



# VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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## MEASURING THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP VALUES AND BELIEFS OF SCHOOL LEADERS

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Existing research suggests that school leaders' personal values play an important role in leadership decision-making (Begley, 2000; Hodgkinson, 1978), culture-shaping (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1999) and instructional leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Lomotey, 1989; Scheurich, 1998; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1994; Sizemore, 1990). The standards guiding the profession of school leadership explicitly articulate dispositions and beliefs that effective instructional leaders possess (CCSSO, 1996). While values – individual, organizational, and social – are inherent to all leadership decisions (Hodgkinson, 1978, 1999), the literature suggests that a particular constellation of personal values and beliefs is essential for effective leadership of schools with high populations of at-risk children (Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Lomotey, 1989; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Examples include a fundamental belief in human capacity to learn (Knapp, et. al., 2003) and a deep drive to carry out the dream of democracy through education (Knapp, et. al., 2003; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

Despite what is known about the role of school leaders' values and beliefs in effective leadership, most institutions responsible for preparing school leaders do little to explicitly cultivate instructional leadership values and beliefs in pre-service leaders (McCarthy, 1999; Murphy, 1992, 1999, in press; Smylie, Bennett, Konkol, & Fendt, 2005). Not until very recently, amid a renewed profession-wide commitment to social justice, have some programs initiated efforts that

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expressly intend to influence the values and beliefs of students in leadership preparation programs (Brown, 2004, in press; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; McKenzie, et. al., in press).

While such preparation experiences as critical self-reflection and cross-cultural studies could reasonably be expected to engage individuals' values and beliefs, and while qualitative assessments such as journal entries would suggest meaningful change is taking place (Brown, in press), Begley (1999a) cautions us that there is an "important difference between values articulated and the values to which [pre-service leaders] are actually committed" (p. 4). Without a uniform measure of values and beliefs, it is difficult to study the effect – if any – of instructional innovations to influence pre-service leaders' values and beliefs. Ironically, in a field riddled with standardized tests, there is a dearth of reliable measures to assess instructional leadership values and beliefs of students or graduates of school leadership preparation programs (Brown, 2004; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004).

While the researcher acknowledges the challenges associated with the measurement of instructional leadership values and beliefs, this study is inspired by the conviction that school leaders are the "frontline civil rights workers" (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 6) of our time. The cultivation of instructional leadership values in future school leaders is simply too important *not* to merit quantification in some way. Until data can be generated to corroborate graduate self-report about the effect of instructional experiences designed to influence or draw out values and beliefs, leadership educators will be making program reforms in the dark – and more importantly, missing the vital opportunity to cultivate values and beliefs that our most needy children deserve in their school leaders. In an effort to unearth such evidence, the researcher employs a naturalistic approach to apprehend the relationship between leadership preparation and pre-service leaders' values and beliefs. Such an approach recognizes that empirical inquiry is a "fallible, often inadequate process that can provide only tentative explanations about...human behavior...but [is] the best we have in an imperfect world" (Willower, 1999, p. 130). The researcher is not concerned with proving the "rightness of value" (Hodgkinson, 1978, p. 106). Nor does the researcher claim that the use of an empirical measure somehow produces "pure" or "value free" data. The "empirical-ness" of the measure developed as a result of this study only refers to the fact that it produces data generated by the individual as opposed to the opinions of an external party. While Begley (2000) posits that there is "limited utility [in] conducting research that merely describes or lists values" (p. 236), this researcher would argue that ascertaining descriptions or lists of values

possessed by graduates of leadership preparation programs can shed light on whether such programs produce particular patterns in the ways that pre-service leaders attribute value to desired end-states (Hodgkinson, 1978).

### **Purpose of Study**

The pilot study which is the narrow subject of this article employed a research-based process for developing and validating a measure of instructional leadership values and beliefs (McHorney, et. al., 2000, 2002). The interviews described on the following pages were conducted for the purpose of confirming what instructional leadership values and beliefs are important for school leaders. Using those data to corroborate findings in related literature, an instrument for measuring school leaders' instructional leadership values and beliefs was developed. To increase the validity and reliability of the instrument, an expert panel will review items for content validity and the instrument will be piloted to measure test-retest reliability.

### **Definitions**

The researcher's use of the terms "values" and "beliefs" is informed by the literature in the domains of values and school administration, as well as instructional leadership. Begley (2000, 2001) cites Parsons & Shils (1962) in defining values as "a conception, explicit or implicit...of the desirable which influences the selection...of action" (p. 235). The theme of "conceptions of the desirable" reappears in several other scholars' definitions of *values* (Hodgkinson, 1978; Rokeach, 1973).

