Developing Leaders Using Case Inquiry

DÉIRDRE SMITH
Ontario College of Teachers

Abstract

In this article the author describes a collaborative project undertaken by two provincial education organizations to foster the leadership formation of school leaders. Leadership development through case inquiry was the focus of this innovative partnership between the Ontario College of Teachers and the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario. The lived experiences of principals and vice-principals were used as pedagogy to explore the multiple and complex issues that emerge within educational leadership practice. Reflection, dialogue, and narrative writing extended the professional and ethical knowledge of these educators. The experiences of these educators resulted in the development of a leadership text that is now being used as a pedagogical and curriculum resource in educational leadership programs.

Introduction

Leadership identity can be understood as a storied identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) that is formed in how educators tell stories of their practice along with when, where and to whom these narratives are shared (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). Case narratives are dilemma-based stories that help shape educators' professional identities, knowledge, and practice. This form of storytelling is explained by one experienced educational leader as an empowering professional learning process:

> Case stories pull us to the centre of what we know and what we don't know. They invite us all to reach back and revisit those moments that mattered to us, even when we didn't fully understand why. I used to think we pass through experiences, acquiring knowledge and skills along the way. Now I see more clearly that the experiences in fact pass through us, transforming

our sight and deepening our understanding. So that the aesthetic aspect of
the casework is not so much found in the form of a story but in the gradual
forming of ourselves. (Smith, Goldblatt, & Brodribb, 2005, p. 12)

This article will identify the dialogical and inquiry-based case methodology used
to foster leadership and ethical development with principals and vice-principals.
The case process helped to illuminate educators' professional knowledge and the
cognitive frames used to make decisions. Case participants were able to study the
diverse contextual influences upon their professional practice as a means to their
ongoing learning and leadership formation. This exploration was facilitated by
explicating the multiplicity of dilemmas, tensions or issues that emerge within
the educational leadership practices of principals and vice-principals.

Dilemmas encountered in practice served as catalysts for fostering addi-
tional professional insight and understanding. Many leadership issues require
ethical deliberation, analysis, and reflection. These processes can ultimately
enhance ethical knowledge (Smith, 2003). Using ethical dilemmas experienced
by educators, as the core focus for ethical case discussions and for illuminating
ethical frameworks, is significant for advancing professional practice. This nar-
rative approach is effective pedagogy for leadership formation.

The case inquiry process facilitates dialogue and assists educators in iden-
tifying and understanding the reasons for their ethical choices. Case inquiry
invites educational leaders to identify dimensions associated with their ethical
thinking and action within a community of colleagues. Collective professional
dialogue and critique support the development of shared understandings regard-
ing effective leadership. This form of professional learning connects practice
and theory in meaningful ways that support the ongoing enhancement of ethi-
cal practice. The educative case process supports the application of ethics into
daily practice and honors the *lived* experiences and wisdom of educators (Smith,
2007). Engagement in discussions regarding ethical practice also serves to foster
a disposition toward critical reflection and deepens awareness of the internal
structures that influence ethical action. Additional understanding regarding the
principles and values that guide professional actions can also be an additional
benefit of this form of focused professional inquiry (Smith, 2003).

Context

Two provincial education institutions engaged in a collaborative partnership to
foster the leadership formation of school leaders. These two partner organiza-
tions, the Ontario College of Teachers and the Catholic Principals' Council of
Ontario, had a shared vision of professional learning for principals and vice-
principals. This vision acknowledged the relevance of using the lived experience
of school leaders as a valuable educative source. It also recognized the power of
collective professional inquiry to foster leadership development. Case pedagogy

was identified by both the organizations as a professional learning process that would align with this vision. This professional learning process supports exploration into the multiple and complex issues that emerge within educational leadership practice through an inquiry stance.

The two organizations involved in this project also identified that their individual institutional objectives related to the professional learning of principals would be more effectively addressed through a provincial partnership. Inviting educators to reflect on and inquire into their professional practice through written cases resulted in the development of a leadership text that is now being used as a pedagogical and curriculum resource within educational leadership programs.

The Ontario College of Teachers is the self-regulatory body for 220,000 members of the teaching profession in the province. To be a qualified principal in Ontario, teachers need to successfully complete all components of the Principal's Qualification Program. The College has the responsibility for the development of the Principal's Qualification Program guideline (Ontario College of Teachers, 2009) that provides the framework for this important educational leadership qualification. The College's other responsibilities related to the Principal's Qualification Program which are outlined in regulation include:

1. To establish and enforce professional standards and ethical standards applicable to members of the College.
2. To provide for the ongoing education of members of the College.
3. To develop, provide and accredit educational programs leading to certificates of qualification additional to the certificate required for membership. (Ontario College of Teachers Act, S.O. 1996, c. 12)

The *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* and the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006) form the foundation of the Principal's Qualification Program in Ontario. These agreed upon principles of professional practice were developed collaboratively by both the teaching profession and the public. The standards provide a shared understanding and vision for the collective identity of Ontario's teaching profession and are the core of teacher professionalism. They provide a shared public language in which to speak about the lived experiences of educators. The standards also inspire and guide the ethical professional practices of teachers, principals, supervisory officers, and teacher educators within the province (Smith, 2009b).

The Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) is a professional organization that serves the principals and vice-principals in Ontario's 29 publicly-funded Catholic school boards. A key purpose of this organization is to provide professional learning opportunities, services and resources based on current research. CPCO is also an accredited provider for offering the Principal's Qualification Program to educators who would like to receive professional qualifications as a principal.

Theoretical Framework

The development and refinement of leadership case institutes, as standards-based education and professional learning forums, occurred through facilitating various leadership seminars with practitioners across the province. The College and the Catholic Principals' Council relied on the observations, knowledge, and insights of educators to inform and shape the case processes that were used in this collaborative provincial project. A belief that educators know what educators need to know (Carter & Doyle, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990) and that there is an embodied nature to professional knowledge (Johnson, 1989) constituted the direction taken by the College and the Catholic Principals' Council.

The value of exploring experience or phenomena from a subjective or first-person perspective lies at the heart of phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenologists understand and analyze the essence of an experience by acknowledging that wisdom and knowledge are founded in the lived experience of educators (Merleau-Ponty, 1989; Van Manen, 2003). Educators' knowledge about practice is a storied form (Carter, 1993; Elbaz, 1991; Gudmundsdottir, 1991) and is developed from teachers' stories about their professional work. Aware that educators share information about schools and leadership within narrative forms, it was anticipated that inviting school leaders to write about school dilemmas would instigate discussions underpinned by the ethical standards and standards of practice (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006). Therefore, the exploration of narratives concerning professional practice was an occasion for professional learning using the profession's principles of practice (standards) as a shared lens for understanding and critiquing leadership experiences.

Educators' conversations are the basis for social interchange (Dewey, 1938) that facilitates teacher dialogue and collaborative communities form (Kleinfeld, 1992; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998) for the purpose of stimulating meaningful conversation. Dialogic processes (Bakhtin, 1981) for constructing knowledge about educational leadership was viewed as essential to leadership development as articulated within the profession's standards (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006). The inquiry methods employed in this project, acknowledged that the knowledge of educators is both personal and professional (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and standards-based.

Case methodology was selected because it links theory and practice and illuminates professional knowledge that is located in the concrete details of narrative (Bruner, 1990; Shulman, 1992; Shulman & Colbert, 1988; Shulman, Whittaker, & Lew, 2002; Goldblatt & Smith, 2005; Allard, Goldblatt, Kemball, Kendrick, Millen, & Smith, 2007; Smith & Goldblatt, 2009). Case narratives allow participants to gain in-depth understanding of particular situations, for example, school cultures or leadership practices. Cases present a "holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit"

(Merriam, 1988, p. 21). The College and the Catholic Principals' Council were interested in exploring the significance of case inquiry as a professional learning approach for educational leaders.

The theoretical principles that would underpin the case processes used with the educational leaders in this project were the province's standards for the profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006). Shulman (1986) noted that the defining quality of a case is that it must be *a case of something*, or drawn from a theoretical perspective (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1983) in order to "reveal the properties of the class to which the instance being studied belongs" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 371). Case methodology was employed because it would make the theoretical concepts of the teaching profession's ethical and practice standards concrete and memorable. The nine concepts or principles of practice articulated in the standards for the Ontario teaching profession include: *Commitment to Students and Student Learning, Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, Leadership in Learning Communities, Ongoing Professional Learning, Trust, Respect, Care and Integrity* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006). These principles of practice provide the theoretical foundation for teacher education and leadership development courses and programs in the province.

The use of case narratives for advancing the professional knowledge and skill of school leaders is well documented in education (Ciuffetelli Parker, Smith, & Goldbaltt, 2009; Goldblatt & Smith, 2005; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005; Strike, 2007; Shapiro & Goss, 2008; Smith & Goldblatt, 2009). The use of case narrative is particularly relevant in exploring ethical leadership. Written cases are "effective means for capturing the rich layers of meaning that are integrated with educational leadership experiences" and can provide "lenses into the ethical thinking, values, commitments and actions of educational leaders in a range of different education settings" (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009, p. 4). The intentions, actions, knowledge, and decisions of educational leaders become more visible through the record of a written case. This illumination of lived leadership experience enables deep investigation and critique of professional practice to occur individually or collectively for the purpose of informing and enhancing educational leadership. The cases then become educative and inquiry-based pedagogy for fostering leadership formation. Honoring the lived experiences of educators and using them as the pedagogical core of teacher education and leadership development programs holds educational significance for the teaching profession. It is a pedagogical approach that acknowledges the voice, experience, and leadership of educators (Smith, 2006, 2009a).

Methodology

A Collaborative Partnership

A collaborative research partnership was developed between the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario and the Ontario College of Teachers. The intent of this

provincial partnership was to collaboratively explore the significance of inquiry-based case methodology for the ongoing leadership development of principals and vice-principals. The key components of this inquiry project involved: the participation of 20 principals and vice principals in a two-day facilitated case institute; development of written cases by the school leaders; validation of relevance of the cases with two thousand educators within Principal's Qualification Program courses and within school board leadership development sessions; the implementation of a case discussion process through an e-learning forum for principals and vice-principals in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Ontario; and lastly, the development of a leadership text for use in principal qualification programs entitled *Exploring Leadership and Ethical Practice through Professional Inquiry* (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009).

