

## Review

# Ethics in school administration

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Accepted 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2009

**Ethics is a concept about moral values and rules. The principals' ethical leadership is of great importance regarding the educational organizations. The most important responsibility of school principals is to have an ethical perception of school administration. This paper presents a conceptual framework about ethics in school administration. School principals have certain responsibilities and they have to behave ethically while making decisions. The paper emphasizes the necessity of establishing codes of ethics and behaving according to these codes for school leaders. This study gives a brief summary about some ethical dilemmas that school principals faced. Related literature in the study indicates that most principals need professional development in ethical decision-making.**

**Key words:** Ethics, ethics in education, school principals, school administration.

## INTRODUCTION

The term ethics is a fashionable term and it is possible to see it in almost every profession. Ethics in education especially in school administration deals with educational actions which take place in school. Schools are educational organizations and school administrators have the vital role in managing schools. The success of a school and the degree of reaching educational aims depends on the principal and his/her effective governance. To be able to create an effective school and manage it fairly is possible with codes of ethics. The main purpose of this paper is to draw a general picture about ethics in school administration.

## ETHICS AND SCHOOLS

The word ethics may be simply defined as the science of right and wrong, the science of moral principles, the science of moral judgment and conduct. It not only analyzes, classifies, describes and explains human actions as good or bad but also helps us know why and on what bases our judgment of human action is justified (Kizza, 2007). Ethical issues are part of everyday life in schools. They frequently arise from decisions which require value judgements about doing the right thing, or saying the good or best thing in a particular situation. Although doing the right thing seems easy enough most times when an ethica-

lly difficult situation arises, it may cause individuals to examine their ethics in practice (Campbell, 2004).

It is important to remember that schools have never been islands, able to ward off the effects of trends emerging in the wider society. However, it is equally important to understand that schools now are subject to the impact of global changes to which their stakeholders require rapid local responses. Schools are subject to a lot of changes today, and with schools becoming increasingly self-managing environments, the principal has started to feel more pressure on his/her shoulders when dealing with ethically complex situations (Dempster and Berry, 2003).

In recent years, the ethics of practice has been a popular discussion topic in many professional fields, including education. Dozens of articles and chapters have been written during the past 20 years on the ethics of practice in education, including debates about the desirability and feasibility of developing codes of ethics (Gordon and Sorok, 2001). Today many professional communities have developed a code of ethics to make more specific the moral code that specifically applies to their situation. The code must be idealistic and also be practical, so that it can apply reasonably to all educational administrators. Some professions have certain and detailed codes of ethics that they sometimes take place of law (Haynes, 1998).

## ETHICS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

The concept of governance incorporates four fundamental issues:

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- i.) How an organization is managed to optimize performance and accountability.
- ii.) How values and goals are reflected by the systems and structures that are created.
- iii.) How leaders establish relationships that engender the commitment of those who work with and for them.
- iv.) How the application of leadership is formally applied in the conduct of organizational business (Karri et al., 2005).

In a school context, the principal is mainly responsible for these four fundamental issues. Hence the school principal must integrate his/her managerial skills with codes of ethics on which all staff has agreed.

All school personnel, of course, are responsible for creating and maintaining a community conducive to academic, emotional and social learning, but the principal is the primary architect and promoter of the values and standards that ensure everything and everyone in the school building function according to the highest ethical standards (Harsh and Casto, 2007).

The educational program housed in a school organization is supposed to serve moral purposes (the nurturing of human, social and intellectual growth of youngsters). Thus, although educational administrators do many generic things common to all administrators, these activities are aimed at promoting the educational goals of the institution (Starrat, 1991).

Today, moral leadership is essential for every organization of all types and in all corners of society. Administrators play a significant role in society as leaders and role models for today's students but future's leaders. To create a morally virtuous community, those who manage today's schools and business departments must invest in a continuing dialogue about their ethical duties to society and thoughtfully examine both their roles and the benefits that can come from honoring the responsibilities of ethical leadership (Caldwell and Jeane, 2007).

## CODES OF ETHICS FOR PRINCIPALS

Ethics deals with actions that are commonly seen as right or wrong. Showing favoritism in hiring a colleague who is white over someone who is black is discriminatory. We can say that it is clearly wrongheaded. An ethical leader not only endeavors to do the right things but also to do things right. The school administrator whose behavior is consistent acts morally and therefore he/she values social justice (Glanz, 2006). If the school administrator is inconsistent and behaves arbitrary, this causes him to lose his reliance among the other school staff and as a natural outcome of this the decisions taken by the administrators become controversial.