In contrast, scholars who study instructional leadership use the terms *values*, *dispositions*, and *beliefs* interchangeably (see for example, Deal & Peterson, 1999; Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003). For purposes of this study, the researcher will use the term *values* to refer to "conceptions of the desirable that motivate behavior," while *beliefs* are "those things that an individual accepts as true."

### **A Brief History of Measuring Values**

The measurement of values has long been studied in the field of psychology. Rokeach (1973), recognizing the importance of values in driving behavior, devoted himself to developing a measure of values, which he defined as "enduring belief(s) that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable" (p. 5). He, and others in the fields of psychology and school administration (see for example, Begley, 1999b; Hodgkinson, 1978), believed that understanding values is vital to understanding and predicting how an individual will act to achieve his or her preferred "mode of conduct" or "end-state of existence." While Rokeach (1973)

described values as “enduring,” they are not altogether unchangeable. Such malleability is also suggested in Hodgkinson’s (1978) description of values as “concepts of the desirable with motivating force” (p. 105). Values have cognitive, affective, and behavioral features (Allport, Vernon, & Lindzey, 1960; Rokeach, 1973), opening up opportunities to influence value change through intellectual reflection, emotional engagement, and experience.

To test these assumptions, Rokeach and several successors, most notably Shalom Schwartz, have developed and validated instruments that measure values. The Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) is comprised of two lists of eighteen values statements that respondents rank order. Its initial validation testing involved a large sample ( $n > 1,500$ ) (Rokeach, 1973). Since its development in the late 1960’s, it has been widely used and further validated; it is still in use today. In the mid-1980’s, Shalom Schwartz extended the work of Rokeach by developing another instrument to define a comprehensive typology of cross-cultural human values. The Schwartz Values Inventory (SVI) has been completed by more than 15,000 subjects in over 36 countries and has demonstrated strong validity and reliability performance (Schwartz, 1992, 1994).

### **Instructional Leadership Values and Beliefs**

While few scholars have devoted themselves specifically to studying the values of effective instructional leadership, many researchers of instructional leadership have found that effective school leaders share a specific constellation of what they term personal values. A review of literature in school improvement and instructional leadership yielded a short but specific list of values and beliefs that influence school culture and promote “powerful and equitable” learning (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Knapp, Copland, & Talbot, 2003; Senge, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1994; Waters, McNulty, & Marzano, 2004). Research of urban schools in particular, where students are most at-risk, suggests that educators’ beliefs about 1) students’ potential, and 2) the purpose of schools, are defining factors in student success (Haberman, 1995; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Lomotey, 1989; Sizemore, 1990). In summarizing the literature on instructional leadership, Knapp and his colleagues (2003) articulated what they termed five key “values” that school leaders must possess: 1) ambitious standards for student learning; 2) belief in human capacity; 3) commitment to equity; 4) belief in professional support and responsibility; and 5) commitment to inquiry (pp. 20-21). The dispositions described in the ISLLC standards are consistent with these five “values” (CCSSO, 1996).

## **Methods: Soliciting Practitioners’ Perspectives**

### *Developing the Protocol*

A ten-item semi-structured interview protocol (contact author directly for a copy) was developed to conduct a one-on-one interview study of teachers and school administrators. To craft interview questions, the researcher compared the list of values, beliefs, and characteristics resulting from the review of instructional leadership literature with the Schwartz theory of human values to identify overlap. Three of the ten basic types of motivating values from the Schwartz topology were selected for their relatedness to instructional leadership values.

*Universalism*, defined by Schwartz (2002) as an “understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and nature, was selected for its relation to a commitment to equity” (p. 268). *Benevolence* (“preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent contact” (Schwartz, 2002, p. 268)) was selected for its relation to belief in professional support and responsibility. Finally, the researcher selected *self-direction* (“independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring” (Schwartz, 2002, p. 268)) for its relationship to a commitment to inquiry, as well as to visionary leadership. Interview questions were drafted to tap these values. In addition, a question was developed to explore how effective instructional leaders may be motivated by the Schwartz (2002) values of power (“social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources” (p. 267)) and achievement (“personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards” (p. 267)).

Additional questions were crafted to tap the instructional leadership beliefs that did not have a clear relationship with the Schwartz values, including beliefs about human potential, the ways leaders define their job, and beliefs about the role of schools in society. The overall purpose of the interviews was to corroborate findings in the literature with current practitioners’ perspectives on the question, what are the personal values and beliefs necessary to be an effective instructional leader?

