

CALIBRATING ONE'S MORAL COMPASS: HOW PRINCIPAL PREPARATION SHAPES SCHOOL LEADERS^{*}

Donald E. Larsen
Mary Lynne Derrington

This work is produced by The Connexions Project and licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution License [†]

NCPEA Publications



NOTE: This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and is endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of education administration. In addition to publication in the *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*,¹ Volume 7, Number 2 (Summer 2012), ISSN 2155-9635, this manuscript exists in the Connexions Content Commons as an Open Education Resource (OER). Formatted and edited by Theodore Creighton, Virginia Tech; Brad Bizzell, Radford University; and Janet Tareilo, Stephen F. Austin State University. The assignment of topic editor and double-blind reviews are managed by Editor, Linda Lemasters, George Washington University. The IJELP is indexed in the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), sponsored by the United States Department of Education.

Sumario en español

En la Universidad Occidental de Washington, el Programa Educativo de la Administración depende de los estándares de la Escuela Interestatal Líderes Licensure Consorcio (ISLLC) definir contenido de curso y resultados esperados. El Estándar de ISLLC 5 quizás sean doblados fácilmente el estándar "ético de líder" : "Un administrador de la escuela es un líder educativo que promueve el éxito de todos los estudiantes actuación con integridad, la justicia, y en una manera ética" (Klocko & Kirby, 2010).

NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

^{*}Version 1.2: Jun 21, 2012 12:47 pm GMT-5

[†]<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

¹<http://www.ncpeapublications.org/latest-issue-ijelp.html>

1 Introduction

The bleachers in the school gym were filling rapidly with students, parents, and community members in anticipation of the basketball game that would begin at 7:00 p.m. The air resonated with spirited pep band music, and the home school's squad of cheerleaders warmed up the crowd. Standing near a doorway where spectators were filing in to find seats in the stands, the principal noted with some satisfaction that, among those in attendance, were several members of the faculty. The principal's thoughts wandered abstractly to her belief that effective teachers see their influence as extending beyond the walls of the classroom.

A few minutes before the opening tip-off, the principal noticed that three more of her staff had entered the gym. As he started up the bleachers, one of the trio stumbled and pitched headlong onto a parent who was sitting at the aisle. His companions helped him to his feet; and the one who had fallen, together with his buddies, continued unsteadily to seats near the top of the stands. Moments later, as a whistle announced the opening tip-off, the parent who had borne the impact of the teacher's fall stood at the principal's side.

"They're drunk!" the parent blurted. "I can't believe it! They're drunk! What kind of a role model can they be?" After a heartbeat-long pause, the parent added, "You've got to *do* something!"

While many decisions that a principal must make can be delayed as the leader ponders the best course of action or even seeks input from a variety of stakeholders, the situation at the game screamed for a prompt, damage-control response. Several thoughts passed through the principal's mind: The teachers were of legal age to drink, but were clearly under the influence of alcohol at a school event; to allow the inebriated trio to remain might send an undesired message of tolerance for behavior that, if exhibited by a student, would result in consequences that could include suspension and referral for further evaluation by a substance-abuse counselor; to send the teachers home might create a scene if they were to resist the idea of being required to leave the game; sending the trio home with one of them at the wheel opened other possibilities for school liability, including natural consequences the principal preferred not to invite.

No textbook that the aspiring principal encounters in preparing for the role of school leader discusses what steps to follow when a member—or members—of the school staff challenge standards of professional judgment and moral rectitude. Instead, the most reliable guide at the principal's disposal may be the "moral compass" upon which the individual has learned to rely.

2 Rationale

Since 1996, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards have served as the benchmarks for school administration programs (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 2007). Beginning with Standard 1 (developing a shared vision); continuing through Standard 2 (sustaining school culture and instructional program), Standard 3 (management of organizational operations and resources), Standard 4 (collaboration with families and communities), Standard 5 (acting with integrity, fairness, and ethics); and concluding with Standard 6 (influencing larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context), each of these guideposts might appear to merit equal emphasis in the content and practicum experiences that frame principal preparation. In practice, however, coursework focused on law, supervision, fiscal management, and cementing collaborative relationships may be more readily aligned with ISLLC frameworks than a class or thematic strands that may attempt to examine a would-be administrator's ethical fitness (Kidder, 1995). A mixed-method study that drew data from surveys sent to 379 school leadership preparation programs and included interviews with a select group of education administration faculty concluded that more attention should be given to embedding Standard 5 (acting with integrity, fairness, and ethics) in the curriculum (Machado & Cline, 2010). Recognizing that Standards 4 and 6 might also warrant greater emphasis, the researchers stated, "Given the fact that schools are more inclusive and diverse places than they were 50 years ago this study challenges education administration faculty to align programs more effectively with Standards 4, 5, and 6" (Machado & Cline, 2010, ¶ 1).

