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Negotiating the Double Mandate: Mapping Ethical Conflict Experienced by Practicing Educational Leaders

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NEGOTIATING THE DOUBLE MANDATE: MAPPING ETHICAL CONFLICT EXPERIENCED BY PRACTICING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Acknowledgment

Without question, I feel as though I have been writing this dissertation my entire life. Each of us has useful things to say; however, circumstance has a strange way of providing voice to our potential. I have been fortunate throughout my life to have had people play in my favor. This project is dedicated to them.

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pertinent to public administration, but during the coursework phase of this program, he also introduced me to the rigors of the case study methodology. Because puzzling out alternative interpretations of information and paths of action is what this study is about, I can’t help but to think that his course influenced the direction of my dissertation. In addition to serving on my dissertation committee as an accomplished qualitative researcher and critical theorist, Dr. Sherman validated my ideas and helped me begin to organize them. This paper began to take shape during her seminar course. Finally, Dr. Mansfield made continuous suggestions that improved both the technical quality and readability of this project from start to finish. Each member of my committee joined with me when their professional calendars easily indicated otherwise. I am profoundly grateful to them. If the value of experience lies in what can be taken from it, I exit this journey enriched from having the opportunity to work with them at work worth doing.
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NEGOTIATING THE DOUBLE MANDATE: MAPPING ETHICAL CONFLICT EXPERIENCED BY PRACTICING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

By Jeffrey W. McGee

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013

Major Director: Kurt Stemhagen, Ph.D.
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The qualitative approach used in this study captured and described ethical conflict experienced by a sample of practicing educational leaders. Narrative inquiry data were collected from 42 former and current doctoral students and additional data were captured through follow-up interviews with selected participants. The major findings of the study suggest that ethical conflict is inherent in the practice of educational leadership. Such conflict is most often experienced in relation to colleagues when the ethics of justice and care collide. Leaders’ ability to mitigate conflict that is often the result of institutional and external factors is promoted by varied background and contextual experiences. Educational leaders also felt that ethics and ethical competence is essential to the role of educational leader and that pre- and in-service preparation is important.
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

School leaders that rely on efficient approaches to solve dilemmas run the risk of suspending their ethical responsibility to students. Colnerud (1994) suggests that ethical tension and conflict finds their origin where ethical norms collide. The collision of these norms creates space for ethical dilemmas to arise in schools and in the decisions of those who work in them. In this context, leaders face a double mandate wherein their professional conduct is expected to support such norms as well as students’ best interests.

In the field of educational leadership in the United States, interest in ethics increased when the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium released standards for the licensing of school administrators that include an ethical strand (ISSLC, 1996). Based on the assumption that moral and ethical conflicts exist in the experience of educational leaders, as a framework for responding to ethical dilemmas scholars have theorized that the ethical conflict educational leaders’ experience occurs within three domains; that is, justice, critique, and care (Starratt, 1991). Thus, it has been proposed that a multidimensional ethical framework that combines the ethics of justice, critique, and care can provide a lens through which leaders’ can view their work from an integrated ethical perspective to reconcile ethical conflict. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2011) take up the issue of responding to such conflict by proposing an ethic of profession that synthesizes the three component ethics. The ethic of profession espouses decision-making in the best interests of the student. These theoretical advances, while significant, have not mitigated the difficulty leaders experience supporting the best interests of the student (Colnerud, 2006).
Bearing these issues in mind, this dissertation is organized in five chapters. Chapter one establishes the context of the study by identifying the problem, purpose, and research questions. Chapter one also establishes the relevance of the study and sketches out major concepts. Chapter two presents a review of the literature and finds a gap in it relevant to the need for empirical inquiry into the difficulty educational leaders’ face in making decisions in the best interests of students. Based on the review of research, chapter three outlines the chosen methodology and specific methods used to conduct this study. Chapter four describes the study’s sample of participants, presents and clarifies the data gathered and used in the study, and offers the study’s findings. As a method of conclusion, the final chapter of the study relates the data captured to the research problem and applies it to answer the study’s research questions. Chapter five closes by offering recommendations for future research.

**Statement of the Problem**

Theory and research in ethics and moral reasoning in general and in the applied area of educational leadership in particular has historically adopted a narrow perspective on decision-making that can jeopardize the best interests of the student (Campbell, 2001; Colnerud, 1997, Langlois, 2004, Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004; Vitton & Wasonga, 2009). For example, when confronted with difficult decisions leaders can be pressured by guidance that comes in the form of zero-tolerance (Keleher, 2000), influenced by norms associated with collegial loyalty (Colnerud, 1997), or suffer from the effects of goal displacement (Langlois & Lapointe, 2007). What’s more, in some cases organizational conditions can inhibit moral agency or make inaction legitimate (Saimer, 2008). While
the literature suggests that a multiple ethical approach can help leaders to make important
decisions, in itself such an approach can cause leaders to experience ethical conflict as
students, parents, colleagues and leader all have a certain ethical standing and do not
always agree in terms of best interests. Ethical conflict is part of the landscape of
educational leadership and not enough is known about it. Ethical decision-making is a
persistent problem in the field of educational leadership.

**Rationale for Study of the Problem**

Reconciling value-laden perspectives to promote moral ends is a legitimate area
of inquiry in the field of educational leadership and an important responsibility of
educational leaders (Begley, 1999; Starratt, 2005). Because it is unacceptable for
educational leaders to make decisions that are harmful to students, this research thus
represents a relevant and important line of inquiry that has the potential to contribute to
the educational leadership literature.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

Bringing together literature in educational leadership and related fields relevant to
the problem of ethical decision-making, the purpose of this research is to capture and
describe ethical conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders through a
multidimensional theoretical lens. From this basis the following questions are
investigated:

1. What is the nature of ethical conflicts that practicing educational leaders
   experience?
2. Is the critical incident technique a tool relevant to the purpose of capturing ethical conflict as perceived by practicing educational leaders?

3. How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to leadership background?

4. How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to school context?

5. What are the implications for leadership preparation and professional development?

6. What are the implications for future research?

Although similar research has been conducted that documents ethical conflict in teaching (Colnerud, 1997; Pope, Green, Johnson, Mitchell, 2009), research has not been located that employs ethical theory to interpret conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders as specified by this research.

**Literature/Research Background**

To begin to consider ethical conflict and student best interests, let us start with a question: why it is that dilemmas arise in schools that risk jeopardizing the best interests of the student in the first place? Learning something about the sources of ethical conflict in schools is pertinent to the decision-making responsibilities of educational leaders.

**The Relevance of Ethical Decision-making to Educational Leadership**

Reasoning between ideological points of view is relevant to many aspects of public policy. For example, values embedded in forms of orthodoxy and progressivism have very different conceptions of moral authority that can lead to equally different judgments (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau and Thoma, 1999). Like societies, people are not devoid of a particular moral perspective and do not always share the same values in terms
of what is right or wrong and good or bad (Sockett, 2006). The values that are manifested by individuals impact in social institutions such as schools (Starratt, 2005).

For instance, Jonathan Zimmerman (2003) is one author to examine culture wars that are fought in America’s schools. From his perspective, the struggle for expression of progressive values is fought on two different fronts; that is, the teaching of history and religion. Similarly, from the international perspective, Rest et al. (1999) offers that ideological struggle is a defining characteristic of the post-cold war world. While it is clear that varying views and ideologies exist in culturally plural contexts that themselves are perfectly reasonable, it is also plausible that the coexistence of them in context can be a source of conflict and struggle (Rawls, 1993).

**Culture, Values, and Decision-making**

Respecting the customs in civil society does not mean the same thing in every context. It is possible that there are several logics that can be applied to solve problems each perhaps being based on differing comprehensive views or ideologies. Valuing one ethical basis can devalue another. Since conceptions of ethics can differ within and across cultures (Passini, 2010), educational leaders who are called on to serve student interests have to be able to draw from an expanding repertoire of ethical perspectives.

To illustrate, consider Miller’s (1990) work which supports the idea that culture and values effect the development of one’s reasoning ability. Miller (1990) found that in India, subjects respond to a broader audience of others (parent, friend, stranger) in moral terms when tasked with deciding whether or not to render aide, as compared to the United States in which subjects only valued aide to parents and did not consider lending aide to
friends or strangers as a moral imperative. Miller (1990) is of particular relevance to the present topic of decision-making in the best interests of the student. Such decision-making entails the extension of applicable moral protections for the purpose of fostering the well-being of others who may lie outside of an agent’s culturally constructed scope of justice. The subjects in the Miller (1990) study clearly operated on the basis of a broad scope of justice. In a manner similar to the subjects in the Miller (1990) study, educational leaders who have the capacity to take the perspective of students are able to extend such moral resources and protections to them in order to make decisions in line with their interests.

Personal values issue from cultural perspectives and are developed over the course of time (Vitton & Wasonga, 2009). For example, personal values can arise from different religious or nonreligious traditions (Sockett, 2006). Similarly, Putka (2002) offers that the moral ideologies with which people identify are not easy to change or modify. Further, he indicates that one’s moral ideology resides close to the surface making it easy to retrieve when in the process of moral negotiation as it can invite defensiveness.

Being an educational leader brings with it a public role. Such a public role can call on leaders to modify personal values and tightly held ideology. Although the professional responsibilities of an educational leader require high levels of personalization (Starratt, 2004), "professions are inherently public and communal"...and "professionals require membership in a community" (Shulman, 1998, p. 520). The values of a professional community are a synthesis of personal and professional ethics (Shapiro
& Stefkovich, 2011). Professional values include a focus on decision-making that promotes the well-being of others.

As a focus of inquiry, problem solving in educational leadership has typically had the profession’s attention (Callahan, 1966; Crewson, 1987; Farqhuar, 1989; Glass, 1992; Leithwood & Raun, 1993; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995). Because values impact in social institutions including schools (Starratt, 2005), the field of educational leadership has expanded beyond modern perspectives toward consideration of the role affect plays in ethical reasoning (Begley, 1999; Gross, 2006). More specifically, the decision-making of educational leaders is justified due to the nuanced and value-laden context in which decisions are made (Begley, 1999). Since educational leaders frequently face critical ethical incidents, ethical reasoning is a valid area of inquiry (Gross, 2006).

Postmodern perspectives such as phenomenology find values and affect at the core of moral and ethical functioning (Magee, 1987). Accordingly, there is research that pursues axiological approaches (Dempster & Berry, 2003; Foster, 1985; Greenfield, 1985; Hodgkinson, 1991; Lakomski & Evers, 1999; Langlois, 2004; Langlois & Lapointe, 2007; NPBEA, 1996; Starratt, 1991; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, Sherman & Grogan, 2003). Such reasoning can be developed via experiences that broaden one’s scope of justice (Bloom, 1977, Passini, 2010, Shweder, 1982, Vitton & Wasonga, 2009).
Ethics and Morality

It is useful at this point to define ethics and morality and explain why these terms are used in a discussion of educational decision-making. Ethics derives from the Greek *ethos* and morality derives from the Latin *mores*. To the ancient Greeks, *ethos* relates to the person or individual while the Latin *mores* means social habits or customs. In other words, ethics are a means exercised by individuals to promote moral ends (Robbins & Trebicht, 2009).

Passini (2010) suggests that as “educational agents” schools are in position to play an important role in promoting an inclusive morality. As a framework to interpret dilemmas that can arise in schools, the idea that consolidating ethical perspectives can add value to the decision-making of educational leaders was first suggested by Starratt (1991) and initially included three ethics; that is, the ethic of critique, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of care. Because the terms ethics and morality are used in varying and nuanced ways in the literature, it is useful to use Starratt (2004) to further put them in line with the educational context:

Ethics is a term that is used in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. I use it here to denote a study of the underlying beliefs, assumptions, principles, and values that support a moral way of life. The product of that study is an ethics—a summary ordering of those principles, beliefs, assumptions, and values into a logical dynamic that characterizes the moral life. (p. 5)

Starratt’s (1991) idea that ethical themes could be brought together to provide educational leaders an organized way to think about their work from ethical perspectives
attracted the scholarly attention of Shapiro and Stefkovich (1997) who later merged these ethics into an ethic of profession (2001). While this theoretical synthesis has provided a new approach to research on ethical leadership and decision-making, it has not mitigated the difficulty in making decisions in the best interests of the student (Colnerud, 2006).

**Ethical Decision-making**

Benevolence and beneficence are additional terms that are relevant to ethical leadership and decision-making in education. Benevolence is a cognitive macromoral concept that resides at the communal level (Rest et al., 1999). Benevolence has to do with feeling sorry for others and taking action as a result. Thus, instead of valuing high levels of contextualization and intimacy, benevolent decision-making favors fairness and equity. Although educational decision-making grounded in benevolence can be efficient, it is not sensitive to individual student needs. Leaders who practice this brand of decision-making therefore run the risk of compromising their ethical responsibility to students.

