

Some Ethical Considerations in the Principalship

Robert Watson and Scott Wegner
Southwest Missouri State University
A Problem Based Learning Activity

Introduction

In this problem-based learning activity attention is focused on the integrity, fairness, and ethical behaviors of the principal, the theme of Standard 5 of the ISLLC standards. The content has been organized into two "problems." One deals with the philosophical premises of education. The other asks the aspiring principal to construct a code of ethics for the school district.

With each problem the student will need to develop: one or more products; a set of guiding questions provides one way to stimulate thinking about developing the products. In addition, some resources are listed; both the instructor and the student are encouraged to identify and use resources that go considerably beyond those given here. Each of the "problems" has a list of key terms.

The notes to the instructors provide additional suggestions for processing the learning activity. We encourage you to extend this list and share it with us and others. Finally, there is a scoring guide for each exercise. Here again, the instructor is encouraged to work with other criteria and ways of scoring. We tried with these to follow the standard approach to scoring such kinds of learning activities developed by Educational Testing Services.

Standard 5

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Key knowledge and performance concepts

- Knowledge --The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:
 - the purpose of education and the role of leadership in modern society
 - various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics
 - the values of the diverse school community
 - professional codes of ethics
 - the philosophy and history of Educational Administration
- Performances -- The administrator:
 - examines personal and professional values
 - demonstrates a personal and professional code of ethics
 - demonstrates values, beliefs, and attitudes that inspire others to higher levels of performance
 - serves as a role model
 - accepts responsibility for school operations
 - considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others
 - uses the influence of the office to enhance the educational program rather than for personal gain
 - treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect
 - protects the rights and confidentiality of students and staff
 - demonstrates appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity in the school community
 - recognizes and respects the legitimate authority of others

- examines and considers the prevailing values of the diverse school community
- expects that others in the school community will demonstrate integrity and exercise ethical behavior
- opens the school to public scrutiny
- fulfills legal and contractual obligations
- applies laws and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerately

Welcome!! Feel free to start whenever you are ready.
You do not need to work on these in any particular order.

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Problem 1: "Why a Principal?"

Scenario

You are the principal of a school of 1100 students. You have one assistant principal and a part-time athletic director to assist in the operation of the school. Enrollment has steadily grown in the past several years and projections show that next year the student population will exceed 1200 students. You and your team are swamped with the daily operation of a large school.

To address this situation you have been working with the superintendent for the past year on the addition of another assistant principal to meet the growing student population. Even with state guidelines for student/administrator ratios (and common sense as far as you are concerned) supporting your request ratios aside, you have met with some resistance. Essentially, the resistance is due to financial constraints within the district. Since state aid is calculated on previous year's enrollments, new monies to the district often lag a year, or even two years, behind. Your district has been caught in this dilemma. The Board and superintendent are sympathetic, but they have been forced to put off your proposals due to state revenues lagging behind the population boom. You basically have been asked to "make do until the money is there."

Just when things started to look up (state funding had caught up, enrollment projections had been verified and the superintendent had given the "green light") you have been presented with an unexpected hurdle. In the last board election two candidates running on a general theme of "fiscal conservatism and accountability" won election. They quickly gained the support of another board member to form a coalition dedicated to blocking any program, personnel or budgetary request that lack "purpose" or "persuasive justification." To date they have held up about every request brought to the board. They have not been vindictive nor particularly political, they just will not pass items that appear to have no purpose.

After a lengthy closed door session to consider personnel issues, the superintendent came over to talk with you privately. He made a somewhat odd request. The board, and specifically the "conservative coalition," has asked for a detailed rationale for your assistant principal request. That part wasn't so unusual, it was what the board wanted in the rationale that gave you a start.

The superintendent related to you that the discussion concerning the assistant principal request was extremely interesting. The board wasn't particularly interested in recommended student/administrator ratios or job descriptions, indeed the discussion centered more on "why principals?" Looking hastily over his notes the superintendent pointed out several statements that merited some response. The statements included:

- It looks to me like we could get a couple of cheaper non-certified people to do some of the tasks and possibly get by with fewer principals.
- Do we have to have principals? Can't we designate lead teachers to do most of the duties?

- In my day all the principals did was the budget and discipline. One person can do these tasks.
- Do principals really make a difference in the bottom line? You know, in student learning?
- What is the relationship of principal leadership and having a good school?
- What's the return on having more principals? Or any principals for that manner?
- Where do principals fit in the whole scheme of things? How do they make a better school? A better community?

The superintendent is concerned about the questions that have been raised and wants you to prepare a presentation for a board retreat planned for two weeks from today. The superintendent feels that if the board is given good data and a sensible "history" lesson delivered in a professional manner, they will not only be favorable with the request but they might even perceive all administrators in a more favorable light. The superintendent is especially interested in capturing the basic philosophical orientation of the district and showing how principals can promote it.