Depending on the licensure requirements of the state and the program format that prepares the candidate for the role of building administrator, the principal preparation program that leads to licensure may or may not include a course specifically dedicated to "ethics." Even in the absence of a dedicated course, questions

of ethical behavior and morally-purposed leadership may be threaded thickly through coursework whose focus embraces the traits that effective leaders should have—or at least aspire to. Whether rooted in an educational setting (e.g. Evans, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Starratt, 1994; Strike, Haller, & Soltice, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Willower & Licata, 1997) or instead in the world of business (e.g. Collins, 2001; Kidder, 1995; Lencioni, 2002), consideration of how leadership should be judged against an ethical standard goes hand-in-hand with establishing and nurturing the purpose and vision for an organization.

At Western Washington University, the Educational Administration Program relies on the standards of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) to define course content and expected outcomes. ISLLC Standard 5 might readily be dubbed the “ethical leader” standard: “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” (Klocko & Kirby, 2010). Although no single requirement at Western focuses exclusively on ethics, establishing a culture founded on an individual’s core values receives more than passing attention in classes dedicated to leadership theory, school law, supervision, personnel, finance, and school administration.

In the state of Washington, the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), manifesting its authority through Washington Administrative Code (WAC), requires that each education administration program across the state assess the effectiveness of the program as well as the extent to which the program conforms to standards established in WAC. These benchmarks include the state’s Standard V, whose sub-points (1-6) align with near precision with ISLLC Standards 1-6. In keeping with statute, Western’s Professional Education Advisory Board (PEAB) for the Educational Administration master’s and post-master’s program annually receives a report generated by a survey sent to recent graduates—now principals and assistant principals—and their supervisors—often school district superintendents and other senior members of the administration team. The survey that practitioners and their supervisors complete addresses the several ISLLC standards and the corresponding strands of the state-mandated Standard V. This snapshot of stakeholders’ perceptions of program effectiveness includes questions that scrutinize the extent to which graduates are prepared to act and lead in an ethical manner.

WWU surveys graduates during the newly-minted administrators’ first and third years in the position. The purpose of this self-assessment is to gauge whether those who have completed the Educational Administration Program perceive their coursework and field-based internship as having provided them with the foundational knowledge and skills to be successful in the role of building administrator. The corresponding survey information from supervisors offers opportunities to obtain either confirming or disconfirming data about the efficacy and preparation of those who complete Western’s principal certification program.

3 Conceptual Framework

With alarming frequency, the news media carry stories about educators whose moral compass has failed. In 1997, a 37-year-old Seattle-area teacher, Mary Kay LeTourneau, earned notoriety after she engaged in a sexual relationship with a former student, Vili Fualaau, who was then 13. Incarcerated for several years for her crime, LeTourneau later married the young man who had fathered two of her children. Similar, more recent, allegations of unprofessional conduct have resulted in headlines every school administrator dreads (e.g. Box, 2011; Lynn, 2011).

Transgressions have not been limited to sexual impropriety, although such events may warrant the most scathing public outcries. In 2005, the Houston Independent School District launched an investigation of undue help from teachers tasked with supervising student testing based on suspicious results reflected in statewide tests administered in 2004 (Axtman, 2005). Other parts of the country are not immune. “From Boston to Florida to California, school districts have been investigating claims that educators are providing students with answers, changing answers after the test is over, and giving students extra time” (Axtman, 2005, ¶ 4). Other examples of teachers and principals cheating to boost student test results were reported in Indiana, Mississippi, and Arizona (Axtman, 2005).