Beneficence, on the other hand, is action taken on behalf of others for the purpose of promoting their well-being. Beneficence is an affective micormoral concept that resides at the level of the individual (Rest et al., 1999). Beneficent decision-making issues from high levels of contextualization and intimacy that originates empathic volition that moves one to take action on behalf of another. Educational leaders who pursue beneficent means to solve ethical conflict are sensitive to individual student needs and take action to promote their well-being. Educational decision-making in the best interests of the student values beneficence.
Macro-Micro Binary

It is helpful to further develop the macro-micro binary mentioned prior. Developing this concept is important because macro and micro are terms that help to address some of the problems of modernity (i.e., individualism, isolationism) that are relevant to ethical decision-making. In public enterprise, the connection of theory and practice is mutually beneficial. For instance, decision-making in educational leadership requires high levels of contextualization and intimacy yet whether such decisions are in the best interests of the student or not simultaneously requires an understanding of related theoretical concepts including justice, care and critique (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starrett, 1991). Similarly, in the related field of public administration, contextualized human resource functions or practices can be thought of as micro yet whether they are effective or not may rely on one's understanding and consideration of particular macro organizational theories and their influence (Farmer, 1995). In public enterprise, means and ends can therefore be thought of as reciprocally determined and mutually interdependent.

Ethical Dilemma

For the purposes of the present study and as used in the educational leadership literature, an ethical dilemma is a social situation that involves a conflict between imperatives such that supporting one often results in transgressing the other.

Methodology

To answer the research questions outlined prior, a qualitative interpretative methodology has been employed. According to McMillan (2004), qualitative research
can take four forms: ethnographic, case study, phenomenological, or grounded theory. Since the purpose of this study is to capture and describe the nature of phenomena (the ethical conflict experienced by educational leaders), the appropriate approach to take is qualitative with elements of phenomenology. The approach used in this study is in line with prior research that explores ethical problems and conflicts in the field of education (Colnerud, 1997; Pope et al., 2009).

**Summary**

The background literature and research presented establishes the need for research relevant to ethical educational leadership and decision-making. Resolving ethical conflict is an inherent but not easy task pertinent to the role of educational leaders. The task is difficult because the reasons that guide the decisions of leaders are not bracketed in practice and are difficult to bracket in research. The ethics of justice, critique, and care overlap with each other and are often hidden in institutional norms and practices and decision-making guidance is masked in various jurisprudential concepts. Thus, this research considers the difficulty leaders’ face in making decisions that are in line with the best interests of students by focusing on the specific kinds of ethical conflicts practicing leaders’ experience.

The preceding introductory discussion provides solid footing for a more in-depth look at the literature which is taken up next.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature as it pertains to ethical educational leadership. As a starting point, databases including ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Humanities International Complete were selected based on relevance and searched using the search terms “ethical educational leadership”. Abstracts of articles were reviewed for relevance. Based on relevance, articles were studied and assimilated. The bibliographies and reference lists of relevant selections were also reviewed and assimilated. Based on this search and assimilation, two themes emerged from the literature.

The first theme has to do with the relevance of ethical decision-making to the field of educational leadership. Due to the complexity of practice there is a significant amount of nuance involved in resolving dilemmas to reach decisions that are in the best interests of students. The second theme that emerged is the postmodern view of ethical decision-making as grounded in a multidimensional framework. On this view, multiple ethical perspectives interpenetrate each other to create an ethic of profession. Such an ethic of profession provides educational leaders with an expanding repertoire of ethical bases to draw from when making decisions. Integral to both of these themes is the presence of ethical dilemmas in the school setting.

The Double Mandate

Leaders who pursue efficient solutions “often turn to legalistic approaches to resolve what may essentially be ethical dilemmas” (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2006, p. 197).
Such school leaders thus risk suspending the ethical responsibility they have for students’ well-being *in loco parentis*. Colnerud (1994) suggests that ethical tension and conflict finds its origin where ethical norms collide. In this context, educators face a double mandate wherein their professional conduct is expected to support both ethical norms as well as individual students’ interests. The collision of these norms creates space for questionable situations to arise in schools that can taint the decisions of those who work in them. In such cases, educators who have a singular ethical focus can rely on one ethic at the expense of others. Colnerud’s (1997) descriptive study of professional ethics in teaching found that ethical conflict “in relation to pupils, parents, and colleagues” can jeopardize the well-being of students (p. 630). Similarly, supporting the best interests of students is an important responsibility of educational leaders.

Of particular relevance to supporting the best interests of students are the work of Starratt (1991) and Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011). Starratt (1991) proposes a multidimensional ethical framework that includes the ethics of justice, critique, and care. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) add an ethic of profession that results when the ethics of justice, critique, and care are merged. At the heart of the ethic of profession is consideration of the best interests of the student. The determination of the best interests of the student can involve applying the ethic of profession to three thoroughly contextualized best interest correlates; that is, rights, responsibility, and respect (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004).

Despite the attention paid to decision-making in the field of educational leadership, research investigating complex decision-making via the lens of a
multidimensional framework is thin. Only the work of Langlois (1997, 2004), Slavinsky (2006), and Vitton and Wasonga (2009) were located; however, Langlois’ (1997) work is in French and therefore inaccessible. The empirical work by Langlois “in different cultural and linguistic settings has allowed for the verification of Starratt’s multidimensional model” (Langlois, 2007, p. 249). As stated prior, the theoretical advances in professional ethics have not made it any easier for educational leaders to support the best interests of students (Colnerud, 2006). Although Colnerud (1997) suggests that the most effective way to investigate issues of professional ethics is by studying them in relation to the interactions agents have with those in their professional life, such an approach has not been located in the field of educational leadership. The present research aims to build on prior research (Colnerud, 1997, 2006; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2011) by interpreting ethical conflict through a multidimensional theoretical lens. Yet, before considering the multidimensional ethical framework, it is helpful to think ourselves into the position that gives rise to such a framework. Hamlyn (1987) advises that at its core, philosophy is concerned with problems, “even if only the problems of understanding something or other” (p. 12). Thus, consideration of the philosophical position in which the multidimensional ethical framework finds fulfillment as a means to resolve dilemmas and promote student best interests can help us to understand its application and relevance to practice.

**Modern vs. Postmodern Reasoning**

Modern reasoning does not fit contemporary approaches to decision-making for at least two reasons. First, as advocated by modern philosophical approaches, if people can
think themselves out of the existence of all ideas except thought (as did the
paradigmatically modern-thinker, Descartes), then what monitors reason and thought? It
would seem that on the modern view, self-interested reason serves the function of judge
and jury. Second, the enlightened view of reason holds that bodily experiences of
passion and affect get in the way of reason. It turns out that the opposite is true.

Demasio (1994) shows in Descartes’ Error: emotion, reason, and the human brain that
emotionless people cannot be rational. Cognitive science suggests that people cannot
puzzle out desirable ends without emotion.

The postmodern idea that values impact the decisions of educational leaders is in
line with the work of Bull and McCarthy (1995) who advocate for the expansion of the
fields of law and ethics beyond traditional perspectives. Langlois (2004) thus suggests:

In a post-modern context, which most would consider complex, it seems to us that
it is important to consider this new light which has been shed on ethics. This
perspective extends beyond the empirical and into the veiled psychological world
of mental processes where the very acts of management occur, distinguishing
between practices that are considered good from those which are considered bad,
according to the individual belonging to a community of practice. (p. 81)

In other words, the new light that has been shed on applied ethics signals a path
away from the tenants of pure reason and toward an acknowledgement that human factors
such as affect supplement reason to form a more complete picture of ethical functioning.
This new light originates in the phenomenology of thinkers such as Husserl and
Heidegger and in the pragmatism of others such as James.
Why is it that the capacity of emotion is so important to rational functioning?

One place to look for the answer to this question is in the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger. The systematic investigation and analysis of objects in consciousness is called phenomenology (Magee, 1987). An essential Husserlian insight that is relevant to our purpose is that phenomenological objects “includes not only material objects but a great many different sorts of abstract entity; not only our own thoughts, pains, emotions, memories and so on, but music, mathematics, and a host of other things” (p. 254). Similarly, Heidegger proposes an approach that considers concepts such as state of mind and the emotional life as legitimate focuses of philosophical inquiry. From this point of view, people are not the observing subjects or knowing beings that modern reason assumes us to be, but rather we are simultaneously both. Heidegger calls this contextualized and social account of being Dasein (Magee, 1987).

The pragmatism of James is also relevant to our discussion. One aspect of James’ pragmatism involves a cluster of terms including will, habit, and belief. Will is the desire for something and the origin of choice. Habit consolidates choices into behavior that allows people to achieve what they want. Beliefs result from habits and transform the will by providing a structure of meaning to what we do that allows us to do things unthinkingly. Therefore, will, habit, and belief can be reduced to a system of representation. From this perspective, many of the choices we make have already been made for us. In this way, systems of representation are real and act upon us whether we want them to or not (Parkinson, 1988). On the consequences of habits turning into
beliefs, James thinks that ideas become naturalized into our body, part of our nervous systems, and therefore part of our nature. Nervous systems are structured around habit and activity. New information usually leads to minor adjustments in one’s systems of representations, but in some circumstances a conversion experience can occur and a new system can replace the old system.

In developing a theoretical perspective in which affect serves to supplement cognition, Blasi (1983) offers that the “dividing line in the motivational field is not placed, here, between affect and cognition…” Blasi continues that while “there is […] a normative pull, both in action and in development, in the direction of cognitive objectivity” the process of arriving at moral decisions is far from “mechanically logical” (p. 195). On Blasi’s view, the self exercises a central and active role. The “significant developmental changes” that one’s moral identity undergoes is attributable to a self that “chooses and acts” (1983, p. 201).

The Multiple Ethical Paradigm

The multiple-ethical paradigm consists of four areas related to applied ethics in school administration: the ethic of justice, the ethic of critique, the ethic of care, and the ethic of profession. The literature, however, does not fit neatly into one or the other and they necessarily interpenetrate each other (Starratt, 1991). The overlaps that appear in the literature owe to a bit of irony. While scholars have argued in favor of one or the other position, the multiple ethical paradigm acknowledges that ethical leadership and decision-making in education is not an either, or endeavor. Alternatively, “in this paradoxical, unstable, and ethically polarized era” a multiple ethical paradigm approach
can assist educational leaders as they wrestle with the dilemmas they face (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 3). In their watershed work, *Reflection of the Knowledge Base in Law and Ethics for Educational Leaders*, Bull and McCarthy (1995) similarly call for the integration of “major intellectual domains, across the full range of administrative decisionmaking” (p. 613), and that leaders who attempt to maintain separate personal and public ethics are inviting ethical controversy.

The descriptions of the ethics of justice, critique, and care that follow are broad rather than specific and exhaustive. As such they fill out a conceptual framework rather than present a detailed history. The descriptions therefore do not include every notable scholar in each area. Also, in order to bring out some of the nuance and inherent contradictions within them, the descriptions are supplemented by some relevant empirical and scholarly work. In this way, the multidimensional framework provides a platform for the development of the ethic of profession, which involves a more comprehensive discussion.

**The Ethic of Justice**

The ethic of justice focuses on the laws and rules that govern society and on the accompanying rights of individuals. It may be broadly separated into two categories; that is, deontological ethics and consequentialist ethics. Justice reasoning is a source of the uniformity that is typically found in decision-making in schools.

Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1998) offer that a useful way to understand the deontological perspective is via the concept of equal respect. Because humans are capable of reason, the core of this perspective is the non-relativist belief that all people
are moral agents and therefore ought to be respected. Breaking rules that may jeopardize the rights of other moral agents, even if it serves a greater good, is not an option. An axiom that is a useful way to describe the deontological perspective is *people are ends in themselves.*

On the other hand, theorists such as Beauchamp and Childress (1994) advance a view that has its roots in utilitarianism. For those who align with this approach, rules are guides and depending on the probable outcome of a situation the rules may be violated. A useful way to describe the utilitarian perspective is via the principle of benefit maximization (Strike et al., 1998). The principle of benefit maximization is specified by its Millian call to each person to make decisions bearing the end of bringing the greatest amount of benefit to as many people as possible in mind. While consequentialist conventions acknowledge rules and laws, such conventions simultaneously acknowledge that there may be times when rules have to be broken in order to serve a vision of the greater good. In this way consequentialism finds society as the central figure. An axiom that is a useful way to describe this perspective is *ends justify means.*

**Deontological Ethics.** For the deontologist, individuals are central and respect of rights is most important. One place to look for the origin of deontological ethics is in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century work of Kant (Goldberg, 1995). In order to understand Kant's position it is helpful to briefly consider the work of Hume. Hume believed that a posteriori knowledge is all that one can hope to know. For example from Hume's point of view there is no way to know that the sun will rise tomorrow, because tomorrow lies in the future and we have not experienced tomorrow yet. Ideas have to be verifiable. Thus, Hume shows that while
reason is capable of identifying desirable ends, reason is not capable of compelling people toward them. This, he believed, is due to reason's inability to infer ought from is. In other words, the rational desirability of an end has to be verified if the end is to have the power to compel an agent to act toward it. The desirability of a moral end falls short on this account due to its metaphysical nature. While reason can prove the existence of a desirable moral end, happiness for example, it is not capable of moving an agent to the belief that they ought to pursue it. On Hume's account just because happiness exists doesn't necessarily mean that it ought to exist.

