# VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

## MORAL LEADERSHIP AND THE ETHIC OF COMMUNITY

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The argument that education is fundamentally a *moral* endeavor is certainly not new. Dewey, for example, wrote about schooling as an essentially moral practice as early as 1922. However, in recent years, scholars have given increased attention to the moral aspects of schooling, with the literature in educational leadership reflecting this trend. Goldring and Greenfield (2002) provide a good example of this burgeoning interest in moral leadership in their recent work on the "roles, expectations, and dilemmas" of educational leadership. They state that the "moral dimensions of educational leadership and administration" constitute one of the special conditions that make administering schools "different from such work in other contexts" (pp. 2-3). Similarly, Sergiovanni (1996) argues that schools are "moral communities" requiring the development of a distinct leadership based in "moral authority" (p. 57). Starratt (1999) adds that "the nature of learning itself is intrinsically a moral activity . . . Leadership within that morally charged environment, then, involves educators necessarily in attending to the moral character of what the community is called to do" (p. 3).

There are many identifiable reasons for the growing interest in the moral aspects of educational leadership. These include: the emergence of the critical humanist perspective in the 1980s (e.g., Foster, 1986), the increasing recognition of the "new realities" of the social context of schooling (e.g., Cunningham & Mitchell, 1990), and a growing tendency to reject "scientific," rationalist perspectives on leadership in schools (e.g., Furman, 2003b). In response to these trends, the literature on moral leadership in schools "has been one of the fastest growing areas of leadership study" in recent years (Leithwood & Duke, 1998, p. 36).

This expanding literature on moral leadership includes several sub-strands. One of these focuses on *how* moral leadership might be practiced (e.g., Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1995, 2003), and within this sub-strand ethics has emerged as a major area of study. As Beck and Murphy (1997) state, educational scholars "are showing an unprecedented amount of interest in explicit consideration of ethical issues" (p. vii), and many are contributing to the development of this literature (e.g., Beck, 1994; Beck & Murphy, 1994; Begley, 1999; Hodgkinson, 1991; Katz, Noddings, & Strike, 1999; Noddings, 1984; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Starratt, 1994; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998; Willower & Licata, 1997). By the mid 1990s, ethics was widely accepted as part of the "knowledge base" for educational leaders, evidenced by its inclusion as one of the six domains in the widely-adopted "ISLLC" standards for administrator preparation (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996). Many educators are now familiar with various frameworks for thinking about ethics in education, including Starratt's (1994) well-known tri-partite framing of the ethics of justice, critique, and care.

In addition to attending to the *how* of moral leadership practice, another sub-strand in the literature is concerned with the *why* of leadership practice, that is, with the moral *purposes* of leadership in 21st century schools (Murphy, 1999). In other words, much of the current work on moral leadership is shifting from a focus on the traditional concerns of leadership studies—*what* leadership is, *how* it is done, and by *whom*—to the *why* of leadership—its moral purposes and how they can be achieved in schools (Furman, 2003a). Social justice, for example, has emerged as one of the central purposes or goals of contemporary leadership practice, and scholars are developing a new literature on leadership *for* social justice in schools (e.g., Grogan, 2002; Marshall, 2004; Shields, 2003).

Given the increased focus on both *ethics* as a guide to leadership practice and the *moral purposes* of leadership in schools, it is important to consider the *fit* between ethics and the accomplishment of these moral purposes; in other words, is leadership practice informed by dominant ethical frames likely to be effective in working toward these moral purposes? This question is the motivation for the analysis in this article, in which I propose the idea of an *ethic of community* to extend the ethical frames typically used in education. I argue that this expansion of our ethical frames is important for achieving the moral purposes of educational leadership in 21st century schools. I define ethic of community as the *moral responsibility to engage in communal processes* as educators pursue the moral purposes of their work and address the ongoing challenges of daily life and work in schools. The ethic of community thus centers the *community* (as opposed to the individual) as the primary locus of moral agency in schools. In the following sections I will (a) argue that the ethical frames currently used in education focus primarily on the *individual* as ethical agent; (b) develop the concept of an ethic of community as a complement to these frames; (c) show how the ethic of community is related to achieving the moral purposes of schooling in the 21st century, using the example of social justice; and (d) provide a conceptual framework that links ethics, leadership practice based in the ethic of community, and the moral purposes of school leadership.

