being strapped to formulaic procedures or regulations that did not allow for reasonable distinctions between equality and equity. Principals wanted to “just give [students] what they need[ed]” at an individual level and not be questioned about why they were not doling out the same treatment or responding and acting in the same, uniform manner toward every student.

Considering students as unique individuals unto themselves required that each be treated differently based upon their varying needs, abilities and constitutions along with a host of circumstantial factors. Administrators described the difficulties they experienced, both externally by way of publicly defending their decisions and actions to others, and internally as a moral struggle between their own sense of fairness as equity and the uniform procedures and policies that were to be applied equally to all students. The

intrapersonal moral tension brought about by a “clash” between organizational policy, professional expectations, and personal morality described by secondary school administrators is depicted in greater detail in Chapter 8; but as for working with students individually for their best interests, well reasoned equitable treatment was considered paramount.

Principals expressed, in a variety of ways, the importance of treating students equitably. In describing her own moral approach to decision making, a female high school principal said: “Treat everyone fairly. I’m big on not showing favoritism. I always try to be fair and that the decision is in the best interest of the student, but the decision is different in each case.” Another principal described the difficult balance of addressing the demands of both equity and equality in fair treatment. He put the matter this way:

I think we struggle with what is fair and consistent. We have to treat everybody as an individual, but we have to be consistent with our discipline. I know sometimes we have to weigh it. How is it going to be looked at by the rest of the kids or the faculty if one thing happens to this kid who did the same behavior as another kid? See, they don’t get the background information.... You definitely have to keep your faculty happy; you have to be supportive and let them know you’re backing them up, but they don’t know that we can’t treat everybody the same sometimes for the same behavior because there’s circumstances out there. I wish some people would just understand that and even parents too.

According to participants, the phrase “the best interests of the student” meant a lot of different things. All the principals in this study, except two, defined and used the

expression in such a way as to represent who they were as people in responding morally to serving students' needs and/or as a professional maxim to assist them when making decisions about particular students or students in general. Either understood as virtuous response or an obligatory principle that guides one's conduct, "the best interests of the student" could not be achieved unless a host of other factors were considered when deciding and acting ethically. The "best interests of the student," as secondary administrators understood the expression, was tied to a variety of circumstances, and defining what was in the best interests of a student (one) was very different from what was in the best interests of an entire student body.

Principals indicated that "best interests" had "many facets," but assuming a special responsibility to children and youth, which was part of the moral uniqueness of the profession (see Chapter 6), involved among other things, serving the best interests of students by responding to their needs. The responsible, responding relationship, characterized as personal investment involved not only following a professional maxim, but also required one to possess character qualities and personal dispositions conducive to genuinely wanting to do what was in a student's or students' best interests. In addition, being morally attuned to the best interests of the student involved keen awareness and reflection about the unique personal qualities of individual students and the varying conditions and circumstances that play a role in formulating a moral judgment and carrying it out.

The perspectives that principals held about the saying "the best interests of the student" were explored in greater depth toward the end of the second interview when I asked them specifically about how the Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests

(Stefkovich, 2006) definition fit with their own understanding and experiences. Once again, viewpoints were varied as principals reflected on a more theoretical explanation of a student's best interests.

### **“Best Interests” Meaning and the 3Rs – Theoretical Definition and Variations**

As outlined in Chapter 4, the Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests first recognizes that adults possess a great deal of power in determining students' best interests and it is “incumbent upon school leaders to make ethical decisions that truly reflect the needs of students and not their own self-interest” (Stefkovich 2006). The framework seeks to provide a jurisprudentially and ethically defensible expression of what is in a student's best interests and to assist educational leaders with understanding that self-reflection, open-mindedness and sensitivity are important aspects of moral choice where “ethically-sound decisions profoundly influence others lives” (p. 28). The expression, “the best interests of the student,” is structured by the three Rs, and most obviously consists of a robust focus on the essential nature of individual rights, the duty of responsibility to others for a common interest, and in addition, respect as mutual acknowledgement of the other as having worth, value, and dignity unto him/herself.

When questioned about the theoretical definition, and more specifically, the three components that are supposed to make up or define what is meant by the adage, “serve the best interests of the student,” principals gave a mix of responses; although many viewed the three defining components as “important” or “foundational” matters when fulfilling their roles and discharging their duties as building administrators. Each principal had a slightly different view of the three Rs and how they operate in order to ensure the best interests of the student. With regard to the three defining components –

rights, responsibility and respect – as an “expression” of what is in a student’s best interest, school leaders shared their perspectives about the fundamental quality of each of these “considerations” and their role in clarifying and addressing students’ needs. A black, female, high school leader working in a suburban/metropolitan area offered up a coincidental response when asked about her thoughts pertaining to the framework. She said:

The three Rs. Maybe you should call it that. They should be underlining every situation, everything in the entire world, so they’re very important. It’s just unfortunate that it’s not part of everybody – that that’s not their groundwork, that’s not embedded in them – it’s not intuitive for them. That should be something for all people in our profession.

Participants’ immediately keyed on the three Rs as fundamental and important considerations when I named them toward the end of the second interview. All the principals affirmed the value of rights, responsibility and respect when determining what is in the best interests of a student; and the definitions they gave for each, mirrored, for the most part, the explanation offered in the framework. What was striking though was the lack of reference to one of the three defining components of the framework. When talking with participants early on about their own understanding of what the phrase “the best interests of the student” meant from them in their own work, many referenced responsibility (their own) and respect (their own), by name, (and if not by name, very close variations) as important aspects of serving the best interests of students and responding to their needs, but no one mentioned student rights.



For some participants, student rights and responsibilities were understood as being tied up together, intermingled, and even confounded with each other, while several other principals viewed respect as set apart – a special or first order consideration. One principal said that, “we talk about their [students’] rights, but at each individual level they have to understand the rights and the opportunities [others] possess as well, as individuals, if that makes sense. It has to be a conscious thing.” Administrators did not explicitly frame the best interests of the student as consisting, in part, of student responsibility, as does the framework, but rather focused on themselves and their own responsibility to address student needs. This perspective carried over into the realm of respect as well. Principals focused on their own attitudes, dispositions, rule-following, and responses when serving the best interests of a student, or group of students, and spent little time discussing a student’s rights, responsibilities and respect as playing a role in his/her own best interests.

When the three Rs of the framework were directly discussed principals talked more readily about a student’s role in realizing their own best interests, but prior to introducing the framework components, students’ rights, responsibility and respect were not part of the “best interests” equation. After further rumination about the framework and its attempt to clarify not only what is meant by “serve the best interests of the student,” but also, herald as the moral underpinning of the profession the needs of children, principals were asked to rank order the three “considerations” in importance. Table 2 lists the responses of participants and reveals the variety of perspectives on what was most salient when deciding and responding to students’ needs. A veteran, male administrator leading a

rural high school offered his perspective, which eloquently expressed the primacy of respect that was shared by a number of secondary principals. He explained:

I think they're backwards: respect, responsibility and rights; simply because respect is a view of others, and if you view others as being equal, valuable and important then you will be socially and consciously responsible to their best, and possibly the realization that those responsibilities include protecting the rights of all individuals....I think respect is [acknowledging] that everyone has value and our value is equal. No one person has more value than anybody else. We all have value. It doesn't mean you like everybody equally, it doesn't mean everybody will be the same, it means you look at the equality of that individual. It's not what they are, but who they are. They could be wealthy...or they could be poor and they still have respect, because they're human beings.

Table 2. List of Participants and Their Interpretation of the Expression “The Best Interests of the Student”

Participant	Perspective on a student's best interests vs. the students' best interests	Perspective on the theoretical “expression” (three Rs) of best interests
Principal 1	“It can't be the same thing.”	“Important” considerations. Rank: respect, responsibility and rights.
Principal 2	“Times you look at the whole...times when you look at individuals.”	“Very important” considerations. Rank: no order, interconnected.
Principal 3	“Yes [a difference]. You have to balance that. Absolutely, yes.”	“Absolute” considerations. Rank: rights, responsibility and respect.
Principal 4	“I think it depends on the situation...[sometimes] message to the entire student body based on what happens to the individual.”	“Very important” considerations. Rank: respect, responsibility and rights.
Principal 5	“Yes. What's best for all is not necessarily what's best for the individual.”	“Very important” considerations. Rank: no order, interconnected

Principal 6	“Think of the student body as a whole, and when I need to I deal with students individually.”	“Very important” considerations. Rank: respect, responsibility and rights.
Principal 7	“It’s different...there are times when you have to do things in the collective best interests.”	“Important” but not “overriding” considerations. Rank: responsibility, respect and rights.
Principal 8	“Circumstances which you’re going to have to think about the best interests of the individual, and then there are others that you think collectively as a group. It depends.”	“Relevant” and “fundamental” considerations. Rank: responsibility, rights and respect.
Principal 9	“Sure...the needs of many out weigh the needs of one, yet I’m willing to meet [a student’s] need, but I can’t sacrifice everybody else’s [needs] because of it”	“Obvious” and “very important” considerations. Rank: respect, (rights, responsibility; or responsibility, rights)
Principal 10	“We’re always going to make [decisions for] the best interests of the whole.”	“That’s what I talk to kids...[and] my parents...about.” Rank: rights, responsibility and respect.
Principal 11	“It may have been in the best interests of [a] particular student, but it wasn’t in the best interests of students in general.”	“Foundational” considerations. Rank: respect, responsibility and rights.

## Conclusion

The expression, “the best interests of the student” was employed by participants as both a professional injunction of special duty and as an intimation of personal dispositions deemed necessary in order to recognize, respond and address students’ needs. Sometimes the phrase was used as a formal maxim, while more often the expression was “weighed” with a variety of other rules of actual duty, assortments of additional considerations and motivations, and situational and contextual variables in order to determine what value or set of values take(s) precedence while seeking to meet both individual and collective student needs.

As principals told their own stories about working with students and faculty, they provided many illustrations of what it meant to serve the best interests of students; and

with their responses to direct questioning, a depiction of the responsible, responding relationship emerged as one of personal investment. Every participant expressed a moral viewpoint that reached far beyond formal professional obligation. Personal investment in students was described in many ways but primarily centered on being sensitive to students' needs, expressing care in a way that demonstrated genuine concern for children's wellbeing and assuming responsibility for relationships that emulated parental guidance and direction.

Most principals used and described the expression "the best interests of (the) student(s)" as a principle or rule, but not only as such in order to make decisions. Every participant interpreted the best interests of students as a way of responding morally by being who they were as people – possessing virtuous qualities of character and the ability to reflectively judge the moral implications of decision and corresponding action within unique and varied circumstances. Principals indicated that "best interests" had "many facets," but assuming a special responsibility to children and youth, which was part of the moral uniqueness of the profession (see Chapter 6), involved among other things, serving the best interests of students by responding to their needs. The responsible, responding relationship, characterized as personal investment involved not only following a professional maxim, but also required one to possess character qualities and personal dispositions conducive to genuinely wanting to do what was in a student's or students' best interests. In addition, being morally attuned to the best interests of the student involved keen awareness and reflection about the unique personal qualities of individual students and the varying conditions and circumstances that play a role in formulating a moral judgment and carrying it out.

Principals were more inclined to focus on themselves – what rules they operated by or what kind of people they needed to be in order to serve the best interests of students – rather than bring a student, qua student, or students collectively, into the equation for achieving their best interests. After further reflection, it became more obvious to participants that students themselves do indeed play a role in meeting their own needs as specified in the Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests; whether that role is simply principals recognizing the rights students possess in the public schools or the lessons administrators teach, either explicitly or through their actions, about students being responsible for themselves and to others and likewise respecting others as persons who have needs, goals and valued ends of their own.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Findings**

#### **A Phenomenological Exploration of Moral Conflict between Self and Organization in Decision Making**

This chapter closely examines the experience of internal moral conflict between participants' personal values and the organizational or professional values and expectations they were to adhere to as part of their professional decision making. This chapter does not construct a full-scale and completely developed phenomenology intrapersonal moral discord, but does make an attempt to provide a textural, structural and composite portrait of an aspect of school leadership that has not been thoroughly explored. The Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005) makes reference to, and elaborates upon, a characteristic of professional moral decision making that involves a "clash" between one's own personal "code" of morality and the values, expectations and guidelines of an organization and/or profession. The goal of this chapter is to illuminate and make more explicit the process and structure of internal moral discord experienced by secondary school principals when faced with, what was for them, challenging ethical decisions. Analyses of participants' words indicate experiences and conceptions that can serve to inform and extend theory.