Facilitating a Leadership Case Institute

A two-day Leadership Case Institute was facilitated by the staff from the two provincial organizations involved in this partnership. The principals and vice-principals that volunteered to be involved in this innovative and intensive professional learning experience were committed to increasing their own professional practice and to contributing their written experiences to help enhance the collective teaching profession. The establishment of an open, supportive, and trusting learning community was an essential element in enabling the educational leaders to share leadership issues and dilemmas. The educational leaders wrote initial cases based on a leadership dilemma they had experienced in professional practice. They agreed to contribute their lived experiences as part of an educational leadership text that could be used to support the formation of current and future school leaders.

Developing Written Cases

The leadership cases were revised base on the feedback received from colleagues participating in the institute and from the institute facilitators. Focused feedback, conversation, and e-mail correspondence provided support to the educational leaders as they re-crafted, edited, and refined their case narratives. The case writers were cognizant that the written cases were to be eventually used an educative resource to support leadership development. They employed this lens along with the lens of the profession's standards when providing feedback and making adjustments to the cases. The input and reflective stance of colleagues helped writers to consider diverse perspectives and think critically about leadership experiences. It was noted in previous case institutes that exposure to multiple perspectives benefitted critical thinking, re-framing of thoughts and extended points of view (Smith, Goldblatt, Engemann, Kitchen, & Cerubini, 2008; Allard et al., 2007; Goldblatt & Smith, 2004, 2005). A community of inquiry was formed through the insightful and attentive feedback shared among the case writers.

Validating the Cases Provincially

It was necessary to validate the written leadership cases beyond the original group of writers. The two partner organizations needed to ensure that the cases were both relevant and educative. The cases, as a pedagogical strategy for leadership development, needed to be meaningful within the diverse educational contexts that exist in Ontario: English, French, Public, Catholic, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. As result, it was necessary to have the cases read, discussed and critiqued by a variety of educators across the province.

The cases written by the educational leaders were predominately validated with educators within principal qualification courses or within school board leadership forums. The cases were also employed as both a pedagogical and curriculum resource for in-service teacher education courses. Through facilitated case discussion, educators were invited to explore leadership dilemmas and experiences identified in the individual case scenarios. Through dialogue and critical analysis, future school principals and experienced school principals collectively reflected on, discussed, debated, and critiqued the leadership practices of colleagues.

Both the College and the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario were interested in the level of resonance experienced by educators as they engaged with the written cases. The two institutions also wanted to investigate the extent to which educators' assumptions and beliefs became visible during the case discussions. The degree to which the thinking and perspectives of participants changed or were extended during the process was also of interest. A variety of inquiry-based processes were developed to capture the significance of these cases upon the professional knowledge and practices of educators.

A case that resulted in a high degree of participant engagement, resonance, and discussion was viewed as being an effective case to use in other professional learning contexts. An effective case was also one that could be used to inform professional practice from a variety of educational leadership roles: teacher-leader, vice-principal, principal, and supervisory officer. It also need to be an effective educative tool in terms of the standards for the profession. Following each case discussion, participants were invited to reflect on the process and explicitly comment on the significance of the discussion for their own professional knowledge and practice.

Validating the Cases Internationally

Cases that had been validated successfully within a number of professional contexts were then introduced as leadership pedagogy and curriculum for an e-learning administrator's case discussion forum facilitated by the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario. This online professional learning opportunity was provided free of charge to principals and vice-principals in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Ontario. Feedback received from this leadership development forum provided further insight into the value and relevance of the cases for supporting leadership formation internationally.

Developing a Leadership Development Text

A leadership book entitled *Exploring Leadership and Ethical Practice through Professional Inquiry* (Smith & Goldbatt, 2009) was developed from the provincially and internationally validated cases. A variety of practical inquiry frameworks were created to assist educators in explicating the multi-faceted and complicated nature of leadership issues, tensions, and dilemmas embedded in each of the leadership cases. These frameworks for supporting professional inquiry were also validated with several thousand educators in the field to ensure they were effective in extending professional knowledge. A set of commentaries for each leadership case was elicited from 65 international educational scholars, practitioners, and policy makers. The commentaries function as another inquiry process to explore the rich and complex dimensions associated with educational leadership. This text is currently being used as a pedagogical and curriculum resource in teacher education and leadership development programs in North America. The leadership cases in this text are organized under the following leadership themes that emerged within the various written cases: *Leaders as Ethical Decision Makers; Leaders as Facilitators of Community; Leaders as Reflective Practitioners*; and *Leaders as Educational Partners.*

Relevant Professional Learning

The Leadership Case Institute emerged as a highly relevant and meaningful professional learning approach for educational leaders. It is a practical strategy that supports the leaders in enhancing, promoting, and applying new learning directly to their professional practice. The institute also nourished and affirmed the deep interest of these leaders in contributing their individual cases to a collection of leadership cases that would eventually become a pedagogical and curriculum resource for the profession. The recognition that the lived experiences of these educational leaders could serve as leadership curriculum for others was inspiring and affirming for them. They had come to realize that power of case scenarios to serve as educative models for enhancing and transforming practice. Participants also identified other professional benefits to case writing. They stated (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003):

1. I think it helps to record a professional memory that we need in our profession. (p. 6)
2. Case writing is reflection upon reflection. (p. 8)
3. I have really grown as an educator as a result of being involved. (p. 18)
4. The value of being in a network of people that are doing similar things . . . to actually sit with people that you are tackling the same obstacles with . . . (p. 18)
5. This space has improved my knowledge. (p. 12)
6. The case institute experience was a mechanism for reflection on the standards which previously had just been words on a page. (p. 7)

The two partner institutions involved in this project were mindful of these perspectives at the both the inception and planning phases of this innovative professional learning project. Reflection on practice was an integral component of this project. Formal time was designated for thoughtful contemplation throughout the project to help inform all phases of this professional learning initiative. The two partner organizations were also very committed to deepening understanding of reflection and inquiry-based practices from an institutional perspective.