### Ethical Frames in Education

Given the rapid growth of ethics as an area of study within educational leadership, it is important to identify, analyze and critique the ethical concepts and models that are commonly used and are influencing the field. Beck and Murphy's monographs (1994, 1997) have made an important contribution by analyzing the ways that ethics is approached both in the literature and in leadership preparation programs. In brief summary, they found two primary ways of thinking about ethics. The first is to conceptualize ethics as a set of fundamental principles that can guide ethical reasoning and decision-making (e.g., the works of Kidder, 1995; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998). The assumption underlying this approach is that individual educational leaders, in their day-to-day professional practice, are confronted with ethical dilemmas that are difficult to resolve. By applying principles of ethical analysis, the individual can think through such dilemmas and make decisions that are ethically sound. For example, a particular dilemma might be understood as a conflict between two (or more) competing values, such as justice versus mercy, and the individual trying to resolve the dilemma would need to determine which of these values to honor in the particular situation. One mechanism to aid in such a decision is to engage in a "consequentialist"-type of analysis (Beck, 1994), that is, to compare the consequences of a justice-based decision with the consequences of a mercy-based decision (Kidder, 1995).

The second way of thinking about ethics, according to Beck and Murphy (1997), is to equate it with "perspectives that inform perceptions, character, and beliefs" (p. 33). In this view, "ethics is less about making decisions using objective principles and more about living morally in specific situations" (p. 33). In other words, ethics is "grounded in one's character or disposition" (p. 42)—in the individual's *internalization* of moral values and virtues that guide personal and professional practices. Nodding's (1984) concept of caring in human relationships is an example of this approach to ethics, according to Beck and Murphy, as is Starratt's (1994) discussion of the "foundational qualities of an ethical person" (p. 29).

These two approaches to thinking about ethics—as *principles for decision-making* or as *individual character*—are different in their emphases; however, when reduced to

their essentials, both approaches focus primarily on the *individual* as ethical actor; in doing so, both imply or reinforce the notion that individuals are the primary "moral agents" who have an impact on schooling, a point I will return to shortly.

Perhaps the most familiar ethical framework used in education is based in Starratt's (1994, 2003) conceptualization of the ethics of justice, critique, and care. These three ethics complement each other, and each are needed in the project of "building an ethical school," according to Starratt (1994). The ethic of justice requires that we "treat each other according to some standard of justice which is uniformly applied to all our relationships" (p. 49). In other words, *fairness* or equal treatment is the core value underlying an ethic of justice. The ethic of critique, in contrast, looks toward *barriers* to fairness. The assumption here is that it is insufficient to work for fairness within existing social and institutional arrangements if the arrangements themselves are *un*fair. One must also critique the present system, examining the ways that policies, practices, and structures might be unfair, how they might be advantaging one group over another. The third frame, the ethic of care,[1] is concerned less with fairness—the equitable distribution of resources and application of rules—and more with caring for individuals as unique persons. The ethic of care requires absolute regard for the dignity and intrinsic value of each person, is based in relationships, and "desires to see that persons enjoy a fully human life" (Starratt, 2003, p. 145).

Starratt's tri-partite frame is sort of a hybrid between the two approaches to ethics identified by Beck and Murphy (1994). Where the ethics of justice, critique, and care may all be utilized as fundamental principles that can guide decision-making, the ethic of care is also seen as a fundamental "virtue" internalized by individuals, according to Beck and Murphy (1997). Thus, combined with his analysis of the "foundational qualities of an ethical person" (1994, p. 50) and his plan for building an ethical school, Starratt's approach to ethics is quite comprehensive. However, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) suggest that the justice, critique, and care frame needs to be further expanded by adding a fourth dimension—the ethic of the profession. They argue that

> even taken together, the ethics of justice, critique, and care do not provide an adequate picture of the factors that must be taken into consideration as leaders strive to make ethical decisions within the context of educational settings. What is missing . . . is a consideration of those moral aspects unique to the profession . . . (p. 18)

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[1] In presenting the ethic of care, Starratt closely follows the foundational work of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), which in turn reflects the "I-and-Thou" philosophy of Martin Buber.