According to the Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005) some school leaders find difficulty in separating personal beliefs and values from professional or organizational values and expectations prior to sustained reflection, while for many there exists a "clash among codes." A variety of possible clashes are identifiable, but a

key conflict is the one experienced within the administrator as value incongruity between the personal and organizational/professional.

This disparity, as the Ethic of the Profession would have it (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005), often exists between professional and organizational codes and expectations meant to inform decision making and conduct in work, and the personal moral values of administrators that serve to guide their judgment and behavior. An attempt to integrate organizational/professional and personal “codes” can lead to a repetitive and sustained moral dissonance, or “clashing of codes.” Accordingly, there arises within the moral actor, and in this case the educational leader, an internal moral disagreement emerging from two competing sets of values, one personal and one professional, that, in some sense, manifests itself as an internal struggle because of a lack of value correspondence. In responding to this inevitable discord, and ultimately either resolving or conditionally satisfying the internal moral struggle, the Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001, 2005) suggests grounding ethical decision making in the needs of children. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005) indicate that moral considerations should be grounded in the prima facie principle: Serve the best interests of the student. This principle is affirmed as a moral “ideal (that) must lie at the heart of any professional paradigm for educational leaders” (p. 23), and additionally, can be relied upon to calm the internal struggle between personal morality, what is determined as right and good according to the individual moral actor, and what an organization and/or the profession expects and values or delineates as right and good practice.

**Finding a Way Through the Gray: Wrangling with Oneself Over Self and the Organization/Profession**

When the moral space between personal and organizational/professional gets cramped, typically in difficult decision making contexts that do not lend themselves to rational, pattern-based or habituated choice (Hansson, 1994), there occurred for participants, some rather frequently while others only occasionally, a private, tacit, internal moral wrangling with oneself. This space between personal morality and professional expectation and organizational obligation was referred to as a “gray area” by administrators. Navigating or finding one’s way through the gray areas was difficult. The journey through cramped moral spaces was described in different ways, but was primarily depicted in unpleasant terms not unlike a “clash.” There were a variety of experiences and responses that participants shared as they explained what the moral “clash” was like for them – a “clash” between personal beliefs and values and professional and/or organizational expectations.

Findings in this chapter, as they relate specifically to the experience of intrapersonal moral discord, will follow an analysis sequence that emulates components found in fully-developed phenomenological research. The procedure will include reporting two detailed textural descriptions, verbatim examples of participants’ own words (What happened?) and then organizing and synthesizing an additional set of descriptions, known as structural accounts (How was the phenomenon experienced?) and then combining both textural and structural descriptions into an isolated expression depicting the essence of one, specific “clash among codes” as identified in the Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

This chapter is not a phenomenology, but has been constructed with reference to and guidance from phenomenological techniques and approaches to data collection and



analysis. Chapter 5 (pp. 81-86, 107-108) provides details about specific research strategies and procedures that were used in order to depict the phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord.

In setting the stage for describing the experience of a private, tacit, internal moral wrangling over value incongruity between oneself and the organization and/or profession, participants identified a wide variety of instances and circumstances where they held a different notion of what was right or good than that of their employer, the profession (including teachers' perspectives) or public education in general. Several principals talked about their personal values and morality and how their ethical viewpoints were different from what was important or right, or appeared to be important or right in their estimation, for public education as a social institution. Some participants talked about dealing with a "one size fits all" philosophy whether in the form of inflexible instructional practices enacted in the classroom, rigid school district policies pertaining to pupil personnel issues, or uniform expectations for student achievement.

Even though principals expressed overwhelming support for standards and accountability practices in order to increase student achievement (see Chapters 6 and 7), uniform expectations for all students when it came to testing performance was, in the view of many participants, morally wrong. They believed that all students are "unique, and have different needs, and...on the basis of uniqueness, in all fairness to the students, that needs to be considered." One principal indicated that:

Everyone should be one hundred percent proficient. I think that's an admirable goal to set, but I think that's where the issue comes in with morality: judging every kid at that same standard. What's 100% for you may be a different 100% for me. It sort of

becomes that sliding scale with all those other factors that come into play in everybody's lives – to expect everyone to be at the same spot, I think that's morally wrong.

According to participants, an intrapersonal value clash was not precipitated by any abstract, philosophical differences they had with public education in general, but rather with specific, isolated circumstances that called upon them to make, what was for them, difficult ethical decisions. One principal shared a story about a tangible moral conflict he experienced:

I was asked [by a former superintendent] to tell some folks something that I knew was not [true], to lie to them. Some of these people I worked with...I had taught with these people. I began as a rookie, taught there for a long period of time, and I became their boss. Some of them were ten years older than me, [and] I had a long history with those people. I'm supposed to go lie to them. I had a great deal of trouble with that. I did it, but I guess I sort of justified it to myself somehow – I stretched the truth or whatever, but bottom line it wasn't ethical.

It was in direct and immediate circumstances, that required participants to decide and act, that brought about the experience of internal moral wrangling. For the majority of administrators these direct and immediate circumstances, similar to the account given above, had to deal with feeling duty bound to institutional policy, procedure or directive and at the same time honoring their own sense of what was morally right.

### **Textural Descriptions**

Two textural descriptions for two different principals provide a depiction of what happened to them in direct and immediate circumstances that caused the experience

intrapersonal moral wrangling. The two textural descriptions are typical of the many that were shared by participants. Textural descriptions are necessarily long in order to provide a more complete picture of the relevant factors involved in an experience under investigation. A textural description is rich in detail and provides an elaborate account of what transpired as it relates to an experienced phenomenon. There are different approaches to going about rendering a textural description of an investigated phenomenon. One approach is constructing individual textural descriptions of participants in the study. The evoking of clear images by vivid descriptions produced by either the researcher or the participant him/herself can constitute a textural description (Moustakas, 1994).

#### First Textural Description

The first participant account is about how a white, middle aged, male principal, heading up a suburban high school of about 900 students, dealt with some sticky student residency issues. This excerpt, taken directly from the interview transcript, briefly but effectually frames the situation, conditions, circumstances, actors and relationships involved in experiencing intrapersonal moral discord. As the principal shares his story about being “put in a situation,” the reader can empathize with his struggle to both recognize and honor his sense of duty bound obligation to organizational policy and administrative guidelines in order to run an effective and efficient public school, on the one hand, and respond to a student’s unique needs in order to promote their success and best interests, on the other hand. The detail this principal spends on explaining the policy he is working with and the varying situation-specific circumstances students find

themselves in gives testament to the often complex internal wrangling of personal and organizational values that occurs in route to making a decision.

In addition to describing the details of what transpires to give rise to an intrapersonal values clash, this principal provides an account of his perspective taking (putting himself in the shoes of others involved in the situation) and a glimpse into his own personal way of dealing with the value incongruity he experienced. He said:

I tell you one place that I run into [difficult problems] is the whole residency thing. And what I mean by that is, when I run into those circumstances where I may have a family who's in turmoil, and I find out that they may not be residents (because they've moved to either one parent or another parent, there's been a split) and I get put in the position where I have to make a decision; and I have a policy that says if they're not a resident they have to pay tuition – bottom line, unless their homeless. One thing that gets [me] off the hook a little bit is the whole homeless thing. If you can find a way that you can demonstrate they're homeless, now you're OK. And I've gone to great lengths to try to find that they're homeless and then be able to identify them as such so that they can continue to school here, because bouncing them around to two or three neighboring districts, when I know they're probably going to wind up back with me, what's that educational year going to look like for that kid? Whereas if I can keep that kid here...where I know the kid is pretty solid – I'll give you an example. There's a girl we have, there was a change in custody, the mother moved out of the district, she changed custody [to] her father who lives in a [neighboring town] and she moved in with her father late April, early May. Now she's a junior, and this kid is like an A – B student, no problem, good school assistant and all that

kind of stuff. In order for her to qualify for policy 202 which is our policy that lets somebody finish their senior year if they've been here for 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> even if they may not be a resident in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they can finish 12<sup>th</sup> grade [here]. They have to complete 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> as a resident. Well she completed 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> almost. The kid wants to go to school here, she's been successful here, and to me that's a good thing that a kid wants to go to my school and the parents want their kid to go to my school. I had to make a decision where, by the letter of the law, I didn't follow the letter of the law. The bugaboo was with policy 202. It said they had to finish 11<sup>th</sup> grade here. So I just had to say OK they finished 11<sup>th</sup> grade here. Did I lie? Yeah, I did...But [I] get placed in that situation a lot with the residency thing. That's one thing I know I really struggle with....Morally and ethically, OK, I didn't quite follow the letter of the law.

I had an instance two years ago where a family built a house just across the district line, in the next town, and because somebody in the district office (one of the secretaries in the district office) happened to know about this, they kicked up their heels and got all involved in it. Well, first of all that pissed me off, but anyway, that's a whole other dynamic, you know what I mean. So then I had to deal with this family. Now it turned out that this family still owned properties in our district...and the grandparents were still in our district. But they build this big, new, beautiful house and had moved into that. So I had to confront them because this was this girl's junior year, it was in the middle of the year, and because someone in the business office had found out about it, now the superintendent knew about it. Now [because of circumstances] it wasn't the kind of the thing I could deal with, as one of my

predecessors used to tell me, 'certain things you deal with administratively.' So, ultimately I got involved...and I said, 'Look, I want to do what's best for your kid, so let's find a solution, there's a solution here to be found.' Ultimately, the solution was that the residency was changed to the grandmother, but the mother stayed with the grandmother during the week and then went to the new house on the weekend. Now did I go look and see who was sleeping where? No. I didn't. It was a solid family. I knew what I was dealing with. I at least satisfied the residency requirement that way, you know what I mean, so that everybody over on that end [district office] was at least satisfied. Then she could finish her junior year, and then everybody moved into the new house [that summer], because her senior year under policy 202 she could finish if she didn't live in the district or the parents didn't live in the district. And come graduation time, I mean that kid was happy as a clam because she wanted to finish here. She went all the way through: K-12. Now, you could take the hard line, and this is what I struggle with sometimes about the people above me, and I understand their plight because they have to be accountable too. You could take the hard line, and say, 'you know what, you should of thought of [all this] before you built that other house.' Well, I guess. You talk about the ethical part of that, that's a part that I constantly come back to that does get me in trouble sometimes with those above me.

[The residency issue] happens on a regular basis where you have to deal with it. I guess I never thought about, OK, what are the guiding principles which will take me through this decision? I don't have a mental check list, there must be a checklist though, I guess I never thought about it. But like I said, one thing you're going to

weigh out is OK; I need to do what's right. In that, right is conditional, because I take those circumstances as they arise and I deal with it...It's kind of like the age old thing where you got to have a policy, you have to, but then you have to apply that policy. You're the judge, the jury and the executioner a lot of times is what it comes down to. So you have the policy for consistency, but you also have to be able to apply it. Let's face it, we're in the position to make decisions, that's what we do, principals, that's what we get paid to do, there's a lot of other stuff we do that we really aren't getting paid to do, we're getting paid to make the decisions. So making those decisions, of course, then you have to weigh out those factors of what are the rules, and regulations and the policies, but at the same time what's moral and what's ethical. If I'm going follow the letter of the law, and I know darn well this kid is going to wind up bouncing through three schools and then back here again; if I follow the letter of the law there's going to be a real hardship here for this kid. Now is it my fault, now that becomes the question, is it my fault or is that their parents' fault? Am I responsible? Well, I don't worry about who you blame for it. Sometimes people go to great lengths trying to figure out who they should blame because that then takes them off the hook....I can't tell you what that line in the sand is....So there's a place where I know, and if I get taken to task on it, I'd be in a ringer – point black.