Like Hume, Kant believed that experience and human nature can present desirable ends to be pursued, and that reason was particularly adept at determining the appropriate means to achieve such ends. But unlike Hume, Kant believed that human nature consists of more than one part. Kant was Christian and Hume’s idea of the self being only a cluster of experiences or impressions devoid of a metaphysical perspective puzzled Kant.

The practical part of human nature, according to Kant, changes over time due to sensuous experience while the rational part of human nature does not change. If Hume is correct in assuming that moral action is rational action, then for the same reason that Hume believes that action based on rationalism is beyond the reach of human beings, Kant believes it is within our reach. In other words, if humans are rational then moral action has to apply to all beings because of it. Therefore, beings on Kant’s view can be ends in themselves.

Integral to an understanding Kant’s categorical imperative is an understanding of the terms maxim, law, and will. A maxim is a practical rule that is determined via reason
and on which one acts. A law, on the other hand, is an a priori objective principle that is relevant to all rational beings and on which one ought to act. A will is informed by reason and supplies volition. Thus the categorical imperative, “Act only on the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” (quoted in Goldberg, 1995, p. 107), is reasoned practical volition that is in itself in line with reasoned law. The Golden Rule can be considered such a maxim, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In this way, the imperative has the power to deduce ought from is and thus compel beings toward moral ends. As the product of pure reason, good conduct has intrinsic moral value in itself. The Golden Rule is clearly based in the ethic of justice. What we have a right to expect from others is the same as what they have a right to expect from us.

Typically deontological guidelines can present in the form of codes of ethics. Pertinent to decision-making, the duty orientation of deontological ethics can create constraints that trump other ethical considerations. For example, an administrator’s duty to report suspected abuse may put a child in additional danger. A narrow focus on rights and duties can push one to make decisions that lead away from rather than closer to the moral core of the education profession (Hanson, 1998). Such a focus, while supporting the ethical principle of neutrality can also support the abdication of personal responsibility for others (Marshall, 1995). Because deontological ethics determines not only the kinds of rules we ought to follow, but also supplies the volition to pursue such ends, it is critical that codes and legislation be rationally vetted for warrant. Because
difficult decisions are often characterized by divided loyalties, an understanding of the deontological framework is pertinent to decision-making (Dempster & Berry, 2003).

**Consequentialist Ethics.** Another point of view that is encompassed in the ethic of justice is consequentialism. Consequentialist scholars believe that society is the central figure rather than the individual. One can locate the voice of consequentialism in Mill’s utilitarianism (Goldberg, 1995). Utilitarian ethics is based upon the principle of greatest happiness. Millianism interprets questions about why to maximize happiness as in terms of what makes happiness desirable. The greatest happiness principle grew from the work of Mill’s mentor, Bentham, and addresses an inherent deficit in Kant’s categorical imperative. According to Mill, the maxims which supply the volition toward universal law, contain no inherent constraints on action that would prevent rational beings from adopting immoral laws. In other words, reason serves as judge and jury. Regardless of which values or maxims prevail, a person can always follow an alternative course of action but for the undesirability of the consequences.

Utilitarianism assumes *a priori* that each person knows best the sort of life they wish to pursue and are left alone to pursue it so long as they do not cause harm to others. Millianism supports experiments of living which assumes that trying out different solutions to predicaments enables society to flourish. People are free to do what they please in pursuing happiness even if it offends others since civilized societies typically contain a measure of diversity. Thus, Mill’s greatest happiness principle logically derives from a form of self-interest where each person pursues his or her own happiness which then constitutes a desirable summation of happiness. This is how happiness becomes an
end in itself, and those things that a person pursues intermediate to this end, freedom for example, are means to the end of happiness.

Although Mill's utilitarianism privileges liberty and experiments of living, in some circumstances it is justified to set limits on means. Paternalism is the belief that one may know what is in the best interests of another. Although paternalism can be thought to curtail the pursuit of happiness, Mill considers paternalism justified in cases pertaining to those who do not have the capacity to make responsible decisions for themselves; for instance, the uncivilized and children. In the context of educational decision-making in the best interests of the student, paternalism can be justified on utilitarian grounds. While Mill believed that paternalism was justified in certain situations, the role of the school in making decisions in the best interests of the student may conflict with the teachings of parents. What is one culture’s happiness may not be another culture’s happiness.

While Mill suggests that happiness is desirable as an end in itself, he also suggests that unthinking conformity can lead to stagnation and a stunting of human potential. This raises questions about why the uniform pursuit of happiness does not constitute social conformity. In answering this challenge, Mill's utilitarianism has two levels. First, principles of happiness are developed over the course of time. As such, ends can be derived from experience on utilitarian grounds; that is, those courses of action that tend to maximize happiness for the greatest number can be distinguished from other courses of action. The second level has to do with the application of the principles to specific cases. Applying the principles of happiness to cases can reveal problems. To illustrate,
consider the issue of student rights and school safety. Let us say that an educator viewed an irregular bulge in a child’s book bag. The educator reports this to a school leader who summons the student. Once a suspicion is validated, institutional norms can call for the student’s person and property to be searched. This circumstance appears to be justified on strict utilitarian grounds as the humiliation that the child will endure is far outweighed by the positive feelings enjoyed by the majority whose appetite for safety is satisfied. From this example can be drawn the concept of rule utilitarianism. Rule utilitarianism produces self-evident rules of thumb that serve as bulwarks against majority desires. Using the example of search and seizure, rule utilitarianism makes the humiliation of an innocent person unacceptable even when weighed against the desires of the majority.

In addition to having two levels, Mill’s utilitarianism has two forms. Higher forms of happiness are more nuanced and fit more appropriately to the human condition. Mill defined higher forms as having a cognitive core as contrasted with the lower forms that were physical. For example, Mill suggests that it is better to be a dissatisfied human than a fully satisfied pig. Unlike lower animal forms, utilitarianism assumes humans will direct towards higher forms of intellectual pleasure over the lower physical ones.

In the context of educational leadership, the consequentialist perspective is aimed toward outcomes. In terms of making decisions, the justificatory process has to do with choosing the option that renders the best consequences among the options available. Given that many decisions are complex and not clearly specified, educational leaders
have to contend with unintended consequences of what may arise years later (Dempster & Berry, 2003).

Although deontological and consequentialist conceptions of justice have different starting points; they share the same focus on working toward ends that are just and equitable. To illustrate, consider the example of a teacher bearing witness to a colleague who values order rather than compassion and care. From the consequentialist perspective, if the means of maintaining order is somehow deemed to support the greater good of conformity to collective norms and the promotion of happiness, then the consequentialist teacher bearing witness to such conduct has only one choice; that is, do nothing. Although some children may receive questionable treatment, supporting the end of the greater good is inviolate. The point here is to show that the *a priori* aim of bringing the greatest benefit to the most people (ends) informs the decision making process (means). On the other hand, as moral agents and viewing others as such, deontologists act out of a motivation of duty borne from reciprocal rights-based relationships. Issuing from socially constructed ideals that specify the actions we ought to take, the choice of whether or not to confront or blow the whistle on a colleague places the deontologist in a situation that presents a divided loyalty where the right thing to do is not clearly specified. Standards of justice may not in themselves contain the ethical clarity necessary to deal with the dilemmas inherent in practice. In such cases, it can be useful to supplement the justice reasoning with a supply of critique.
The Ethic of Critique

Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kliner (2000) relate that the creative process is a powerful driver of innovation. Integral to the creative process is tension; that is, wherever there is tension can also be found an intention toward resolution. Thus, the ethic of critique highlights and relaxes the embedded tensions in the ethic of justice. To illustrate these tensions, briefly consider the example of a legal opinion arising in the context of schooling that sets individual rights against the common good; such as, the codification of school bussing. Bussing creates a tension within the ethic of justice because the individual’s right to be locally educated is set against the common good of integrated communities and equal educational opportunity.

Another example that reveals the tension in the ethic of justice is zero-tolerance policies. Zero-tolerance policies are standards of student conduct that when breached are often followed by prescribed and typically severe consequences. The results of research into zero-tolerance raise questions pertinent to the logic of such policies. For example, Skiba and Peterson (1999) offer that schools employing zero-tolerance policies may be no safer than schools without such policies. Keleher (2000) finds that there are significant racial disparities in the application of zero-tolerance policies and that such policies are more likely to exist in districts represented by a predominately minority student population. Further, Keleher (2000) found that in addition to straining the principle of due process, zero-tolerance policies could inhibit the expression of reasonable professional judgment for school educators and administrators. Students require consequences to be sure, but the consequences have to be appropriate. Among other
things, appropriateness can involve specification related to the context of the situation, to the disciplinary and academic history of the student, to the age of the student, as well as to cultural considerations. Zero-tolerance policies are another example of how individual rights can be set against the common good of safe schools.

The discussion of the common good in the context of education echoes of the prior consideration of means and ends. Critical pedagogy espouses a belief that ignorance is a necessary ingredient in the recipe of despair (Freire, 1970). For instance, considering the examples of zero-tolerance and school bussing offered before, Freireian critique calls on people to not only perceive injustice but also to take action against it. Connecting this pedagogy to school settings and individual classrooms, Giroux (1991) similarly encourages educators to perceive their work as oriented toward the end of expanding social justice and eliminating exploitation and suffering. Contemporary critical pedagogues echo the work of Freire (1970) and Giroux (1991), ensuring that empowering social discourse remains a relevant area of research in the field of educational leadership (Kress, 2011). For example, some current themes in the literature related to critical pedagogy include social justice (Brent, 2010; McArthur, 2010), self-authorship (Meszeros, 2007; Pizzolato, 2007; Wildman, 2007); and curricular approaches (Jarrett & Stenhouse, 2011; Lewis, 2011).

In cases where justice concerns present divided loyalties, how do ethical school leaders deal with them? To satisfy this question, it is useful to differentiate two kinds of critical ethics.
Critical Theory. As its commonly accepted starting point, critical theory challenges the underlying assumptions of current practice particularly as they relate to gender, social class and racial inequities; thereby specifying beneficence albeit as an intermediate outcome. Bearing this in mind, a comparison can be drawn between critical theory and “foundational principlism” (Rest et al., 1999, p. 23). As rules or guidelines from which practical guidance can be derived, critical theory works top-down via the use of deductive logic. In this way, the ethic of critique enables non-critical consequentialism and Kantianism to take on the nuance necessary to fit the complexity of practice.

If moral purposes are specified as a call for justice and equity, then it is possible that the rules themselves may favor some over others and therefore be biased (Rest et al., 1999). When rigid and absolute laws or policies such as bussing or zero-tolerance create inequity, become insensitive to individual rights and special circumstances, or particularly when such laws or policies systematically discriminate against entire groups of people, critical theorists ask probing questions about the assumptions that underpin such guidelines. Approaching the ethics of educational leadership from the starting point of critique thus can use political language (Purpel, 1989) to advance a social aim. As its starting point, critique assumes injustice \textit{a priori} and at the same time aims toward a desired end state toward which one is ethically compelled to work. By pushing conceptions of educational leadership into the domain of potentially controversial social action, educational leaders can find the traction that enables them to get things done.
By moving us to rethink the fundamental purposes of our education system including democracy and social justice, Shapiro and Gross (2008) relate that critique also encourages us to puzzle out new conceptions of a host of other foundational ideals integral to ethical decision-making. For instance, pursuant to a democratic ethos of schooling that promotes equity for all children, Sherman and Grogan (2003) combine ethical and critical theory to evaluate school leaders’ responses to gaps in student achievement between minority and majority student groups. Such gaps have been made increasingly relevant by the current movement toward universal standards and call on leaders’ to take action. Taking steps to narrow and close gaps in achievement has become a moral leadership imperative.