The moral aspect unique to the profession, they state, is the moral imperative to "serve the best interests of the student" (p. 23). Shapiro and Stefkovich argue that their concept of the ethic of the profession, which places "students at the center of the ethical decision-making process" (p. 23), is a necessary complement to the other ethics. They propose a four-part ethical framework that includes the ethics of justice, critique, care, and the profession.

Within these various frames for thinking about ethical leadership practice are many references to the importance of community, collaboration, and relationships. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001), for example, note that the ethic of critique is linked, in the works of Giroux (1991), Shapiro and Purpel (1993) and others, to "social discourse" (Giroux, 1991, p. 48) and dialogue. In other words, it is only through "social discourse" that the voices of the marginalized can be heard and the inequities of the system can be exposed. Similarly, in her treatise on the ethic of care, Beck (1994) calls for a leadership that emphasizes relationships, encourages collaboration, and promotes a sense of belonging for students and staff. Starratt's (1994) work perhaps goes the farthest in linking ethics to the communal. He reminds us that ethical concepts are not developed in isolation, but are shaped by "participation in the life of the community" (p. 50) and that moral choices are best made in a communitarian setting.

These references to community suggest that these theorists have been influenced by the growing interest in community in education (to be discussed in the next section) and wish to draw connections between ethical frames and the concept of community. Yet, these gestures toward the communal aspects of ethical practice are *peripheral* to the central points in each frame, which focus on ethics as individual decision-making, or ethics as individual character. Thus, these various approaches to ethical leadership tend to highlight and focus our attention upon the cognitive, emotional, moral, and even spiritual experiences that are *internal to the individual actor* and that serve that individual as a guide for his or her moral leadership practice. With the exception of Starratt's (1994) more holistic view of the "ethical school" and his claim that ethical practice is shaped by "participation in the life of the community" (p. 50), little attention is given in the ethics literature to the communal processes that are necessary to achieve the moral purposes of schooling in the 21st century. Thus, in regard to moral leadership, these ethical frames do little to pull our thinking beyond the mindset, so entrenched in our schools, our field of study, and, indeed, in Western society, of the *individual* as leader and moral agent. This focus on the individual reflects Leithwood and Duke's (1998) comment that "much of the writing about moral leadership . . . adopts the perspective of those in formal administrative roles" (p. 36).

### The Ethic of Community

Along with ethics, *community* has become an important concept in recent educational analysis and research. Advocates of community–building in schools claim multiple potential benefits, including a reduced sense of alienation for students, improved achievement, enhanced collegiality for educators, and the possibility for practices that are more democratic (Furman, 2002; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1994); a thin but growing research base supports some of these claims (e.g., Beck & Murphy, 1996; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Shouse, 1996). In fields other than education, the concept of community is also being used more frequently. For example, Wenger's (1998) work in regard to business organizations seems to show that "communities of practice" are the fundamental social units that promote learning, creativity, and constructive action within organizations. Not surprisingly, emerging analyses in education are attempting to apply Wenger's "communities of practice" concept to educational settings (e.g., Printy & Marks, in press).

While it is not my purpose here to review this community literature in any depth (and most readers will be familiar with the basic assumptions and claims therein), I do wish to show the link between this work on community and the proposal for an *ethic* of community.