The superintendent has selected you for this delicate task and allotted one hour for the presentation. The superintendent has hinted that you could score some serious political capital for yourself and your school if you do a good job and said with a wink that you might even want to craft the presentation a bit to cast yourself and your school in a favorable light. You experience "guarded enthusiasm".

Product Specifications

Presentation to the Board of Education containing the following:

- A characterization of the general philosophy of the district
- It's basic premises
- What the philosophy means to the operation of a school
- The impact of this philosophy on the children
- A brief history of the principalship.
- Where it's been.
- Where it's at.
- Where it's going.
- The impact of the principalship on:
 - A School's Mission
 - Student Learning
 - The Community

A mock journal for the principal detailing:

- Identification of a clear purpose of school (philosophy) and the principal's role in achieving this purpose.
- Decisions related to the superintendent's suggestion to craft the presentation in order to promote personal goals or goals of your school.
- Identification of ethical questions encountered developing this presentation.
- Discussion of presentation strategies that would project a professional image.

Guiding Questions (for use in guiding your thinking)

- How does one determine the philosophy that a district adheres to? Is there a single philosophy that captures the popular sentiment in districts across the U.S.?

- What is the importance of knowing the philosophy of a district? How does it impact the leadership of a district? How does it impact the day-to-day operation of a school district?
- What is the history of the principalship? What are the key issues to understand about the evolution of the principalship?
- What research base is available stressing the impact the principal on student learning?
- What research base is available about the principal's impact upon the school mission?
- What definition of "community" should be used?
- In what ways should or could a principal use board presentations to further their own situation? How about the situation of their school?
- How does the nature of the audience affect a presentation of this type? What factors do you need to consider? What strategies should you employ?

Resources

- Fundamental Concepts of Educational Leadership, Razik and Swanson Merrill Prentice Hall Upper Saddle River, New Jersey ISBN 0-13-0-14491-6
- Creating Effective Schools: An Inservice Program for Enhancing School Learning Climate and Achievement, Brookover et.al. Learning Publications, Holmes Beach, FL ISBN 0-918452-35-X
- Developing the Curriculum, Peter Oliva, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, N.Y. ISBN 0-673-52195-8
- Value-Added Leadership: how to get extraordinary performance in schools, Thomas Sergiovanni, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, HBJ Leadership, San Diego, CA

Key Terms:

- Reconstructionism
- Perceptual Psychology
- Progressivism
- Philosophy
- Perennialism
- Congruency
- Essentialism
- Effectives Schools Research
- Existentialism
- Value-Added Leadership
- Behavioralism
- The Learning Community
- Pragmatism
- Ethics
- Reconceptualism
- Diversity
- Gestalt

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Problem 2: "It's a Matter of Ethics"

Scenario

Your district has been involved in a year-long project re-writing the job descriptions for all certified personnel. As an up-and-coming administrator with a current degree and boundless energy, you have been instrumental in the defining the tasks and specifications for an instructional leader. You have impressed a lot of people with your knowledge and skills,

Because of these contributions the superintendent has asked you to take on a difficult but interesting job. With two scandals (one, dealing with a sexual liaison in a school at school time and one dealing with embezzlement of activity account monies) the superintendent has become extremely interested in ethics. Spurred on by the increasing number of states establishing them and not really sure what it means or how to go about pulling it off, the superintendent has asked you to develop an "Administrative Code of Ethics" to apply to all administrators in the district. It is hoped that such a code will assist in all facets of personnel management in the district (hiring, evaluation, supervision, development programs, compensation, termination, etc) as well as communicate the high standards to which administrators are held to the community at large.

The superintendent wants a comprehensive work with rationale, research and public support. The superintendent wants legal responsibilities, professional standards, community values consulted and a district code of ethics or "10 commandments" established. While the superintendent knows that extensive amount of public input will be needed, the feeling is that a great deal of the leg work to develop a draft of the basic components should be done in advance. It's a tall order but the consensus belief among all administrators is that you are the person for the job.

Product Specifications

The superintendent would like the following items submitted in two weeks:

1. A rationale for the establishment of a code of ethics including:
 - a. A definition of Ethics
 - b. A theoretical paradigm on which to base the code of ethics
 - c. An introduction to the code of ethics for the district including:
 - d. Purpose of the code
 - e. Definitions
2. A recommended set of standards for Administrator behavior cross referenced (when appropriate) to: State Law
3. Other state codes of ethics
4. National standards
5. A summary of community standards that might be considered in the final version and recommendations for implementation or inclusion in the code of ethics.
6. A draft "District Commandments" that summarize the code of ethics and can be posted district wide.
7. A list of potential areas where policies might be needed, such as:
 - a. Reporting

- b. Disciplinary action
 - c. Hiring practices
 - d. Staff development
 - e. Administrator Evaluation
8. Additionally, the superintendent would like you to write, confidentially, a brief paper outlining what you perceive your biases to be concerning the formulation of the above recommendations. The superintendent related that this will help in interpreting the work to others as well as be a good learning tool for you.