In this leadership development initiative, collaborative communities emerged and educators were willing to reveal professional dilemmas. These school leaders made themselves vulnerable by exposing issues, not successes. They openly and eagerly supported each other in the sharing of these complex and messy leadership situations. However, with their intent to improve practice, they were willing to be "curriculum" and "pedagogy" for one another to advance understanding and contribute the profession.

In the case institutes, the school leaders have witnessed the support and mentorship of collaborative communities that offer in their responses to case dilemmas, explanations that encourage practitioner choice, along with the desire to sustain change and inform. The College's work on ethics (Smith, 2003, 2007, 2009a; Smith & Goldblatt, 2009) has revealed the important role personal values and the focused examination of cognitive frames can have upon ethical decision-making processes.

Case institutes do not always allows for sustained professional reflection over time, therefore it is important to communicate with participants several months after the institute to extend time for reconsideration on praxis. Participants once again reflected on the experience,

1. The standards give us the vocabulary, the language, which brings a further insight into what we're doing so that we can communicate with fellow colleagues, with parents, we can be proud of our profession. (p. 26)
2. I think this was a great project. I think that [the College] should know that you have something here that is unique, and something that I think was needed in our profession for a long time. (p. 31)
3. Re-affirmed how important it is to work from the inside out . . . living your values. (p. 11) (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003, pp. 11–31)

Leadership Issues

For the principals and vice-principals attending the case process, certain issues became evident in a number of cases. Dilemmas that revolved around staff, students, and community issues provided the loci for discussions. They felt that as leaders in their schools, the responsibility of their positions demanded timely, efficient, and positive conclusions to educational dilemmas. Being able to speak directly and openly about dilemmas in a supportive and trusting environment

revealed how committed each was to improving practice, even if their professional actions were positioned as the focus for discussion and critique.

Three leadership issues identified by the writers will be discussed briefly using excerpts from various cases written by these school leaders. These written reflections will then be examined using various leadership concepts. The three leadership issues being discussed by the educational leaders include:

1. Community relations
2. Transition of a new principal
3. Students with special needs

In the discussion of the case excerpts pseudonyms will be used for each of these principal writers: Jacob, Jason, Taryn, Heather, and Iija.

Leadership Issue: Community Relations

In written cases, dilemmas are often connected to other issues. Each case narrative also integrates domains from the standards: care, respect, trust, integrity, commitment for students and student learning, professional knowledge, teaching practice, leadership and community, and ongoing professional learning. Jacob's initial dilemma concerning the school building provides a fertile landscape for subsequent issues to emerge. He sets the stage by stating,

> The subsequent September the school population was split and two schools were housed in one building. This created issues to address, from separate recess times to coordinating practice times for school teams. The new school was ready to be occupied in January of that school year. I was grateful that the other principal in the building was a generous and accommodating person. Working as a team we were able to minimize disruption for the students and staff. (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009, p. 265)

Jacob continues to expand on the accruing dilemmas that exacerbate relations with the school community whose children must be accommodated in myriad ways. Issues surrounding staff are extended beyond the cramped quarters of the school when the community expects staff participation in school fundraising events. Although some staff members feel obligated to attend, others refuse. These events become fertile ground for discourse among eager parents, exhausted teachers, exuberant students, and an insightful principal who is very aware of the needs of each group and believes he must satisfy everyone.

Jacob's case reveals that he is struggling to mediate many conflicting perspectives and respond with integrity. He is attuned to the fundraising traditions, needs of his staff, criticism from parents, advice and support from the superintendent and the overall desire to be in harmony with the school community. Jacob's leadership skills are evident in his sensitive investigation into the multiple needs

of all involved. His openness to dialogue and eagerness to listen suggest his actions are informed through ongoing reflection. As it becomes evident that his commitments reside with the teachers, he realizes confrontation and issues may result with the community.

As an educational leader, Jacob is a thoughtful, reflective practitioner. He champions the needs of students by recognizing that the first commitment of the staff must be to the school's population of learners. He affirms the energies and commitments of the staff, particularly in the midst of the physical disruption of the school environment. Jacob has a holistic sense of his entire school community and respects all interrelated aspects. He is aware of the necessity of shared leadership and knowledge (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003) as he involves others in comprehending and working with the conflicts. His collaborative approach ensures inclusion of the community.

Jacob employs horizontal leadership by working with disparate groups, but is also mindful of the vertical structure that includes his superintendent. As well, that verticality includes an awareness of time, time to heal community anger, but also time for the skills, pedagogy, and expertise of teachers to be valued by the community above fundraising.

Envisaging a "big picture" that extends both backwards in time when relations were good with the community, and forward to times when the new building will be completed, requires a strong vision and belief in the continuity of sustainable relationships. The ability to envision is aligned with Korthagon and Vasalos' (2005) view of the knowing and working toward "the ideal" (p. 59).