In July of 2011, national news media placed Atlanta’s school system under the harsh glare of public scrutiny after Georgia’s governor, Nathan Deal, reported that 178 Atlanta teachers and principals had been

involved in altering student scores on high-stakes tests (Johnson, 2011). Some couched the event in a nationwide emphasis on testing and boosting student scores on yearly measures of achievement as the reason these educators were caught with their proverbial pants around their ankles. “When test scores are all that matter,” said Robert Schaeffer, representing the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, “some educators feel pressured to get the scores they need by hook or by crook” (Johnson, 2011, ¶¶ 8). However, others viewed the scandal in a harsher light. “These professionals ultimately felt their students could not even pass basic competency tests, despite targeted school improvement plans, proven reforms, and state-of-the-art teacher training,” one writer lamented (Johnson, 2011, ¶¶ 16). Atlanta’s school superintendent, Beverly Hall, who had been feted as the nation’s superintendent of the year in 2009, resigned her position in June 2011.

In Seattle, the school board relieved Superintendent Maria Goodlow-Johnson of her duties in March 2011 after a state audit showed improper use of district funds by the school system’s small-business contracting program (Gutierrez, 2011; Shaw & Miletich, 2011). The audit found that nearly \$2 million of contracts awarded to small businesses “provided no public benefit or were questionable” (Shaw & Miletich, 2011, ¶ 16). Although neither the superintendent nor the district’s chief financial officer were directly implicated in the audit, an outside reviewer hired by the school district concluded that both school administrators knew enough about the problems to have acted appropriately.

It might appear that any effort to require a moral compass in educators, including school leaders, is doomed at the outset. However, in a multi-cultural social setting that seems fraught with ethical ambiguity, the role of ethics in school administration could not be more important. As Kidder (1995) noted in his seminal examination of integrity in the workplace, ethics is not a luxury; it is central to our survival. “In the twenty-first century the task of good people must be to build ethical cultures larger than the individuals who currently inhabit them” (p. 232).

What difference might an emphasis on an ethical framework make in practical terms, such as in a school setting? A 2007 study conducted by the Ethics Resource Center concluded that the strength of the culture supporting ethical practice is directly related to the frequency and type of misconduct found in the workplace.

The report suggests that the presence of a strong culture of integrity effectively curbs misconduct, whether in such large-scale wrongdoings as altering financial records, taking bribes, and misusing confidential information or in smaller issues involving conflicts of interest, lying to employees, and employee pilferage. (Kidder, 1995, p. 228)

So, does every decision a school leader faces carry the added freight of ethical uncertainty? At least in theory, one might divide the circumstances an administrator faces into two distinct classes: right vs. wrong and right vs. right (Kidder, 1995). “The latter reach[es] inward to our most profound and central values, setting one against the other in ways that will never be resolved simply by pretending one is ‘wrong’” (Kidder, 1995, p. 5). By contrast, right vs. wrong debates tend to sort themselves out quickly. The closer we get to the core of the matter in question, the more it smells. An example of such a right vs. wrong scenario might be the question answered by the United States Supreme Court in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954: Is the practice of segregating schools by race consistent with the provisions of the U.S. Constitution? From the distance of nearly 60 years, the answer remains a resounding “no!” As an aside, it is interesting from the safe distance of considered history that the Supreme Court urged that desegregation in the nation’s public schools be accomplished with “deliberate speed” [Feldman, 2010]; the impetus to change came with the threat of financial impact imparted by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] in 1965, followed by key legislation that gave rise to provisions such as Title I, Title IX, and Public Law 94-142—the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

Neither does every ethical problem pitting one “right” against another necessarily offer a single “correct” response (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998). “Ethical situations often require that hard choices be made under complex and ambiguous circumstances” (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998, p. 3). For the school leader, the present dilemma may not only implicate doing what is “right,” but also what is just, fair, and worthy of repeating when a similar issue demands a decision next week or later in the school year (Kidder, 2008). As one of our students in the Educational Administration program noted in a journal entry during her

internship, “You must be willing to do for your ‘worst’ student, just as you would for your ‘best’ student, and vice versa.”

Not uncommonly, choosing an outcome that favors the perspective or interests of an individual teacher, student, or parent may, by default, require that the school administrator’s decision be at odds with another important constituency—other teachers, other students, or other parents. And no line in the district’s policy manual offers a shred of guidance. Here we might ponder what path a principal is to follow when, year after year, parents flock to request Third Grade Teacher A over Third Grade Teacher B. By now Teacher A is encountering the children of the students she taught at the dawn of her career. She is a legend, arguably larger than life. Teacher B will start his fourth year of teaching next year and has demonstrated the soundness of practice and eagerness to improve that endear many a new teacher to a principal. The principal may be tempted to acknowledge Teacher A is the superior of the two teachers; however, the annual assessment of Teacher B’s competencies shows that he is, by the district’s metric, “satisfactory.” Should the principal bow to the wishes of parents who clearly have a vested and ongoing interest in their children’s education—including how well each child will be prepared to enter fourth grade—or should the principal assure another parent, perhaps just a bit sanguinely, that her child will learn “just as well” with Teacher B and so, perhaps, build this young teacher’s confidence that he has her support?