Much of the literature on community in schools emphasizes the importance of relationships, collaboration, and communication; however, in its general usage, the term "community" tends to connote an entity, a thing, a product, or a specific type of social configuration. In other words, when one *perceives* the term community, one *conceives* a mental image of a tangible entity. For example, when Sergiovanni (1994) calls for a new metaphor for schools—substituting "community" for "organization"—one still envisions a community-like *organization*. Beck (2002) corroborates this tendency to view community as a *thing* in her analytical review of the literature on community. She found that "ontological" images of community abounded: Community was likened to "a family," "a circus," "a neighborhood," or "a jazz group." In other words, community is typically conceived as a thing or entity to be "created" in schools, or a specific type of "social/organizational arrangement" (Beck, 2002, p. 26).

In contrast, in my recent analysis of several studies of community-building efforts in schools (Furman, 2002), I concluded that

> community is *processual*. The sense of community, of connection with others, is based in relationships, which depend in turn on the ongoing processes of communication, dialogue, and collaboration, and not on a set of discreet indicators such as "shared values" and "shared decision making." Thus, community is not a product or entity that can be measured, but an ongoing set of processes that are facilitated by educators who understand and are committed to these processes. (emphasis in the original, p. 285)

In other words, to promote fundamental changes in how schools operate with the goal of enhancing community-like experiences, my analysis suggests that it is more important to focus on the *processes* of community than to think of community as a final product or entity, and it is more important to inspire *commitment to these processes* than commitment to the metaphor or image of community as an end "product."

The proposal here for an *ethic of community* devolves from this analysis of community as *process*. In its simplest terms, an ethic of community means that administrators, teachers, school staffs, students, parents, and other community members interested in schools *commit to the processes of community*; in other words, they feel that they are *morally responsible to engage in communal processes* as they pursue the moral purposes of schooling and address the ongoing challenges of daily life and work in schools. Thus, an ethic of community centers the community over the individual as moral agent—it shifts the locus of moral agency to the community as a whole. It suggests a practice of moral leadership that is clearly distributed and based first and foremost in interpersonal and group skills, such as listening with respect, striving for knowing and understanding others, communicating effectively, working in teams, engaging in ongoing dialogue, and creating forums that allow all voices to be heard. It also means that all persons involved in school communities need to develop these communal skills and practices.

The ethic of community complements and expands the ethical frames typically used in education in its focus on *practice* and on the *communal* rather than the internal thinking and values of the individual as moral agent. Where the other frames highlight the values that might guide an individual's ethical practice in schools—e.g., justice, critique, and care—the ethic of community *centers* this ethical practice in communal processes. Thus, the ethic of community is useful in countering the underlying assumption of much of the "traditional" research on leadership that "heroic" leaders can provide the vision and expertise to overcome the many challenges facing public schooling and lead schools in transformative directions (Bogotch, 2002; Heifetz, 1994). The expanded ethical frame incorporating the ethics of justice, critique, care, the profession, and community is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1:    Ethical framework centered in the ethic of community
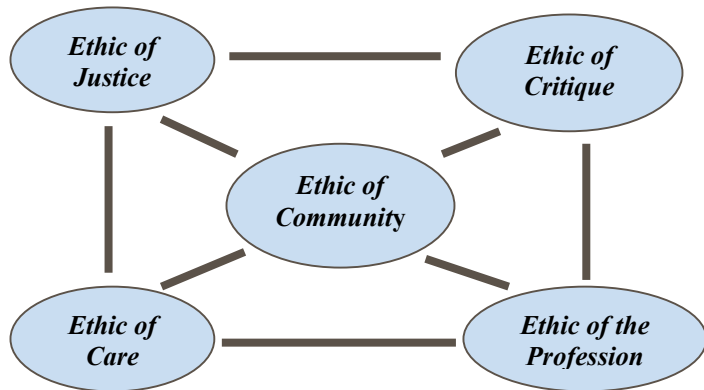


This argument for an ethic of community generates many questions and deserves fuller development than the scope of this article permits.  For example, an important issue is the feasibility of promoting and engaging in communal processes[2] in school contexts characterized by political and power struggles, contexts that seem to call for strong, decisive leadership action.  These issues certainly need to be explored; however, within the scope of this article, I will limit the remaining discussion to the *importance* of the ethic of community in today's schools by exploring the link between the ethic of community and the moral purposes of leadership practice, using the example of social justice.

