



VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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Values and the Ethics of Care: Four Portraits

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how educational leaders incorporate the ethic of care into their practices. The theoretical perspective was authentic leadership. The research question was: How do authentic leaders working from an ethic of care maintain consistency between their espoused values of developing and maintaining relationships in the school community and the reflection of those values in their actions? Portraiture methodology was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and experiences of four educational leaders who place relationships as paramount in their organizations. While findings in this study revealed that these leaders exhibit three different attributes, humility, authenticity, and having an understanding of their personal values, the focus of this article is on the influence of values on their practice.

Key Words

Values, care, ethics, educational leadership, portraiture, authentic leadership

Introduction

Ethics in educational leadership have become increasingly important. This is evidenced by the call from scholars to incorporate ethics into the curriculum of leadership preparation programs (Greer et al., 2015; Mullen, 2017; Shapiro & Gross, 2017; Young & Perrone, 2016) and the adoption of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) in 2015. Prior to PSEL, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards addressed ethics in one standard only. In the 2015 refresh of the ISLLC Standards, now PSEL, ethics is both referenced as a standard of its own, and integrated throughout the other standards as well (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These standards are intended to prepare future educational leaders for their roles in schools and support leaders currently practicing in the field of education. Given its prominence as a PSEL Standard, ethics are foundational to educational leadership.

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This article examines how the ethic of care forms the foundation of four educational leaders' practice. What is presented here is part of a larger research project and will focus on how values affect the practice of these leaders.

Problem Statement and Research Question

While there is a robust literature on ethical educational leadership, including the ethic of care (Bass, 2012; Bass, 2020; Beck, 1994; Louis et al., 2016; Louis & Murphy, 2017; Noddings, 2006; Sernak, 1998; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016), there is very little work examining how educational leaders specifically working from an ethic of care maintain consistency between their espoused values of developing and maintaining relationships in the school community and the reflection of those values in their actions. Particularly there is no research which asks such leaders to discuss their perceptions of the dynamics of and how they approached ethical dilemmas in their schools. To address this problem, the research question that guided this study was: How do authentic leaders working from an ethic of care maintain consistency between their espoused values of developing and maintaining relationships in the school community and the reflection of those values in their actions? Particularly, we were interested in how the participants described themselves as leaders that work from an ethic of care and the values they claim their practice is based on.

Literature Review

To foster the moral and social purposes of schools, it is necessary for educational leaders to engage in ethical leadership practices (Branson, 2014a). A multidimensional approach to ethical decision-making (comprised of the ethics of justice, critique, and care) has been proposed by Starratt (1994) to support educational leaders in their work. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) later added a fourth paradigm, the ethic of the profession. While each of the four ethical paradigms support educational leaders in their work, the ethic of care is the focus of this study, as scholars (Bass, 2020; Beck, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2003, 2005; Sernak, 1998; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994, 2012) assert establishing relationships is foundational to all other work that follows in a school setting.

Educational leaders working from an ethic of care consider the consequences of their decisions and actions on others and value the relationships in their organizations (Noddings, 2005; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) argue that working from an ethic of care requires educational leaders to ask who will benefit and who will be harmed from the decisions they make. This means leaders need to be both compassionate (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Starratt, 1994; Tuana, 2014) and empathetic (Green, 1985; Starratt, 1994, 2004; Tuana, 2014) to the students (and the larger school community) in their care.

As educational leaders are at the head of their organization

they play an important role in promoting the school's ethical agenda. Starratt (1994, 2012) argues ethical educational leaders possess a specific set of qualities (autonomous, connected, transcendent) and virtues (responsible, authentic, present) that contribute to them being ethical persons. It is essential that educational leaders work to develop their ethical selves, based on these qualities and virtues. The literature shows that educational leaders can develop their ethical selves by fostering their senses of moral integrity (Branson, 2010; Evans, 1996; Frick & Covaleskie, 2014; Kristinsson, 2014), having a deep understanding of their personal values (Beck, 1999; Begley, 1999, 2000, 2003; Branson, 2010, 2014c, 2014d; Gonzales, 2019; Greenfield, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1991; Jones et al., 2020; Lazaridou, 2019; Leonard, 1999; Notman, 2014; Sergiovanni, 1992), and engaging in self-reflection (Branson, 2007b, 2014b, 2014d; Hodgkinson, 1991; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Strike et al., 2005).