The matter of choosing the “right” response in a moment of crisis found a multitude of expressions in the minutes and hours that signalled the United States’ wake-up call to terrorism on September 11, 2001. Using that day’s events as a keyhole into the experience of one education leader at a pre-school located mere blocks from ground zero, Shaprio, Gross, and Shapiro (2008) drew the following conclusion:

The education leader should consider first and foremost what is in the best interests of the student, then determine what is in the best interest of all the staff. What is in the best interest of the local community? And will the decision blend in well with the personal and professional ethical beliefs of the education leader? (Shapiro, Gross, & Shapiro, 2008, p. 20)

4 Methodology

The current study derives from action research conducted over the past six years by faculty in the education administration program of Western Washington University. Western is a regional university, serving about 15,000 undergraduate and graduate students, located in the northwest part of the state of Washington. The education administration program at Western is one of 15 principal preparation programs in the state and enrolls the largest number of aspiring school leaders among publicly-funded universities in the state. In the current school year, the program enrolls 80 students, including 25 who are in the midst of a year-long field-based internship as required by Washington Administrative Code. Enrollment has declined from a recent high of 167 during the 2006-07 school year. Western’s program is offered at three sites: the main campus in Bellingham; Seattle; and Bremerton, located on the Kitsap Peninsula, west of Puget Sound. While a few of the school districts that provide candidates for Western’s education administration program are large, such as Seattle (46,000 students) and Everett (19,000), many of the school districts represented in the program enroll fewer than 6,000 students.

By examining survey data obtained from recent program graduates and their supervisors, the researchers sought to assess the extent to which those who have completed the principal licensure program are prepared to address practical circumstances in which their moral compass might be challenged. The current study examines the extent to which graduates of the education administration program are prepared to decide and act ethically in their new roles in school administration (Creswell, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Because the available sample population was limited to graduates of Western’s educational administration program and their supervisors, random sampling was impractical (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

“Action research helps practitioners identify problems and seek solutions in a systematic fashion” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 490). Whereas traditional research may seek to draw conclusions that may be generalized well beyond the immediate setting in which the study originates, “the intent of action research is

only to address specific actions in a single context” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 445). Thus, a study focused on a single education administration program would be in keeping with the aims of action research. The action research process evolves over four steps: identifying a topic or focus; collecting pertinent data; analyzing those data; and taking action based on the analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The current study developed from ongoing efforts by education administration faculty at Western Washington University to embed ISLLC Standard 5 (acting with integrity, fairness, and ethics) in coursework and practicum experiences that lead to principal licensure in the state of Washington. Over a span of several years, beginning in 2006, an assignment related to ethical leadership had been one of three papers each candidate completed during the internship year. However, in the absence of clearly defined product expectations and a rubric for assessing the ethical leader reflection that each candidate generated, consistency in guiding and grading the assignments was unlikely.

Reflection by those engaged in the research is an essential part of action research, “ a process in which practitioners step back from the world of practice and ponder and share ideas about the meaning, value, and impact of their work” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005, p. 491). In 2010, as part of deliberate program adjustments, the ethical leader strand became a product embedded in a course titled “Theory in Educational Administration” (EDAD 541). Corresponding to this shift, the syllabus for “Theory” adopted a new textbook that reinforced the ethical considerations raised in the Kidder (1995) text, one of the long-standing required readings for the class. The new text, by Northouse (2009), guides the reader in articulating her/his core values as an aspiring school leader.

The current project began with an examination of data culled from the first- and third-year surveys, each developed using Survey Monkey, distributed to recent graduates of the education administration master’s degree and principal licensure program and their supervisors. These data came from surveys generated during the 2006-07, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-10 school years. Survey responses relevant to Standard 5 included four sub-strands: position goals and requirements, philosophy/history of education, ethics, and interpersonal relationships.