Democracy and moral reasoning correspond (Passini, 2010; Sharf, 1977). That is, the democratic ethos to which Sherman and Grogan (2003) refer can locate a psychology in moral theory. Moral theory can “explain and empirically document the educational [features] of democratic experience” (Scharf, 1977, p. 91). One feature of democratic experience can be specified as collective role-taking. Collective role-taking “[is] critical to the development of mature social thought” and can be described as the ability “to assume the moral perspective of the group’s authority” (p. 93). Perspective-taking is pertinent to the ability of leaders to mitigate between competing mandates to render decisions that are in the best interests of students.

Bearing in mind the important concepts of means and ends brought out by the ethic of justice, critical theory can reveal a dark side in the literature; that is, means and ends gone astray (Buskey & Pitts, 2009; Samier, 2008). Samier (2008) assumes that the
heart of passive evil is organizational conditions that either inhibit moral agency or make inaction legitimate. For example, one specification of these conditions is a rational organizational mindset that masks evil treatment of others behind technique and technology. Weber (quoted in Samier, 2008) attributes this condition to “the dominance of legal-rational values that suppress other sources of value such as affect, tradition, and high order belief systems” (p. 4). In such an organizational setting, it becomes increasingly difficult to respect others as ends in themselves. “Through language manipulation and moral inversion, administrators can practice evil unintentionally and even unconsciously, making their behavior potentially more dangerous than those knowingly doing so” (Samier, 2008, p. 5). Moral inversion occurs when evil is redefined and accepted as something good. Once woven into policies evil can become masked and not easy to find. To offset the effects of moral inversion, critical self-awareness and governance is necessary in order for administrators to remain cognizant of their moral sensibilities. The root of evil in educational organizations may be found in “those who are morally under developed, in effect walking through the world morally unconscious” (p. 5). To advance development, Samier (2008) advocates against “external controls” and for “internalisation in professional practice” (p. 16). Such internalization in practice occurs through a process of synthesizing various individual, organizational, and administrative characteristics to construct an ethic in administration. By extension, the process ought to address the core problem of passive evil in educational organizations by “cultivating moral self-governance that requires a different and higher standard of morality…” (p. 18).
Similar to Samier’s argument equating passive evil to doing nothing, Buskey and Pitts (2009) acknowledge the range of ethical issues that arise in schools and in the behavior of the professionals that work in them and suggest that the way to prepare professionals for the challenges of educational leadership in the amoral contexts in which they are likely to find themselves is to move beyond non-malfeasance and toward beneficence. These authors note that many who graduate from educational leadership programs do not immediately enter positions that have embedded change mandates or authority. Rather, most exit programs and fill roles as head teachers and/or assistant principals. On these authors’ view, the goal of leadership preparation ought to be to arm completers with the tools of non-violent protest such as strategies for passive and active resistance applicable to amoral school settings. They suggest that when faced with ethical issues school leaders need more “nuanced options” than “deny or comply”, “fight or flight”, and “argue or obey” (p. 59). To gain a contextual handle on the options available to them, Buskey and Pitts (2009) suggest a critical approach to decision-making.

By assuming that the metaphors and narratives on which cadres of administrators were brought up are not well suited to the promotion of social justice, Kempner (1989) invokes critical race and gender theory to argue for a change in recruitment practices. He concludes that in lieu of current thinking that focuses on credentials; administrators might be selected based on their critical awareness of democratic principles including social justice and compassion for the schools. His argument that the field make a focused effort to recruit women and minorities in to the ranks and then train them in the philosophical
and ethical principles of administration is echoed by Shapiro and Gross (2008) who suggest that “critical theorists are often concerned with hearing the voices of those who are silenced…” (p. 24).

In a different voice, the literature also presents evidence of critical theory being evoked in professional preparation at a Catholic university. Everson and Bussey (2007) argue that ethical preparation “must focus on social justice” (p. 178) and assess candidates “as ethical leaders” (p. 184). To this end, the university is designing a quantitative instrument to assess students’ learning related to social justice. While noble, this approach runs the risk of reducing social justice to something that can be easily measured.

**Critique that Uses the Language of Ethics.** While the application of critical theory is a valid strategy for highlighting and attacking injustice, it is not the only way to conceptualize the ethic of critique. Another legitimate brand of critique thus focuses analysis toward issues as they arise in context. Using particular situations as the starting point, this brand of critique invokes inductive logic to derive practical guidance from specific cases.

When leaders make decisions that have no grounding in law or policy they are challenged to do so based on context (Vitton & Wasonga, 2009). In this instance, critique applies the language of ethics to summon “the virtue of justice and the compatible moral principles of fairness and equality…” (Campbell, 2008, p. 373). This orientation is toward ethical educational leadership and decision-making in context as it is invoked in the school setting. As an inductive process that works bottom-up, this
brand of critique can lead to the development of a critical consensus among professionals that is similar to the process that develops common law.

Heslep (1997) considers the practical value of philosophical thought to the ethical dimension of educational leadership. He offers that the practice of relying on philosophy-free professional common sense in lieu of consideration of philosophical traditions and principles can be flawed and limited. Heslep (1997) moves from a normative picture of philosophical thought to a practical one by demonstrating that routine decision-making that lacks philosophical mindedness can become inattentive to the rights of others. Such ethical decisions can be compared to Marshall’s (1992) description of “seat-of-the-pants ethics” that “does not work” because leaders are “unable to make decisions with any sense of professional guidance or support” (p. 383). Heslep (1997) defines philosophical mindedness as “comprehensive, inquisitive, probing, reflective, and critical” and “highly relevant for the judgments in which practitioners of educational leadership have to engage” (p. 4).

Thus far, this review suggests a corresponding relationship between the ethic of justice and the ethic of critique. Because the ethic of justice alone may not contain a supply of ethical clarity sufficient to the task of dealing with situated practice, critique can be used as a supplement. While the two brands of critique outlined have different starting points, they share the same focus on working toward ends that are just. From the perspective of the critical theorists, beneficence is an important end toward which one is compelled to work, but beneficence is intermediate to the a priori aim of social justice. When unjust or inequitable situations arise, critical theorists ask important questions to
reveal and highlight their origin. Therefore, critical theorists work top-down from the macromoral to make concepts such as justice and equity manifest. Conventions then follow from the ideal to prevent the same or similar situations from arising in context in the future. This way critical theory uses deductive logic to develop conventional guidance.

Conversely, those who apply the language of ethics to situations as they are contextually situated are concerned with micromoral concepts and through the use of a particular situation as the starting point, their ethical duty is aimed toward finding just and equitable solutions to situations in context. In other words, analysis of the symptoms informs conventions that support ideal ends. From a contextual starting point, work is done bottom-up. Applying ethical language in context uses inductive logic to develop conventional guidance from specific cases.

From these points of view, critique is generative and developmental. For instance, Bull and McCarthy (1995) suggest that law and ethics can serve more than boundary setting functions. Because “legal and ethical considerations permeate all aspects of schooling”, in order to improve practice it is imperative that administrators develop “habits of criticism” as they apply law and ethics to the problems they face (p. 629). In other words, the counter intuitive approach of blending critical awareness and imagination with law and ethics can enable administrators to make the most of opportunities for improvement in decision-making as such opportunities present themselves (Bull & McCarthy, 1995).
Ethic of Care

Similar to the way that critique supplements justice reasoning, the ethic of care interpenetrates the ethic of critique. Rather than pursuing macro-social aims, the ethic of care features a micromoral orientation aimed toward the nurturance of relationships. Conceptions of uniformity that are typically assumed to be the foundation of decision-making in schools can ignore the ethical diversity that exists in them. In this context, it is possible for decisions to be made at the expense of the child’s best interests. According to Colnerud (1997), ethical ambiguity can appear sharply in three domains: “concerning the status of caring, in relation to the imperative of collegial loyalty, and in the problem of pupils’ self-determination” (p. 633). With regard to caring, she advises, “caring has an uncertain status in competition with other values or norms”. “Although [educators] are concerned about the pupils’ well-being, they hesitate to confront parents or colleagues to protect pupils from ill-treatment…” She goes on to relate that:

The passivity [educators] demonstrate, despite their wish to defend the pupils, reveals an ambiguity concerning the pupils’ right to be spared reprehensible treatment in school. The abandonment of caring ought not be seen as a considered choice, it is more of an unwanted consequence of the unconscious conformity to unreflected traditions. (p. 634)

The ethic of care grew out of feminist scholarship and unlike the ethic of justice that locates law and order at its core; the ethic of care considers caring as foundational to ethical decision-making. For example, the caring administrator is a model of leadership that is in line with the aim of “find[ing] meaning through education” (Marshall, 1995, p.
Intending toward the aim of capturing the inferred and expressed needs of the cared for (Noddings, 2008), decision-making by the caring administrator is thoroughly contextualized thereby “affirming and encouraging the best in others” (Noddings, 1992, p. 25, quoted in Marshall, 1995, p. 450).

The Relation of Justice and Care. A problem in educational research since the 1980s has been the relationship between the ethics of justice and care. While the ethic of justice is based on rules and duties, Noddings (1992, 2003, 2008) and Gilligan (1982) make it clear that the ethic of care places caring at the core of ethical decision-making. Although commonly assumed, the ethic of care does not always trump the ethic of justice. For example, if the aim of education is to be toward developing capacities of care, would males not suffer?

There is work highlighting the correspondences between justice and care (Katz, Noddings & Strike, 1999). According to Colnerud (2006), justice and care “complement each other and, furthermore, often lead to the same moral standpoints” (p. 368). To explain, it is worth returning to the ethical perspective of the deontologist (people are ends in themselves). When applying an ethic of care to the school setting, why is it not reasonable to think that an individual student’s best interests cannot be supported without simultaneously surrendering to potential injustices that may be inflicted on a group? From this point of view “the individual child’s welfare can compete with collective interests” (Colnerud, 2006, p. 368). Accounting for the correspondences between justice and care, multiple ethical paradigm theorists cast a broad net whereby the nuanced aspects of practice can be captured.
There is also evidence from the international literature that suggests that a focus toward justice at the expense of care can compromise student best interests. For instance, Langlois & Lapointe (2007) demonstrate that in Canadian provinces goal displacement can set the ethic of justice against the ethic of care. Goal displacement occurs when the means to reach some end become more important than the end itself. Some educational leaders in Canadian provinces have interpreted the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms as a protection of the official French language at the expense of care for the children in linguistic minority schools. For example, some schools only communicate with homes in French, even if the parents do not speak that language. Further, some schools may adopt rules that restrict student communication to French while at school. Although the true mandate of the Charter grants official language minorities the right to education in their native language, these situations represent a type of goal displacement where school leaders make believe that the intent of the mandate is language protection. The adoption of a biased interpretation of justice causes these principals suspend their ethical responsibility to care. In other words, “language protection [takes] precedence over the protection of pupils’ rights” (p. 257). Further, Langlois and Lapointe (2007) found that principals that practice goal displacement were inexperienced. Less than five years experience as principal can lead one to ground practice in the ethic of justice while increasing experience enables principals to “gradually integrate the three ethics” (p. 256).

**Virtue Carers and Relational Carers.** Differentiating between virtue carers and relational carers, Noddings (2008) makes some relevant distinctions that are embedded within the ethics of care. Briefly, virtue carers believe that they know what is in the best
interest of the cared for and often make decisions based on the inferred needs rather than on the expressed needs of the cared for. Relational carers, on the other hand, fully account for the perspective of the cared for. This accounting includes interaction that captures expressed needs. Relational caring is therefore contextual in nature rather than abstract or inferred and can be characterized by a reciprocal relationship between the carer and the cared for. Without effort from both parties, a caring relation does not happen. Not only is the relational carer engrossed, motivationally displaced, and prone to action (Noddings, 2008) but the cared for has to also signal that the effort of the carer has been received.

The ethic of care can apply critical theory to reveal the voice of injustice as it relates to the ethic itself (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Catherine Marshall (1992) specifies the type of administrator that may be disposed to cultivate effective interpersonal relationships as well as demonstrate fairness. She argues that enduring ethical questions persist because many educational leaders avoid controversy. By hypothesizing that central to this avoidance tendency are practices of risk aversion associated with the norms of Caucasian male administrators, Marshall (1992) relates that when faced with a double mandate, these administrators support institutional norms at the expense of individual students’ needs.

Recalling Colnerud (1994), when institutional norms clash with ethical norms, conservative administrators choose to maintain the former. These administrators may be described as being neither ethical nor unethical, but rather morally mute (Samier, 2008). Accordingly, via purposive sampling of female and minority leaders and analysis of the
dilemmas they faced, Marshall (1992) suggests that supporting atypical leaders may present opportunities to create more humane, fair, and equitable schools and thus overcome the enduring ethical questions that point to educational leadership as a potential catalyst of malfeasance toward students. Similarly, “school districts that seek principals who are likely to use post-conventional thinking would be scouting for a younger, moderately liberal, highly educated female” (Vitton & Wasonga, 2009, p. 113). While Marshall’s (1992) atypicals faced dilemmas that were principally related to structures beyond their control, “the volunteered statements of these administrators show a pattern of caring, sharing, high empathy for teachers’ fairness, and healthy respect for parents, the strongest value that emerged is concern for the individual student” (p. 381).