### *Selection of Subjects*

The key selection criterion for study participants was that they currently work in a school setting as a teacher, building administrator, or central office administrator. The population sampled was comprised of students enrolled in a graduate program in educational leadership.

The sample ( $n=10$ ) was diverse in several respects, except racially. There is even distribution between teachers and administrators. Another important variable in this study is the socio-economic status of the schools. Half of

the sample represented a high-poverty urban school perspective based on the percentage of students who qualify for a free or reduced lunch. The sample was evenly split by gender.

The transcribed interviews yielded 54 pages of analyzable text. An iterative manual coding process was used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, transcripts were reviewed for common themes between interviews. A draft of open codes was defined based on this initial review. The open codes were then compared with a set of codes developed based on the literature review. Codes were further refined and collapsed. The transcripts were then reviewed again and coded using the refined coding structure.

## Findings

The themes that emerged from the interviews are presented here in the order of the frequency and intensity with which they were described by subjects: orientation to work as a spiritual calling; authenticity; beliefs about the potential of kids and schools; a desire for perpetual improvement; and motivation to advance self by helping others.

### *Spiritual Calling*

The theme that most clearly and strongly pervaded the interviews was that of orientation to work as a spiritual calling, as opposed to work as “just a paycheck.” According to subjects in this study, effective instructional leaders see their work broadly in terms of making a difference or building kids’ futures or perpetuating democracy. One subject said that effective instructional leaders believe:

...That what they’re doing is important to the movement of our society forward economically and that every person’s better off in all kinds of ways because people who are educated...can do whatever they want to do.

The spiritual nature of the calling is not necessarily religious, but it is tied to leaders’ beliefs about larger purposes. That is, based on these interviews, effective instructional leaders see their work as their primary channel for fulfilling their destined purpose on earth. One subject said,

Making a difference in kids’ lives] is something that you feel so deep within you, it makes your whole life worth living that you’ve been able to...inspire some of these young minds.

Effective instructional leaders do not think of their work as slogging through a series of meetings or disciplinary actions or projects. Subjects in this study agreed that instead, effective school leaders see their work as the means of carrying out their destiny, of fulfilling

their purpose on earth, of achieving lasting impact by improving the lives and opportunities of children. Inherent in this finding is that instructional leaders have a clear sense of purpose or mission. Such purpose-driven orientation appears more in leadership literature than specifically in instructional leadership literature.

Perhaps what is most compelling about this finding, even if not at all surprising, is that effective instructional leadership must first be effective leadership, a point that is echoed in Begley’s (2001) definition of an ethical leader as practicing “leadership that is knowledge based, values informed, and skillfully executed” (p. 353). In other words, the instructional aspects of instructional leadership come after the requisites of effective leadership are met.

### *Authenticity*

Subjects often coupled their description of the spiritual calling with phrases such as “actually caring,” “leading by example,” “true to themselves,” and “authenticity.” The underlying theme that ties together subjects’ observations was that effective instructional leaders genuinely believe in their mission, are consistent in words and actions, and build real connections to the people in the school – teachers, students, and parents. In other words, they are authentic. This is tied closely to the spiritual calling, as leaders who see their work as their life purpose have a very clear vision of schooling and their role in it. Several subjects felt authenticity in effective instructional leaders is manifested in confident decision-making. Leaders who are “for real” won’t be “threatened by admitting mistakes” because achieving their vision is more important than anything else. At the heart of their vision is a genuine caring about people.

Several subjects gave examples of how leaders demonstrate this value by routinely seeking out teachers or students simply to talk and connect:

Our principal meets with the kids every morning. You know, she stands outside the school, she waves at the parents...She knows the names of the pet who’s often in the car with the kid, she knows the names of siblings, who rides with whom.

Authenticity, according to the subjects in this study, refers both to “congruence between what leaders believe, say, and do” (Leonard, 2005), as well as leaders’ authentic caring for the individuals who make up the school community.

This finding reinforces the work of researchers who study values and ethics in school leadership including Begley (2001), Leonard (2005), and Starratt (2003). The near unanimous agreement of subjects in this study – a cross section of leaders and teachers – regarding the

importance of authenticity in instructional leadership is a strong testament to the relationship of this line of inquiry to everyday school practice. Scholars pursuing other lines of inquiry have arrived in the same neighborhood. For example, Scheurich (1998) found that one of the most important characteristics of effective principals in schools with high populations of low-income children of color is that they genuinely care about each child.

This finding is clearly consistent with literature in school leadership, and in particular, instructional leadership of at-risk students.