Survey information for each year reflects graduates who completed the Educational Administration Program either one year prior or four years prior. Thus, the survey distributed in 2009-10 sought to collect data from program graduates from 2008-09 (one-year surveys) and 2005-06 (three-year surveys). The following table provides information about the rate of response from the first-year administrators and their supervisors, as well as third-year administrators and their supervisors:

	First-Year		Third-year	
	Administrator Response (<i>n</i>)	Supervisor Response (<i>n</i>)	Administrator Response (<i>n</i>)	Supervisor Response (<i>n</i>)
2005-06	19/26 (73%)	24/26 (92%)	17/30 (57%)	19/30 (63%)
2006-07	12/18 (66%)	11/18 (61%)	15/21 (72%)	6/21 (28%)
2007-08	12/26 (46%)	10/26 (38%)	15/28 (54%)	20/28 (71%)
2008-09	15/18 (83%)	11/18 (61%)	18/23 (78%)	15/23 (65%)

The surveys generated data that led to a profile of respondents, including gender and ethnicity. In addition, responses were disaggregated according to the positions in school administration held by graduates. Only those program graduates who had been hired in administrative positions were identified to receive surveys. For example, in 2005-06, 47 students completed either the master’s program in Educational Leadership or the post-master’s principal certification program. Of the 47 who completed the program, 26 made the

career shift to an administrative role the following year (2006-2007). Of these 26, 19 completed the survey.

Year Program Completed	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Respondents by Admin Position	(26 in Admin Roles) 17 APs/VPs 6 Principals 3 Acting/Interim	(12 in Admin Roles) 9 APs/VPs 2 Principals 1 Director	(12 in Admin Roles) 10 APs/VPs 2 Principals 0 Other	(15 in Admin Roles) 4 APs/VPs 6 Principals 2 Deans 3 Directors
Gender of Graduates	47% Female 53% Male	67% Female 33% Male	50% Female 50% Male	47% Female 53% Male
Ethnicity of Graduates	85% Caucasian 5% Non-Caucasian 9% No Response	83% Caucasian 8% Non-Caucasian 9% No Response	100% Caucasian	87% Caucasian 13% Non-Caucasian

The following table reflects program graduates from as early as the 2002-03 school year. The surveys that generated these data were sent to program completers and their supervisors in the graduates' third year in an administrative role. An observation to be made across all four years of the third-year survey, when compared with the data from the first-year survey, is that the administrative role of respondents has shifted substantially toward the principal's position, whereas the first-year survey responses show a preponderance of assistant principals and vice principals.

Year Program Completed	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Total Ed Admin Graduates	30	21	28	23
Respondents by Admin Position	(30 in Admin Roles) 13 APs/VPs 16 Principals 1 Dean	(15 in Admin Roles) 2 APs/VPs 13 Principals	(15 in Admin Roles) 4 APs/VPs 10 Principals 1 No Response	(18 in Admin Roles) 8 APs/VPs 7 Principals 1 Superintendent 1 Dist. Off. Ad.
Gender of Graduates	44% Female 56% Male	33% Female 67% Male	27% Female 67% Male 6% No Response	56% Female 44% Male
Ethnicity of Graduates	80 % Caucasian 13% Non-Caucasian 7% No Response	87% Caucasian 13% No Response	93% Caucasian 7% No Response	94% Caucasian 6% Non-Caucasian

For the current study, only those strands related to ISLLC Standard 5 received attention. The survey distributed to graduates included the following question: "To what degree are you an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity and fairness and in an ethical manner?" Respondents provided a self-assessment on a five-point Likert scale, from 5 (excellent) to 1 (poor). A "no response" was tallied as 0. Supervisors, in their assessment of program graduates, responded to the following question: "To what degree is the identified principal/assistant principal an educational leader who promotes

the success of all students with integrity and fairness and in an ethical manner?” As with the graduates’ survey, supervisors chose from a five-point Likert scale of responses.

The current study is limited by two important factors. First, the sample population for the study is taken in its entirety from graduates of the education administration program at a single regional university. There has been no attempt to date to compare survey data from Western with similar data from other education administration programs. Second, the surveys seek to gauge the extent to which program graduates and their supervisors perceive the graduates’ ethical compass as being properly calibrated. There are no data available that would provide a measure of the ethical fitness of aspiring school administrators at the outset of the education administration program. Thus, it is unlikely that the data derived from our surveys can satisfactorily answer an underlying “chicken and egg” question: “Which came first, the individual’s moral compass or the coursework and experiences that address that compass?”