**Ethic of Profession**

Pertinent to the educational leader’s decision-making role is “consideration of those moral aspects unique to the profession and the questions that arise as educational leaders become more aware of their own personal and professional codes of ethics” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 18). Therefore, the ethic of profession is “grounded [in] the moral dimension for the preparation of school administrators” (Greenfield, 1993, p. 285, quoted in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 25). Such a moral dimension targets the end of social justice. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) suggest that by combining the ethics of justice, critique, and care into an ethic of profession, educational leaders can be equipped with a tool of ethical decision-making that can help them to “leave behind any simplistic notions of right and wrong or good and bad” en route to dealing with the complexity of the post-modern world (p. 184). As such, ethic of profession is in line with
education for social justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Accordingly, leadership for social justice remains an active area of research in the field of educational leadership (Arredondo, 2008; Brundrett & de Cuevas, 2007, 2008; Bruner, 2008; Garza, 2008; Theoharis, 2008).

**Personal Codes of Ethics.** Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) suggest that in order to deepen understanding of the underpinnings of personal ethical beliefs, leaders should “write out personal and professional ethical codes and compare and contrast their two codes” in order to “determine where inconsistencies exits between the codes and where clashes of codes might appear” (p. 7). The logic is that self-examination will result in “difficult dialogue” that can assist “in making our once hidden ethical codes explicit” (p. 180).

Sockett (2006) makes some relevant points in terms of unearthing personal ethics. He believes that the process issues from the Aristotelian concept of “eudaimonia” (p. 12 [italics in original]). Being a human being entails taking responsibility for the kind of person one becomes. Unearthing personal ethics is self-fulfilling conduct inasmuch as self-examination is a means to the end of self-discovery. What is important here is the idea that the starting point for the development of professional ethics is the individual rather than normative ideals. Sockett’s perspective is based on the work of an American philosopher (Norton, 1991). Norton’s point of view as an ethical individualist is specified by the belief that people’s life task is to discover and actualize their innate potential. Such individual actualization leads to the discovery of virtuous traits that enable them to contribute meaningfully to others.
Similarly, Starratt (2004) proffers a view of authenticity and advises that administrators “bring themselves, including their deepest convictions, beliefs, and values, to their work” (p. 65). In addition to being barely discernible, Starratt (2004) goes on to suggest that authenticity is difficult to articulate because “it is so foundational, so close to the bedrock of moral motivation that it is rarely analyzed in its essential elements” (p. 66). Pertinent to Starratt’s analysis of authenticity is the work of a Canadian philosopher (Taylor, 1991). Taylor’s work addresses some problems of modernity, namely radical individualism. Rather than surrendering to the idea that individualism rejects most moral laws and thus generally diminishes the meaningfulness of life, Taylor redefines the issue by embracing individualism’s corollary, self-actualization.

Pertinent to both of these accounts of personal ethics is the concept of personal mastery made relevant by Senge (1990). Both Sockett (2006) and Starratt (2004) envision personal ethics as the simultaneous process of unearthing individual aspiration and awareness. To imagine is to intend toward something generally considered to be external, while the concept of the self typically points toward something internal. As a result, curiosity leads one to imagine, which informs self-awareness and development. This dual awareness of the external and internal creates a tension that by its nature seeks resolution through development.

**Professional Codes of Ethics.** The assumption that professional ethics falls under the normative umbrella of justice is appealing. Adopting this assumption is appealing because many professions such as law, medicine, and business have adopted codes of ethics that serve as guides or rules to be followed to advance professional practice. These
normative codes typically outline high ideals toward which professionals ought to strive. Such codes of ethics can be normative or descriptive (Colnerud, 1997). Normative codes outline how things ought to be and descriptive codes outline how they are. The abstract nature of normative codes can limit their value in practice (Langlois, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Campbell (2001) “illustrates the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of applying ethical standards to actual situations in any professionally and ethically satisfying way” (p. 395). As related in a prior section, deriving ethical guidance deductively is only one of perhaps many approaches. A more profound rendering of professional ethics may result through the blending of normative and descriptive ethical approaches. Working from this point of view, Campbell (2001) supplements empirical evidence with “first person narrative responses to the evidence” to offer that while professionals cannot recite relevant ethical codes, “most of us live lives in which we rarely have to stop to think how not to break the law” (p. 395). Her point here is to show that the moral core of the education profession reflects deeply embedded personal and public principles that ought to make codes of ethics independently irrelevant. Campbell (2001) goes on to suggest that “Professional ethics cannot be imposed, for by their nature they must be internalized to become part of the collective consciousness and the individual conscience” (p. 396). Her argument brings out a point of view in which normative and descriptive aspects reside in interdependence with each other. This point of view signals toward the work of Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) in the area of professional ethics in education and away from the professional ethics of other fields.
such as law and medicine. Thus, it is helpful to differentiate the education profession from others.

**The Education Profession**

In his parallel research on the manner and methods of teachers, Fenstermacher (1990) points out that there are some characteristics of the profession of education that make it distinct, as well as a correspondence between the profession and others. The distinctions have to do with aspects of the relationship between the professional and the client, for instance:

1. Other professions are not aimed toward closing gaps in knowledge as the profession of education is;

2. Other professions do not espouse the widely held opinion that close and appropriate relationships are essential to effective professional conduct; and,

3. Other professions do not describe an effective professional-client relationship in terms of reciprocity of effort.

These distinctions suggest that the profession of education is characterized by measures of contextualization that set it apart from others. Bearing this in mind there is also a correspondence between the education profession and others. The correspondence has to do with the unequal distribution of power between the professional and the client. To this end, Colnerud (1991) relates, “the most serious lack of explicit professional ethics is perhaps when [educators] aren’t aware of the relation between clients’ interests and colleagues” (p. 9). Colnerud (1997) also describes the education profession as maximally contextualized and minimally balanced in terms of power. Accordingly, the
The cornerstone of professional ethics in education is professional decision-making that explicitly places the best interests of students at its core (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011).

The Connection of Theory to Practice in Education

Shulman (1998) makes some relevant observations regarding professional preparation for the centripetal aim of student best interests. Shulman revisits Dewey’s thoughts on professional preparation and his focus on the relation of theory and practice. For the fully developed professional, knowledge and application interact in a fashion that enables the blending of “technical skills and theoretical knowledge in a matrix of moral understanding” (p. 516). Integral to this developmental process is the resolution of the tension that exists between theory and practice as “Clearly the two perspectives are not exclusive and will interact” (p. 512). Theory and practice interact as knowledge rocks back and forth between them. Practice can generate consequential propositions that supply a novel platform that can supplement theory. On this view, theory and practice are points in a process of continual change that is based on a sequence of refinements. Knowledge is provisional because it has to be continuously refined through an ebb and flow between theory and practice.

Rest et al. (1999) outlines a critique of the limits of theoretical abstraction in regard to professional judgment offered by Strike (1982). Strike (1982) calls for a more contextualized approach to professional judgment that can “inform the daily activities of the practicing [educator]”, namely training in intermediate concepts (quoted in Rest et al., 1999, p. 11). From this perspective, Strike’s position is in line with an approach to ethical decision-making that acknowledges the value of situated professional knowledge.
Shulman (1998) thus observes that a fully developed professional educator is able to confront “highly situated problems that draw together theory and practice in the moral sea of decisions to be made, actions to be taken. Options are rarely clean; judgments must be rendered” (p. 525).

Personal and professional codes of ethics can be summarized as follows.

Pertinent to the education profession are high concentrations of moral meaning and unequal relations of power (Fenstermacher, 1990; Shulman, 1998). Therefore, professional ethics for education has to stipulate the professional-client relationship (Colnerud, 1991). This relationship can be specified by a centripetal aim toward student best interest (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Decisions made in this context have to be grounded in appropriate ethical constructs such as justice, critique, and care (Starratt, 1991). Ideally, leaders’ decisions are informed via dialogical interaction with these ethical positions (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). In a moral context, such dialogical interaction “provide[s] a prism of justice, responsibility, and virtue through which [educators] reflect on their actions” (Shulman, p. 516).

**Combining Personal and Professional Ethics**

In order to think about how personal and professional ethics are combined it is worth returning to Taylor (1991). Recall that he espoused a dialogical process of self-actualization. The dialogical process threads concepts of aspiration and awareness together in a manner that renders an understanding of the social domain. The goal of such dialogue is to open new space where people can become increasingly aware of the relationship between their context and their experience. In this way, dialogue is social
rather than individual. Similarly, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) relate their “quest for dialogue and knowledge of ‘self’ in relation to others” (p. 180).

Relevant to the ethic of profession, dialogical interaction involves the mind’s ability to imagine external positions (i.e., justice, critique, care) in an internal dialogue. This is how aggregate concepts are introduced to the particular; and, conversely the particular is diffused to the aggregate. Bearing this in mind, consider that professional communities function as a type of society of mind. After being introduced by individuals and vetted for warrant, communal knowledge can flow back toward situated practice (Shulman, 1998). This dialogical ebb and flow of knowledge from the particular to the aggregate and back again instantiates the ethic of profession. The capacity for membership in a professional community requires one to possess the ability to “assume the moral perspective of the group’s authority”. Such collective reasoning is “critical to mature social thought” (Scharf, 1977, p. 93).

One challenge to this imaginative conception of ethics was located in the literature. Responding to Bull and McCarthy (1995), Strike (1995) challenges that if “the knowledge base for administrators should be structured and represented as a dynamic product of human effort to which anyone with sufficient imagination and intelligence can contribute” (p. 628), then the “very product of an authoritative knowledge base for educational administration is suspect” (p. 639). A literal interpretation of Strike’s comments can lead one to conclude that his view is strictly non-relativist; that is, he seems to advocate from the perspective that dialogue runs the risk of becoming unreflective personal preference or mindless conformity to professional norms.
Strike has a point, as coarse grained and unreflective talk clearly introduces a significant amount of relativity.

But, do Bull and McCarthy (1995) suggest such a coarse grained approach? Rather, the assumption made here is that Bull and McCarthy intend specification toward dialogue that can take place via the spoken or written word (Senge, 1990) and dialogical interaction that is reflective and critical (Taylor, 1991). A further specification of this dialogue is vetting for warrant by members of the community (Shulman, 1998). Such an intentioned and reflective process can evoke an attitude that encourages collective inquiry. Such collective inquiry can account for an expanding rather than restrictive legal and ethical domain. In this way, “these traditions [become] a resource for, not a constraint upon, effective administrative action” (Bull & McCarthy, 1995, p. 613).

To account for this expanding professional domain, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) suggest a reflective practice whereby personal and professional ethics are compared and contrasted in an ongoing manner. Sources for personal ethics can come from “life stories and critical incidents” and sources of professional ethics can come from one’s “consideration of their personal codes” as well as from “experiences of their working lives” (p. 23). Campbell (2001) relates that the application of a unified ethical perspective to the moral complexity of the education profession reinforces a sense of collective moral purpose. “Common support for ethical principles despite possibly differing ideological interpretations of the principles, should signify the potential for dialogue and agreement…” (p. 408). Langlois (2004) found that such reflection on personal and professional ethics may increase one’s theoretical understanding, yet when
confronted with difficult issues in practice subjects tend to draw “upon their personal ethics rather than externally imposed ethics to find values which are closer to their contemporary reality” (p. 89). Thus, an important area of inquiry relevant to the ethic of profession is exploration of that which enables leaders to expand their concept of person (Passini, 2010).

**Best Interests of the Student**

Interestingly, in spite of its use in the literature until recently the best interests of the student lacked a conceptual model of itself (Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004). In order to access the meaning of best interests it is useful to bracket the terms and deal with them individually. Best infers a relative quality in itself related to the ultimate extent of some measure, in this case interests. Interests have to do with a state of being involved with or linked to. The question thus becomes, to what ends are educational leaders to direct themselves to the ultimate extent on behalf of students? A thorough examination of the third edition of Shapiro and Stefkovich’s (2011) book pays only scant attention to this question and then only in a cursory way. It turns out that at the time the first edition of the book was published the construct had not been worked out. Hence Stefkovich and O’Brien (2004) offer:

In their book, *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education*, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) propose a framework for responding to ethical dilemmas. Ethical paradigms based on models of justice, caring, and critique are merged into a fourth paradigm, that of the profession. At the center of this conceptualization is the “best interests of the student.” Educators have often used this concept to
justify important moral and ethical decisions; therefore it seems apt that this concept would lie at the heart of a professional paradigm. Yet research reveals this term is used broadly, interpreted in multiple ways, and few attempts have been made to define it rigorously. (p. 198-199)

Recall that Bull and McCarthy’s (1995) watershed thesis that law and ethics serve more than a boundary setting function for the educational leader. In order for law and ethics to become a resource for rather than a constraint upon the decision-making ability of leaders, these authors suggest that “leaders should integrate these traditions” (p. 613).