Frick and Covaleskie (2014) describe moral integrity as individuals acting consistently across differing roles in their "assumptions, beliefs, values, espoused ethics, actions and behaviors (morality), commitments, principles, and forms of reasoning" (p. 390). Scholars link the ability to be authentic to moral integrity (Branson, 2010; Quick & Normore, 2004). Authenticity can strengthen a leader's moral integrity (Branson, 2010) and allow others to develop trust in them and their abilities to make ethical decisions (Branson, 2010; Evans, 1996; Kristinsson, 2014). Frick and Covaleskie (2014) however, caution against assuming because one has integrity one is also an ethical person. Thus, it is imperative for leaders to be cognizant of strengthening their moral integrity, which can be accomplished through self-reflection practices (Branson, 2007b, 2010, 2014c; Carter, 1996; Polizzi & Frick, 2012). A leader's moral integrity then, is rooted in the values they hold.

Many scholars agree that one's values are central to being an effective ethical educational leader (Beck, 1999; Begley, 1999, 2000, 2003; Branson, 2010, 2014c, 2014d; Gonzales, 2019; Greenfield, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1991; Jones et al., 2020; Lazaridou, 2019; Leonard, 1999; Notman, 2014; Sergiovanni, 1992). However, there is a lack of consensus on defining values in the literature. Scholars such as Begley (1999, 2000) and Hodgkinson (1991) refer to the work of Kluckhohn (1951) who defined a value as: "a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action" (p. 395). Beck (1999), on the other hand argues, "the term values has two connected but different meanings" (p. 226).

In one sense, values are the things we pursue and consider important in life, the things we *value*. However, in the context of educational philosophy and theory the focus is normally on a narrower category of values, namely, the things that are *worthy*

of valuing, the things that are actually *valuable*. (Beck, 1999, pp. 225-226)

Hodgkinson (1991) provides a values theory comprised of three different types of values (transrational, rational, subrational) situated along a continuum of “right” and “good,” which is intended for leaders to use when dealing with a conflict in their organization. Expanding on Hodgkinson’s (1991) work, Begley (2000; 2003) offers a values syntax to describe the various levels of a person’s values. The values syntax can be explained as an “onion” in which there are multiple layers of a person, including their actions, attitudes, values, understandings, motives, and self (Begley, 2003). In order for leaders to understand the types or layers of values they hold, scholars argue the need for leaders to engage in self-reflection practices (Begley, 2003; Branson, 2014d; Hodgkinson, 1991).

Self-reflection is an important element of ethical educational leadership (Branson, 2007b, 2014c, 2014d; Hodgkinson, 1991; Strike et al., 2005). Strike et al. (2005) argue leaders have a duty to make decisions in a moral way because of the influence they exercise over others, which requires deep self-reflection. Branson (2007b, 2014c, 2014d) and Hodgkinson (1991) both offer ways in which leaders can engage in self-reflection practices. Branson (2007b) uses an “inside-out approach” (p. 478) to implement a deeply structured self-reflection process. This begins with educational leaders answering questions about their *Self* and then moving “sequentially outwards through their self-esteem, motives, values, beliefs, and finally, behaviors” (p. 478). As leaders reflect on each area of the self, they gain knowledge of themselves, thus strengthening their moral integrity. Hodgkinson (1991) on the other hand, suggests when leaders are met with a dilemma in their organization, they engage in a value audit self-reflection process. A value audit asks leaders to consider, what are the values in conflict in a given situation and who are the individuals involved (Hodgkinson, 1991). Hodgkinson (1991) argues this type of self-reflection is an important responsibility of ethical leaders and the chosen action or non-action is a result of the process. Both inside-out and value audit approaches to self-reflection support leaders’ abilities to connect and understand the values that ultimately influence their behaviors and actions.