Ethics seems to be part of the job. Administrators who are seen as unfair, unjust, inhumane, or capricious in their decisions usually buy themselves a great deal of trouble in their jobs. Indeed, it has been our experience that admini-

strators are just as likely to fail because they are seen as unjust as they are to fail because they are seen as inefficient. The administrator who is unfair will soon be faced with a hostile faculty and an angry community. Ethics is part of the job. Indeed, it is an essential part of the job. Administrators deal with fairness, equality, justice, and democracy as much as they deal with test scores, teachers' salaries, parents, and budgets (Strike et al., 2005). It is important for the reputation of schools that they have an ethical culture. When viewed from the perspective of staff, their satisfaction and motivation will indisputably be enhanced when they feel that they are working at a school that is run with an ethical approach. Therefore, principals should mind their ethical responsibilities for their teachers; should respect their individual rights and should be just (Karaköse, 2007). It is clear that principals' ethical behaviors help create a trustful school climate. In such a school climate not only school staff but also students have great benefit from educational process.

Numerous organizations—American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 1993), National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 1976), National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAS-SP, 2001), and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) through membership on the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA, 2002) - have articulated a variety of ethical behaviors expected of educational leaders. Many states have also published codes of ethics for educational leaders (Houle and Gimias, 2006).

School boards need to develop their own code of ethics not only to reduce the risk of unethical conduct, but to reinforce the bonds of professional cooperation so sorely needed in any organization. From the beginning, the board needs to recognize that the process can be rewarding but it is often difficult. This happens because ethical issues, by their nature, can be controversial (NSBA, 1997). Although developing ethical codes difficult in the beginning of the process, it facilitates both school administrators and personnel's work in the school. The school staff may reach an ethical standard for their decisions.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) established a list for principals that they must conform. Rebore (2001), lists these codes as it is below. The educational administrator:

- i.) Makes the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making and actions.
- ii.) Fulfills professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity.
- iii.) Supports the principle of due process and protects the civil and human rights of all individuals.
- iv.) Obeys local, state, and national laws and does not knowingly join or support organization that advocates directly or indirectly, the overthrow of the government.
- v.) Implements the governing board of education's policies

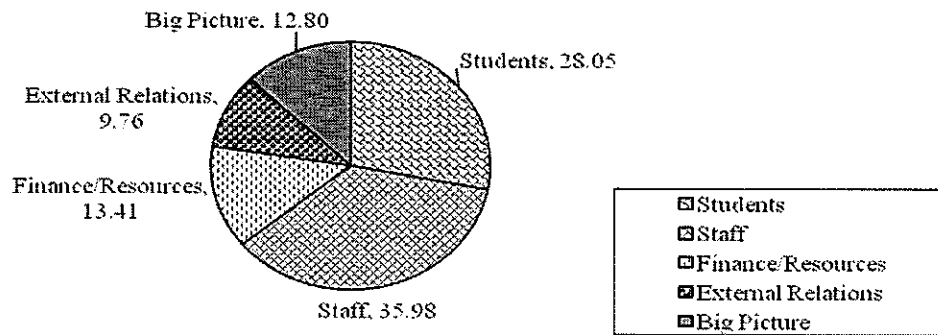


Figure 1. Total instance of ethical issues (Dempster et al., 1998).

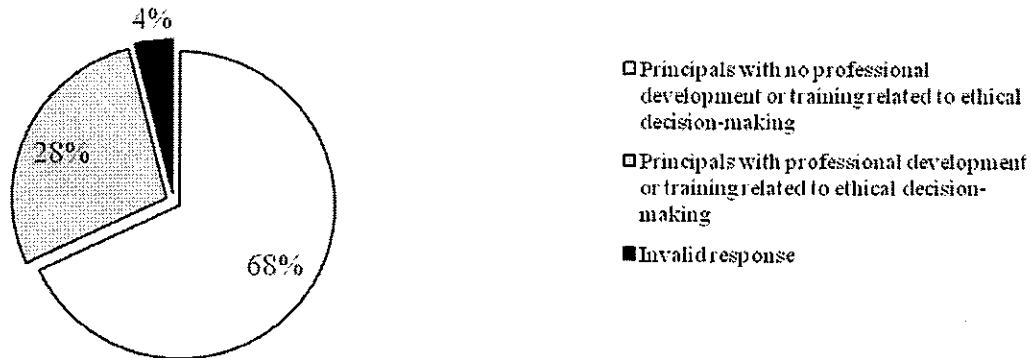


Figure 2. Percentages of principals with professional development and training related to ethical decision-making (Dempster and Berry, 2003).

and administrative rules and regulations.

vi.) Pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies, and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals.

vii.) Avoids using positions for personal gain through political, social, religious, economic, or other influence.

viii.) Accepts academic degrees or professional certification only from duly accredited institutions.

ix.) Maintains the standards and seeks to improve the effectiveness of the profession through research and continuing professional development.

x.) Honors all contracts until fulfillment or release.