Although sensitive to the variety of requests, Jacob knew any decision would frustrate and alienate at least one segment of the community. When he decided he must act in favor of his staff, he still wished he had been able to find solutions acceptable to all. Having explained his decisions and actions with his newly found advisors and network of principals at the case institute fortifies Jacob, even years after the divisive event. Further, analyzing his work in light of the standards suggests to Joseph a model for his staff and school community when another difficult incident arises. His colleagues at the case institute also suggest strategies that build on parental input as a positive support for the staff.

Jason's case, also involves community reactions, however this case concerns a hazing incident. Parents of the Grade 9 students who were the innocent victims of being saturated "with shaving cream and toothpaste . . . marker and nail polish and were marched outside in the night, and made to sing songs and read poems" (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009, p. 61) demand investigation and resignation of the "incompetent" school leaders who allowed initiation rites to occur during a field trip. In contrast, the parents of the Grade 12 initiators compel the school leaders to take a "calm, reasoned approach" (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009, p. 62). They acknowledged that hazing probably needs to be banned. In addition, "teachers' voices add to the confusion by asserting, 'it's just hazing. It's always been done. It's fun, as long as no one gets hurt. Remember, those senior kids are the best'" (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009, p. 62).

Jason, like Jacob, knows he will not be able to satisfy all members of the community. His values and core beliefs guide his actions. He acts confidently, wisely, and like Jacob, listens to all individuals. He worries about dividing the community in spite of his commitment to respond with inappropriate traditions and unacceptable behaviour.

The case institute process was both educative and transformative for both of the principals described above: to share their experiences and receive empathetic support and understanding from their colleagues. All participants had experienced similar opposing points of view on issues that concern staff, which affect the daily management of school and challenge school values. In the case institute, these topics prompt reflections on policy, protocol, practice, and commitments to ensure fairness to all groups. Yet, each participant felt a tremendous burden of responsibility and stress as a principal. A shared understanding of leadership encourages staff, community and students to acknowledge and accept collective responsibility for actions, decisions, and policy. Yet awareness of this shared responsibility raises the need for improved avenues of communication among schools and school districts, and the recognition that the principal is not the only responsible and ethical leader within a school community.

Jason is a decisive decision-maker whose probing examination of the school community, its practices, traditions, and ethical responsibilities causes him great concern as he begins to rebuild a community and stimulate respectful traditions. The complicity and willingness of staff to condone the situation is extremely frustrating for Jason. His narrative probes deeply into his own ethical core, and indeed, he feels isolation as he raises and responds to his own questions and ethical commitments. Eventually he realizes that he has the courage and conviction to resolve the confrontations he must face to ensure student safety and ethical professional practice.

The supportive and educative culture of the case institute enabled Jason to recount this emotional and challenging narrative. His reflections and experiences stimulated connections among all case institute participants. It is empowering to revisit past practice and assess the efficacy of professional judgments and practices. Case institutes position educators as their own experts and uphold the validity of the *school* as locus for meaningful and appropriate discourse. Extending these opportunities to staff encourages shared leadership in a school community because all are involved in what occurs in the school: decisions, implications, and next steps. This collaborative inquiry may even initiate interest in action research projects for a school community, drawing diverse elements together in a search that matters to every individual/researcher.

Leadership Theme: Transition of a New Principal

As a new secondary school principal, Taryn senses that her leadership is markedly different from her predecessor's. This perception is affirmed by the secretary's attitude and the students' behaviour in the halls. It is further confirmed at the first school assembly that she attends,

> . . . as the team is introduced, the boys begin to strut across the front of
> the gym in an amateur attempt at striptease, gyrating and making loud,
> provocative motions. Encouraged by the spectacle, the student body begins
> yelling and screaming . . .

Incredulous at the display she has witnessed, she wonders if this is a lack of protocol, poor management of an assembly, or an isolated incident of unacceptable behavior. She turns the events over and over in her head, unable to accept what she has just experienced. Was this the tip of the iceberg? This incident is just one more thing to add to a list that grows each day (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009).

Immediately, Taryn exercises her leadership through swift and decisive action. Taryn intuitively recognizes that she cannot fully support some of the existing rituals, ceremonies, and traditions. These school events serve as effective catalysts for her to implement positive change. It is immediately obvious that her predecessor's practices are incompatible with her vision for the culture and success of this school. Her values are revealed by her actions and decisions as soon as she becomes principal in the new school. The transparency of her behavior and core values along with her refusal to accept past practices is empowering for many members of this school community that are unhappy with past practice. The importance of character strengths is evident as Jane "mediate[s] between external events and the quality of experience" (Korthagon & Vasalos, 2005, p. 56), demonstrating her strength as an ethical leader.

Taryn becomes aware of additional veiled issues that influence the tone and culture of the school when a teacher of English requests a meeting. She realizes she must build interpersonal relationships, set a new tone, breaking dramatically with entrenched traditions of privilege for some. The English teacher helps Taryn realizes that the changes she has made to school protocols may be more supported by staff if she employs more collaborative methods. She is also informed that the staff will take more ownership in strategic planning if she invites active staff involvement and enables more decision making on the part the staff.