As leaders’ moral integrity is rooted in their values, deep reflection on both their acknowledged and hidden values is critical in guiding decisions to determine what actions (or non-actions) to take in a given situation. In doing so, leaders must also consider the rights of and responsibilities to their students, to ensure they work in the best interest of the student (Stefkovich & Frick, 2021).

Educational leaders working from an ethic of care espouse to value relationships, thus they need to consider how each of their decisions will affect the various relationships in the school community. In order to act with moral integrity, they must deeply reflect on all values, acknowledged and

hidden, that influence every decision. In short, these leaders must be honest with themselves and authentic in their leadership.

Theoretical Perspective

Gardner et al. (2011) note the “increase in scholarly interest in authentic leadership” (p. 1120) and provide a review of the literature on the topic along with an agenda for future research. While several definitions of authentic leadership exist, there are commonalities about what authentic leadership entails and the components necessary for developing authentic leaders. Themes from the literature include the leader reflecting on previous life events and experiences (Branson, 2007b; Shamir & Eilam, 2005), acting in congruence with one’s espoused values (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Shamir & Eilam, 2005), staying true to oneself (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Shamir & Eilam, 2005), and engaging in authentic relationships with followers (Feng, 2016; Ilies et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Shamir and Eilam (2005) assert authentic leaders have the following characteristics: (1) they do not fake their leadership, rather stay true to themselves as opposed to conforming to the expectations of others; (2) they do not take on a leadership role for status, honor, or personal rewards, but rather to promote a value-based cause or mission; (3) while their values, convictions, causes, and missions may be similar to others, they hold them because they have internalized them from personal experiences not because they are imitating others; and (4) their actions are based on their values and convictions.

Authentic leaders obtain self-knowledge and self-concept clarity through developing their life stories, or self-narratives, finding meaning in the events of their lives. This, in turn, lets them know how to think, act, and feel in different situations (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Therefore, Shamir and Eilam (2005) argue guided self-reflection is necessary for the development of authentic leaders.

Branson (2007a) connects the importance of deeply structured self-reflection to a development of authentic leadership practices. This approach helps educational leaders:

- 1) To be able to readily clarify their values.
- 2) To clearly understand how their values are influencing their educational leadership behavior.
- 3) To be more attuned to how some of their values have the potential to cause undesirable leadership behaviors.
- 4) To be able to suppress the influence of those values that can cause undesirable behavioral outcomes so as to enhance the positive effect of their leadership on their followers. (p. 233)

Relevant to this study, Atwijuka and Caldwell (2017) describe the relationship between authentic leadership and the ethic of care. They suggest four propositions about the

relationship between authentic leadership and the ethic of care:

P1. Authentic leaders with high self-awareness demonstrate their concern for others by demonstrating love for those whom they serve.

P2. Authentic leaders demonstrate high relational transparency by demonstrating authentic caring which treats others as valued partners.

P3. Organizations with authentic leaders who incorporate an [ethic of care] decision-making approach are more profitable than firms with leaders that do not follow an [ethic of care] approach.

P4. Organizations with authentic leaders who demonstrate a commitment to the importance of relationships in honoring their moral and ethical duties toward others are more profitable than organizations with leaders who do not demonstrate that commitment. (pp. 1045-1046)

Authentic leaders demonstrate consistency between their espoused values and the values played out in their actions. Therefore, authentic leadership provides an appropriate theoretical framework for better understanding how educational leaders stay true to their core values and enact an ethic of care in their leadership practices.