Taking up what the best interest of the student is, Stefkovich and O’Brien’s (2004) point of view is that ethical and legal perspectives can “converge around what is in the best interests of the student” (p. 197). Therefore we turn to this work in order to find an answer to an essential question; that is, to what ends are educational leaders to direct themselves to the ultimate extent on behalf of students? According to Stefkovich and O’Brien (2004) the correlates of best interests are rights, responsibility, and respect.

**Rights.** These authors proffer a broad range of rights “universal and fundamental to our conception of a student’s best interests” (p. 203):

These include: natural rights granted to all human beings as articulated by philosophers past and present; universal rights recognized by the United Nations, particularly those acknowledged under its *convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989); and rights guaranteed by law, specifically those articulated under US Constitution’s Bill of Rights. In addition, this model
recognizes the existence of certain fundamental rights as universal despite the fact that some countries such as the USA have not recognized them. (p. 202)

Because certain of the rights granted by the US Constitution are limited in the context of the school, these authors specify that:

Our conception also encompasses a right to dignity, which we interpret as entailing both respect for all individuals and protection from humiliation. Finally, it includes two rights that are not recognized as fundamental for students under the US Constitution. They are the right to an education and the right to be free from bodily harm. (p. 202)

**Responsibility.** While individuals have rights, theorists down the line “consider rights to be incomplete if viewed without consideration of accompanying responsibilities” (p. 203). On this view, what do students have a right to expect from school leaders? It turns out that the *responsibility* correlate of best interests, like the correlate of *rights* is embedded in the justice paradigm. Stefkovich and O’Brien (2004) suggest that ethical decision-making is linked “with the responsibility one has in making moral choices” and that according to Rawls “one should make moral decisions based on issues of fairness and equality” (p. 203). Further, Stefkovich and O’Brien (2004) offer that “Kohlberg speaks of conscience as principled responsibility, one of the highest levels on his hierarchy of moral stages. Concepts of rationality and choice also underlie the basis behind Kohlberg’s theory of democratic schools…” (p. 203). It may seem awkward that Kohlberg is used in a discussion of a prominent approach to ethical decision-making authored by women; however, Stefkovich’s training involved studying under Kohlberg.
During its period of prominence, Kohlbergian theory was often studied side by side with the feminist theory of Gilligan (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011).

**Respect.** Unlike the correlate of *rights* and the correlate of *responsibility*, the correlate of *respect* includes an affective component that signals interdependence. Such interdependence is explosive, generative, and can create “symmetry, empathy, and connection in all kinds of relationships, even those, such as teacher and student, doctor and patient, commonly seen as unequal” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1999 quoted in Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004, p. 204). Against Fenstermacher’s (1990) rendering of the education profession as being maximally contextualized and minimally balanced in terms of the relation between the professional and the client and therefore ripe for ethical conflict (Campbell, 2001), respect is a key correlate particularly in light of its affective qualities. Stefkovich and O’Brien (2004) suggest that the idea of respect “includes elements not of sympathy, feeling sorry for another’s plight, but of empathy…meaning the ability to put oneself in another’s shoes” (p. 204).

**Supporting Best Interests Decision-making**

Postmodern reasoning introduces human variables into the equation that produces action. From the postmodern point of view, affect supplements cognition to produce a more complete picture of moral and ethical motivation (Blasi, 1983). Assuming the perspective of others generates emotion that supplies volition to act (Dawes, Fowler, Johnson, McElreath, & Smirnov, 2007; Johnson, 1993; Lakoff, 2008; Passini, 2010). As outlined by Iacoboni (2008) one of the promising trends in neuroscience research has to do with findings related to social competence and empathy. Recalling James’ systems of
representation, Iacoboni (2008) finds that humans are born wired with the capacity for assuming the perspective of others; however, being wired does not also mean that such perspective taking is automatic. Singer and Lamm (2009) relate that empathy is malleable in response to certain factors including the perspective taken by the observer. Johnson (1993) suggests that moral and ethical functioning is the product of imagination:

Unless we can put ourselves in the place of another, unless we can enlarge our own perspective through an imaginative encounter with the experience of others, unless we can let our own values and ideals be called into question from various points of view, we cannot be morally sensitive. (p. 199)

The idea that context can play a role in developing ethical volition is supported in the literature (Bloom, 1977; Passini, 2010; Shweder, 1982, 1990; Vitton & Wasonga, 2009). Located in the reasoning of these scholars is the recognition that individuals “construct their moral knowledge […] through their interactions with the society in which they live” (Passini, 2010, p. 435).

Decision-making in the best interests of the student is linked to care and empathy (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Stefkovich & O’Brien, 2004). In the field of professional education, Cruz and Patterson (2005) favor multicultural learning via an experiential approach as a means to develop empathy and understanding. Such experiential learning in a multicultural context expands one’s moral scope of justice (Passini, 2010). Thus, it is plausible that professional multicultural experiences can develop the capacity for empathic responses that are in line with best interest decision-making.
The multiple ethical paradigm of decision-making in the best interests of the student (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011) has been tested via neo-Kohlbergian moral theory (Vitton & Wasonga, 2009; Slavinsky, 2006). While acknowledging a normative pull toward justice reasoning, Neo-Kohlbergian theorists claim to address fundamental and justified criticisms of Kohlberg’s original theory en route to developing an improved moral theory more in line with contemporary moral philosophy (Rest et al., 1999). By replacing stages of moral development with cognitive schema theory, these theorists argue that criticisms related to the lack of advanced reasoning produced by Kohlberg’s original theory and criticisms related to gender differences are overcome. According to Sockett (2006), neo-Kohlbergian post-conventional reasoning mixes universal principle with individual conscience to represent an ethic of genuine interest in the welfare of others. Thus, Vitton and Wasonga (2009) hypothesize that inquiry into moral reasoning ability via neo-Kohlbergian moral theory and instrumentation can advance the multiple ethical approach to decision-making in the best interests of the student; “Multiple perspectives [enable leaders] to pursue dilemmas with personal sophistication, sensitivity to others, and reflective professional practice. These perspectives echo the characteristics of post-conventional thinking and what is in the best interest of students” (p. 109).

There are some correspondences between neo-Kohlbergian schema theory and the multiple ethical paradigm in terms of epistemology, development, and the similar way in which schemas and ethics combine to produce assimilative thinking. Thus, studies that test the reasoning ability of school leaders via neo-Kohlbergian theory and instrumentation (Vitton & Wasonga, 2009; Slavinsky, 2006) can also be said to be
evaluating congruence that may exist between moral theory and the multiple ethical paradigm.

The results of the two studies located that test educational leaders’ reasoning ability via neo-Kohlbergian theory and instrumentation are interesting. For instance, suburban Indiana (United States) public school leaders in the Vitton and Wasonga (2009) sample had a mean moral reasoning level of P=38.9 which places them on a continuum between senior high school students and general adults. The random sample of Connecticut (United States) school leaders in the Slavinsky (2006) study produced a mean moral reasoning level of P=43.4. This level of moral reasoning places these leaders between Navy enlisted men and staff nurses. The results of these two studies may lead one to wonder why professional school leaders do not possess stronger reasoning abilities.

One explanation why the school leaders in the Vitton and Wasonga (2009) and Slavinsky (2006) studies did not demonstrate advanced reasoning abilities can be located in the neo-Kohlbergian grounding in a macro- rather than micro-moral perspective. The macro- micro-morality distinction has to do with the ways in which cooperation is conceptualized and developed in a community; that is, formal structures versus face-to-face personal interaction. The moral theory on which the Vitton and Wasonga (2009) and Slavinsky (2006) studies are based is grounded in a macro-moral point of view. Being based on a macro-moral rather than on a micro-moral perspective, neo-Kohlbergian theory predominately aims toward fairness, equality, and impartiality within a community rather than toward loyalty and caring between special others (Rest et al.,
1999); hence, the normative pull in the direction of justice. A second explanation is related to neo-Kohlbergian instrumentation. Measuring reasoning ability via the use of decontextualized, hypothetical moral dilemmas is not in line with educational research and practice that finds educational leaders faced with resolving maximally contextualized and value laden critical incidents (Begley, 1999; Colnerud, 1997; Fenstermacher, 1990; Gross, 2006).

**Summary**

It is helpful to summarize the results of this literature review in order to further establish a context for the discussion of methods in the next chapter. As an organizational strategy, the summary outlines what we know, what we do not know, and what this study finds out about ethics and ethical reasoning from school leaders’ perspectives.

**What We Know**

We know that the coexistence of varying ideologies in culturally plural contexts can be a source of conflict that impacts in social institutions including schools. We also know that resolving such conflict through approaches that value efficiency can jeopardize the best interests of students. Efficient approaches (that are predominately grounded in a paradigm of justice) are potentially harmful to students because such solutions are located at a level of abstraction that is not sensitive to the contextualized nature of the education profession. Because of this, scholars have theorized that an integrated approach that supplements justice with critique and care can potentially empower educational leaders to
make ethically balanced decisions. Thus, the ethic of profession is constituted by a supply of reasoning from a multiple ethical perspective (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011).

We also know that research has been conducted that provides a considered response to the concept of student best interests. Using the strategy of legal review, Stefkovich and O’Bryan (2004) have tentatively located elements of justice, critique and care in court decisions involving the best interests of children. Elements of multidimensional decision-making have also been located in the reasoning of school superintendents (Langlois, 2004; Sherman & Grogan, 2003), and the multidimensional approach to decision-making has been connected to neo-Kohlbergian theory and tested via the Defining Issues Test-2.

**What We Do Not Know**

In spite of the theoretical advances that have been made, we still do not know enough about how to promote school leaders’ ability to make decisions that are in the best interests of students and a range of pertinent questions have not been answered in the literature. For example, it would be helpful to know more about the nature of ethical conflicts that practicing school-level leaders experience. Does supporting one ethic often result in transgressing another as the literature suggests? Are the conflicts as perceived by practicing leaders related to their leadership background or school context? Why are the voices of school leaders largely silent in the literature in terms of ethics and ethical reasoning? From the methodological perspective, we do not know enough about how to capture ethical conflict as experienced by school leaders. Finally, given the call for ethical development in leadership preparation and practice, we need to learn more about
the implications the answers to these questions have for future school leaders and for future research.

**What This Study Finds Out**

Through qualitative research methodology and instrumentation this research addresses the gap that exists in the educational leadership literature relevant to ethics and ethical reasoning featuring the school leader as the participant. Based on the review of literature, research questions (as outlined in the next chapter) are designed to capture and describe perceptions about ethics and ethical reasoning from school leaders’ perspectives.
CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methods and procedures used in this descriptive study. Since the purpose of this study was to capture and describe the nature of phenomena (the ethical conflict experienced by educational leaders), the appropriate approach to take is qualitative with elements of phenomenology.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of ethical conflicts that practicing educational leaders experience?

2. Is the critical incident technique a tool relevant to the purpose of capturing ethical conflict as perceived by practicing educational leaders?

3. How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to leadership background?

4. How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to school context?

5. What are the implications for leadership preparation and professional development?

6. What are the implications for future research?

Qualitative Phenomenological Study

The descriptive approach used in this study is in line with prior research that explores ethical problems and conflicts in the field of education (Colnerud, 1997; Pope et al., 2009). Capturing ethical conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders through a multidimensional ethical theory produces a map of ethical land-mines that describe a sample of the kinds of situations that cause ethical norms to collide.
Participants and Sites

Maxwell (2005) suggests that choices regarding “where to conduct your research and whom to include” are typically called sampling (p. 87). Typically, qualitative studies make use of what Maxwell (2005) calls purposeful selection. Purposeful selection is a strategy in which “settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). Maxwell (2005) continues, “Selecting those times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information that you need in order to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative selection decisions” (p. 88). Based on the review of literature, practicing educational leaders are purposefully selected as they have the potential to provide necessary information with which to answer the research questions. Such leaders were solicited from a pool of experienced practicing leaders who are pursuing or who have recently completed a doctoral degree (Ed.D and Ph.D) in educational leadership from an accredited research university in central Virginia (USA). Prospective participants received initial and follow-up email messages inviting their participation in a brief online survey and follow-up interview if selected.