You have to constantly weigh what you're doing in terms of your own conscience of right and wrong. And that's a struggle...there are times that you have to bite the bullet and you have to do what's right. And people need to know that you did what was right. Even though it may not have been popular or it may not have been acceptable, but you did what was right. From my good Catholic background I

understand that sometimes you beg forgiveness and sometimes you ask permission. You have to weight that out....Do I feel like I made bad decisions, no, because my guiding principle was what was best for that kid.

### Second Textural Description

The second textural description is taken from an account given by a younger, black, male principal working in an urban middle school with an enrollment of about 500 students. He described a discipline issue involving the district's zero-tolerance policy and his sensitivity to unique circumstances involving a female student. Once again, this excerpt was taken directly from the interview transcript and succinctly frames the situation from the participant's perspective. He relates the details, circumstances, actors, conditions, and relationships involved in experiencing intrapersonal moral discord over following his sense of duty bound obligation to administrative rules and district policy and his own personal sense of what was right and good. As the principal relates the story of a girl violating the district's zero-tolerance policy, he shares his level of sensitivity and the perspective taking required to put himself in other's shoes in order to arrive at a moral decision despite personal consequences.

Although this principal's decision seems to be clear cut as he shares his story, the decision to treat a student differently than what was prescribed by district directive took the form of an internal grappling with two aspects of fairness – equality and equity. His reasoning for following a specific course of action is justified by going beyond and behind the face value of circumstances and behavior to explore the motivation, intent and character of those involved. This illustration is another example that helps answer the



question, What happened?, when exploring the phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord between self and organization. He said:

We had a young lady a couple years ago. [She] came from a rough section of town. This particular day...[she] caught the city bus to school, and what she did was, in the process of catching the bus (I guess she was in a hurry) she left her purse on the bus. The bus got her here on time, she went through the school day, but then the bus director called me and he said, 'Mr. \_\_\_\_, we have one of you're student's purses, we found it on the bus and we want to return it to you.' I thought it was kind of strange that he wanted to personally return a student's purse. Normally they just send it to us. So then, [when he arrived at school] he tells me, 'inside [the purse] there's a box cutter. I called her down; and she admitted having it on school property the previous day. She knew she shouldn't have had it. She knew basically that if she were caught with it that would mean expulsion. And there were literally people who wanted to arrest her and expel her!

She had a great mind. Now the reason she had this box cutter was because she had decided basically that she didn't want to take another beating from the girl gangs that ran [in her neighborhood]. She took her last beating and she told herself, 'I ain't getting beat up no more.' So she started carrying a weapon. Technically she admitted bringing it one day and the second day it was actually confiscated and was never on [her] – it was brought on school property by the city bus director. Now you're splitting some fine hairs there, but the other side of it is, she never had a history of being a threat when you looked at her record. She's always been our student, and basically the way it is, you can take her to an expulsion hearing and kick her out, and

[then] she's in a rough neighborhood threatened by gangs, or you [can] hold her accountable briefly or immediately and get her back in the system, so what are you going to do here? I decided to keep her...She should have gone to expulsion. I didn't send her...I think the conflict occurs when you begin to question: is this the right thing to do? I gave her a day out of school [suspension] and brought her back. It hit the fan [with] legal ramifications...but now she's on the verge of graduating.

And that's the thing I tried to explain about zero tolerance. Now when you talked to her she readily admitted [having the box cutter], there was no [deceit]. The other side, she didn't threaten anybody in the building with it, there was no excessive or extreme violence within the building. I'm not advocating carrying box cutters. I'm just simply saying, according to her perception she needed it in her community when she walked the streets because she was being jumped. And that was the environment she lived in. So what am I to do, you know? Do we penalize her and say that she's...kicked out of the school community or ostracize her, or do we try to look at the circumstances and understand...I think that when you look at some of those things, the intent, the motives, the action and usage plays a big part in terms of whether you need to move to an expulsion. We talk about kids walking the street or coming to school with freaking box cutters and guns; but the reality is, basically, the school is a reflection of the community. Now we have the zero tolerance or the parameters that we're not going to accept this from you...and for some people, we have to deal with them accordingly. But many of the things we see happening out there [neighborhoods] are going on in here [school], and I'm thinking we're hard on [the kids] for bringing this stuff in the schools. What about the community? They're

still carrying it! You know, people they're getting shot, they're getting killed, they're getting cut; and parents, some parents know!

The two textural descriptions presented here are designed to answer the question, What happened?, when exploring the phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord between personal values and professional or organizational expectations. Most participants gave similar accounts of specific instances or circumstances where they were “put in a position” and consequently had to wrangle over, what was in their view, an acceptable moral course of action because their personal values conflicted, acutely, with what was expected of them organizationally or professionally as a principal. Both accounts reveal a considerable degree of perspective taking and empathy by the principals. Problem solving and decision making yielding an acceptable moral response involved being open to what the circumstances of the immediate situation revealed about the pluralistic values represented in context and taking a reflective posture in order to carefully consider, not only ethical rules, moral consequences, and personal virtues, but construct a way to a more carefully reasoned and sensed ethical position.

### **Structural Descriptions**

An integrated structural description for all eleven participants seeks to answer the question, How is the phenomenon experienced by participants? In rendering a brief and loosely constructed structural description, participants' words indicate how intrapersonal moral discord was experienced by them. What is important for this stage of description is a clear account of what is involved and the dynamics of the experience as opposed to providing an elaborate account of what transpired as it relates to an experienced

phenomenon. The goal of structural description is to elucidate how participants as a group experience what they experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Navigating or finding one's way through the gray areas was difficult for participants. Gray areas were moral terrains that not only became cramped as a result of specific circumstances, but were instances where personal beliefs and values and professional and/or organizational expectations were countervailing ("clashed"). There were a variety of experiences and responses that participants shared as they explained what the moral "clash" was like for them. As participants reflected on their experiences of intrapersonal moral discord, they used a wide range of expressions to depict the phenomenon. What follows is a brief account of how the phenomenon of intrapersonal moral wrangling, or a "clash among codes," one personal and the other organizational, was experienced by participants.

A clear expressions of intrapersonal conflict in the context of a specific incident was shared by a white, middle aged, female high school principal working in a suburban/metropolitan region. She relates her episode of intrapersonal moral dissonance between duty and circumstance, and although the two previous textural accounts lent themselves to overriding duty for personal value, this account ends with the principal taking the side of duty. She said:

I expelled a young man. I knew a lot about him – his molestation, unsettled family background, and many personal and life challenges. The kid had a laminated marijuana leaf in his pocket. I was torn, personally. The leaf tested positive. I didn't want to see him expelled, that's what the rule said... but I certainly didn't like it. I wanted to fix the situation in my own counseling way versus applying a consequence.

I look at both sides a lot – it’s difficult...I felt the [moral] discrepancy...When a situation arises, personal beliefs arise. I wound up suspending the student...

The experience of intrapersonal moral discord was expressed similarly by a younger, black, female school leader who also worked in a suburban/metropolitan region. She indicated how, in many instances, she couldn’t allow herself to experience too much moral dissonance because of the need to do the practical thing – which was for her, the purposeful and efficient daily operation of the high school. She explained:

It’s really hard sometimes, because we bring how we were raised and all that into whatever job we do – it comes with you. You bring you with you, and so sometimes you can’t dig that deep, you just have to do what is the right thing as far as the practical thing.

Although two participants were explicit about intentionally setting aside their personal values, or at least trying to, in order to make a “practical” decision, both indicated they still experienced an internal tension. The other nine principals clearly indicated that intrapersonal moral discord was, at times, part of their experience when formulating a judgment about a specific matter. Some administrators said their wrangling occurred frequently while others indicated a “clash” occurring only on occasion.

The experience of a intrapersonal “clash” between personal values and organizational and professional expectations was described as: “getting placed in a situation that I really have to struggle with,” “weighing what you’re doing in terms of your own sense of what’s right and wrong,” “weighing out the factors of what are the rules, regulations, and policies but at the same time what’s moral and ethical,” “weighing out what it all is...so you can do the best you can,” “having to deal,” “struggling and dealing,” “dealing with

gray,” “gray judgment,” “having to read (extremely hard) between the lines,” “bight[ing] the bullet,” “feeling troubled,” “a difficult struggle – a tough pill to swallow,” “placed in uncertainty,” “a weight,” “moral pressure,” “troubled [while] trying to balance out,” “questioning if this is the right thing,” “personally bothered,” “being unfortunately stuck” and “frustrating.”

For the majority of administrators, deciding and acting as a result of direct and immediate circumstances pertaining to institutional policies, procedures or directives, for which they felt duty bound, while at the same time honoring their own sense of what was morally right, resulted in a common experience that was described in a variety of ways, but typified the moral wrangling and “clash” identified in the Ethic of the Profession (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

### **Composite Description of “Essence”**

The concluding descriptive stage, as rendered here, is designed to bring to light the meaning of the experience of intrapersonal moral discord. Textural and structural descriptions were synthesized into an isolated expression of what is asserted to be a commonly experienced phenomenon. Evidence from first-person reports of life experience were reduced to meaning units, substantiated by textural descriptions, and organized into a coherent description of the most essential constituents of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994); or in other words, a composite portrait of professional moral discord as experienced by participants. A depiction of the essence of intrapersonal moral discord when faced with difficult moral choices is offered as the final portion of phenomenological exploration in this study.

An intrapersonal value clash experienced by a high school administrator primarily occurs within a direct and immediate circumstance that requires a decision. This specific circumstance brings about an immediate awareness of, and feeling of obligation to, institutional policy, procedure and directive while at the same time prompting the administrator to consider his/her own personal values and sense of right making that conflict with organizational expectations. A moral disruption is sensed and a feeling of being put in a situation that must be dealt with brings about the beginning of a private, tacit, internal dispute. The administrator begins to weigh out the factors of rules, regulations and policies and his/her own sense of what's right and wrong, good or bad, praiseworthy or blameworthy. This weighing back and forth begins to feel like a struggle and accompanying feelings follow such as being bothered, frustrated, uncertain and weighed down. In a struggle to judge, the administrator considers his/her moral choice as emerging from an intrapersonal state where an array of morally gray and uncertain options is appraised.

### **Resolving the Dilemmatic Condition of Self vs. Organization/Profession**

Although most participants experienced a common phenomenon of intrapersonal moral wrangling between their own set of values and their felt obligation to organizational expectations, especially the adherence to policies, procedures and administrative direction, there were a variety of ways in which principals resolved the internal "clash of codes" or dilemmatic condition they experienced as educational leaders. In coming to a place of decision, and likewise resolving (to some degree) the internal dissonance between duty bound obligation and personal values, principals followed a number of pathways including: adhering to one's gut instinct or personal

sense of right, leaping (choosing) in uncertainty about one's interpretation of gray options, following organizational expectations and then consciously separating oneself as a person from positional duty or work role, rationalizing by gathering information, brainstorming with others and following past experience, or following a personal policy, principal or maxim that guides one's conduct.

A number of principals indicated that they resolved the internal moral tension they experienced by following their personal sense of right or gut instinct. Some participants called this being true to themselves. One principal said: "I guess I have to be able to live with the decision I make. Is the decision true to myself? I have to be able to answer that question." Another principal explained that "I feel duty bound if that's what you have to do. I think you can be flexible in your application sometimes and your interpretation. There's always room for flexibility, for patience...[and] being true to yourself." Being true to oneself, according to a middle aged, male high school principal was "trying to follow the policy and the rules...however; I'll follow my gut instinct if I'm sure it's right." A black, female administrator felt strongly about following this specific pathway when she said, "I feel that I'm bound literally to my own morals and values, and sometimes I'm not going to go against that.... So I would go to court and sit there and tell them why I did it and let the cards fall where they fall." This perspective was summed up by the same school leader who provided one of the detailed textural descriptions. He indicated that:

you have to weigh what you're doing in terms of your own conscience of right and wrong...[and] there are times that you have to bite the bullet and do what's



right...Even though it may not have been popular or it may not have been acceptable, you did what was right.