Research Methods

Portraiture, a form of narrative research, is defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) as “research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (p. xv). Portraiture seeks to “record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions – their authority, knowledge, and wisdom” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. xv). Through dialogue between the portraitist and participant, a portrait is created that depicts both the perspectives and experiences of the participant and the portraitist’s interpretation of the experiences shared. Therefore, portraiture is an appropriate methodology for understanding educational leaders that utilize an ethic of care in their leadership practices, as the researcher has the ability to have in-depth dialogue with the participants about their experiences as caring leaders.

Portraiture is “framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, sharing many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 13). However, an important distinction between ethnography and portraiture is that “ethnographers listen to a story while portraitists listen for a story” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 13). Further, the voice of the researcher is more evident with portraiture than any of the other research forms (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997), which makes it that much more important

for the researcher to be “vigilant about identifying other sources of challenge to her or his perspective” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 11). As portraiture is concerned with the experience of the lifeworld (Adams & van Manen, 2008) and the participants are the subjects of the study (Hill-Brisbane, 2008), portraitists seek the traits and characteristics that shape the participant’s experience of the lifeworld.

For this study each participant engaged in three 1.5-hour in-depth interviews (Seidman 2013), which were audio recorded and transcribed. The data were then analyzed using both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding entails starting with a list of themes that the researcher expects to hear based on “the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypothesis, problem areas, and/or key variables that the researcher brings to the study” (Miles et al., 1994, p. 81). Inductive coding, on the other hand, is when “other codes emerge progressively during data collection” (Miles et al., 1994, p. 81). Both methods for creating codes were necessary in this study. As analysis entailed listening for a story, the data were coded and sorted into themes without the aid of software. This analysis led to the creation of a portrait of each participant, which was shared with the participant to ensure it resonated (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) with them. This member-checking contributed to the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participants

For this study, we asked professors who teach ethics in graduate programs in educational leadership to recommend potential research participants based on the following criteria:

1. The educational leader gives thought to the decisions they make and how these decisions will affect the people and relationships in their organization (Noddings, 2003; Shapiro & Stefkovich & Frick, 2021 Starratt, 1994).
2. The educational leader demonstrates a high level of integrity. What the leader professes to care about is shown in the actions of the leader (Branson, 2010; Evans, 1996; Frick & Covaleskie, 2014; Kristinsson, 2014).
3. The educational leader engages in self-reflection practices (Branson, 2007b, 2014c, 2014d; Hodgkinson, 1991; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Strike et al., 2005).
4. The educational leader demonstrates respect and understands how their power affects boundaries (Sernak, 1998; Starratt, 1994, 2004).
5. The educational leader considers the ways in which consequences are provided to students and what is in the students’ best interests (Bottery, 1990; Haynes, 1998; Peters, 1966; Shapiro & Stefkovich & Frick, 2021).
6. The educational leader works collaboratively with others in the organization and community to support the

needs of the school (Beck, 1994; Furman, 2003, 2004; Starratt, 1994).

7. The educational leader exhibits both receptive and transparent communication with others in the organization (Beck, 1994; Starratt, 1994, 2004).

Based on the recommendations from professors and the criteria above, four educational leaders were selected to participate in this study.

Each participant in this study was a White male and worked in an educational setting in the United States. The work settings included private and public schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas. The names of the people and schools in this study have been changed.

While the participants represented diversity in geographical region and type of school, a limitation of this study is that all of the participants are White males. Thus, future research needs to be expanded to include diverse voices in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and various cultures particularly non-Western ones.

¶ Adam is Head of School at Saint Abigail School, an urban Pre-K through 8th grade Catholic school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Adam has held this position for the last seven years. Prior to that, Adam held the position of Coordinator of Academic Affairs for three years at a different school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Thinking back on educators in his life, Adam knew his teachers loved him. He stated, “They really poured their whole self into us as students, and I just saw that. I always felt cared for ... I stayed connected to a lot of those teachers after the fact.” Adam fondly remembers his small Catholic elementary school experience and believes it provided him with a “moral foundation” and “very strong values.”

