

Implementing the *Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* for the Improvement of Ethical Conduct: Ten National Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

Ethical conduct should inspire a quality of behavior that exemplifies honor and dignity for oneself. In a school district, teachers, administrators, staff, and school board members should understand the importance of ethical conduct in the educational arena. An effective educational organization entails the need of individuals maintaining integrity and high morals. *The Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) by William Allan Kritsonis, PhD provides insight in improving ethical conduct in the educational environment.

Introduction

Employees of a school district should serve with honor. Individuals should strive to help students reach their potential to be socially and responsible citizens. School district employees should understand the importance of upholding ethical values. The following statement by Harry Wong emphasize the significance of educators valued principles: “Teachers are not in private practice. We are in the helping and caring profession, a service profession to help people enhance the quality of their lives.” The supportiveness, safety, and security of all areas are crucial in the learning environment.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss ten recommendations that are important in the improvement of ethical conduct. *The Ways of Knowing Through the Realms of Meaning* (2007) provides insight in improving ethical conduct in the educational environment. Dr. William Allan Kristonis is a noted author, professor, lecturer, consultant, editor-in-chief, and publisher. Using his expertise, he has detailed concepts in the realms of ethics. The focus of this essay is regarding the improvement of ethical conduct for school administrators. The administrator is responsible for providing leadership to the school community. The recommendations that are given will enhance the character development of principals and leaders as they model behavior for the students and staff.

Ethical Theory

The development of ethical theory dates back to Plato and Aristotle. The word ethic has its roots in the Greek word ethos. Ethos is the perceived degree of character or credibility that a person believes exists in another person or object (Haskins, 2000). The amount of trust and belief one has in another will have an important impact in how persuasive one will be.

According to Kritsonis (2007), the value of ethical theory is in guiding teaching and learning. In the ethical realm, emphasis should be on ethical understanding and how it may be improved. A person who has knowledge of ethical theory is as moral as a person who lacks such knowledge. Moral conduct pertains to one’s actions in certain situations. To solve a problem, one should be clear of the choices for the given situation. Kritsonis (2007) precisely states, “Before a person can know where to go, he needs to understand where he is starting from.” There must be a mission in order to fulfill a vision. Moral decisions require a set of values to serve as a form of reference in evaluating the consequences.

The values and morals an individual finds appropriate are called ethics. Ethical theory supplies rules. These rules are guidelines used in making decisions about a particular situation. Ethics in leadership deal with what leaders do and who they are. How leaders respond to a given situation and the choices they make are led by ethics. The concerns of ethical leaders are issues of justice and fairness. One cannot be a leader without involving values. One must be sensitive to the needs of others, care for others, and treat them in ways that are just in order to be an ethical leader.

Character Development

Character education programs teach students how to be good citizens and develop aspects of decision making. Effective character education programs affect the student's ability to be socially and personally responsible. Holloway (2006) identifies the fact that character education promotes core ethical values, creates a caring school community, and engages the staff as a learning community that instills morals.

In order for a school community to work well, the members must be aware of expectations. The principal is significant in building trust among the community. Principals lay the foundation for respect and personal regard. The actions of the administrator contribute to a positive learning environment in the school. There must be equal treatment among the different student groups. There should be a common link for success among all groups.

Principals must understand the importance of creating an effective learning community. There must be an open line of communication between the principal and stakeholders. Administrators must be available to students, teachers, and staff members throughout the day. They must also attend school and community events. The use of surveys is important in the correspondence to stakeholders. Kritsonis (2007) states that in all realms, the ability to communicate intelligibly and forcefully can be coordinated with other aspects into an integrated vision and commitment. The display of a principal's character can inspire character development in faculty and students.

Integrity

Integrity means that the behaviors of leaders are consistent with their stated values and that they are honest, ethical, responsible and trustworthy (Hoy and Miskel, 2005). Integrity is to say what one means. One must deliver what is promised, and stand for what is right. To be ethical means to be fair. Leaders should treat stakeholders fairly, equitably, and with dignity. Administrators inspire integrity by recognizing positive behaviors in teachers and students. A principal must concur to be liable to a high standard of ethical behavior. Leaders should lead by being an example.