Some principals followed a different path to resolving their experience of moral discord. This approach involved navigating through an array of morally gray options before making a choice which, for the principal, was not morally optimal but could be lived with under a given circumstance. One participant indicated that “the right is out there, but it’s hard to institute the right on a continual basis. I think you can be true to yourself pretty much, but it all gets back to gray.” Another principal said, “that gray area: interpretation. I think that makes you a good administrator.” A young, male principal spoke about how his decisions have become, in his estimation, more morally gray when dealing with student discipline issues:

I think probably I have...become even more gray in areas. [I] work very hard – attendance, tardiness to school, how you conduct yourself in the hallway, how you speak to adults across the board – very hard administratively not just to be black and white.... I think I’ve probably extended the boundaries of...fairness across the board.

Several other principals indicated that they resolved the internal moral tension they experienced by following organizational expectations and then consciously separating themselves out as a person from their positional duty or work role. Two white, male, veteran principals, one leading an urban high school and the other a rural high school had very similar perspectives. One said:

I’ve really struggled...because I have a very strong personal belief, however I know it’s a law to enable their [homosexual] cause, you know. And sometimes I struggle with that. I think it’s my own bias, bigotry, but I know where I fall. I think the only

way to resolve [the struggle] is following the law. I'm not sure it's internally resolved, it's resolved in my practice because it has to be, but not sure internally it's resolved...Also, I don't see my job as personal, I used to, but not anymore. It's not personal to me, it's my job. That's what I do, not who I am. And who I am speaks a lot more than what I do.

The other principal commented on the psychological work of distancing oneself from decisions made based on organizational expectations – a conscious separating oneself as a person from positional duty or work role. He explained the coping this way:

I think you have to be able to separate yourself somewhat from what you do. This is what I do. I define myself, who I am, by this job as well, but on the other hand – it's a 'what I do' thing. I have to be able to go home and separate that out through whatever method I choose, whether it's religiously, whether it's spiritually, whether it's meditation, going for a walk, playing tennis, whatever. I think people have to be able to separate those things out and in [their] own mind [and] learn to cope.

These perspectives were mirrored by comments made by a young principal who described a kind of self-imposed schizophrenia:

Sometimes you just got to set aside what the personal is...cut and dry. Sometimes that's hard to do. Stone cold sometimes – be callous. You just got to block, I mean you just got to – that's a hard one to do, it really is.

Another approach principals used to mitigate the experience of intrapersonal moral discord was rationalizing choices by gathering information, brainstorming with others and following past experience. This approach was not viewed as consensus seeking, but rather a process used to “gain perspective” in order to decide. One principal explained

that, “I’m pretty committed to reflecting on what are the community values. I might not agree with this, but this is the right thing to do, in this situation, based on what I know.” Other principals said they seek advice from others in a variety of ways. One participant characterized himself as a “brainstormer” and said: “I very often reflect with other staff. There isn’t anybody here that I don’t go and say, ‘I got a situation here, here’s what’s going on.’” Another participant expressed his approach this way: “You’re always going to question; you’re always going to feel hesitant. Sometimes decisions are based upon past experiences, from advice and direction and the experiences of other people....I utilize the folks [I’m] surrounded by.” Another principal said that “you just need more data to make the difficult [ethical] decision.” This sentiment was expressed another way:

Show me the facts...show me the data, show me the line. There’re so many positive things that contain information for us as leaders to take a look at and help us make decisions; [and] we’re going to feel comfortable making some decisions because of what we have at hand.

Several principals indicated that they resolved the internal moral tension they experienced by following a personal policy, maxim, or ethical principle. One of these principles, if an administrator had a clear idea about its meaning, was stated often and quite regularly as “do what’s best and right for the kids” or “try to do what you think is best for the kid” or any number of variations on the expression “serve the best interests of the student.” Even though almost every principal (nine out of eleven) readily used the phrase to indicate a priority consideration when choosing courses of action and deciding on important school matters, only a couple participants indicated that the expression was helpful in resolving any internal moral tension they experienced between their own

values and those of the school district or profession. Other rules of thumb, or self-imposed reflections, were referenced as well but not as often. “How would I want my kid to be treated in this situation?”, or “How would I feel?”, or “Treat people the way I would expect to be treated.” were mentioned as important rules or considerations when resolving an intrapersonal struggle over personal values and organizational expectations.

It is important to note that principals quite frequently blended approaches or paths in their effort to resolve the experience of internal moral discord. Even though the pathways to resolving an intrapersonal “clash” are depicted as hard and fast approaches, possibly quite antithetical to one another, administrators did not characterize themselves in pure, distinct terms, although one approach was more illustrative of each participant than the others. One administrator summed up his experience of resolving the moral tension he feels this way:

There are times when you lay awake at night or you wake up three in the morning – ‘How do you want to handle that?’, or ‘How do you want to deal with that?’ But for the most part I think you have to try to make the decisions as you can and move on and keep them in perspective...One of the best coping skills you have is to be able to look at life [and] issues in our lives that we have and say – this is beyond what I can do as a human being, as a mortal; as a result, it’s in someone else’s hands.

## **Conclusion**

A clash between the personal and professional was very real for participants. The experience was generally frequent, but varied from principal to principal (reports of daily to occasionally to several times a year). The phenomenon of intrapersonal moral discord between personal values and institutional/professional policy and practice was described

in a variety of ways and tended to be experienced in specific circumstances that required more immediate decisions and actions. Negative and unsettling language was used to describe the experience of struggling between what was right and good personally and what was figured to be right and good in terms of organizational or professional expectations. Participants resolved the experience of internal moral tension in a variety of ways. One basic principle driving the profession that stands as a moral imperative or ideal for clearing away moral discord between personal values and professional and organizational expectations, procedures and policies was not evidenced in the data.

There were a variety of ways in which principals resolved the internal “clash of codes” or dilemmatic condition they experienced as educational leaders. In coming to a place of decision, and likewise resolving (to some degree) the internal dissonance between duty bound obligation and personal values, principals followed a number of pathways including: adhering to one’s gut instinct or personal sense of right, leaping (choosing) in uncertainty about one’s interpretation of gray options, following organizational expectations and then consciously separating oneself as a person from positional duty or work role, rationalizing by gathering information, brainstorming with others and following past experience, or following a personal policy, principle or maxim that guides one’s conduct.

Principals quite frequently blended approaches or paths in their effort to resolve the experience of internal moral discord. Even though the pathways to resolving an intrapersonal “clash” are depicted as hard and fast approaches, possibly quite antithetical to one another, administrators did not characterize themselves in pure, distinct terms; although one approach was more illustrative of each participant’s way of operating than

the others. Internal moral discord was not primarily allayed by decisions strictly based on personal values, beliefs or moral disposition, or conversely, a dogged adherence to organizational policies and administrative guidelines. Rather, for the participants in this study, a blending of strategies was required to maintain a sense of moral equilibrium between oneself and the institution.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Discussion**

#### **Conclusions**

This study asked a series of specific questions related to an ethical decision making model for educational leadership. The questions were designed to test the utility, comprehensiveness and explanatory power of a professional ethic as proposed by Shapiro & Stefkovich (2001, 2005) and Stefkovich (2006). Central research questions were derived directly from this theoretical framework, and data derived from participant interviews, observations and analytical notes were organized and categorized along deductive themes. I divided participant transcripts into units or blocks that expressed, or appeared to express, a self-contained meaning corresponding to the theoretical model under investigation. Appendix C is a visual representation of the initial chunking of units or blocks of transcript text. Meaning units were further broken down into smaller sub-sets of words and ideas and these classifications were essentially derived by searching for finer grained regularities and patterns in the words of participants (see Appendix D for specific coding categories).

In addition to using a theoretical framework to initially inform this study, it became important to utilize the established practices of constant data comparison, analytic induction, and searching for discrepant evidence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Participants' words indicated experiences and conceptions that extended beyond what the theory would allow. At this point, original domains and categories of tabulated codes were adjusted by either completely abandoning the initial deductive coding derived from theory or collapsing deductive codes into new, re-conceptualized themes and categories.

This process served as a secondary analysis of the data that pertained to the statement “the best interests of the student.” Where the data did not fit the theory, a secondary analysis provided a way to contrast practicing principals’ views against the theoretical explanation (see Appendix E for emergent “best interests” categories).

Assertions and conclusions are made from participants’ words found directly in the data. Any claims and interpretations inhere in the data and Appendices C, D, and E serve to make evidentiary claims derived from participants’ words and my observations more transparent. From the data findings, it became clear that practicing secondary school administrators believed they were acting for the best and were capable of defining good moral practice as a combination of both duty bound obligation to institutional policies and procedures and a unique professional morality influenced and guided by who they were as people.

Participants clearly identified moral aspects of their work that were, for them, of a general quality including appropriate habits and dispositions in order to do the work of school administration. In addition, the relational aspects of leading and interacting with a wide range of people including professional teaching staff, students and peer administrative colleagues all revolved around suitable responses to appropriate parties, responsibilities to parties and the obligation to build relational trust, meet specific needs, and demonstrate a commitment to processes resulting in collaboration. From this general impression about their work, participants articulated what they believed to be morally unique aspects of their work.

Morality unique to the profession of educational leadership consisted of specific practices such as “answering” to and “balancing” out the requests of many constituents



by negotiating compromises between competing sets of values. Being willing and able to negotiate and manage competing views of what is desired and valued from a range of different interested parties and establishing some kind of a middle ground was deemed an important moral task. Also, being a role model under close public scrutiny in and outside the work environment, leading and supporting the moral enterprise of teaching and learning, and possessing a commitment for assuming particular responsibilities to children and youth all contributed to a constellation of morally unique aspects of educational leadership. Administrators participating in this study asserted the aforementioned aspects of their work as being uniquely moral or ethical in nature for their profession. These views are important because they support the notion of administrative practice that extends beyond narrow conceptions of scientific management and rationalistic perspectives pertaining to the orchestration of organizational life and centers itself on cultivating meaningful purpose, responsibility and collective relational values within public schooling (Starratt, 2003).

With respect to the particular responsibilities administrators assumed for children and youth, the use of the expression “the best interests of the student” was employed frequently in conversation as a means of determining what should be a morally correct action. These findings are similar to those in other empirical investigations of administrative moral decision making and value orientations (Wolcott, 1973; Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1984; Greenfield, 1991; Marshall, 1992; Walker & Shakotko, 1999; Klinker & Hackmann, 2003; Storey & Beeman, 2005), but this investigation examined more precisely the function and meaning of the phrase as it was employed by practicing school leaders.

The Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students' Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006) posits the maxim "the best interests of the student" as a central ethical ideal for educational administration and attempts to define the expression in order to provide a clearer professional ethic for educational leadership. This theoretical framework indicates that "the best interests of the student" is best understood and promoted as a central guiding moral principle in decision making. This study challenges the notion of the expression being used primarily as a maxim to guide behavior.

The expression "the best interests of the student" was employed by participants as both a professional injunction of special duty and as a way to express personal dispositions deemed necessary in order to recognize, respond and address students' needs. Sometimes the phrase was used as a formal maxim, while more often the saying was weighed with a variety of other concerns and considerations, obligations to organizational rules and policies and situational and contextual variables in order to determine what value or set of values take(s) precedence while seeking to meet both individual and collective student needs. The maxim was generally conceived by participants as a very important rule of thumb, but not taken to be absolute as if the saying were a principle of duty of transcendent value.

Principles were more inclined to focus on themselves – what rules they operated by or what kind of people they needed to be in order to serve the best interests of students – rather than bring a student, qua student, or students collectively, into the equation for achieving their best interests. Administrators wanted to define the expression "the best interests of the student" more as a depiction of the responsible, responding relationship

Personal investment in addressing and responding to the “whole child” figured prominently in principals’ understanding of serving the best interests of students and meeting their needs. Even though most principals used and described the expression “the best interests of (the) student(s)” as a kind of rule to help them in decision making, they also clearly understood the expression to mean something about them as a person and professional educational leader. Every participant interpreted the best interests of students as a way of responding morally by being who they were as people. The virtuous disposition of responsible, relational response in the form of personal investment was what the best interests of the student(s) meant to administrators.