¶ Jonathan is the Executive Director of Student Services in South Bruno School District (SBSD), an urban district located in the Southwestern region of the United States. He oversees twenty-four elementary and secondary schools in the district. Prior to becoming the Executive Director of Student Services, Jonathan worked in SBSD as a high school assistant principal and middle school principal for nine years. Jonathan also served for one year as principal of Jackson Hills Academy, a K-12 residential school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Jonathan did not know he would end up as an educational leader but admits there was always a familiarity with education as both of his parents were educators. To add to his comfort level with education, Jonathan excelled in school, becoming the valedictorian of his high school class. He remembers his elementary school teachers, in particular, as always showing a lot of care for their students. While Jonathan’s three leadership roles in his career have required different responsibilities and duties, the values guiding the ways in which he approaches these positions has stayed consistent. In each role, Jonathan has been guided by the belief that schools should be a “place

where equity is established.” He recognizes that inequities exist for his students, and they do not all arrive to school with the same level of support – whether that is parental support or financial support. This has influenced the ways in which he handles conflict and discipline situations in his organization.

¶ Matthew is the Upper Head of School at Thomas Patrick Academy (TPA), a private suburban school in the Northeastern region of the United States. Additionally, Matthew has been an administrator at three different independent schools over the past seven years. Matthew grew up in a family that was very grounded in their faith. Matthew’s parents sacrificed certain “luxuries” in order to send him to a faith-based private school that shared their values. Matthew remembers that time of his life as being filled with “wonderful experiences” that shaped him as a person and recalls a number of teachers who genuinely cared about him. Matthew values the relationships in his school community. He prioritizes working with teachers, students, and parents to create a “culture that’s beneficial and conducive to flourishing for everybody.” Paying attention to the culture of an institution is integral to Matthew’s leadership practice.

¶ Phillip is a faculty member at Ellison University (EU) in the Northeastern region of the United States. Phillip is an assistant professor of education and Master’s Department Chair in Educational Leadership at EU. Prior to this, Phillip spent nine years as a building level administrator in Larsen Area School District (LASD), a rural district in the Northeastern region of the United States. Of the nine years Phillip was an administrator, two of those years were spent as a high school assistant principal and eight years as a middle school principal. Both as a teacher and administrator, Phillip was very cognizant to create a culture for students that was focused on learning and having fun. This is very different from the type of experience Phillip had in school. Phillip describes his elementary school experience as “miserable.” He remembers being bullied by both teachers and students because he took dance classes rather than playing sports. While Phillip did not have strong teacher mentors, his grandfather was a “father figure” and mentor in his life. Both his grandfather’s view of the world and the ways in which he was treated by teachers when growing up have had a strong influence on Phillip’s view of how to treat others. Phillip strongly believes that “everyone has dignity and should be treated as such.” Thus, Phillip spent his time as an administrator always tending to the relationships in his organization.

Findings

Analysis of the data revealed that the educational leaders in this study shared three attributes: humility, authenticity, and an awareness of their values. Here we focus on values.

Values are essential for effective ethical educational leadership (Beck, 1999; Begley, 1999, 2000, 2003; Branson, 2010, 2014c, 2014d; Gonzales, 2019;

Greenfield, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1991; Jones et al., 2020; Lazaridou, 2019; Leonard, 1999; Notman, 2014; Sergiovanni, 1992). The values of the leaders here guide their decision making, support them in developing and maintaining relationships with others, and help them to establish a sense of community in their organizations.

These leaders recognize that their values influence how they make decisions in their organizations. For example, these leaders believe the voices of others are important in decision making, particularly when those individuals will be affected by the outcome of the decision. Thus, these leaders include others in the decision-making process when appropriate. Phillip explained how his value of including others in decision making plays out in his work as an educational leader:

When you don't ... involve all your stakeholders in these decisions you're doomed to failure. The schedule I inherited from the former principal was devised by the former principal. She did not involve anybody else. No parents, no teachers, central office. She just made the schedule and forced it on them. It was doomed to failure because people were opposed to it just because they didn't have a say.