Are these codes of ethics beneficial for school principals? Do they facilitate their job? Our answer is quite simple. Of course, yes. Without any established codes, it would be really difficult to make ethical decisions.

### ETHICAL DILEMMAS FACED BY SCHOOL LEADERS

Educational leaders may often be faced with choices that require them to make decisions. All these decisions may

not have any clear cut resolution and are likely to be highly problematic. That's why; principals may frequently face with ethical dilemmas. In short an ethical dilemma comes out from a situation that requires a choice among competing sets of principles, values, beliefs, perspectives (Cranston et al., 2003).

An ethical dilemma is not a choice between wrong and right. It is a choice between two rights as it was stated by Rushworth Kidder (1995). Deciding whether scarce resources should go to a gifted curriculum or a dropout-prevention program would constitute a dilemma and this is very challenging for the principals (Lashway, 1996).

The principal faces some ethical issues mostly about staff, students, financial matters and relations with public. Established codes of ethics help principals and show how to behave ethically. We can see a detailed in the Figure 1 below showing ethical issues that principals face. Dempster and his fellows reached these results after their survey with school principals working for Education Queensland in Australia.

As it is seen clearly in Figure 2, the most common ethical decisions are made about school staff. External rela-

tions constitute the least part in the figure as in a school environment student and staff interaction takes place more intensively.

### ETHICAL DECISION MAKING; IS IT A FANTASY OR REALITY FOR PRINCIPALS?

Human beings are moral agents. They are responsible for their choices, and they have a duty to make choices in a morally responsible way. Thus it is crucial that people be able to reflect ethically on their choices and their actions. This is especially important when individuals have power and influence over the lives of others. We can think of few areas where it is more important than in the administration of schools (Strike et al., 2005).

Decision making is a crucial process for school administration. In a school context principal is the main decision maker in the school. Therefore an ethical or unethical decision directly affects school climate positively or negatively.

It can be said that the causes of poor ethical decisions are often the same as the causes of poor decisions generally; decisions may be based on inaccurate theories about the world, about the other people or about us. Ethical decision making may be improved in the same way that general decision making is improved (Messick and Bazerman, 1996). It is undeniable fact that school administrators have to consider all the consequences of actions they planned.

Komives (1998) points out five principles in making ethical decision. These are;

- i.) Respecting autonomy.
- ii.) Doing no harm.
- iii.) Being Just.
- iv.) Benefiting others.
- v.) Being faithful (Glanz, 2006).

On examining Figure 2, we concluded that a great amount of principals' need professional training as regards ethical decision making. It can be said that school principals should be better prepared to respond to the challenges of contemporary school leadership through professional development approaches that take account of the ethical complexity of school-based management (Dempster et al., 1998). For ethical school governance it is necessary that we need qualified school principals who have special training related to ethical decision making. Schools and universities should provide this necessary training and support for administrators in a cooperative way.

### Conclusion

Educational administrators are supposed to manage not simply an organization but an educational organization the ethics of educational administration is about administrators establishing an ethical environment. Hence the admini-

strator should have moral responsibility and the desirable ethical standards (Starrat, 1991). Having moral responsibility and ethical standards are essential elements; however without practice they have no meaning.

A code of ethics in itself, of course, cannot guarantee ethical practice or to be cure-all for other problems in a profession. To have such expectations is to mistake the main purpose of a code. A code of ethics speaks to the very best that a profession is or strives to be. It is idealistic side of a profession, A projection of the vision of the professional identity as it ought to be (Connely and Light, 1991).

Finally, school principals have a key role in managing schools because they are main decision makers, they are school leaders, and they have more responsibilities than the other staffs have. Hence principals' ethical behaviors and decisions directly affect school climate positively. Principals must follow codes of ethics and always think of students first in decision making. In such an ethical school environment success is a definite outcome of the educational process.

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