Thus, it seemed necessary to expand data collection to probe the extent to which coursework focused on ethical decision-making might influence the deliberations of aspiring school administrators. To this end, we surveyed several principal certification candidates who were completing the final weeks of a year-long field-based internship. The survey posed the following questions:

1. In what ways/to what extent did Western’s Educational Administration coursework and internship, leading to principal certification, prepare you to be an ethical leader in your role (or anticipated role) as a school administrator?
2. Describe a situation you have encountered in dealing with a student, parent, a member of the faculty/staff, or an administrative colleague in which you were guided by your professional/personal values.
3. To what extent are “right vs. right” decisions a part of your role in the school?

Although the initial question was not framed to lead respondents to identify a single class as being seminal in their thinking about professional ethics, the preponderance of those surveyed identified Theory in Educational Administration as the source of epiphanies about how one’s moral compass has relevance in school leadership. One of those who responded offered the following observation about her own self-reflections:

I felt that wrestling with questions of ethical decision-making and leadership in this way established a foundational ethical framework of personal core values that informed all of my learning that came after, throughout the program and internship. It led me to recognize and take seriously the need to be mindful of ethical dilemmas involved in decision making, particularly because moving into a leadership position means having more responsibility and accountability. Every decision I make in my current role is more public and has a broader and more significant impact than those decisions I made as a teacher.

Another of the respondents reflected how his study of several theoretical perspectives had prompted a careful evaluation of his own professional anchor points. Noting how the works of Fullan, Sergiovanni, Bolman and Deal, Collins, and others had challenged his thinking, this 20-year veteran of the elementary classroom said, “I was prompted to not only reflect on my own experiences in education but really analyze how those experiences both meshed and clashed with my core beliefs—both professionally and personally.” He added, “It was important that I synthesize my experiences in the world of administration with my optimistic, practical, and theoretical views of that world, all the while keeping in mind who I am as a human being.”

In the context of the internship, it is not uncommon for students in the Educational Administration program to encounter decisions and circumstances that rarely cause a night of fitful sleep for the classroom teacher. One respondent, whose internship had meshed the experiences of an elementary principalship with the role of a central office program director, found herself asking whether there may be ethical principles that supercede the dictates of law. Reflecting on a situation where a student who would have benefited from the services available in a Title I school could not access those services because his address required that he attend a school that did not qualify under Title I, this intern mused, “Often the difficulty in handling federal funding is that following the law sometimes leads us to do that which *feels* profoundly wrong.” She briefly considered whether she should advise this student’s parents how they might skirt the boundary issue by

reporting a home address within the Title I school's catchment area; then she applied Kidder's "individual vs. community" and "short-term vs. long-term" paradigms. Guided by the possibility that a less-than-forthright decision process might come to light in the usual audit to which federal programs are subject, our student made a decision that left her feeling less than satisfied. "In this particular case," she reflected, "choosing to provide supplemental support for one child in the present could ultimately result in denying that same support to many children in the future." She felt satisfied that this represented a classic "right vs. right" dilemma. "Nevertheless, it doesn't make it any easier to explain to parents why they may want to consider moving across the street so that their son can get the help he needs." Taking a course thickly threaded with ethical issues had helped our student "to develop a framework for recognizing and analyzing ethical dilemmas and to become familiar with tools for how to resolve them."

5 Findings and Conclusions

Survey responses for first-year administrators were readily disaggregated according to relevant ISLLC Standards. Graduates from school year 2005-06, surveyed during the 2006-07 school year, rated their competency on Standard 5 above the other ISLLC standards, except Standard 1: Steward of Vision. On this first-year survey, the mean of responses for Standard 5 (4.47) was identical to the mean of responses for Standard 1. On the first-year surveys of graduates from the 2006-07 school year, the 2007-08 school year, and the 2008-09 school year, respondents also self-rated Standard 5 as their strongest. In 2008-09, the ethics strand of Standard 5 showed a mean response of 4.4 on the 5-point scale, reflecting respondents' greater confidence in their moral compass than in other attributes relevant to the ISLLC Standards.