Responding to political and internal pressures, her core reflection is built on her sense of social justice and the role she must play in promoting it. She assures teacher support and makes it clear to the secretary there will be a new model in place (Christensen, Aaron, & Clark, 2005). Her commitment to fostering and sustaining change is aligned with her sense of self, grounded in her values. She is an instructional leader, communicates effectively, and makes informed decisions. Taryn emerges an ethical role model for the staff and students. Presenting her struggles with colleagues at the Leadership Case Institute, Taryn shares how her core reflection empowered her professional identity as an instructional leader.

Korthagon and Vasalos (2005) reinforce Taryn's reliance on her core values as a guiding lens for her leadership when they state,

> . . . what is even more important is that, by recalling the memory of the positive experience, she is able to re-experience, to feel the personal qualities and to access the will to mobilize them. This will enable her to address the question of how she can build on those core qualities . . . (p. 57)

Participant's reflections on the cases highlighted the significance of the profession's standards for them. They came to understand the standards as a theory of action and as a guide for effective leadership. The standards are public professional theory to which leaders can turn for guidance. Written leadership cases articulate the lived experience of educators and reveal the ideal that is achievable through the standards. Reflecting, the participants confirm,

1. The standards of practice are a living document, and the case studies highlight this fact. Up until now, they functioned as guidelines. However, their significance and foundation in the daily operation of the school is clear.
2. Being able to observe educators talk about the standards and inquire into their own practice through case discussions or case writing really enables them to gain ownership in explicit ways of the standards . . . (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003, p. 16)

When asked to describe which elements of the case institute might be used to support leadership development, participants asserted the importance of . . .

1. The case discussion model: self-reflection, group discussion, active listening, face-to-face interaction.
2. The writing of a case personal to you could enhance leadership.
3. I'm a better administrator for having been here–an experience to last a lifetime. (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003, p. 30)

Leadership Theme: Student has special needs

In the case An Emotional Event, Heather is confronted by three staff members who are not working collaboratively together to support Terry, a student with significant multiple needs. Conflicts over roles, responsibilities, medical procedures, equity, health and safety, and communication become issues that end up escalating in an out of control group tirade in Heather's office. As the school principal, Heather attempts to calmly respond to these issues. In the midst of this dilemma, Heather realizes that her perceptions about staff relations and Terry's educational program have been incorrect. Heather had believed that the team of professionals supporting Terry were working effectively together and collaborating on the implementation of an individual education program of this learner. Her observations and words tell a different story,

Terry starts to cry again. The two women yell louder in order to be heard over his sobbing. I speak slowly in a firm but authoritative manner. "Yelling doesn't help us resolve any issue. We need to calm down and listen to one other. Terry is upset again and we need to stop his crying." (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009, p. 39)

Relying on her core qualities of quiet strength, patience, and understanding, Heather has great trouble maintaining restraint, particularly when the child in question is not only present to the arguing, but in great distress. Heather needs to make decisions and take action. Instead, she remains paralyzed by the events that unfold.

Not surprisingly Terry's mother *blows up* at the principal; accusing the school staff of being the "most incompetent group of people [she] has ever dealt with" (p. 41). Terry's distraught mother calls the superintendent "to let him know that . . . her son is losing valuable learning time while the principal defines roles" (p. 41). "This," she continues, "is absolutely unacceptable and I will not tolerate this kind of incompetence" (Smith & Goldblatt, 2009, p. 41).

Similarly, in the case entitled, Too Many Needs, Not Enough Supports, Iija outlines the needs of wheelchair-bound twins and insufficient funding assistance that prevents adequate care for their unique needs. The twins' mother, arriving at the end of day, finds one of her children with soiled underclothes, strapped to her wheelchair.

Heather and Iija are not insensitive to the issues that have occurred in their schools. The complexity of the associated issues in these cases impact upon their actions and decisions. Both these educational leaders did engage in extensive planning with all staff prior to the learners being admitted to school. It becomes apparent that there were issues unresolved or undisclosed to the principals. Communication with parents prior to these events had persuaded both principals that effective planning and programming were in place for these learners. Feeling great frustration, the principals reveal that they felt let down, even betrayed by staff and the school district. Once believing they had the support of parents, they are now the targets for failure of the school system. Strategies, protocols, policies and resources were developed by these principals. Naively, each had persuaded him/herself that all issues had been taken care of at the school year's outset.

At the Leadership Case Institute, each educator admits their short sightedness to have thought new issues would not have arisen, and that communication with parents and staff would have to be ongoing. Heather and Iija persist in mulling over how to share responsibility, continually rallying staff in Heather's case, and the school district in Iija's case. They try to act professionally in order to ensure the dignity and fragile needs of the students are met promptly, and with appropriate actions. Heather and Iija recognized there would be no one perfect solution to the dilemmas. They realize that leading a school community composed of myriad responsibilities involves dealing with unexpected issues that can significantly impact upon the effectiveness of a school. Korthagon and Vasalos

(2005) might have reinforced each principal's core qualities to act decisively with staff rather than their inhibiting illusion that all issues concerning these students had been looked after.