Practicing secondary school principals did not define the expression “the best interests of the students” in such a way that mirrored the Ethic of the Profession’s model. Every participant indicated in some fashion a sharp distinction and clear difference between the best interests of one student and the best interests of students as a group. The distinction administrators made was markedly different from the conceptual framework guiding this study. They viewed the work of deciding and acting in the best interests of the student body as being qualitatively different than working with students on an individual basis. Balancing the two priorities was difficult, but essential, within the confines of a bureaucratic institution. Even though administrators would like to consider the best interests of each and every student “in a perfect world,” they viewed their thinking, decisions and actions in accordance with the best interest of all students as taking center stage in the daily operation of their schools. Serving the best interests of individual students and meeting their needs was vital and part and parcel of leading a school, but principals made a clear distinction between the best interests of one student and the

student body, and those different interests, based on context and circumstance, may not be the same.

Respect figured prominently in principals' understanding of what "the best interests of the student" means as a professional ideal. Rights and responsibility were viewed as important considerations for clarifying the meaning of the expression, but respect – expressed in natural conversation as a responsible, responding relationship of personal investment in students, and additionally in administrators' ranking of the three Rs – was named, in a collective sense, as a foundational virtue from which a guiding or decision making principle for the profession could emerge.

The moral discord experienced by practitioners when faced with morally challenging or even dilemmatic situations is apparent in the empirical literature (Marshall, 1992; Ashbaur & Kasten, 1984, 1986; Kirby, Paradise & Protti, 1992a; Roche, 1999; Grogan & Smith, 1999; Sherman & Grogan, 2003; Langolis, 2004; and Storey & Beeman, 2005). Most research on value-laden problem solving or dilemma situations reveals that practitioners are not reactionary or morally single-minded, but rather possess a capacity for managing situations, are reflective and thoughtful about the range and plurality of values they are dealing with, and make reference to organizational policy and rules without necessarily following them to the letter. Very little research hints at what the intrapersonal struggle is like for administrators. Roche (1999) indicates that administrators "agonized" over achieving satisfactory moral solutions to difficult, value laden problems, while Langolis (2004) indicates that administrators relying on solely political, administrative or legal logic to solve complex problems seem to constitute a

“form of torture” only resolved through reflection and decision making based on “personal ethics.”

This research indicates that a “clash” between personal values and professional/organizational expectations was very real for participants. The experience was generally frequent, but varied from principal to principal (reports of daily to occasionally to several times a year). Accounts of a “clashing of codes” pertained to specific instances or situations that called upon the principal to weigh out and wrangle with external administrative guidelines, policy, and procedure expectations on the one hand and their own personal values, moral orientations and beliefs on the other. There were a variety of experiences and responses that participants shared as they explained what the moral “clash” was like for them. As participants reflected on their experiences of intrapersonal moral discord, they used a wide range of expressions to depict the phenomenon of an intrapersonal value clash and a tentative composite description of the “essence” of the experience is reported in Chapter 8.

Principals followed a number of pathways for resolving the internal moral discord they felt under specific circumstances. The paths to resolving conflict when personal values were not aligned with organizational expectations included: adhering to one’s gut instinct or personal sense of right, leaping (choosing) in uncertainty about one’s interpretation of gray options, following organizational expectations and then consciously separating oneself as a person from positional duty or work role, rationalizing by gathering information, brainstorming with others and following past experience, or following a personal policy, principal or maxim that guides one’s conduct.

One basic principle driving the profession, namely, “serve the best interests of the student in order to meet individual needs,” as proposed by The Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006), was not evidenced in the data; nor was a professional principle utilized as a special moral imperative or ideal used to clear away the moral discord experienced by administrators. Based on this study, administrators use their own unique ways to calm the internal moral struggle between personal values and organizational and/or professional expectations. Moral judgment was more complicated and contextually defined for the secondary principals participating in this study. Relying on one principle or rule of thumb to guide decision making was not in accordance to administrators’ stated ways of dealing with personal and organizational value incongruity.

### **Implications**

There is a unique morality that defines the profession of educational leadership. As part of a professional ethos, one important moral aspect of the work is a response to the needs of children and youth and serving their best interests. This moral imperative can ideally serve as a principle of prima facie duty, but in most cases, at least in practice, the maxim “serve the best interests of the student” is employed as a principle of actual duty when taking into account a variety of other circumstantial and contextual considerations; and therefore becomes more akin to an injunction of special consideration for a specific profession when balancing and negotiating a wide variety of value claims in order to meet both individual and collective student needs.

Part of the work of being an educational leader is experiencing internal moral dissonance between personal values, beliefs and one's own sense of right and what the organization (school district) or even profession deems as appropriate, right and good. Although it would be attractive for a school leader to utilize one basic principle that serves as a moral imperative for professional decision making, and likewise mollify moral conflict both within and outside oneself, it appears that such an absolute rule or reference point, at least in practice, is not available, or at least employed.

Although there is a common recognition and use of the expression, "do what's best for the student" (and its many forms), and there is a clear aspirational quality to the injunction, the vagaries of professional moral judgment, especially for principals, suggest that the maxim is a reference point, a check among many checks when balancing and negotiating the wide mix of values and considerations while making decisions that have moral and ethical qualities.

Should the professional ideal stand? Of course it should, because the injunction, "serve the best interest of the student", is situated under two grand deontic principles of justice and beneficence (Frankena, 1973). And responding to principles of justice and beneficence, and cultivating virtues that signify qualities of justice (justice as a trait: fairness, even handedness, disposed toward equal treatment) and beneficence (benevolence, kindness, goodwill, disposed toward others' well-being) that transcend behavior strictly motivated by mere duty or obligation, provides a necessary moral balance – a balance of principal(s) with that of traits.

According to Noddings (2002) "history suggests that the prescriptive use of principles has not been effective. Moral people rarely consult abstract principles when they act

morally...[rather] moral motivation arises within the agent or within interactions” (p. 1). The focus on, How shall we live? or What kind of person am I to be?, not just What is my duty or obligation?, is central to moral educational leadership. MacIntyre (1984) has indicated that moral discourse is “paralyzed if not dead” because of the “interminability” of discussion pertaining to the utilitarian-deontological debate that endlessly circles round and round with an almost exclusive emphasis on decision making and moral choice.

Moral properties or qualities do not just pertain to choices, but more fundamentally to persons...moral action cannot [be adequately] understood on a piecemeal basis, certainly not on the basis of decisional quandaries. Modern moral theorists...are so preoccupied with the decision-making moment, under the rubric of an ‘ought,’ that they overlook the complex, and indeed more substantive matrix of morality (Hittinger, 1989, p. 450).

Virtue must have some role in following the injunction “serve the best interests of the student”. Virtue ensures that motivation is not entirely external, adventitious, or nonmoral, but provides for what Mill calls “internal sanctions” (Frankena, 1973). This conception is supported within the field of educational leadership by Starratt (2005), Begley (2005) and Greenfield (2004). The moral ideal for the profession stands as a “double-aspect conception of morality” where the principle *per se* and a personal way of being provide the necessary motivation to act, decide and more importantly, live and work in a certain way all for serving “the best interests of the student” and meeting their individual and corporate needs.

In addition to these implications for theory and practice, it is important to bring to the forefront the very common and everyday morality that administrators speak about. Much



of what constitutes good and right professional practice is really subsumed within a broader personal moral vision the administrator possesses as s/he performs her/his professional role. Although there is no doubt that principals feel some sense of duty bounded-ness (of varying degrees) to administrative rules and institutional policies and procedures, all operate from a moral and motivational value base that is constructed, to a very great extent, outside organizational or professional influences. “We bring how we were raised and all that into whatever job we do – it comes with you. You bring you with you.” All the normative ethical thinking that administrators carry to work is part of who they are and defines them for themselves and others and has bearing on what professional practice means to them.

Cady (2005) captures the dynamic nature of our moral life and judgment this way:

Few if any of us hold consistently to any one ethical theory as we sort through the moral challenges we face. Sometimes we are preoccupied with thinking through our options to determine their likely consequences. Sometimes we are intent on acting with respect to a specific rule regardless of the outcome. Sometimes we are caught up in cross-examining ourselves about the traits of character we most want to manifest in our behavior. Sometimes we notice ourselves acting more-or-less spontaneously out of compassion for another, or out of deference to social norms. And sometimes we are caught in a combination of these concerns, and with other concerns as well (p. 10).

This short description typifies the dynamic of ethical thinking expressed by most administrators in this study. It involves a thick and rich combination of rule referencing, maximizing benefit and promoting nonmoral good, assessing one’s character, motivation

and disposition and responding with empathy and personal investment in the lives of others, being reflective and maintaining an open posture to what context, circumstance or situation may afford as a moral lesson or insight. This depiction is one of authenticity, being true to oneself in “mutually affirming relationship with others” – not being fake – as a basis for ethical decision making in professional practice (Starratt, 2004).

The Ethic of the Profession and its Model for Promoting Students’ Best Interests (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006) centers a professional ethic for educational administration on a rule-like moral imperative: serve the best interests of the student by meeting their individual needs. The ethical ideal, encapsulated in the expression “the best interests of the student,” means much more than a rule-based principle in the eyes of practitioners. The expression resonates with who they are as a moral person and the qualities and dispositions that must be possessed in order to aspire to a viable professional ethic; an ethic that calls for “an understanding of oneself and others” through reflection (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005).

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## Appendix A

### Two-Interview Sequence Format: Vignette and Protocols

#### Interview 1:

The moral problem chosen for the first interview was selected from a collection of dilemmas used for education leadership training in *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005, p. 126-129) and modified for the interview context.

#### Vignette:

The meeting could have been worse. That though provided Central High School principal, Charlie Franken, little solace as he sat in his office reflecting on the discord created in the just concluded meeting with his department chairs. Their responses to the proposed curriculum changes approached open revolt, and Charlie felt trapped with few good options.

Central High students always performed well on the state's standardized tests by maintaining scores that were equal to or above state averages. The school continued to meet state defined adequate yearly progress targets. Unfortunately, it was the school's future performance that most concerned the Board of School Directors. With each passing year, the state's goals for acceptable scores became more aggressive. Due to such high expectations, it appeared that a large number of districts would not meet state goals in the coming years. The school directors wanted to insure that their district would not be among them.

If the number of Central High students achieving acceptable scores increased at the current rate, the school would be placed on the state's "at risk" list in two years. Such an

action would eliminate state funding incentives for good performance and open the door for a state takeover of the school district. With such dire consequences looming in the future, the directors thought it prudent to increase student performance on the state test. The board charged the district superintendent, Dr. Carl Horne, to design and implement a curriculum that specifically addressed state standards. Appreciating the gravity of the situation and the serious concerns of the board, Dr. Horne developed a plan that he presented to Charlie Franken.

In the meeting with Charlie, Dr. Horne presented an outline of the curriculum changes that the board of directors agreed would address their concerns. Courses, specifically designed to address the state standards, would be created in each of the four core disciplines for grades nine through twelve. These new courses would provide intensive training in test-taking skills. The curriculum would be centered on the material covered by the state standards and would be mandatory for students who failed to meet acceptable levels of achievement on the state exams. Since there was no federal or state funding provided to support such an initiative, these changes were to be implemented utilizing current staff.

Charlie's reaction to the proposal was less than enthusiastic. Sensing his opposition, Dr. Horne explained how such a curriculum was in the best interest of the school district. The community respected the accomplishments of the district and was proud of its standing in the state. The threat of falling below state expectations and being placed on an "at risk" list would undermine the trust and support of the community. The turmoil that would result from such a situation would be unthinkable; consequently, it was necessary to take action before problems developed. Dr. Horne's parting words were

clearly etched in Charlie's memory. He stated, "You're either part of the problem or part of the solution. Keep me informed of your progress."

Now that he had his "marching orders," Charlie's first action would be to meet with his department chairs. Because of their previous work on developing the curriculum, he knew the meeting would not be pleasant.