Guiding Questions (for use in guiding your thinking)

1. What is a code of professional ethics? Do they differ from profession to profession?
2. How does the law affect ethics? Are they one in the same?
3. How does community or cultural expectations affect professional codes of ethics?
4. What is the history of ethics?
5. Who are the stakeholders that will eventually have an interest in the development of the code of ethics?
6. What behaviors, beyond technical or theoretical skills, should be expected of school administrators?
7. What is the affect of unethical behavior? How should unethical behavior be dealt with?
8. What is the place of morality in the ethics? Are they one in the same?
9. Will there be alternative positions relative to a professional code of ethics? How does one deal with multiple ethical frameworks?
10. What is the role of religion in determining ethical behavior?
11. What will the effect of a code of ethics be on a school district? Formally or Informally

Resources

- The Ethics of School Administration, Kenneth Strike, Emil Haller and Jonas Soltis, Teachers College Press Columbia University, New York
- Ethics for Professional Educators, Kenneth Strike and P. Lance Ternasky, Editors, Teachers College Press Columbia University, New York
- Matter of Breath: Foundations for Professional Ethics G. De Stexhe and J Verstraeten, Peeters Publishing Leuven Belgium
- Ethics and Decision-Making in Local Schools: Inclusion, Policy and Reform, James Paul, Neal Berger, Pam Osnes, Yolanda Martinez and Wm. Morse, Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Baltimore, MD
- Georgia Code of Ethics for Educators - <http://www.gapsc.com/Professionalpractices/NEthics.asp>

Key Terms:

Accountability
 Mores
 Behavioralism
 Norms
 Casuistry
 Power
 Constructivism
 Professional code of ethics
 Ethical Relativity
 Professional Standards
 Ethics Protocol
 Gemeinschaft
 Roles and Responsibilities
 Gesellschaft
 Rules
 Laws
 Universality
 Morality
 Values

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Instructor Notes and Scoring Guide

Problem 2: "It's A Matter of Ethics"

Notes to Instructor

- I. The following ISLLC criteria are supported by this problem. You can enhance the students experience by assuring that either appropriate instruction in these areas has been given or additional resource made available to support student decision-making.
 - various ethical frameworks and perspectives of ethics
 - the values of the diverse school community
 - professional codes of ethics examines personal and professional values
 - accepts responsibility for school operations
 - considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others
 - uses the influence of the office to enhance the educational program rather than for personal gain
 - treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect
 - protects the rights and confidentiality of students and staff
 - demonstrates appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity in the school community
 - recognizes and respects the legitimate authority of others
 - examines and considers the prevailing values of the diverse school community
 - expects that others in the school community will demonstrate integrity and exercise ethical behavior
 - opens the school to public scrutiny
 - fulfills legal and contractual obligations
 - applies laws and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerately

- II. You could assign this case to either an individual or a small group. The more members in the group the more detail that should be requested in the products. The students could be asked to use their own school district as a platform of study. (Using their own districts would also allow for a more authentic task though it may create logistical problems for groups of students who are not from the same district.)

- III. If your state already uses a specific code of behavior you could have the students study them as a primary source and work to justify their use or expand them to be more encompassing. Conversely, you could have assign them to a district not in your state and give them the opportunity to develop their own from scratch.

- IV. Lastly, you may modify the project to give more or less direction or requirements. You could also require that certain technologies be used such as PowerPoint or other presentation software for a presentation to the administrators/Board of Education

- V. As written, the project should take 6-9 hours of classroom time over a two to three-week period.
- VI. Possible optional assignment - A mock journal for the principal detailing decision-making elements including:
- VII. Identification of at least three potential problems in this scenario that might have to be dealt with in more detail at a later time.
- Identification of the key elements to decision-making regarding the documents produced.
 - Identification of issues that may support or hinder the ultimate success of this project.
 - A discussion of the rationale for selecting the chosen ethical framework. The strengths and weaknesses of any or all ethical models considered.