These leaders value collaborating with different stakeholder groups to reach a decision that is best for the students and community as a whole. This is consistent with the research on collaborative leadership (Heck and Hallinger, 2010) and Sernak's (1998) call for caring leaders to become "co-workers" (p. 15) in their organizations. "Caring leadership would entail becoming a co-worker, that is, working with the other members of the organization" (Sernak, 1998, p. 15). The value these leaders hold in hearing input from others in the organization guides their decision-making processes.

When these leaders make decisions, they are concerned with the impact their decisions will have on individual members of the school community. Phillip described his concern about the effect of his decisions on others:

It's part of the way I operate. I'm always thinking about the impact of my decisions and the things that I do – what impact they have on people around me – whether students, teachers, and parents. That's something I'm constantly thinking about.

Jonathan believes listening to school members' concerns is a way in which he tends to the relationships he has with them. Jonathan stated he always wants

the parents to walk away feeling like they have been heard – feeling like that I'm going to put the time and effort in - to look into the situation. They may or may not have the outcome the parents want, but at least I have invested in trying to figure out whether or not the parent was correct.

Equity is a value that influences Jonathan's decisions. He believes that schools should be a place where "equity is

established." Jonathan recognized early in his career that "not everyone ... arrived to school with the same level of support." Thus, when making decisions Jonathan keeps this value in mind. He explained:

I would say every decision that I make I have to consider so many other factors than just what is the very nuances or specifics of the situation because let's say it's a decision about where resources go - you can't just allocate resources equally among twenty-four campuses because they're not all the same - their daily experiences are not the same on every campus in our district.

As the participants in this study demonstrated, the values they hold influence the ways in which they approach decision making in their organizations.

These educational leaders value the relationships they have with others in their organizations. They are willing to put in the work to develop and maintain relationships with students, teachers, and parents. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Marshall et al. (1996) in which they found that caring leaders place the needs of those in their organization as top priority, indicating their willingness to devote "personal and professional time to relationships building" (p. 281). Phillip illustrates this point when he asserts that "you always do right by people." This value was instilled in Phillip by his grandfather:

I loved the way my grandfather viewed the world – it was, you always do right by people. So, I try in my work and in my life to always do what is right by people ... I just feel that's the right way to be. Whether that's the student or even parents of students – you have to understand how to interact with them and understand their lot in life and what they are struggling with.

Phillip's values concerning the treatment of people also came from his own school experiences. As a student, Phillip recalls being treated poorly by educators. He explained:

Well, I certainly learned a lot of my values from the way that I was treated as a student. Every kid has dignity, and you don't have the right as an adult or as a teacher especially - you don't have the right to make kids feel like they are less than others ... So, that sense of everybody has dignity and they should be treated as such is a strong value of mine. And, that goes for when you are disciplining [a] kid.

The value which forms the basis for Matthew's relationships is: "putting others first, being selfless and taking other's perspectives." Matthew explained that his parents and faith informed the values he now holds as an educational leader:

I think my Christian faith also informs [my values]. So, you've got to humble yourself and put others

before yourself if you truly want to be an effective leader, and I really believe that. I think serving other people - like listening to other people - putting their insights and their ideas before your own or at least consider them - I think that's real key.

When these leaders interact with others in the school community, they keep in mind the values that were instilled in them early on in life and how they want to treat others around them.

Schien (2011) argues that a leader "creates and changes cultures" (p. 352). The educational leaders in this study all spoke to the importance of tending to the culture in their organizations. Specifically, they are interested in creating a culture where care is valued and promoted. Thus, they indicated the importance of establishing a sense of community in their organizations. Being aware of their own values and how those values play out in the institution is an important component of these leaders cultivating a culture of care. Adam recognizes the importance of his values aligning with the values of the community in which he is working. He stated:

I think we have certain proclivities as administrators. And, there's some schools that I'm not going to be good at. I mean, I'm not going to mesh [with] the values of that community. And, I think that I've done well in my current school because I'm built in a way, as an administrator, that fits pretty well with who they are - what their needs were at the time.