Ethical Standards

This research is conducted from start to finish in accordance with the guidelines of the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board.
Data Collection Methods

Data are collected using methods of narrative inquiry and semi-structured interview. The following research questions were answered via the use of narrative inquiry (the critical incident technique) and data analysis protocol described below.

1. What is the nature of ethical conflicts that practicing educational leaders experience?

2. Is the critical incident technique a tool relevant to the purpose of capturing ethical conflict as perceived by practicing educational leaders?

Narrative Inquiry. A useful outline of the development and fundamental principles of the critical incident technique can be found in Flanagan (1954). There are three assumptions commonly associated with the critical incident technique. First, it is important that the incident correspond to a clearly articulated case. Second, if the respondent cannot produce a clear account of what occurred, then the case is not valid. Third, the unit of analysis is the critical incident itself. Based on these three assumptions, the critical incident technique is a valid means to collect data on decision-making behavior.

Literature supports the critical incident technique as an appropriate means through which to examine practicing professionals’ responses to ethical dilemmas in education (Colnerud, 1997; Pope et al., 2009; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Further, decision-making from a multiple ethical perspective involves affect (Starratt, 1991). There is evidence that the critical incident technique can capture such emotional content since “it
is reasonable to argue that the perceived “critical incident” is essentially an emotional event…” (Cope & Watts, 2000, p. 114).

**Procedure.** Relevant empirical research (Colnerud, 1997; Pope et al., 2009) using the critical incident technique “involves asking subjects to respond in writing to a single question about a significant experience” (Pope et al., 2009, p. 779). Thus, to capture information relevant to the research question, the solicitation posed to participants was: “Briefly describe a situation or a kind of situation in which you find it difficult to know the right or wrong thing to do from a moral/ethical point of view in relation to [student best-interest]” (Colnerud, 1997, p. 629; Pope et al., 2009, p. 779). Consistent with literature, added to this solicitation is “Feel free to describe a first-hand experience with ethics and [the best interests of the student] or more general ethical issues you have encountered with [the best interests of the student]” (Pope et al., 2009, p. 779). As mentioned prior, this research targets the collection of fully contextualized data. This methodology is appropriate as it allows participants to respond in their own words and from their own particular perspective; thus, being in a good position to provide a complete description of the ethical conflict they face.

**Data Analysis Methods**

Maxwell (2005) advocates a three-pronged approach to data analysis: coding, organizing, and sense-making. In the present study critical incident data coding, organizing, and sense-making took place in an ongoing manner. As the critical incidents were received they were be labeled with a numerical value from 1 to N. In order to make
sense of the data and answer the research question, once collected the data was coded and organized in three tables.

**Coding and Organizing.** Before beginning to examine the contents of the solicited critical incidents, a table scaffold was created that displays column headers across the top of the table from left to right that represent anticipated domains of ethical conflict (Colnerud, 1997). It is anticipated that educational leaders experience ethical conflict when in the course of fulfilling their professional responsibilities in relation to students, parents, and colleagues. Thus, critical incidents were categorized in a table by domain of conflict. The “x” in each column represents the number of incidents.

Table X

*Critical Incidents Categorized by Domain of Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of Conflict</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Colleagues</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the critical incidents have been categorized by domain of conflict, they were organized in a second table in relation to the ethical paradigms that come into conflict (Starratt, 1991). The second table lists ethical paradigms of justice, care, and critique as row and column headers. Each critical incident was analyzed to identify the ethical paradigms that come into conflict. Based on the outcome of this process, an organizational code will be placed at the upper right corner of the critical incident just under the domain of conflict indicator that will signify conflicting ethical paradigms. For example, from the table below twenty-five of the reported critical incidents were marked...
with \( J/C \), because twenty-five of them present conflict that sets the ethic of justice at odds with the ethic of care.

Table X

**Conflicting Ethical Paradigms in Reported Critical Incidents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflicting Paradigms</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Care</th>
<th>Critique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data analysis procedure described above enables a rendering of the nature of ethical conflicts that practicing school leaders experience by categorizing them by domain of conflict and conflicting ethical paradigms. In order to illustrate the data analysis process, consider the following hypothetical example.

**Solicitation of Critical Incident:** Describe a situation or kind of situation in which you find it difficult to know the right or wrong thing to do from a moral/ethical point of view with regard to student best interests. Feel free to describe a first-hand experience with ethics and the best interests of the student or more general ethical issues you have encountered relevant to supporting the best interests of the student.

**Response to Critical Incident:** I was confronted with a situation in which I found it difficult to know what to do. My school espouses and practices high expectations for students and builds in many supports to assist regular education students who begin to fall behind. In spite of these interventions, there are some students who begin to fail each year and produce substandard achievement results. In the school division, families are
transferred from state to state/country to country regularly. The governing body offers policy guidance that allows students to exit the school year up to 20 days before the end of the semester without a requirement for reenrollment in another school. Further, students are not subject to school attendance requirements since the governing body is not required to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Over time, gaps in school attendance create gaps in students’ learning that present as failing grades and low test scores. In addition, the governing body does not provide summer educational services. As the educational leader I am faced with making decisions regarding retention for selected students based on the recommendation of a school committee authorized by regulation for that purpose. If I support the recommendation of the committee for retention, I may abandon my responsibility to support the best interests of the student as retention seldom works. If I do not uphold the recommendation for retention, I may also be abandoning my responsibility to the student because they have developed significant learning gaps that are only likely to grow in the future.

Finding: The hypothetical critical incident reported represents a conflict experienced in fulfilling an important professional responsibility in relation to students. This critical incident was thus be coded with S. In addition, the critical incident represents a conflict between norms of justice and norms of care. If a committee of professional educators recommends retention for a child who has not earned passing grades, from the point of view of justice the educational leader ought to uphold the recommendation. However, when in the course of supporting norms associated with justice the leader can simultaneously abandon their responsibility of care for the student.
Thus, the example above represents a critical incident in which the ethic of justice and the ethic of care conflict and was coded with *J/C*.

**Semi-structured Interviews.** Semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) are pursued in order to answer research questions three through six.

3. How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to leadership background?
4. How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to school context?
5. What are the implications for leadership preparation and professional development?
6. What are the implications for future research?

From the pool of reported critical incidents four to six participants were selected for semi-structured interview. In addition to the information provided in responses of interview participants, questions five and six were also be answered via researcher reflection in the discussion chapter of this research.

**Credibility**

It is recognized that some reported critical incidents may not include enough information to make coding, organizing, and sense-making possible. If necessary, member checks were conducted on all incomplete or ambiguous cases to gather feedback for the purpose of clarification. If after respondent verification the case remained ambiguous, a second knowledgeable professional was consulted. If an interpretation of the incident was impossible after member checking and a second interpretation, while an accounting of such cases is provided in the results the case was not included in the sample.
Reactivity occurs when participants are influenced by the researcher. While important, reactivity is impossible to eliminate (Maxwell, 2005). Because the researcher and participants belong to the same professional community, reactivity can be productive since both parties experience similar ethical challenges and mandates. It is anticipated that participants were motivated to provide complete and authentic accounts of ethical conflict because the results of this study are useful to them.

**Limitations**

Generalizability is not an aim of this study. In fact, due to the design of this study, generalizability is not possible and this could be thought of as a limitation of the study. In addition to generalizability, the instrumentation and perspectives of the subjects present limitations. Based as they are on reconstructions of past events, it is pertinent to note that the reported critical incidents are dependent on respondents’ ability to accurately recall them. As noted (Rest et al., 1999), sometimes people know more than they can tell; therefore, the critical incidents “may not accurately reflect the intensity of […] thoughts and feelings…” (Cope & Watts, 2000, p. 116). But as these scholars note, capturing critical incidents as they naturally occur is a methodology that is very difficult to operationalize so “researchers will always be dependent on the subjective representations of their respondents” (p. 116).

In terms of respondents, a potential limitation of this study is the size the sample of participants that can be captured from the population. The population is anticipated to be approximately 175. If a sample of participants reaches 25% of the population, then approximately 40 participants can be anticipated. Although generalizability is not a goal
of this study, if the sample size falls significantly short of this level, then sample size can be considered a potential limitation.

In addition to being subject to the ability of respondents to recall critical incidents and subject to adequate sample size, this study is also limited by the perspective of the researcher. This research was conducted from the perspective of a practicing educational leader at the school level with experience as principal in three middle schools in Virginia (United States) including urban, suburban, and rural settings as well as in an international setting with the Department of Defense Dependent’s Schools. In addition, I am currently serving as the director of a regional public high school that is a magnet for high ability learners. In my role as a school leader, I am faced with ethical conflict in the relationships I have with others including students, parents, and colleagues. In fact, ethical conflict appears to be a phenomenon inherent in educational leadership. Prior to beginning this project, while I was aware that such conflict existed, I did not know much about it; that is, ethical conflict is often not easily discernible. As the researcher, I recognize that I collected and interpreted data through a lens colored by my experiences.

No data analysis plan can do all things. In an effort to provide structure at the outset and to consider the data in light of current theory in the field, it is possible that the precast structure obscured other possible interpretations.
CHAPTER FOUR. FINDINGS

Modern theory and research in ethics in the applied area of educational leadership has typically mitigated conflict through a rational lens. Such a rational approach often lacks the ethical clarity necessary to reach decisions that are in the best interests of students. For instance, recall that zero tolerance policies often prescribe disciplinary sanctions that are severe and that often lack due process (Keleher, 2000; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). When in the course of determining an appropriate level of consequence, the absence of consideration related to context and student characteristics can cause leaders to suspend their ethical responsibility to students in loco parentis.

Balancing value-laden perspectives to reach decisions that are in the best interests of the student can require a supply of reasoning from an expanding ethical domain. Theorists have suggested that rational approaches, when supplemented with the ethics of critique and care, can provide the ethical clarity necessary to mitigate conflict in the best interests of students (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 1991). In spite of these theoretical advances, not enough is known about the kinds of situations that cause leaders’ to experience ethical conflict. Thus, the purpose of this research is to capture and describe ethical conflict experienced by a sample of practicing educational leaders using the multiple ethical paradigm of ethics. The following research questions were used to guide this study.

1. What is the nature of ethical conflicts that practicing educational leaders experience?
2. Is the critical incident technique a tool relevant to the purpose of capturing ethical conflict as perceived by practicing educational leaders?

3. How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to leadership background?

4. How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to school context?

5. What are the implications for leadership preparation and professional development?

6. What are the implications for future research?

Results are organized and presented in line with data collection methods. The first section presents an analysis of data collected via narrative inquiry and the second section presents an analysis of data collected via semi-structured interview. Because candidates for interview are selected based on the data captured in the first phase, it makes sense to organize and present the data this way for clarity.

**Analysis of Narrative Inquiry Data**

In addition to presenting a description of the sample of participants, this section describes the nature of self-reported ethical conflict and the feasibility of capturing such data via narrative inquiry (critical incident technique). So that readers can easily interpret the data, descriptions are presented as text, tables, or figures.

**About the Sample**

The target population for this study was practicing educational leaders who were also current doctoral students or recent doctoral completers from an accredited research university in central Virginia. The population consisted of 167 potential participants who were sent an email inviting them to participate in an online survey which was hosted by
SurveyMonkey. The email provided a brief overview of the project, the name of the principal investigator, acknowledged that participation was voluntary, explained that data would be protected, and provided a link to the online survey. Follow-up emails were sent to the same population during the second and third week following the original message. The same population received follow-up emails because there was no way to distinguish between those who had and had not completed the survey. Participants who also wished to participate in a follow-up interview (if selected) were invited to provide contact information. This recruitment process produced a sample size of 42 survey participants which equalled a response rate of 25%.

In terms of job title, the sample of participants consisted of 9 assistant principals (21.4%), 11 principals (26.2%), 6 central office administrators (14.3%), and 16 who self-identified as “other” (38.1%). Relevant to gender, 14 were male (33.3%) and 28 were female (66.7%).

Regarding the years of experience that participants had as an educational leader, 6 had 0-5 years experience (14.3%), 17 had 6-10 years experience (40.5%), 6 had 11-15 years experience (14.3%), 6 had 16-20 years experience (14.3%), and 7 had 21 or more years experience (16.7%). From Figure 1, it is clear that a significant percentage of the sample reported an experience level of 6-10 years, it is also clear that no single experience level constitutes a majority of the sample. While generalizability is not a specific goal of this study, the spread of the sample in terms of experience level is varied.
Figure 1. Years of Experience as Educational Leader

Participants were asked to indicate the context in which the majority of their experience was invested. In terms of context, 11 participants reported that the majority of their experience as an educational leader was in urban contexts (26.2%), 5 participants reported that the majority of their experience was in rural contexts (11.9%), and 27 participants reported that the majority of their experience was in suburban contexts (64.3%).