#### *Human and School Potential*

The most frequently-repeated verbatim phrase across all interviews was that leaders must believe “all kids can learn.” Unpacking this phrase was a challenge. When probed, subjects nearly unanimously indicated that all kids can learn “at a high level.” Further pursuit of “high level” finally yielded variation in subjects’ responses. For some subjects, the “high level” standard would be met when:

The instructional leader [is] confident that most of the kids that have graduated from this high school can fill out a job application.

Another subject cautioned:

We forget that some kids aren’t going to college...Having all advanced placement classes doesn’t help a great many students. That’s not where they’re going.

These responses were instrumental in defining the continuum on which the value of “ambitious standards for student learning” (Knapp, et. al., 2003) is anchored. The interviews in this study revealed that the adage “all kids can learn” is one to which virtually all educators subscribe; however, variation occurs in beliefs about whether all kids *will* learn, and whether what kids will learn could be normatively described as “high,” or whether “learning at a high level” simply refers to acquiring more skills and knowledge than the child had when he or she walked in the school door.

Leaders’ beliefs about human capacity are closely related to their beliefs in the capacity of the school to effectively help kids learn. Some subjects paired their commentary on the potential of students with a qualifier regarding schools’ diminished responsibility for students’ learning given social, economic, and cultural challenges students face outside of the school. Others indicated unequivocally that leaders must believe schools are responsible and effective in impacting kids’ learning. One such subject captured this notion when he said,

We’re...realizing that we can’t make excuses anymore... We have to get to the part where it’s not about blaming people, it’s about finding what we can

do from 8:50am to 3:35pm instructionally to help students.

These responses helped to flesh out a continuum of beliefs about the basic capacities of individuals to learn, and the capacity of schools to effectively facilitate that learning.

Ultimately, the repeated uniform appearance of the notion that “all kids can learn” specifically corroborates findings of prior research indicating that instructional leaders must believe that all students can and have a right to learn and succeed (Knapp, et. al., 2003; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

#### *Desire for Improvement*

Consistent with the value of “commitment to inquiry” (Knapp et. al., 2003) found in the literature, the theme of orientation toward improvement surfaced through this interview study. One subject neatly summarized the idea:

The [leader] has to value improvement and not just status quo. Improvement is absolutely necessary and the person who is leader also must believe improvement is achievable.

In addition to an overall orientation toward improvement, the interviews indicated that leaders must exhibit other values and behaviors related to improvement such as willingness to take risks in pursuit of improvement, openness to nontraditional structures or strategies to achievement improvement, and especially, the use of data in making decisions. One subject simply stated, “They have to know how to interpret the data, read the data, and know what it stands for”. The implication of this theme is that effective instructional leaders can and routinely do critically analyze problems at their schools to pursue and achieve improvement, academic and otherwise. This would suggest that on the Schwartz framework of values, effective instructional leaders fall toward self-direction and openness to change rather than to conformity and conservatism.

#### *Service Ambition*

In a departure from a traditional “leader” profile in which individual ambition and self-promotion are significant motivators of behavior, subjects in this study showed broad agreement that effective instructional leaders are *not* motivated by salary or occupying positions of increased responsibility. Most subjects felt that successful school leaders look to measures of student achievement and/or faculty (teacher) satisfaction to gauge their success.

Interestingly, participants in the study underscored the need for school leaders to share their authority – to empower others in schools to make decisions and work toward common goals.

According to this sample, effective instructional leaders do not hoard power or responsibility. Nearly every interviewee used the word “supportive” or “facilitator” to describe the orientation of the effective instructional leader toward leadership authority. Such a leader is more interested in distributing power by grooming new leaders.

This finding is highly consistent with the literature describing instructional leaders as demonstrating professional respect for teachers and for the organization. It also suggests that on the Schwartz values continuum, effective school leaders’ values will fall toward self-transcendence, universalism, and benevolence rather than self-enhancement, power, and achievement.

### **Instrument Development and Pilot Strategy**

To create an instrument based on these results, the researcher developed individual items to incorporate each of the five themes that emerged from the interviews. It became immediately clear that some of the themes, though they hang together logically, are composites of several concepts. To develop a measure with discrete scales to assess each aspect of instructional leadership values and beliefs, the researcher broke some themes into sub-themes. For example, the theme *Human and School Potential* captures leaders’ beliefs and values regarding 1) the potential of all students to learn; 2) the potential of schools to facilitate that learning, and 3) beliefs regarding the underlying purpose of schools. Accordingly, this theme was converted into three separate scales with items in each scale developed to tap each discrete component of the theme. The original five themes became eight scales, named to describe the neutral continua on which the desired value identified through the study resides. The resulting eight scales were: 1) work orientation; 2) beliefs about human potential; 3) beliefs about school potential; 4) beliefs about the purpose of schools; 5) improvement orientation; 6) decision-making orientation; 7) sources of motivation; and 8) power orientation.