The language of morals should be ordinary language (Kritsonis, 2007). No special concepts are needed in expressing intended meanings. When one states, "This action is right," he is not meaning that it is enjoyable. There are some leaders whom have inspired us by their sense of integrity and moral values such as Jesus, Isaiah, Confucius, and Moses. National heroes who exemplified moral courage were Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, and Joan of Arc. Moral philosophers that contributed to moral leadership were Socrates, St. Augustine, Immanuel Kant, and John Dewey.

In the educational field, there have been investigations reporting negative academic integrity and faculty wrongdoing. Faculty and student misconduct has been widespread. There has been wrongdoing ranging from plagiarism to falsification of data. There have also been violations of teaching norms to sexual or other harassment. Some campuses have been investigated for breaches of regulations. Academic integrity cannot be coerced, neither can it be

taught. For an organization to function using high moral standards there must be a leader that inspires a sense of integrity.

Displaying a high level of integrity can also relay the message that the leader is fair and just. The leaders treat all individuals in an equal manner. In some cases individuals might be treated differently due to specific circumstances. Leaders must be fair when dealing with awards and punishments.

Responsibility

The realms of esthetics are concerned with active personal commitment (Kritsonis, 2007). Morally, one is obliged to do right, and if one fails, he feels guilty. An effective leader should be responsible. Responsibility entails dependability, initiative, persistence, aggressiveness, self-confidence, and the desire to excel. One must be liable for one's own actions. Individuals must report concerns and rule violations.

Leaders in education have an ethical responsibility. They must have a moral vision of what is expected of them. Starratt (2005) identifies five domains of responsibility that are central to educational leadership. They are as follows:

- Responsibility as a human being
- Responsibility as a citizen and public servant
- Responsibility as an educator
- Responsibility as an educational administrator
- Responsibility as an educational leader
- Responsibility as a human being

Trust

Trust is building confidence through teamwork and open communication. In an effective school environment there is a culture of trust. There is mutual trust between the principal and staff, there is mutual trust between the colleagues, and there is faculty commitment to the school. Hoy and Miskel (2005) states, "Trust is like air; no one thinks much about it until it is needed and it is not there." It is important to have trust in schools. It facilitates cooperation and promotes cohesiveness. Trust has also been shown to improve student achievement.

Leaders should build a sense of trust within the environment. Their trust is built by behavior that is considerate, supportive, and collegial. When there is a high level of trust toward the principal, it is believed that the principal is benevolent, reliable, knowledgeable, honest, and open with the staff. Trust can be a powerful aspect of successful leadership.

Haskins (2000) suggests the following for improving trust through communication:

- Adapt messages to listeners by being sincere and honest in presenting the information.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in information to demonstrate the speaker's honesty in presenting messages.
- Introduce sources that were used in developing the presentation.

- Explain the soundness of analysis, arguments, and evidence that can help reinforce trust.
- Earn trust by showing trust towards others in the educational process.

Confidentiality falls in the category of trust. Leaders should stress the importance of confidentiality of student information. The school must maintain accurate and comprehensive student records. Records cannot be released without the consent of parents or guardians. Staff members are forbidden to discuss a student's private information. Leaders should not only value the confidentiality of students but the importance of confidentiality of staff members as well.

Kritsonis (2007) believes that there are certain principles, such as the duty to keep promises and to tell the truth. Obvious differences in principle may really be the difference in application due to different circumstances. Leaders must prove to be trustworthy to achieve a cohesive working environment.

Honesty

In the empirical realm, meanings are factual (Kritsonis, 2007). There is a distinction between empirical meaning and ethical meanings. If one was more clearly understood, then there would be less confusion about ethical questions. Ethical statements are neither true nor false, but they are expressions of personal preferences. Ethical language is used to alter feelings and behaviors.

In the education arena, one should be truthful and honest with one another. This includes teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. To be a good leader, one must be honest. When one thinks of dishonesty, one sees the significance of being honest. Dishonesty is lying, being deceitful, and not trusted by ones peers. When a leader is not trusted, there is no respect. Dishonesty weakens relationships, and there is also a negative impact on the organization. Being honest not only means being truthful, but it also means being open.