### The Ethic of Community and Social Justice

To explore the importance of the ethic of community, I return to a claim I made earlier, that the field of educational leadership is focusing more on the *moral purposes* of schooling and leadership practice.  In other words, what is most important to address in the study of leadership in the 21st century is how leadership can help work toward moral purposes such as social justice, racial equity, and learning for all children. My claim in this article is that leadership practice must be grounded in an ethic of community in order to work toward these moral purposes. This section looks more closely at this relationship, using the example of social justice as an important moral purpose in contemporary schools.

Social justice has recently acquired a new intensity and urgency in education for several reasons, including the growing diversity of school populations (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002), the increasing documentation of the

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[2] The developing literature on "democratic community" in schools is a good source for conceptualizing the "communal processes" related to the ethic of community.  See, for example, apple & Bean, 1995; Furman, 2004; furman & Starratt, 2002; Green, 1999; Maxcy, 1995; Reitzug & O'Hair, 2002; and Shields, 2003.

achievement and economic gaps between mainstream and minoritized children (Coleman, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Valenzuela, 1999), and the proliferation of analyses of social *in*justice as played out in schools, including the injustices that may arise from the current policy environment of high-stakes assessment and accountability (Larson & Ovando, 2001; Macedo, 1995; McNeil, 2000; Rapp, 2002).  While there is no static, agreed-upon definition for social justice, Bogotch (2002) reminds us that constructs such as social justice acquire a shared, though imprecise, meaning during certain periods of time.   In education, the current shared meanings about social justice include its critical stance, that is, its critique of current educational arrangements that are "rife with inequity . . . and lead to inequitable outcomes" for children (Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002, p. 270); its call for radical change to address these inequities (Bogotch, 2002; Grogan, 2002); and its general goal of improving the "education and life chances of poor and minority children" (Larson & Murtadha, 2002, p. 150) through changes in schooling. Taken together, these shared meanings of social justice suggest that working *for* social justice requires a *deliberate intervention* that challenges fundamental inequities and works toward better educational and economic outcomes for marginalized children.

But the specific nature of this deliberate intervention remains vague.  Larson and Murtadha (2002) provide a fine review of the background theories and arguments related to social justice, but conclude that "there is a vagueness . . . as to what all of this means to researchers and practitioners" (p. 157).  However, a recent analysis by Bogotch (2002) provides a helpful distinction between "social justice from a community perspective" and social justice related to a "quasi-heroic discourse based on 'individualistic' notions" of leadership (p. 144). From a community perspective, working for social justice involves an openness to the participation of all community members in "constructing" visions of social justice that are appropriate and meaningful within the local context; further, this work is "continuous and recursive," because when local conditions change, "the only recourse is to begin again" to reconstruct concepts of social justice (p. 146-147).   In contrast, from the individualistic perspective, working for social justice is based in "heroic" action. As Bogotch states, "Heroic individuals often have a single-mindedness to pursue their own vision tenaciously and apart from others who may not share their particular vision" (p. 148).  Rather than "constructing" the meaning of social justice locally and communally, from diverse views, and engaging the community in working toward it, heroic leaders struggle valiantly, often against great odds, to achieve a particular vision of social justice.  Though Bogotch says that both the communal and individualistic approaches are important, he also concludes that "all social justice/educational reform

efforts must be deliberately and continuously reinvented and critiqued" (p. 154), a process he clearly links with the communal view of social justice. Bogotch's analysis strongly suggests the importance of a communal perspective when working for social justice in schools.

Taking this communal perspective of social justice a step further, Furman and Shields (2003) conclude in a recent analysis that the concepts of democratic community and social justice are reciprocal and inextricably connected. They state,

> . . . there is an essential and dynamic interplay both within and between these concepts that provides a sort of check and balance . . . democratic processes permit a construction of what social justice means . . . social justice, on the other hand, suggests some essential underlying values and offers a construction of moral purpose that provides the compass for the common good. (p. 18)

In other words, *meanings* of social justice as well as decisions on the *interventions* required to work for social justice are *constructed* by the community through the processes of democratic community—open inquiry and critique—with a broad scope of participation across community members, while social justice, in turn, provides the moral compass for these communal processes.