Adam understands that even when most of his values align with the school community in which he is working, there will still be differences that occur. He explained:

So, I've got to recognize that I represent - as an administrator - I represent the values of the school. But I also am sort of looked as the representative of all my families, and so all my families have different values. So, I don't think that means that I compromise who I am or who we are. It just means that I'm mindful of the fact that we're different - that we have different approaches to things, and I think there's a respect in that.

Adam is able to tend to the culture of his organization because he has an awareness of his own personal values and is able to recognize when values conflict with members of his school community.

Matthew values "life in community" and relating to others. He explained:

I think, talking about values that have led to my desire to be an educator - I think that being a part of a team and sort of this - being a part of something bigger than yourself. School communities are like that ... so much happens in the community - so much depends on that community. So, I think that also is appealing to me - just valuing life in community - valuing the

relationships that I have with people and that they have with me.

Matthew and the other leaders in this study value their relationships with members of their school communities. Therefore, they spend each day investing time in developing and maintaining those relationships to create a strong sense of community.

These leaders could not have an awareness of their values and how those values play out in their work unless they spent time in self-reflection. Branson (2014d) emphasizes the importance of leaders having an awareness of their own personal values, arguing that it is "one of the most fundamental components of ethical educational leadership" (p. 195). Further, Branson (2014d) argues leaders can only know their actual values and use them to guide their behaviors, while also monitoring and suppressing values that result in unethical actions, through a "deeply structured self-reflective process" (p. 201). For these leaders, self-reflection, either alone or with others, is an integral part of their practice. Phillip explained his ongoing reflection process:

It's part of the way I operate. I'm always thinking about the impact of my decisions and the things that I do - what impact they have on people around me - whether students, teachers, and parents. That's something I'm constantly thinking about.

Matthew described how he incorporates self-reflection into his leadership practices:

I use ... my commute in the morning as time ... to think or reflect. Anyway, that's kind of more on a daily basis. I think certainly ... as a person of faith ... that's just part of my life. Just trying to take a look at my heart - the motives of my heart - my intentions and things. And, just checking those. Because I think we could easily get lost in our own selfish [motives].

Jonathan explained that self-reflection is important to his work as an educational leader. He stated, "Self-reflection is ... really a critical piece. And, I think I probably do it naturally to a certain extent. I think it's always just always been a part of how I approach anything involving leadership." Adam spends a lot of time reflecting on what his words and actions communicate to members of his school community. It is important to Adam that what he communicates is aligned to his values. He explained:

I will say that I tend to be very reflective in my email writing in the moment. I usually ... take a long time to go through my emails ... As I write email or correspondences, or if I'm writing a paragraph - an intro to a marketing piece - I'm very reflective of that - every word and what meaning that's going to convey.

For these leaders then, self-reflection is an essential component of their leadership practices.

Self-reflection helps these leaders to understand their values and how those values are exercised in the organizations in which they work. Consequently, they have developed a strong sense of self-awareness, which is essential for authentic leadership. Shamir and Eilam (2005) argue one of the characteristics of authentic leaders is that they do not fake their leadership, but instead stay true to themselves as opposed to conforming to the expectations of others. Adam illustrated this point when he explained:

I think you have to be true to who you are as an administrator and really know yourself – know what makes you tick... I'm aware of it, and I try to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of how I've shaped my administration.

Jonathan's self-awareness allows him to be authentic when he elicits feedback from his staff. He stated:

So, if I say I really want to hear what you have to say about this - I want it to be genuine - that I really want to hear - I really want to know. I don't want it to be lip service. So, that they feel like they have a voice.

Matthew also explained how authenticity plays out in his work:

I think one thing honestly, which is maybe a ... blessing and a curse for me is ... I'm not very good at being political ... I'm not good at ... trying to work people at certain angles to get something out of them ... I think hopefully my candor and my transparency is useful in creating ... an environment of ... transparency and safety and honesty. I don't know how to ... beat around the bush or ... act like everything is fine if it's not. It's just hard for me ... It shows. It's very obvious to folks that I ... wear some of that on my sleeve.