Respect

Respect means a leader listens, is empathic, and has concern for employees. Respect from a leader show employees that they are treated as worthy individuals. One feels respected when there beliefs, attitudes, and values are acknowledged. The relation of one person to another is the awareness of a presence, the I-Thou meeting (Kritsonis, 2007). Personal relationships are achieved in what presently is. Obligation pertains to the result of what is on the basis of an ideal.

We have a duty to treat others with respect. Leaders who respect others are usually respected in return. Respect is important and it should be valued. Seldom does one think about what it means to respect an individual or what it means to be respected. To respect someone means looking at the individual in a distinguished manner. Self-respect leads to respecting others. If one does not respect himself or herself, then one is likely not to respect other individuals. Typically if there is no respect for an individual, then their views and opinions are disregarded. Respect cannot be learned, purchased, or acquired. It can only be earned.

Knowledge of Sexual Harassment

Sex and family relations is an area of primary ethical interest. Kritsonis (2007) believes that the family is the elemental social institution in which persons are born and nurtured, and it is essential that the relation between the sexes and among the members of the family be considered carefully and ordered wisely. It is necessary to have moral codes dealing with this issue. Leaders should not only know the policies for their particular district, but they should be strictly enforced. The following are examples regarding sexual harassment policies in an educational organization.

Sexual Harassment and Abuse

- Students and employees should be treated honorably.
- Sexual advances, remarks, or conduct at not permissible.
- Employees who sexually abuse or harass students or employees will face disciplinary action.
- Students who sexually abuse or harass employees will face disciplinary action.

Sexual Harassment by Employees

- Employees who engage in any sexually oriented conversation, activities, or other sexual conduct with students or employees is considered to be committing sexual harassment of the student or employee.
- Employees are prohibited from dating students.

Sexual Harassment by Students

- Student should not engage in conduct that sexually harasses employees or other students.
- Romantic relationships between student and employees with parental consent are discouraged.

Sexual Abuse of Students

- Sexual abuse includes fondling, sexual assault, and sexual intercourse.
- Sexual abuse by employees will result in termination and legal action.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse Awareness

Leaders are not the principle source of moral guidance. According to Kritsonis (2007), the most significant source of such influences are the laws and customs of society. There are some standards of conduct that are taken for granted. It is not always right to be obedient to laws or customs. Social standards that are accepted are meant to provide guidance for conduct.

School activities should promote healthy ideals for the students. Employees should serve as role models for their colleagues and the students. Drug and alcohol abusers are frequently absent, less productive, and can cause possible harm to themselves or others. Substance abusers have a negative influence on others.

Social Relationships

Kritsonis (2007) believes that every culture has its distinctive expectations and regulations about what is right and wrong in these relationships. Matters in relationships within class, ethnic, racial, religious, and vocational groups should be valued by leaders. Leaders should focus on the improvement of religious concerns as well as race related issues in public school. Displaying knowledge and sensitivity to these issues will impact individuals in the educational organization.

Principals should know the state laws regarding prayer and other religious activities in public schools. If the laws are not implemented, there could possibly be lawsuits that would affect the school district. Leaders should acknowledge and respect the religious beliefs of others in planning school activities. Students and staff should not feel pressured in taking part in holiday events or programs that are not a part of their religious beliefs.

Leaders should also acknowledge race related issues as they arise. Culture diversity training should be planned for staff members each year. It is important for everyone in the organization to have knowledge of the diverse ethnic population that is a part of their environment. Race, ethnicity, and cultural background have played a role in ethical theory.

Ethical leaders take into consideration the purpose of individuals involved. There should be a common goal for the organization. Leaders should focus on their specific individual goals as well as the goals for the organization.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, in a school district, teachers, administrators, staff, and school board members should understand the importance of ethical conduct in the educational arena. An effective educational environment entails the need of individuals maintaining integrity and high morals. Employees of a school district should serve with honor. Individuals should strive to help students reach their potential to be socially and responsible citizens. School district employees should understand the importance of upholding ethical values. The supportiveness, safety, and security of all environments are crucial in the learning environment. Leaders are the key players in improving ethical conduct in the educational organization. Using the ten recommendations that were given in the essay: knowledge of ethical theory, character development, integrity, responsibility, trust, honesty, respect, knowledge of sexual harassment, drug and alcohol abuse awareness, and social relationships will not only strengthen the leader, but it will create an effective learning environment.

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