Guide For Scoring Student Products

Performance Criteria	1	2	3
applies laws and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerately	The student fails to cite legal references and neglects to consider important legal principles related implementation issues.	The student's product contains references to legal issues but does not consistently consider implementation issues related to the law. (due process, contract law, etc.)	The student's product reflects an in depth study of the laws related to principal behavior. Additionally, the product adheres to legal principles related to due process, contract law and other related legal fields.
fulfills legal and contractual obligations	The student fails to cite legal references and neglects to consider important legal principles related implementation issues	The student's product contains references to legal issues but does not consistently consider implementation issues related to the law. (due process, contract law, etc.)	The student's product reflects an in depth study of the laws related to principal behavior. Additionally, the product adheres to legal principles related to due process, contract law and other related legal fields.
opens the school to public scrutiny	The student fails to consider disclosure of misconduct and the public's right to know	The student's work intimates disclosure but specific policy recommendations are not present.	The student offers evidence of an understanding of the public's "right to know". Reporting policies indicate disclosure processes.
expects that others in the school community will demonstrate integrity and exercise ethical behavior	Gaps in recommendations or standards are present that allow for potentially substandard behavior	The product and recommendations establish a legally acceptable quality	The product and recommendations are standards based, comprehensive and of high quality.
examines and considers the prevailing values of the diverse school community	The student's work fails to examine the philosophical nature of ethics, parroting legal requirements or contractual obligations with out accounting for multiple perspectives. Self-reflection lacks sufficient depth or clarification. No ethical framework is considered or developed.	The student's work effectively examines the philosophical nature of ethics, but with a somewhat narrow focus (the majority viewpoint or a single cultural viewpoint) Self-reflection is value based but with a narrow perspective. Only one ethical framework is considered and used.	The student' work effectively examines the philosophical nature of ethics, taking into account multiple viewpoints and allowing for diverse stands on ethics. The product and especially the self-reflection is value based but with a broad perspective. Multiple ethical frameworks are considered, the end

			product is a synthesis of two or more frameworks
demonstrates appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity in the school community	The student's work fails to examine the philosophical nature of ethics, parroting legal requirements or contractual obligations with out accounting for multiple perspectives. Self-reflection lacks sufficient depth or clarification. No ethical framework is considered or developed.	The student's work effectively examines the philosophical nature of ethics, but with a somewhat narrow focus (the majority viewpoint or a single cultural viewpoint) Self-reflection is value based but with a narrow perspective. Only one ethical framework is considered and used.	The student' work effectively examines the philosophical nature of ethics, taking into account multiple viewpoints and allowing for diverse stands on ethics. The product and especially the self-reflection is value based but with a broad perspective. Multiple ethical frameworks are considered, the end product is a synthesis of two or more frameworks
the values of the diverse school community	The student's work fails to examine the philosophical nature of ethics, parroting legal requirements or contractual obligations with out accounting for multiple perspectives. Self-reflection lacks sufficient depth or clarification. No ethical framework is considered or developed.	The student's work effectively examines the philosophical nature of ethics, but with a somewhat narrow focus (the majority viewpoint or a single cultural viewpoint) Self-reflection is value based but with a narrow perspective. Only one ethical framework is considered and used.	The student' work effectively examines the philosophical nature of ethics, taking into account multiple viewpoints and allowing for diverse stands on ethics. The product and especially the self-reflection is value based but with a broad perspective. Multiple ethical frameworks are considered, the end product is a synthesis of two or more frameworks
recognizes and respects the legitimate authority of others	There is no evidence of an understanding of "chain of command" nor recognition of the rights and authority of the public	There is evidence of school "chain of command" but no recognition of the public's rights or authority.	There is evidence of both school "chain of command" as well as recognition of the public's rights and authority
protects the rights and confidentiality of students and staff	Confidentiality does not receive any attention or is merely intimated.	Confidentiality is intimated or dealt with in a general fashion	Confidentiality is specifically dealt with in the code of ethics and policy recommendations
treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect	There is evidence that dignity of people is secondary to organizational maintenance. Due process may be lacking or incomplete.	Dignity of people is implied but not specifically mentioned as a goal of the project. Due process meets legal standards	Dignity of people is a common theme throughout the project. Due process ensures confidentiality and fair treatment
considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others	Project and reflection piece shows limited understanding of the implication of administrative practices upon others within and outside the school setting. Reflective piece only recognizes impact managerial duties not value system.	Project and reflection piece intimate an awareness of the implication of administrative practices upon others within and outside the school setting. Does not clearly state how one's value system impacts others.	Project and reflection piece demonstrate a keen awareness of the implication of administrative practices upon others within and outside the school setting. Recognizes the impact of one's value system upon others.
accepts responsibility for school operations	Includes no statements designating principals as having primary responsibility for what happens in their buildings	Includes only a global statement designating principals as having primary responsibility for what happens in their buildings	Multiple instances of evidence designating principals as having primary responsibility for what happens in their buildings
Shows knowledge of professional codes of ethics	Work is incomplete or so narrow in scope as to give no direction. Reflection is	Project is complete The work effectively examines the philosophical nature of	Project is complete and comprehensive. The work effectively examines the

	superficial, does not explore strengths and weakness nor origins of ones own value system.	ethics and the reflection piece examines ones own biases and values. Work does not show depth of thinking or narrow thinking.	philosophical nature of ethics, taking into account multiple viewpoints and allowing for diverse stands on ethics. Reflection piece thoughtfully examines ones own biases and values
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