The supervisors of graduates, now in their first year in an administrative role, similarly perceived the first-year administrators as particularly competent in their demonstration of traits associated with the ethical leader. Supervisors' perceptions of program graduates who completed their certification requirements in 2005-06 scored Standard 5 above all other ISLLC Standards on the survey. On the survey of 2006-07 graduates, current supervisors rated graduates as marginally more competent on Standard 4 (Community Leader) than on Standard 5 (Ethical Leader), with a mean response of 4.53 on Standard 4 compared with a mean response of 4.51 on Standard 5. Supervisors responding to the survey of 2007-08 graduates again rated first-year administrators as being most competent on Standard 5 (4.77); and on the survey focusing on 2008-09 graduates, supervisors rated graduates' competency related to Standard 5 (4.30) ahead of all other standards.

Parallel data from surveys given to third-year administrators and their supervisors continue the trend found in data reflecting first-year administrators. Third-year data collected for those who graduated in 2003 and earlier do not readily align with data from 2004 and later. This lack of alignment may be traced to the shift in outcome lenses used in Washington, from 21 Domains prior to 2004 to ISLLC Standards for 2004 and thereafter. Beginning with students who graduated in 2004, who entered administration in 2004-05 (first-year) and were surveyed in their third year in 2006-07, the trend toward high levels of self-identified competency related to the ethical leader standard mirrors the responses from first-year administrators and their supervisors. Surveys of graduates from 2004 (4.42), 2005 (3.78), and 2006 (4.38) show Standard 5 with the highest mean ratings compared with self-assessments for the other five ISLLC Standards.

Supervisors of third-year administrators also assessed those who had graduated from Western's principal-preparation program as likely to decide and act in an ethical manner. Assessing the competencies of administrators who had completed their course of study in 2004, 2005, and 2006, the supervisors rated "ethical leader" as their supervisees' greatest strength.

After examining the data related to first-year and third-year administrators in light of Standard 5, one question remains unanswered: Do program participants develop the sense of core values associated with being an ethical leader (Kidder, 1995) as a result of the coursework, readings, discussions, and assignments designed within the context of the Educational Administration Program? Or do students who choose to enroll in and complete the Educational Administration Program at Western Washington University come to the program with their core values fully developed and articulated? If the latter were true, one might then ask whether an emphasis on ethical leadership through program content and practicum experiences is

warranted.

How do practitioners in school administration view ethical leadership as a relevant component of principal preparation? Supervisors' survey assessments of first- and third-year school administrators suggest that the ethical fitness of the principal or assistant principal trumps all other considerations. The response of one supervisor to an open-ended question about ethical leadership on the first-year survey may provide guidance as to how the topic of one's moral compass should be incorporated in the preparation of tomorrow's school leaders:

I believe that we cannot stress enough the importance of the "deposits in the moral bank account" for all of our students, as well as the critical nature of follow-through and service to staff members as part of the [school leadership] position.

Another supervisor reflected, rather abstrusely, "The moral imperative of leadership [should focus] on challenging current practice where research shows it [the practice] is not in the best interest of kids, especially when the culture of the school is committed to the ineffectual/unhealthy practice."

The current study leaves unanswered certain key questions about the effect that course content and practicum experiences may have in shaping the aspiring school administrator's sense of ethical direction. These questions notwithstanding, the data demonstrate that, among practicing school leaders and their supervisors surveyed as part of Western's efforts to monitor program graduates, the ambiguity that may attend the term "ethical leader" does not prevent survey participants from assessing program graduates as having a well calibrated moral compass.

Responses to the open-ended questions we used in surveying several of our students who were then completing the final days of their field experiences in administration suggest a distinguishing connection between program coursework and the opportunity for program participants to hone their moral sensibilities. One of our respondents said that taking a course thickly threaded with ethical issues had helped her "to develop a framework for recognizing and analyzing ethical dilemmas and to become familiar with tools for how to resolve them." Another respondent, who in a few weeks would be putting theory into practice as a newly appointed elementary principal, reflected, "[I've] learned an important lesson: sticking to your moral compass *will* lead to consequences. But that does not mean you act in a morally dubious manner to keep everyone happy."

Another respondent averred, "It is our responsibility and job as administrators to follow through on what is right, not what is easiest." Yet another student, who was completing her field-based practicum in a large, urban high school, mused, "Just because someone is expected to be an ethical leader doesn't mean that they always follow through." This same student summed up what we as faculty in the Educational Administration program hope is etched into the thinking of every individual who aspires to a role in school administration: "If I don't do the right thing, who will?"