Essentially, these arguments for a democratic *communal* approach to social justice are saying that social justice cannot be realized given the status quo of hierarchical relationships and communication patterns in schools, the assumption that moral leadership is the purview of "heroic" leaders in administrative positions, and the dearth of opportunities for "full participation and open inquiry." Communal processes, as captured in the proposal for an ethic of community, are necessary. Thus, the ethic of community can serve as a *vehicle* for working toward social justice because it centers in leadership practice the communal processes of democratic community. When school "leaders"—meaning anyone and everyone who cares about and participates in the life of the school—internalize the ethic of community as a guide to practice, they turn away from "heroic" and often futile notions of moral leadership toward communal notions. They recognize that working toward moral purposes like social justice is a communal responsibility rather than the purview of a "transformational" leader with "vision". They become open to the possibilities of constructing concepts of social justice that are appropriate in the unique contexts in which they work and learn. Finally they develop the capacity to continually reconstruct visions of social justice through communal work. Thus, an ethic of community centers the community over the individual as the primary locus of moral agency in schools in the effort to work toward moral purposes such as social justice.

### A Model Linking Moral Leadership, The Ethic of Community, and Moral Purposes

As I think about the importance of the ethic of community as a guide for leadership practice, I am reminded of analyses that are unfolding in regard to other issues in education. For example, there is a major thrust to identify the links between leadership practice and student learning outcomes. As with the work on social justice, this endeavor often has suffered from the assumption that the individual "heroic" leader can act as a primary agent in improving student learning. New analyses, however, are acknowledging the complexity of the links between leadership and learning. They are creating new scaffolds for thinking about the multi-layered, complex relationships among various dimensions of schooling that have an impact on learning. For example, Spillane and Louis (2002) "backward map" from student learning through a complex series of links among classroom instruction, classroom community, school-wide professional community, organizational learning, and leadership practices. Their analysis clearly highlights the importance of communal processes in working toward improved student learning. They state, for example, that without the development of social trust, time to meet and talk, strong teacher voice in decisions, and reduced school size and complexity, professional community will not be developed and organizational learning will not occur—both critical components for improved student learning.

Figure 2: Links between ethics, leadership practice, and social justice in schools.
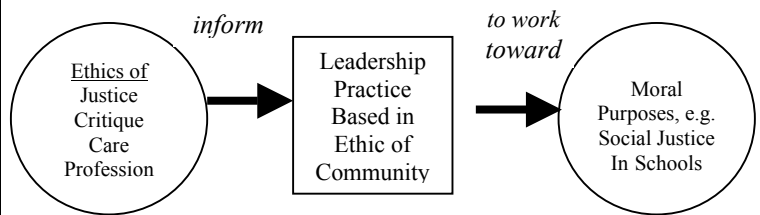


I see the analysis in regard to ethic of community in a similar way. If we "backward map" from the moral purposes of school leadership (e.g., working toward social justice in schools), we see that democratic communal processes are at the heart of working toward this valued end. And we see that moral leadership practice means participating in, promoting, and supporting these communal processes. The ethic of community captures the centrality of this need for communal processes in a way that currently used ethical frames do not. Thus, the ethic of community is a missing link in thinking about the relationships among ethics, leadership practice, and the moral purposes of schooling. While the ethics of justice, critique, care and the profession are invaluable guides to decision-making and

leadership practice, the ethic of community *centers* this practice in communal processes, which are essential to the pursuit of moral purposes in today's schools (Bogotch, 2002; Furman & Shields, 2003). Figure 2 illustrates these relationships.

In short, my contention in this article is that the commitment to the ethic of community is the foundation for moral leadership practice in 21st century schools.

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