Under Charlie's collegial style of leadership and the notable support of the department chairs, especially the respected English Chair, Alicia Weston, the faculty developed a curriculum that best served the needs of all Central High School students. They researched and worked with a strong sense of purpose nurtured by an altruistic desire to give their students the best. Developed and implemented over a five-year period, the curriculum identified three "directions" of academic preparation based on students' post-graduation plans. Each discipline offered courses designed to prepare students for college, vocational/technical school or direct entry into the workforce. At each grade level, an interdisciplinary relation among the four core subject areas was established. Students were free to choose among the offerings in order to create an individualized plan that best suited their needs. Although subject to ongoing evaluation and revision, the current curriculum appeared to be successful in achieving the desired objectives and was highly regarded by the staff. It was with this in mind that Charlie presented the new curriculum revision plan to the department chairs.

As anticipated, the chairs were not receptive to the proposed change. The impact on the current curriculum would be significant. The discussion began with a practical consideration. With no new staff, the courses offered for vocational/technical school students and those desiring to enter the workforce upon graduation would be virtually

eliminated since many of those students would most likely be candidates for the new courses. This trend would be exacerbated in future years with the relentless raising of state targets for successful achievement.

The discussion then took a more philosophical turn. The validity of teaching test-taking skills was questioned. How were such skills useful in the real world?

Additionally, the practice of “teaching to the test” was anathema to educators interested in providing their students with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their chosen areas. Also, by identifying which students were assigned to the new courses, the school would be eliminating students’ and parental choice by subjecting them to mandatory tracking. It was no surprise that Alicia Weston was particularly vehement in her objections by suggesting that teachers were not needed to fulfill the processing demanded of the new curriculum; trainers would be sufficient.

What did surprise Charlie was Alicia’s threat to resign her position as chair and return to the classroom as a teacher if such curriculum changes were mandated. She did not want to be in a leadership position for the implementation of a program that she considered to be unethical. Charlie knew Alicia well enough to know that this was not a mere bluff. Trying to gauge the reactions of the other chairs to her pronouncement, Charlie could not discern if any were inclined to follow her lead.

Sitting in his office, Charlie considered his dilemma. He knew he was bound to carry out the mandates of the school board and the superintendent, but what if he thought that a particular directive was not in the best interests of students? Then he paused to reflect: Who is the ultimate judge of what is in their best interests? The authority certainly resides with the board, but are the directors the best qualified to make curricular and

pedagogical decisions? What would be the effect on the school's students, morale, and culture if the curriculum changes were unilaterally mandated? Would siding with his chairs in a unified front delineating the shortcomings of the proposed changes influence Dr. Horne and the board to reconsider their position? These questions preoccupied his mind as Charlie tried to formulate the first report of progress to Dr. Horne.

Protocol:

1. If you were Charlie, how would you deal with this situation? How would you go about making a professional decision?
2. Why is accountability so important in education today? Who benefits from the accounting of students' standardized test scores and uniform standards?
3. What is Charlie's ultimate responsibility? Is there a difference between strict accountability and a broader notion of responsibility for student outcomes?
4. What would the profession expect Charlie to do in this case? Can something be educationally right but morally wrong or vice versa? Can something be morally true or ethically correct and educationally impossible or inappropriate?

Interview 2:

Protocol:

1. In what ways do you consider your work as a school leader to be moral and ethical in nature? What is good moral practice?
2. What kinds of difficult moral and ethical decisions are you faced with in your work? How often?

3. Would you say that you feel “duty bound” to rules, policies, institutional practices and professional expectations set by those you work with and others within the profession?
4. Have you experienced a standout, salient event in your life that has changed or shaped the way you approach your professional decision making? How has that experience guided your moral choices as an educational leader? (Probe to question 4).
5. Can you recall an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences? Tell me about that experience. (Probe to question 5).
6. Have you ever experienced a conflict over following a school law, policy, institutional procedure or professional expectation that you believed was morally questionable? (Probe to question 6).
7. Has there been a time in your career when what you believed was right personally was different from what you thought was expected or the right thing to do professionally? Tell me about that.
8. How did you resolve the discrepancy? Do you believe you acted for the best? (Probe for tension, clash and internal conflict.)
9. What assisted and guided you in making your decision? Do you have a particular approach or a principle you try to follow? (Probe race, gender, community type, school size, religion, etc.)
10. Are you familiar with any particular set of professional codes of ethics?
11. Are there moral considerations and judgments unique to this profession?



12. If you were to give advice to a beginning administrator about the essential ingredients of right, true, and good practice, what would you say? Is there such a thing as right, true, and good practice?
13. Have you ever heard of the expression, “The best interests of the student?” What does that expression mean? Could your interpretation and understanding of that expression help you in making ethical choices in your work? Why and how?
14. What is the difference between being responsible to teachers versus being responsible to students?
15. Is there a difference between the best interests of the student (one) and the best interests of the students (all or most) in your mind?
16. How important is the consideration of rights, responsibility, and respect in making ethically sound educational decisions that affect students? How do you define rights...responsibility...respect?
17. Are any of the three principles more important than the other? If so, how would you rank them?

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**  
The Pennsylvania State University

**ORP USE ONLY: IRB#21108**  
**The Pennsylvania State**  
**University**  
**Office for Research Protections**  
**Approval Date: 06/01/05 JKG**  
**Expiration Date: 05/25/06 JKG**

An Investigation of Public School Administrators' Ethical Reasoning in Considering "the Best Interests of the Student"

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1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to examine and better understand the ethical decision making of educational leaders. This study will examine how practicing school administrators make sense of moral dilemmas, the process by which ethical decisions are made, and meanings ascribed to moral judgment.
2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in a two part interview. The two interview segments will be audio-taped. The interviews will be conducted in person at a location convenient for you. When meeting in person is not possible, the interviews will be conducted over a land-line phone (i.e., not cellular) to preserve confidentiality.
3. Discomforts and Risks: Typically, when public school administrators talk about their work, they describe positive as well as negative aspects. Some interview questions may be awkward for, or require difficult self-reflection of, the participant. To reduce any possibility of risks or discomfort from participating in their interview: (a) Participants are free to discontinue the interview at any time; (b) Researcher will not name participants or their school/district in any research reports stemming from this study; (c) Researcher will not include any descriptive information that makes participants or their school/district identifiable; (d) Researcher will not play the audiotape of the interview except for transcription and coding; (e) Audiotapes of interviews will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will be destroyed in 2008.
4. Benefits:
  - a. Participant benefits include an opportunity to talk frankly about the complex nature of their work, to reflect on their decision making and choices as a school leader and perhaps learn more about themselves.
  - b. Societal benefits include generating information and ideas about how to go about making clear, informed and well-reasoned decisions that influence others' life, liberty and property interests within an organizational setting.

5. Duration/Time: The two part interview will last approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes in total length; approximately 45 minutes for each part/session.
6. Statement of Confidentiality: Any information that you share with the principal researcher will remain confidential and not be shared beyond his faculty advisor(s). If this research is published, no information that would identify you or your school/district will be written. Only the principal investigator and a professional transcriber will have access to the audiotape recordings. The Office for Research Protections may review records related to this project.
7. Compensation: There is no compensation for participation, but I am very grateful for your participation.
8. Right to Ask Questions: If you have questions about the research project, please contact the name(s) listed above. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.
9. Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any and you can decline to answer specific questions.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. You will receive a copy of the document for your records.

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Participant Signature

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Date

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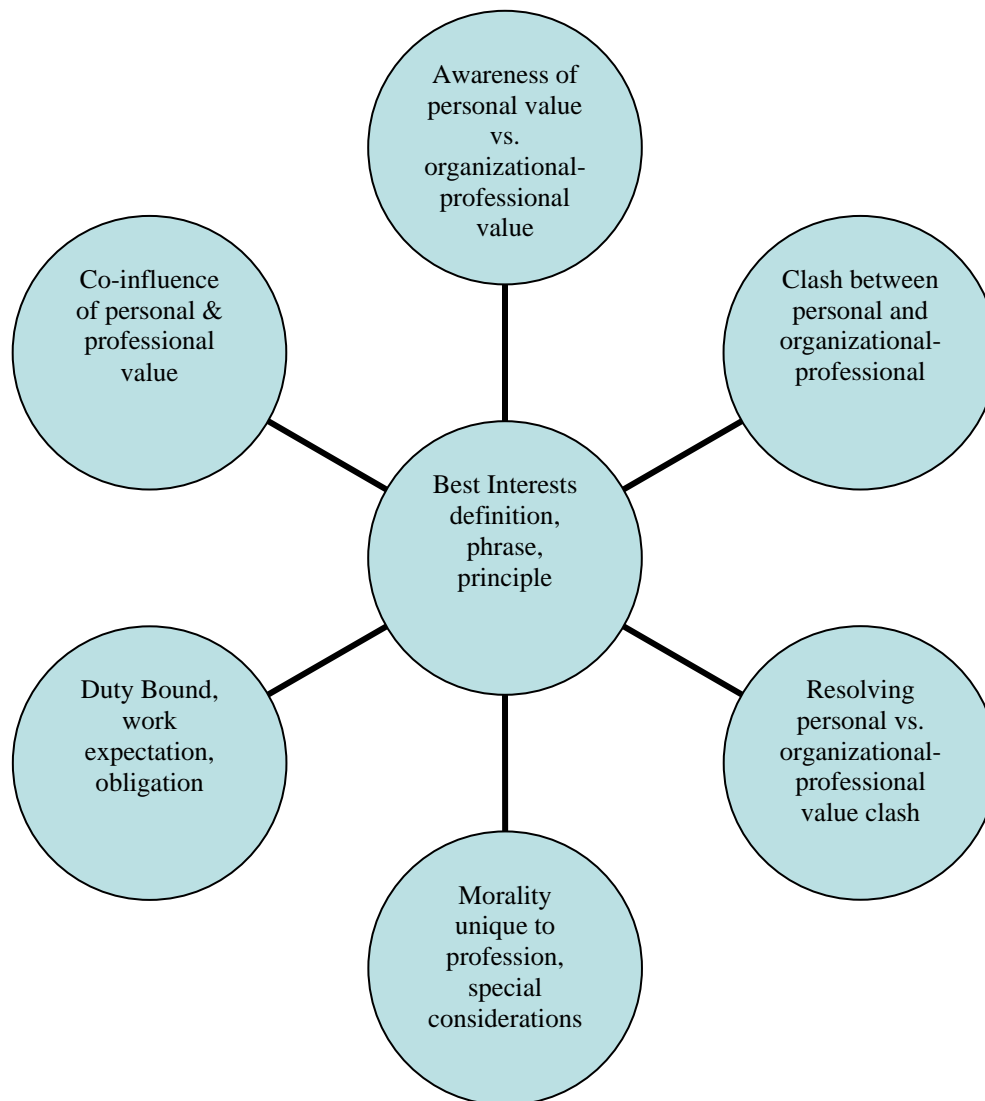
Investigator Signature

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Date

## Appendix C

### Concept Map and Initial Coding Categories



## Appendix D

### Data Display for Deductive Categories and Corresponding Codes

CODING CATEGORY: DUTY BOUND

SORT: 1 <sup>st</sup> Level	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level
DICTATES – NO		
CHAIN OF COMMAND	DIRECTIVE	
	PASS OFF	BUY TIME
	INFORM	
	TRUST	
POLICY CHECKING		
SUPERVISE		
FIND OPTIONS	COLLABORATION	COMPROMISE
		REASON
	STUDY	
GATHER INFORMATION		
BOTTOM LINE	DIRECTIVE	
ACCOUNTABILITY – YES	C&I	
PROGRESS	TEST SCORES = PERFORMANCE	
POLICY MESSAGE		
FEEL BOUND – YES		
FEEL BOUND – NO		
ANSWER TO MANY	ADMIN STAFF	
	PROF STAFF	SERVE
		RESOURCES
	SUPPORT STAFF	
	PARENTS	SUPERVISE & TEACH
	STUDENTS	TRUST
ORGANIZE		
TIME		
POLICY FOLLOW	W NEG MORAL PRESSURE	
	CONSISTENT	PROFESSIONALISM
	HEALTH, SAFETY, WELFARE	
THINK & JUDGE		
REASON		
COMMUNITY EXPECTATION		
REFLECT – VISION		