A panel of graduate students in educational leadership reviewed the items for clarity and wording. Items were revised or removed based on this review. Several models for the design of the measurement instrument were considered, including the Rokeach Values Survey (Rokeach, 1973) and the Schwartz Values Inventory (Schwartz, 1992). The ESS Basic Values Instrument (Schwartz, 2003) asks respondents to indicate on a six-point scale how much like or not like they are to a third person, e.g. “It’s very important to him to help the people around him. He cares for their well-being.” The rating scale from the ESS permits respondents to indicate that the person described in each item is Very much like me (6), Like me (5), Somewhat like me (4), A little like me (3), Not like me (2), and Not like me at all (1). This scale

was adapted to create a Measure of Instructional Leadership Values and Beliefs.

To establish test validity, the measure is being reviewed for content validity by experts in the fields of instructional leadership and social justice leadership. Each expert panelist will evaluate each item for its face content validity in measuring the intended domain, and for its overall clarity. Panelists will also review the scales to determine whether items comprehensively represent the construct in each scale. Following the expert review, the measure will be piloted and field tested to evaluate internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and criterion and concurrent validity.

### **Uses and Limitations of Instrument**

As school leadership development programs pilot more innovative models and modes of instruction to cultivate instructional leadership values, there is a need for a measure to gauge change in students’ value positions. Such a measure can provide formative feedback to individual institutions regarding how effective new methods are in achieving program goals, helping to guide program changes. As data accumulate, they can begin to point to best instructional practices in leadership development, and in particular, in facilitating change in beliefs and values. The objective is not to identify the “one best way,” but to understand many effective ways of helping future leaders develop the beliefs and value positions that undergird instructional leadership.

For the field of school leadership development as a whole, such an empirical instrument has the capacity to generate cross-program data about instructional efficacy or impact. No such data are currently available (Brown, 2004; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004), making it impossible to effectively respond to criticism of leadership development programs as impotent or irrelevant (see for example, Broad Foundation and Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2003; Levine, 2005). Indeed, data generated from research using this measure could contribute substantially to the knowledge base in school leadership by illuminating the relationships between individual leaders’ values and their career placement (low/high need schools or districts), school culture, student performance measures, graduation rates, graduate post-secondary education, and teacher turnover. In other words, a measure of instructional leadership values can indicate whether individual instructional leadership values and beliefs are a predictor of school and student success, especially in high-poverty urban schools.

Of course, such an instrument could be used by individual school leaders for self-assessment at regular intervals throughout their career. Since there is some evidence that self-reflection and critique are effective

methods for driving values change, this may be one of the most fruitful uses of the instrument among leaders who are already predisposed to self-monitor their beliefs and behavior.

There are limitations and dangers to the use of such a tool, especially in the field of education where standardized tests are frequently relied upon as the sole data source for critical decisions. A measure of individual values cannot be used in isolation. That is, whether used as a self-assessment instrument, or for individual program evaluation, or for research in the field of leadership preparation, one measure cannot adequately capture a holistic picture of school leaders' values and beliefs. However, the Measure of Instructional Leadership Values and Beliefs can yield data that are otherwise very difficult to collect, as part of a portfolio of multiple measures including student journals, interviews, and most importantly, measures of actual leadership behavior in schools. Given the philosophical intent of the instrument – to assist in increasing the number of school leaders who effectively lead instruction in low-SES school settings – the Measure of Instructional Leadership Values and Beliefs should never be used solely to exclude individuals from either leadership development programs (e.g. as an admission requirement) or the profession (e.g. as a licensing requirement). Rather, the data collected can help programs more effectively guide individuals' learning experiences, as well as inform career guidance offered to students.

## Conclusion

The pilot study described in this article aimed to identify the values and beliefs that are essential to effective instructional leadership. A review of literature and analysis of practitioner interviews yielded an instrument, the Measure of Instructional Leadership Values and Beliefs made up of eight scales: work orientation, beliefs about human potential, beliefs about school potential, beliefs about the purpose of schools, improvement orientation, decision-making orientation, sources of motivation, and power orientation. The measure is being reviewed by an expert panel and will be piloted and field-tested to confirm validity and reliability. An empirical measure of school leaders' values is a vital component of a larger measurement toolkit, including qualitative measures, used to evaluate pre-service leadership preparation program efficacy in facilitating the development of strong instructional leaders.

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