For participants in the Leadership Case Institute, being able to reveal systemic problems, often ones that were not resolved to principals' level of expectation can be educative and transformative. Tensions discussed become an occasion and opportunity for reflection, building on strengths and preparing for future actions. Revisiting an unsuccessful outcome cannot rectify past dilemmas; however, it can become a powerful tool for learning new ways to address similar situations. For the Leadership Case Institute participants openly sharing challenges with colleagues provided support that helped in alleviate the isolation experienced by many school principals. Open, honest, and reflective dialogue encourages strategizing for unexpected events. Participants report that they experienced support at the Leadership Case Institute, particularly in the collective discussions of dilemmas. Many anticipate using similar approaches within their own professional context to support teacher development. They laud the opportunity to reflect on practice and engage in dialogue with principals from a variety of school districts. A participant reflects on the value of the Leadership Case Institute,

> The standards of practice for the teaching profession teach us the ideal. Teachers, however, must dialogue about their experiences; reflect on what is good in their practice and what needs to change. They must be empowered by school administrations to take risks on behalf of their students and not be afraid to admit there are some professional shortcomings that need to be resolved—not in isolation, but collaboratively, with hope and the ultimate belief that 'teaching is the noblest of professions'. (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003, p. 31)

This participant envisions a collaborative learning community in which dialogue and support are mainstays. He expresses a desire to take risks, display attributes of caring and concern, be vulnerable and open, to be nurtured by the support of the colleagues, but also in theory by the standards.

When ideas, principles, and broader understanding are emphasized, expanded views of social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2003) can occur. Educational cultures that celebrate inquiry and critical thought contribute to the formation of socially responsible and socially conscious leaders. The formation of leaders with these dispositions and convictions helps turn our ethical eye and stance towards the larger purposes of education within a democratic society.

Educational Significance

Engaging educators in professional dialogue serves to heighten awareness and consciousness of principles of practice and values related to teaching

and leadership. These dialogues guide thinking and actions, revealing educational significance for both teacher education and leadership development. When educators are empowered to play a meaningful role in running the school, leadership is distributed and shared at all levels. Rather than directing, principals are part of a collaborative process of shared leadership. Using one's school as site and laboratory for research extends the *meaning* of school beyond daily practice. This expanded understanding positions a school as a source for inquiry in which leadership issues fuel reform that is meaningful and informed by practitioners. Communities of inquiry that include students and their parents, awareness of societal issues and ongoing change, along with an examination of practice stimulate commitment: there is potential for contextualized change, particularly when learning communities collaborate and agree on a course of action. The Leadership Case Institute, as a professional community of inquiry, offered the following benefits of this form of collective professional learning:

1. Increased critical thought and reflection.
2. Extended cognitive frameworks.
3. Heightened examination of thinking, actions and the implications of decisions.
4. Deepened professional ethical knowledge.
5. Enhanced leadership efficacy.
6. Renewed professional identity.
7. Changed beliefs and assumptions that guide practice.
8. Informed policy development and implementation.
9. Raised ethical consciousness.
10. Fostered social justice oriented conversations. (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003, pp. 1–32)

The joint work of the College and CPCO in designing and implementing Leadership Case Institutes have illustrated the value of these professional learning forums. Case methodology has been effective in enhancing awareness and integration of the profession's standards in a sustained and meaningful way with educational leaders. These standards convey a vision of shared democratic leadership. This commitment to shared leadership is expressed by one of the case participants as he connects the use of cases to fostering this empowerment and collaborative process: "I am convinced that cases are a powerful way of authentically bringing the voice of staff into the school. It is a powerful way to foster shared leadership" (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003, p. 31).

Melanie, a secondary school principal and case participant, reminds us that the essential tools for creating cultures of shared leadership within school communities based on reflective practice lies within the knowledge and experience of each educator:

> I now understand that reflective practice is essential and that it is a process which requires time, interaction with others, and requires guidance in order to reach deeply into the wisdom and experience which we already carry within us as educators. (Ontario College of Teachers, 2003, p. 30)

Final Thoughts

Principal development and preparation programs have the public responsibility to prepare future educational leaders that will possess the requisite dispositions, knowledge, skills, and experiences to help build a democratic society. These leadership formation contexts represent a significant agency for fostering the ethical knowledge and consciousness of educators who will be able to promote and work toward socially just education. Case pedagogy, as outlined in this paper, represents a critical (Giroux, 1981) professional learning approach for supporting leadership formation. This approach privileges the lived experiences of educators and uses it as curriculum and pedagogy for collectively advancing the ethical dimensions inherent within educational leadership. This critical approach to leadership development will help to ensure schools are sites of empowerment and transformation. Thus, enabling the leaders of the present to "draw from their own personal biographies, struggles, and attempts to understand their own contradiction in the context of the contradictions of schooling" (Torres, 1998, p. 7) as they strive to shape the future. As Friere (1998) reminds,

> The future isn't something hidden in a corner. The future is something we build in the present. (Friere, 1998, p. 54)

References

Adelman, C., Jenkins, D., & Kemmis, S. (1983). Rethinking case study: Notes from the Second Cambridge Conference. In *Case study: An overview* (pp. 2–4). Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press.

Allard, C. C., Goldblatt, P. F., Kemball, J. I., Kendrick, S. A., Millen, K. J., & Smith, D. M. (2007). Becoming a reflective community of practice. *Reflective Practice International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives, (8)*3, 299–314.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogical imagination: Four essays.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press.

Carter, K. (1993). The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. *Educational Researcher, 22*(1), 5–18.

Carter, K., & Doyle, W. (1987). Teachers' knowledge structures and comprehension processes. In J. Calderhead (Ed.), *Exploring teachers' thinking* (pp. 147–160). London: Cassell.