FLEXIBILITY – ADAPT		
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## CODING CATEGORY: VALUE DIFFERENCE

SORT: 1 <sup>st</sup> Level	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level	4 <sup>th</sup> Level
DICTATES – NO	COLLABORATE		
	TRUST		
	TIIME		
CHAIN OF COMMAND	DIRECTIVE	RESTRICTIVE	
PROGRESS	TEST SCORES = PERFORMANCE	MEASUREMENT VS. PUNISHMENT	
POLICY MESSAGE	DISCRETION (PROCEDURE)	OWN DEFINITION OF RIGHT	
	DISCRETION	OWN DEFINITION OF RIGHT	TIME
	DISCRETION	BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENT (ONE)	EQUITY VS. EQUALITY
		CARE FOR OWN	BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENT (ONE)
			SUPPORT & UNDERSTANDING
			CORRECTION & RESPONSIBILITY
			SAFETY NETS
		OWN SENSE OF RIGHT	
	OWN DEFINITION OF RIGHT	IN LOCO PARENTIS	
		TIME	
POLICY VIOLATION	LIE	BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENT (ONE)	
	CARE FOR OWN	SUPPORT & UNDERSTANDING	
		PROFESSIONALISM VS. TIT FOR TAT	
	CONSCIENCE	OWN DEFINITION OF RIGHT	
	MORAL RISK VS. ORGAN SANCTION		

POLICY QUESTIONING	CONSCIENCE	OWN DEFINITION OF RIGHT	DIFFERING STANDARDS (EQUALITY VS. EQUITY)
			EQUITY AMONG TEACHERS
			DIFFERING INSTRUCTION (EQUITY VS. EQUALITY)
		TEST SCORES = PERFORM. 100%	(EQUALITY VS. EQUITY)
		BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENT (ONE)	
CONSCIENCE	OWN DEFINITION OF RIGHT	DOUBLE STANDARD	
		GOLDEN RULE	
		NOT LEGAL OR NICE	
		RESTRICTED BY SYSTEM	
		RESTRICTED BY LIMITED FORUM	
		STUDENT COMPETITION	
		SUSPEND FOR PRACTICALITY	TIME
PERSONAL VS. COMMUNITY			
CHARGE/OBLIG.	BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENTS (ALL)	SAFETY, WELFARE, EDUCATION	
		RELATIONSHIP	
	WHOLE STUDENT		
	CARE FOR OWN EQUITY		
	PROFESSIONAL VS. PERSONAL	RELATIONSHIPS	
JOB NOT ME CALLED TO JOB			
ACCOUNTBLITY – YES	MORAL TRAINING		
	BEST		

	INTERESTS OF THE STUDENTS (ALL)		
	C&I		
DIFFERENT STYLES	HIGHER MORAL GROUND		
HIGHER MORAL GROUND	ROLE MODEL		
	INTEGRITY	SAY – DO	
REALITY CHECKS			
PROACTIVE	LOOKING AHEAD	CONTROL	
	CONTROL		
REFLECT	PROFESSIONAL MORAL IDEAL		
	TRANSCEND CIRCUMSTANCE		
FIND OPTIONS	COLLABORATE	COMPROMISE	
MORAL FAILING			

## CODING CATEGORY: CLASH

SORT: 1 <sup>st</sup> Level	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level
NEGOTIATE	COMPETING VALUES OUTSIDE	BUFFER
		COMMUNITY
		CENTRAL OFFICE ADMIN
		BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENTS (ALL)
		INFORMATION
		PARENTS
FOLLOW PRINCIPLE		
PERSONAL VS. POLICY	CIRCUMSTANCES (CONDITIONAL)	
	PUT IN POSITION	
	TORN	
	SPLITTING HAIRS	
	STRUGGLE	
	INDECISION	
	GRAY AREA	
	STUCK	



	ANGER	
	PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY	RELATIONAL TRUST
	TRUST MAKERS	
	ARGUE FOR EXCEPTION	
	HANDS TIED	
	MORAL PRESSURE	
	WEIGHT – BURDEN	
	COMPLY	
	NO COMPLY	
PERSONAL VS. PRACTICE	WEIGHT	
	NO CONSENSUS	
	SURPRISE	
	RISK	
	GRAY AREA	
	READ BETWEEN LINES	
	HARD CHOICE	
	MORAL FAILING	
	FALSE JUSTIFICATION	
	INDECISION	
	RELATIONSHIPS	
	ANGER	
	FRUSTRATION	
	JUDGING BY SEPARATING OUT SELF	
	SUBTLE MORAL DEFIANCE	
	BOTHERED	
	PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY	C&I
	DEFINING ONESELF	
MORAL BALANCE	CIRCUMSTANCES (CONDITIONAL)	
	POLICY GUIDE VS. APPLY	
	JUDGMENT	
	PERSONAL VALUE	
	LOOK AT SIDES	
	TIMING	
	INFORMATION	

CODING CATEGORY: RESOLVE

SORT: 1 <sup>st</sup> Level	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level
FOLLOW PRINCIPLE	GOLDEN RULE	
	WHAT'S BEST FOR THE STUDENT (ONE)	
	MY KID TO BE TREATED	
	SELF-IMPOSED AMNESIA	
SEPARATE SELF FROM POSITION		
CREATIVE INTERPRETATION OF GRAY		
RATIONALIZE DECISION		
GUT INSTICT		
ASK OTHERS FOR ADVICE		
FOLLOW PAST EXPERIENCE		
PERSONAL SENSE OF RIGHT		
TRUE TO SELF		
BLAME		
LEAP AND ASK FORGIVENESS		
FOLLOW POLICY/EXPECTATION	REFRAME	COMPENSATE FOR PERSONAL VALUES
SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE		
LAST DITCH TO PERSUADE		
RISK LOSS OF JOB		
HOBBIES		
WEIGH	TIME	
	COMMUNITY VALUES	
	CIRCUMSTANCES (CONDITIONAL)	
	BRAINSTORM W/ OTHERS	
	INFORMATION	
	DEBATE W/ ONESELF	
	GAIN PERSPECTIVE	
NEVER RESOLVED	LINGERING TENSION	
	SELF-IMPOSED	

	AMNESIA	
NO DECISION/NO ACTION		

## CODING CATEGORY: BEST INTERESTS

SORT: 1 <sup>st</sup> Level	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level
STUDENT (ONE)	EDUCATION, WELFARE	NEEDS
	POLICY MESSAGE	
	PRACTICE	CARE
		JUSTICE
		CRITIQUE
		FUTURE BENEFIT
STUDENTS (ALL)	RELATIONSHIP	
	C&I	POLICY DEVELOP
		POLICY MESSAGE
	BEFORE TEACHERS	
	SAFETY, WELFARE, EDUCATION	
	EDUCATION	CRITIQUE
PRINCIPLE	CHARGE	
	STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST (ALL)	POLICY DEVELOP
		MASTER ®
	A STUDENT'S BEST INTEREST (ONE)	NEED
	WEIGH	CIRCUMSTANCES (CONDITIONAL)
		TEACHER NEED
		OWN VALUES
RANK	NO	
	RESPECT, RESPONSIBILITY, RIGHTS	
	RESPECT, RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITY	
	RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITY, RESPECT	
	RESPONSIBILITY, RIGHTS, RESPECT	
	RESPONSIBILITY, RESPECT, RIGHTS	
COMMUNITY VALUES		

INFORMATION		
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## CODING CATEGORY: MORAL UNIQUE

SORT: 1 <sup>st</sup> Level	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level	4 <sup>th</sup> Level
PROFESSIONAL STAFF	RELATIONAL TRUST & REGARD		
	MORAL SUPERVISION		
	RESPONSIBLE		
	COMMUNICATION	ACTIVE LISTENING	
		SENSITIVITY, TIMING, LANGUAGE	
		PRIASE	
	LOYALTY RECOGNIZED		
	IMPARTIALITY		
	IN LOCO PARENTIS		
	RESPONSIBILITY		
	CONFIDENTIALITY		
STUDENTS	CONFIDENTIALITY		
	RELATIONSHIPS	EXTENDED TIME CARE	
	BEST INTERESTS	FUTURE BENEFIT	
		SENSITIVE TO CHILD	
		HEALTH, SAFETY, WELFARE	
		INDIVIDUAL NEEDS	
		PROFESSIONAL STAFF	COLLAB. & COMPROMISE
	RESPONSIBLE	LIVES AFFECTED	
		IN LOCO PARENTIS	SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING
		EDUCATION, SAFETY, WELFARE	
		ALL CAN LEARN	

VIRTUE	BRAINSTORM – FIND OPTIONS		
	HARD WORK		
	HONESTY	INTEGRITY	
	SEEK ADVICE		
	HUMILITY	RECOGNIZE MISTAKES	
	DO WHAT YOU ASK OF OTHERS		
	EMPATHY		
	EXPERIENCE		
	KNOWLEDGE – JUDGMENT	CRITICAL EYE	
	GENUINE	CONSIDERATION	
	RESPECTFUL		
	KIND		
	GIVE – GOING BEYOND		
	VISION		
	FAIR		
	LOVE		
	PATIENCE		
	TOLERANCE		
	OPEN TO RISK		
	DEFINING ONSELF		
DUTY BOUND	PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL		
	PROFESSIONAL		
	PERSONAL		
	CALLING		
FOCUS ON TEACHING & LEARNING			
ROLE MODEL	SCRUTINY	PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL	
CHAIN OF COMMAND	NEGOTIATE – PERSUADE		
ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF	COLLABORATE		
COMPROMISE			
PUBLIC RELATIONS	SENSITIVITY	TIMING	
		LANGUAGE	
COMMUNITY VALUES			

SCHOOL CLIMATE			
MANY CONSTITUENCIES	BALANCE		
ENCOMPASSING ETHIC			
CREATIVE INTERPRETATION OF GRAY			

**Appendix E**

**Tree Diagram for Emergent Categories Linked to Corresponding Codes**

Emergent Categories for Best Interests

Original Best Interests Codes & Codes from Other

Conceptual Categories Related to Best Interests

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SCHOOL-COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

EXPECTATIONS

(BI) COMMUNITY VALUES

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

C&I

POLICY DEVELOP

MESSAGE

(BI) PRINCIPLE

STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST (ALL)

POLICY DEVELOP

(BI) STUDENT (ONE)

EDUCATION

(DB) ACCOUNTABILITY – YES  
C&I  
(DB) ANSWER TO MANY  
(MU) COMMUNITY VALUES  
(MU) MANY CONSTITUENCIES  
BALANCE  
(MU) PROFESSIONAL STAFF  
MORAL SUPERVISION  
(MU) COMPROMISE  
(R) WEIGH (BALANCE)  
NEGOTIATE  
COMPETING VALUES OUTSIDE  
CONFLICT (BI) STUDENTS (ALL)  
EDUCATION  
CRITIQUE  
(BI) DEFINITION



RESPONSIBILITY

RIGHT

(BI) STUDENT (ONE)

PRACTICE

JUSTICE

CARE

(BI) PRINCIPLE

CHARGE

(R) NEGOTIATE

COMPETING VALUES OUTSIDE

COMMUNITY

CENTRAL OFFICE ADMIN

PARENTS

TEACHERS

POLICY-PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATION

ADVOCATE UP

(BI) DEFINITION

RIGHTS

(BI) PRINCIPLE

CHARGE

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

C&I

ED, SAFETY, WELFARE

EDUCATION

CRITIQUE

(DB) CHAIN OF COMMAND

INFORM

(DB) FIND OPTIONS

COLLABORATION

COMPROMISE

(MU) CHAIN OF COMMAND

NEGOTIATE – PERSUADE

POLICY-PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATION

RESPONSE

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

EDUCATION

C&I

POLICY DEVELOP

(BI) PRINCIPLE

STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST (ALL)