Every practitioner in school administration can readily call to mind myriad circumstances that required an appropriate response to a right vs. wrong situation. With the possible exception of school leaders whose moral compasses do not reliably point to a true direction, we as leaders spend little effort rationalizing what we know will fail the test of moral rectitude (Kidder, 1995). Far more troubling are those situations, such as that faced by the principal at the high school basketball game, in which the "right" response is less than self-evident, that are best addressed with the confidence that derives from ethical fitness (Kidder, 1995). Although maintaining that level of fitness requires the practitioner to apply her or his core values at every opportunity, the current study suggests that the regimen that informs one's sense of professional values may find its source in theoretical concepts and purposeful reflections that arise from coursework in principal preparation.

6 References

Axtman, K. (2005, January). When tests' cheaters are the teachers: Probe of Texas scores on high-stakes tests is the latest case in series of cheating incidents. *Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved May 23, 2010 from <http://www.csmonitor.com>.

- Box, D. (2011, March). Kentlake teacher charged in superior court with sexual misconduct with minor. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved March 24, 2011 from <http://www.seattlepi.com>
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap and others don't.*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Evans, R. (2007). The authentic leader. In *The Jossey-Bass reader on educational leadership* (2nd ed.), pp. 135-156. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.
- Feldman, N. (2010). *Scorpions: The battles and triumphs of FDR's great Supreme Court justices*. New York: Twelve Publishers.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Gall, J. P., Gall, M. D., & Borg, W. R. (2005). *Applying educational research: A practical guide* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gall, J. P., Gall, M. D., & Borg, W. R. (2010). *Applying educational research* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gutierrez, S. (2011, October). Criminal charges filed in Seattle schools financial scandal. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved October 27, 2011 from <http://www.seattlepi.com/>
- Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (2007). Standards for school leaders. In *The Jossey-Bass reader on educational leadership* (2nd ed.), pp. 249-268. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson, P. (2011, July). America's biggest teacher and principal cheating scandal unfolds in Atlanta. *The Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved October 27, 2011 from <http://www.csmonitor.com/>
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2000). *Educational research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Kidder, R. M. (1995). *How good people make tough choices: Resolving the dilemmas of ethical living*. New York: Fireside.
- Kidder, R. M. (2008, May). Moral rudders and superintendent values. *The School Administrator*, pp. 10-16.
- Klocko, B. A., & Kirby, B. (2010, October-December). ISLLC 2008: Websites to promote standards-based principal preparation. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 5(4). Retrieved March 31, 2011, from <http://cnx.org/content/m35957/latest/>.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2001). *Practical research: Planning and design* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Lynn, A. (2011, March). Tacoma teacher charged with sex with student. *The Olympian*. Retrieved March 24, 2011 from <http://www.theolympian.com/>
- Machado, C., & Cline, D. (2010, April). Faculty perceptions: Where do education administration programs stand with the ISLLC/ELCC Standards? *Connexions*, 11(1). Retrieved February 15, 2011, from <http://cnx.org/content/m33637/latest/>
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Mertler, C. A. (2009). *Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Northouse, P. G. (2009). *Introduction to leadership: Concepts and practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (2007). Leadership as stewardship: "Who's serving who?" In *The Jossey-Bass reader on educational leadership* (2nd ed.), pp. 75-92. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.
- Shapiro, J. P., Gross, S. J., & Shapiro, S. H. (2008, May). Ethical decisions in turbulent times. *The School Administrator*, pp. 18-21.
- Shapiro, J. P., & Stefkovich, J. A. (2001). *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

- Shaw, L., & Miletich, S. (2011, March). Seattle School Board ousts superintendent over financial scandal. *Education Week*. Retrieved October 27, 2011 from <http://www.edweek.org/>
- Starratt, R. J. (1994). *Building an ethical school: A practical response to the moral crisis in schools*. Washington, DC.: The Falmer Press.
- Strike, K. A., Haller, E. J., & Soltis, J. F. (1998). *The ethics of school administration* (2nd Ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007). Becoming a trustworthy leader. In *The Jossey-Bass reader on educational leadership* (2nd ed.), pp. 75-92. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.
- Willower, D. J., & Licata, J. W. (1997). *Values and valuation in the practice of educational administration*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.