People do not have to wonder what Matthew truly thinks or feels in a given situation because he is authentic when interacting with them. This is consistent with the work of Luthans and Avolio (2003) who argue educational leaders should provide guidance and direction to their staff that is genuine and honest. Leaders that do this “will be transparent with their intentions, having a seamless link between their espoused values, actions, and behaviors” (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 242).

Luthans and Avolio (2003) assert that “the authentic leader does not try to coerce or even rationally persuade associates, but rather the leader's authentic values, beliefs, and behaviors serve to model the development of associates” (p. 243). For example, Phillip did not believe anyone was above helping out in his school. Rather than just tell people to help others, Phillip would model what he expected from members of his school community. He explained:

I would mop the floors. I would sweep up the floors. I would wipe down the tables and empty soda cans.

So, the kids would see me in a different light and some of them would ask me like, ‘Why are you doing this?’ Or, an adult might ask me that. My goal was to ingrain in the kids that there's no task too menial for a person to do because it's all important.

Phillip was the first to model what he expected of others in the organization. This created a culture in which everyone was expected to help one another and care for one another regardless of their position in the organization.

The stories shared by the participants in this study demonstrate how their values influence their leadership practices. Specifically, the values of these leaders who work from an ethic of care guide their approaches to decision making, support them in developing and maintaining relationships with others, and help them to establish a sense of community in their organizations. Further, by these leaders engaging in self-reflection, they are able to continually reflect on how their values inform their work as educational leaders.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was focused on exploring how educational leaders incorporate an ethic of care in their leadership practices. Further, it sought to understand how these educational leaders' espoused values of developing and maintaining relationships in the school community are reflected in their actions.

The relationships these educational leaders have with members of their school community are a top priority. These leaders discussed how they develop and maintain relationships with students, teachers, parents, and themselves. Primarily, these leaders strive to be present and visible in their schools. The interactions these leaders have with others in the school community are genuine and not forced. These leaders seek to present their true selves to others in the organization. This requires the leaders to have a deep understanding of themselves and be open to feedback on their leadership practices. Self-reflection and reflecting with others they trust can support them in knowing themselves and staying true to their core values.

In addition to their relationships with members of the school organization, these leaders are also concerned with the relationships organizational members have with one another. The leaders in this study engage in genuine interactions with others and take time to demonstrate care for others and the school. In doing this, these leaders hope that others in the organization will do the same. By tending to the relationships in the school community, these leaders seek to establish a school culture in which care is promoted and trust exists.

The educational leaders here are able to work from an ethic of care because they act consistently with their values. Thus, they are able to present an authentic self, and gain the trust of members of the school community.

The stories of these leaders show that prioritizing the ethic of care in educational leadership takes strength. These leaders draw strength from their values. It is their values that guide them to be consistent in the messages they communicate to their school community and to lead by example. Most importantly, their values prioritize relationships in their school communities. They are concerned with taking care of others and promoting caring relationships in their organizations.

By having an understanding of their own personal values, these leaders are able to know themselves and have conviction in their leadership practices. As these leaders really know themselves, they are able to be authentic in their decision making, relationships with others, and in establishing a sense of community in their organizations. They understand that their role is about serving others and making decisions for the benefit of members of their school communities and the organization as whole. In doing so, these educational leaders cultivate a culture of care in which individuals can flourish.

Recommendations for Practice

Authentic leaders act consistently with their values as they have developed self-knowledge. Consequently, they are aware of the influence their values have on the decisions they make. Through self-reflection the participants in this study were aware of their values and understood that they formed the basis of their practice. Thus, our findings indicate that educational leaders need time for self-reflection in order to have an awareness and understanding of their personal values and the role these play in their practice. Consequently, educational leaders need to prioritize the use of their time. This includes leaders giving themselves permission to take time to engage in reflection on their values.

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