CHARGE

POLICY DEVELOP

(BI) STUDENT VS. STUDENTS

(BI) STUDENT (ONE)

EDUCATION

(DB) ACCOUNTABILITY – YES

C&I

(DB) POLICY MESSAGE

(DB) PROGRESS

TEST SCORES = PERFORMANCE

(DB) BOTTOM LINE

DIRECTIVE

(DB) FIND OPTIONS

COLLABORATION

REASON

COMPROMISE

(MU) MANY CONSTITUENCIES

BALANCE

(MU) VIRTUE

BRAINSTORM – FIND OPTIONS

VISION

(MU) STUDENTS

BEST INTERESTS

RESPONSIBLE

ED, SAFETY, WELFARE

(VD) PROGRESS

TEST SCORES = PERFORMANCE

MEASURE VS. PUNISH

RELATION BY CONTEXT

GROUP

(BI) STUDENT VS. STUDENTS

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

ED, SAFETY, WELFARE

EDUCATION

CRITIQUE

(BI) PRINCIPLE

STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST (ALL)

POLICY DEVELOP

(DB) FIND OPTIONS

COLLABORATION

COMPROMISE

DEFINITION

(BI) PRINCIPLE

STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST (ALL)

C&I

(BI) PRINCIPLE

STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST (ALL)

POLICY DEVELOP

MASTER SCHEDULE

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

EDUCATION

C&I

POLICY DEVELOP

POLICY MESSAGE

(DB) ACCOUNTABILITY – YES

C&I

(DB) CHAIN OF COMMAND

DIRECTIVE

(DB) PROGRESS

TEST SCORES = PERFORMANCE

(MU) COMPROMISE

(MU) CHAIN OF COMMAND

NEGOTIATE – PERSUADE

(MU) PROFESSIONAL STAFF

MORAL SUPERVISION

(VD) ACCOUNTABILITY – YES

C&I

BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENTS

POLICY-PROFESSIONAL EXPECTATION

MORAL SUPERVISION

(BI) PRINCIPLE

STUDENTS’ NEEDS FIRST (ALL)

POLICY DEVELOP

WEIGH

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

CHARGE

WEIGH

TEACHER NEED

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

(BI) DEFINITION

RESPONSIBILITY

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

C&I

BEFORE TEACHERS

EDUCATION

CRITIQUE

(BI) INFORMATION

(DB) FIND OPTIONS

COLLABORATION

COMPROMISE

(DB) ANSWER TO MANY

PROF STAFF



SERVE

(DB) ACCOUNTABILITY – YES

C & I

(DB) PROGRESS

TEST SCORES = PERFORMANCE

(MU) PROFESSIONAL STAFF

RESPONSIBLE

MORAL SUPERVISION

RELATION TRUST & REGARD

(MU) STUDENTS

BEST INTERESTS

PROFESSIONAL STAFF

COMMUNICATION

COLLABORATION

(COMPROMISE)

(VD) FIND OPTIONS

COLLABORATION

COMPROMISE

(VD) POLICY MESSAGE

DISCRETION

OWN DEF OF RIGHT

(TIME)

RELATION BY CONTEXT

ONE

(BI) STUDENT (ONE)

EDUCATION & WELFARE

RELATIONSHIP

EDUCATION

PRACTICE

CRITIQUE

CARE

(BI) PRINCIPLE

CHARGE

STUDENT'S BEST INTER (ONE)

NEED

WEIGH

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

TEACHER NEED

(DB) ANSWER TO MANY

PARENTS

SUPERVISE & TEACH

(DB) STUDENTS

TRUST

(MU) STUDENTS

RELATIONSHIPS

CARE

BEST INTERESTS

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

(MU) MANY CONSTITUENCIES

BALANCE

(VD) POLICY MESSAGE

DISCRETION

CARE FOR OWN

(SAFETY NETS)

BEST INTER OF STUDENT

(EQUALITY VS. EQUITY)

(VD) POLICY VIOLATION

CARE FOR OWN

(SUPPORT, UNDERSTANDING)

LIE

BEST INTER OF STUDENT

(VD) CHARGE/OBLIGATION

BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENT

EDUCATION

(VD) POLICY QUESTIONING

CONSCIENCE

OWN DEF OF RIGHT

1) TEST SCORES =

PERFORMANCE

100%

2) DIFFERING

STANDARDS

3) DIFFERING

INSTRUCTION

(EQUALITY VS.

EQUITY)

(R) PERSONAL VS. POLICY

NO COMPLY

STRUGGLE

ANGER

SPLITTING HAIRS

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

PUT IN POSITION

(R) MORAL BALANCE

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

POLICY GUIDE VS. APPLY

JUDGMENT

PERSONAL VALUE

(R) PERSONAL VS. PRACTICE

BOTHERED

(R) FOLLOW PRINCIPLE

BEST FOR THE STUDENT

(R) WEIGH

BRAINSTORM WITH OTHERS

		INFORMATION
	MODEL	(BI) STUDENT VS. STUDENTS
		MODEL
	PROGRESSION	(BI) STUDENT VS. STUDENTS
RELATION BY CONTEXT		
	STUDENT & GROUP	(BI) STUDENT (ONE)
		EDUCATION
		NEEDS
		PRACTICE
		PRACTICE
		CARE
		(BI) STUDENT VS. STUDENTS
		DEFINITION
		MANY FACETS
		RESPONSIBILITY
		PRINCIPLE

WEIGH

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

(BI) PRINCIPLE

WEIGH

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

RELATIONSHIP

(R) PERSONAL VS. POLICY

HANDS TIED

WEIGH

PERSONAL-PROFESSIONAL

DEFINITION

(BI) DEFINITION

MANY FACETS

RESPONSIBILITY



FAIR

IN LOCO PARENTIS

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

RELATIONSHIP

ED, WELFARE, SAFETY

BEFORE TEACHERS

SAFETY, WELFARE, ED

(BI) PRINCIPLE

CHARGE

STUDENT'S BEST INTER (ONE)

NEED

STUDENTS' NEEDS FRIST (ALL)

MASTER SCHEDULE

WEIGH

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

(BI) STUDENT (ONE)

PRACTICE

CRITIQUE

JUSTICE

FUTURE BENEFIT

RELATIONSHIP

(BI) STUDENT VS. STUDENTS

(BI) INFORMATION

(MU) STUDENTS

BEST INTEREST

RESPONSIBLE

IN LOCO PARENTIS

(VD) CHARGE/OBLIGATION

BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENTS

SAFETY, WELFARE, ED

(VD) POLICY MESSAGE

## DISCRETION

## CARE FOR OWN

(SUPPORT &amp;

UNDERSTANDING)

(CORRECT &amp;

RESPONSIBILITY)

## OWN DEF OF RIGHT

(IN LOCO

PARENTIS)

(VD) ACCOUNTABILITY – YES

C&amp;I

(R) NEGOTIATE

## COMPETING VALUES OUTSIDE

BEST INT OF STUDENTS

INFORMATION

(R) FOLLOW PRINCIPLE

“FINALITY”

BEST FOR THE STUDENT

(BI) PRINCIPLE

STUDENT’S BEST INTER (ONE)

WEIGH

(VD) CHARGE/OBLIGATION

BEST INTERSTS OF STUDENTS

SAFETY, WELFARE, ED

RELATIONSHIP

(VD) REFLECT

TRANSCEND CIRCUMSTANCE

(R) FOLLOW PRINCIPLE

BEST FOR THE STUDENT

PERSONAL-PROFESSIONAL

VANTAGE

(BI) STUDENT (ONE)

SAFETY & WELFARE

PRACTICE

CRITIQUE

JUSTICE

CARE

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

BEFORE TEACHERS

EDUCATION

CRITIQUE

(BI) PRINCIPLE

STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST (ALL)

STUDENT'S BEST INTER (ONE)

WEIGH

TEACHER NEED

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

OWN VALUES

(BI) DEFINITION

COP OUT

IN LOCO PARENTIS

(BI) INFORMATION

(MU) SCHOOL CLIMATE

(MU) DUTY BOUND

PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL

(MU) STUDENTS

RESPONSIBLE

ALL CAN LEARN

LIVES AFFECTED

IN LOCO PARENTIS

RELATIONSHIPS

BEST INTERESTS

FUTURE BENEFIT

(VD) POLICY QUESTIONING

CONSCIENCE

OWN DEF OF RIGHT

1) TEST SCORES =

PERFORMANCE

100%

2) DIFFERING

STANDARDS

3) DIFFERING

INSTRUCTION

(EQUALITY VS.

EQUITY)

(VD) CHARGE/OBLIGATION

WHOLE STUDENT

(VD) ACCOUNTABILITY – YES

(R) PERSONAL VS. PRACTICE

READ BETWEEN LINES

HARD CHOICE

RELATIONSHIPS

(R) WEIGH

GAIN PERSPECTIVE

DEBATE WITH ONESELF

(R) BLAME

(R) PERSONAL SENSE OF RIGHT

(R) FOLLOW PRINCIPLE

BEST FOR THE STUDENT

(R) FOLLOW POLICY/EXPECTATION

REFRAME

(COMPENSATE FOR

PERSONAL VALUES)

(R) TRUE TO SELF

(R) CREATIVE INTERPRET OF GRAY

(BI) STUDENT (ONE)

POLICY MESSAGE

SITUATION



PRACTICE

CRITIQUE

JUSTICE

(BI) PRINCIPLE

WEIGH

OWN VALUES

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

(BI) DEFINITION

MANY FACETS

(BI) COMMUNITY

(BI) INFORMATION

(MU) CREATIVE INTERP OF GRAY

(VD) CONSCIENCE

OWN DEFINITION OF RIGHT

SUSPEND PRACTICAL

(VD) POLICY QUESTIONING

CONSCIENCE

OWN DEF OF RIGHT

BEST INTER OF STDNTS

(VD) CHARGE/OBLIGATION

WHOLE STUDENT

(R) PERSONAL VS. PRACTICE

GRAY AREA

(R) PERSONAL VS. POLICY

TORN

(R) MORAL BALANCE

LOOK AT SIDES

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

POLICY GUIDE VS. APPLY

PERSONAL VALUE

PERSONAL-PROFESSIONAL

VIRTUE

SUSPEND PERSONAL VALUE

TIMING

(BI) STUDENT (ONE)

WELFARE

EDUCATION

NEEDS

PRACTICE

CARE

JUSTICE

CRITIQUE

(BI) PRINCIPLE

CHARGE

STUDENTS' NEEDS FIRST (ALL)

WEIGH

CIRCUMSTANCES

(CONDITIONAL)

(BI) DEFINITION

RESPECT

MANY FACETS

(BI) STUDENTS (ALL)

RELATIONSHIP

CRITIQUE

(DB) REFLECT – VISION

(DB) FLEXIBILITY – ADAPT

(MU) DUTY BOUND

PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL

(MU) STUDENTS

RESPONSIBLE

LIVES AFFECTED

BEST INTERESTS

## SENSITIVE TO CHILD

## (MU) VIRTUE

DO WHAT'S ASKED OF OTHERS

RESPECTFUL

KIND

HONESTY

GENUINE

CONSIDERATION

GIVE – GOING BEYOND

LOVE

## (VD) POLICY MESSAGE

DISCRETION

CARE FOR OWN

(SUPPORT, UNDERSTANDING)

(CORRECT, RESPONSIBILITY)

## (VD) CHARGE/OBLIGATION

CARE FOR OWN

BEST INTERESTS OF STUDENT

EDUCATION

SAFETY, WELFARE, ED

(VD) POLICY QUESTIONING

CONSCIENCE

OWN DEF OF RIGHT

BEST INTER OF STUDENT

LOVE

(R) PERSONAL VS. POLICY

ARGUE FOR EXCEPTION

(R) ASK OTHERS FOR ADVICE

(R) FOLLOW PRINCIPLE

MY KID TO BE TREATED

(R) PERSONAL SENSE OF RIGHT

## Vitae

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Pine Grove Area School District 2004 – 2006

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Salisbury-Elk Lick School District 1996 – 2000

District Counselor, Coordinator of Special Instructional Services, Teacher

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