Christensen, C., Aaron, S., & Clark, W. (2005). Can schools improve? *Phi Delta Kappan*, *86*(7), 545–551.

Ciuffetelli Parker, D., Smith, D., & Goldbaltt, P. F. (2009). Teacher education partnerships: Integration of case studies within an initial teacher education program. *Brock Education, 18*(2), 96–113.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2003). Learning and unlearning: The education of teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *19*(1)*,* 5–28.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1990). Research on teaching and teacher research: The issues that divide. *Educational Researcher*, *19*(2), 2–11.

Connelly, M. F., & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Connelly, M. F., & Clandinin, D. J. (Eds.). (1999). *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Art as experience*. New York: Perigee Press.

Elbaz, F. (1991). Research on teachers' knowledge: The evolution of a discourse. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 23*(1), 1–19.

Elbaz-Luwisch, F. (2007). Studying teachers' lives and experience. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 357–382). London: Sage Publications.

Friere, P. (1998). Pedagogy of freedom—ethics, democracy, and civic courage. Baltimore, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers.

Giroux, H. A. (1981). *Ideology, culture, and the process of schooling.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Goldblatt, P. F., & Smith, D. (2004). Illuminating and facilitating professional development. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 27*(3), 335–354.

Goldblatt, P. F., & Smith, D. (Eds.). (2005). *Cases for teacher development: Preparing for the classroom.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective evaluation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gudmundsdottir, S. (1991). Story-maker, story-teller: Narrative structures in curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 23*(3), 207–218.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2003). Sustaining leadership. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *84*(9), 693–700.

Johnson, M. (1989). Embodied knowledge: Personal practical knowledge series. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *19*(4), 361–377.

Kleinfeld, J. (1992). Learning to think like a teacher: The study of cases. In J. Shulman, (Ed.), *Case methods in teacher education* (pp. 33–49). New York: Teachers College Press.

Korthagon, F., & Vasalos, A. (2005). Levels in reflection: Core reflection as a means to enhance professional growth. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *11*(1), 47–71.

Loucks-Horsley, S., Hewson, P., Love, N., & Stiles, K. (1998). *Ideas that work: Mathematical professional development*. Columbus, OH: Eisenhower National Clearinghouse.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1989). *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge.

Merriam, S. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Ontario College of Teachers. (2003). Impact of the Case Institutes. Unpublished report. Toronto, ON: Author.

Ontario College of Teachers. (2006). *Foundations of professional practice* [Brochure]. Toronto, ON: Author.

Ontario College of Teachers. (2009). *Principal's qualification program guideline 2009* [Brochure]. Toronto, ON: Author.

Shapiro, J. P., & Gross, S. J. (2008). *Ethical educational leadership in turbulent times: (Re)solving moral dilemmas.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Shulman, J. H. (Ed.). (1992). *Case methodology in teacher education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Shulman, J. H., & Colbert, J. (1988). *The intern teacher casebook.* San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

Shulman, J. H., Whittaker, A., & Lew, M. (2002). *Using assessments to teach for understanding: A casebook for educators.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, *15*(2), 4–14.

Smith, D. (2003, June). *Discovering a methodology that reveals ethical knowledge.* Paper presented at the meeting of the International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching, Leiden, Holland.

Smith, D. (2006, November). *Inquiry-based curriculum and pedagogical resources for teacher education.* Paper presented at the meeting of the International Conference for Teacher Education, Calgary, AB.

Smith, D. (2007, February). *Developing a shared vision for the teaching profession.* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, New York.

Smith, D. (2009a, October). *Inquiry-based curriculum and pedagogical resources for teacher education.* Paper presented at the EDGE Conference, St. John's, Newfoundland.

Smith, D. (2009b, April). Re-conceptualizing a principal qualification program: A narrative *approach to policy development.* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Smith, D., & Goldblatt, P. F. (Eds.). (2009) *Exploring leadership and ethical practice through professional inquiry.* Québec, QC: Les Presses de l'Université Laval.

Smith, D., Goldblatt, P. F., & Brodribb, P. (2005, April). *Self study through case inquiry.* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Education Research Association, Montreal, QC.

Smith, D., Goldblatt, P. F., Engemann, J., Kitchen, J., & Cherubini, L. (2008). *Learning from experience: Supporting beginning teachers and mentors—Booklet 3: Exploring professional practice with beginning and mentor teachers—Vignettes.* [Brochure]. Toronto, ON: Ontario College of Teachers.

Strike, K. A. (2007). *Ethical leadership in schools: Creating community in an environment of accountability.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Strike, K. A., Haller, E. J., & Soltis, J. F. (2005). *The ethics of school administration* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Torres, C. A. (1998). *Education, power, and personal biography: Dialogues with critical educators.* New York: Routledge.

Van Manen, M. (2003). On the epistemology of reflective practice. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *1*(1), 33–50.

Zellner, L., & Erlandson, D. A. (1997) *Leadership laboratories: Professional development for the 21st century. NASSP*, *585*, 45–50.

About the Author

Déirdre Smith is the Manager of the Standards of Practice and Education unit at the Ontario College of Teachers, 121 Bloor Street East, Toronto, ON M4W 3M5. In this capacity, she has led provincial teacher education policy development and research initiatives that support a collective vision of professionalism as articulated in the ethical standards and standards of practice for Ontario's teaching profession. E-mail: dsmith@oct.ca