To provide information relevant to describing the sample, participants were also asked to share the level at which the majority of their experience was invested. In terms of level, 13 participants reported that the majority of their experience was at the
elementary/primary level (31%), 9 participants reported that the majority of their experience was at the middle level (21.4%), and 18 participants reported that the majority of their experience was at the high school level (42.9%). Additionally, 2 participants did not answer this question (4.7%). Although Figure 2 shows that the sample is most significantly represented by leaders who have invested the majority of their careers practicing at the high school level, it is also useful to note that all three areas are well represented. While generalizability is not a significant focus of this study, the spread of responses across levels signals toward the balance of the sample.

Figure 2. Level of Experience as Educational Leader
Findings and Analysis of Narrative Inquiry Data

Moving beyond background information, the survey next asked participants to share in writing a situation in which they found it difficult to know the right or wrong thing to do from a moral/ethical point of view in relation to a student’s best interest. From the 42 participants who accessed the survey, 34 provided a written account of a critical ethical incident (80.9%). Of the 34 respondents, 5 (14.8%) provided 2 accounts of ethical incidents which brought the total count of incidents to 39.

At this stage it is worth recalling that people know more than they can tell (Rest et al., 1999). As a means to capture ethical conflict, the critical incident technique asks respondents to tell a brief story. As the unit of analysis itself (Flanagan, 1954), the critical incident does not contain all of the information that respondents know. The critical incident report therefore provides the raw material for broad rather than specific inferences. Thus, the reports are relevant to the purpose of classification by domain of conflict and by conflicting ethical paradigms in tabular form.

Prior research suggests that situations that cause teachers to experience ethical conflict find their origin with students, parents, and/or colleagues (Colnerud, 1997). As Table 1 shows, 9 (22.5%) of conflicts reported by this sample of leader had to do with students, 10 (25.0%) of reported conflicts had to do with parents, and 20 (51.3%) of reported conflicts had to do with colleagues.
Table 1

*Critical Incidents Categorized by Domain of Conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of Conflict</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Colleagues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The categorization of the reported ethical conflicts by domain of conflict was worked out in accordance with prior research (Colnerud, 1997; Pope et al., 2009). It is useful to note that the domains were given, not created and the data were organized according to a *best fit* criterion pertinent to the origin of conflict. It is also helpful to add context to the incidents in each domain by reporting a sample from each in Table 2-4 below.

**Conflict in the domain of student.** Most frequently, the nature of conflict in the domain of student was related to substandard performance. Such substandard performance created the need for action on the part of the school leader. From the sample responses below in Table 2, it appears that in dealing with conflict in the domain of student, leaders are able to discern the connection between their decision-making and its impact on the student’s best interests. When deciding to spare students from unnecessarily negative consequences leaders seem equipped to draw from more than one ethical frame and are mostly disinterested in what rationalism may call for. It is, however, also important to note that the voice of the student is largely absent and primarily anecdotal in the accounts of these leaders.
Table 2

Sample of critical incidents involving students

“One year as a summer school coordinator, two eighth grade students performed poorly on their final Civics project, which meant they would fail the course. If they failed Civics they would have to repeat the 8th grade. I knew this would be the second time each student had failed a grade in middle school. I had the authority to “pass” these students onto high school, even though they had technically failed a required course. I was conflicted between holding these two students to an academic standard versus putting them back into a potentially negative situation by having them repeat another grade in middle school.”

“In my work with students in higher education, I encounter ethical conflicts when students with psychiatric/mental health concerns appear to be at risk, and parents become involved out of concern. I am bound by FERPA, however must weigh the safety of the student, their right to autonomy, and their risk for harm in making decisions to talk with parents or other support persons outside the university.”

“Several MDR meetings come to mind, that would call into the ethical question the use of a long-term suspension as punishment when the student does not see it as a punishment and particularly when the student already has several risk factors that predict a high likelihood of dropping out.”

“In education, there are rules, policies, and guidelines that you are expected to follow. At times, a student has not followed the rules and are supposed to receive a specific
There are times when you know that student’s home life and it is better for him/her to be in school than not…”

Note: The narrative text presented represents full or partial accounts of reported critical incidents

**Conflict in the domain of parent.** It appears that conflict involving parents is more nuanced and problematic than conflict with students. This nuance often seems related to the competition that results when the parent and the acting parent engage in an *ethical tug-of-war* with respect to the best interests of the student. The tug-of-war signals toward the inclusion of the perspective of the parent in the leader’s scope of justice (Passini, 2010). From the sample of responses below in Table 3, such competition can create space for the best interests of the student to be jeopardized.

**Table 3**

*Sample of critical incidents involving parents*

“…parents often refuse to accept the fact that their child is not the only child to be considered in most instances. As building administrators, we must always find the solution that is in the best interest of not only the one student but all the students.”

“I am conflicted when the issue of residency is raised. [...] I feel that children need stability and I hate when they are moved multiple times during their elementary careers. The problem becomes when I am not interested in bending the rules for waivers…with problem parents.”

“I work often with families from poverty in which their decisions may impact their children’s ability to attend school on a regular basis. In one situation, the mother asks for her older child to watch the younger children when they are home sick because of
she does not go to work, she does not get paid. In this situation we work closely with the student and family to help support them, and we do not penalize. Ethically there is an attendance policy, the grey area becomes the survival of this family and how responsible is the school, and how much do they get involved?"

“Some students come from very different situations where honesty and ethics are not taught or modeled. I have had students who have stolen items in the classroom or from other students. Sometimes they have been taught that this is okay to do from home. […] It is difficult to suspend a student for a day out of school for stealing when they have not been taught differently.”

Note: The narrative text presented represents full or partial accounts of reported critical incidents

Conflict in the domain of colleague. The collegial conflict reported in the present study primarily involved superiors, however leaders can also experience conflict with subordinates. As shown in the sample of responses in Table 4 below, one of the reasons that leaders in this sample reported ethical conflict is due to occupying an uneven position of power relative to those who oversee their decisions. In effect, these leaders felt that they had no real choice given the stance and expectation of their superiors which can favor rational decision-making. Thus, subordinate leaders may jeopardize student best interests as a result of remaining loyal to their superior.

In teaching, collegial loyalty can be described as supporting a colleague at the expense of a student’s best interest (Campbell, 2001). Such support can include bearing false witness or turning a blind eye toward a colleague’s malfeasant behavior. One subtle difference between the empirical evidence involving teachers and the findings of the
present study is that while the reported cases in this study included no incidents in which a leader bore false witness, one incident was reported that saw a leader turn a blind eye to malfeasant treatment to students.

That being said, much of the conflict involving colleagues that practicing educational leaders in this sample experienced is more closely related to Samier’s (2008) notion of moral inversion. Recall that moral inversion occurs when legal-rational values prevail at the expense of other approaches. Although leaders are inclined to behave differently, they feel compelled to follow the status quo.

Table 4

Sample of critical incidents involving colleagues

“I provide support to struggling and novice teachers. Teachers are asked to change or grow, but they may not always buy in to the changes which would be in the best interests of the students. On very rare occasions, I have worked with a teacher who refuses to make the necessary changes over a period of several months, and the school-based administrator doesn’t follow up by doing the required paperwork, it can be frustrating to have my hands tied.”

“I always have an ethical issue when asked to sit in with the police officer during an interrogation. We are supposed to watch out for the student and yet we are also supposed to let them talk which in many cases results in a confession and legal ramifications. I have watched the police lie to student to obtain a confession…”

“It creates an ethical conflict for principals every day when they are told to adhere to zero-tolerance policies and to bring better classroom and behavior management to
their schools (this increasing student achievement and growth) AND, at the same
time, are told that they must keep a keen eye on the number of out-of-school
suspensions of students with disabilities or students of color.”
“…it is difficult to suspend someone for 10 days when they were just trying to deal with
the symptoms of their cold as a Senior in High School.”

Note: The narrative text presented represents full or partial accounts of reported critical incidents.

Conflicting Ethical Paradigms

As reported in the review of literature, theorists suggest that it is helpful to
consider multiple ethical paradigms in order to reach decisions that are in the best
interests of students (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). In this way, the ethics of justice,
critique, and care interpenetrate and/or overlap with each other (Starratt, 1991). When
the ethics interface, they can conflict. On this view, mitigating ethical conflict to the
benefit of student interest is conflicting in itself. Thus, leaders must acknowledge the
complexity of situations they face and view them as solvable puzzles. This conceptual
frame is reminiscent of Shulman (1998) who observes that a fully developed professional
educator is able to confront “highly situated problems that draw together theory and
practice in the moral sea of decisions to be made, actions to be taken. Options are rarely
clean; judgments must be rendered” (p. 525).

The ethic of justice focuses on the laws and rules that govern society and on the
accompanying rights of individuals. It may be broadly separated into two categories; that
is, deontological ethics and consequentialist ethics. Justice reasoning is a source of the
uniformity that is typically found in decision-making in schools. The ethic of critique
highlights and relaxes the embedded tensions in the ethic of justice. The ethic of critique is grounded in critical theory and the promotion of social justice. Finally, the ethic of care grew out of feminist scholarship and unlike the ethic of justice that locates law and order at its core, the ethic of care considers caring relations as foundational to ethical decision-making.

In order to bring out the ethics of justice, critique, and care in the reported critical incidents, the incidents were organized in relation to the ethical paradigms that came into conflict. It is important to recall that, like the domains of conflict; the ethical paradigms (justice, critique, and care) were not created, but rather were given in the literature (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 1991). The classification of conflicts was carried out in line with procedures that were influenced by Pope et al., (2009). Thus, using these ethical paradigms as an organizing framework, the critical incidents were classified against conceptual themes found in the review of literature. Table 5 below lists conceptual themes that can be found in ethical paradigms.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample of Paradigm-related Conceptual Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown below in Table 6, ethical paradigms can conflict with themselves and with other paradigms. The nature of the critical ethical incidents can be described by their location in Table 6. An examination of the pattern of results in Table 6 shows that of the 39 incidents 3 (7.7%) involved justice vs. justice conflicts, 21 (53.9%) involved justice vs. care conflicts, 10 (25.7%) involved justice vs. critique conflicts, and 5 (12.9%) involved care vs. critique conflicts.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflicting Paradigms</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Care</th>
<th>Critique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dashes indicate that ethical paradigms did not conflict in reported critical incidents.

Bearing in mind that the purpose of this study is to capture and describe ethical conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders, it is useful to learn more about the kinds of situations that are represented by the numerical values in each cell.

**Justice vs. Justice.** As shown in Table 7 below, the two brands of justice ethics can conflict. Conceptual themes associated with the ethic of justice are deontological (respect), consequentialist (principle of greatest happiness), zero-tolerance, duty, and policy.
Table 7

Sample of responses as justice vs. justice

“As building administrators, we must always find the solution that is in the best interest of not only the one student but all the students.”

“When bad things are done by good students it is often easy to overlook the need for equal discipline. But at the same time there should be equality in discipline.”

“Maintaining a safe, orderly learning environment for every student may conflict with an individual’s best interests.” “So, overall, weighing the best interest of one versus the best interests of many often times brings questions and conflicting emotions.”

Note: The narrative text presented represents full or partial accounts of reported critical incidents.

Justice vs. Care. From the sample of responses as justice vs. care, deontological and consequentialist perspectives embedded in the ethic of justice conflict with elements of contextualization which are emblematic of the ethic of care. Note that the sample of reported incidents involves more than one domain (i.e., students, parents, colleagues).

Conceptual themes associated with the ethic of care include relationships, emotion, beneficence, trust, and communication.

Table 8

Sample of responses as justice vs. care

“In education, there are rules, policies, and guidelines you are expected to follow. At times, a student has not followed the rules and are supposed to receive a specific consequence. There are times when you know the student’s home life and it is better
for him/her to be in school than not, which becomes trivial with finalizing your decision.”

“I always have an ethical issue when asked to sit in with the police officer during and interrogation. We are supposed to watch out for the student and yet we are also supposed to let them talk which in many cases results in a confession and legal ramifications. If it were my child, I would tell them to remain quiet until I had consulted a lawyer. I have watched the police lie to students to obtain a confession so I am always ethically challenged in this situation.”

“The ethical dilemmas occur when one must decide to keep the last hired because they are more beneficial in the classroom and cutting the person who may have tenure because they are less effective in the classroom.”

“I am conflicted when the issue of residency is raised. I often want to bend the rules to keep the students with our school. I feel that children need stability and I hate when they are moved multiple times during their elementary careers. The problem becomes when I am not interested in bending the rules for waivers coming to our school or bending rules with problem students or parents. It is a conflict.”

“Suspending students out of school when I know the home life is horrible.”

“As a principal, I had a student come to my office and show me a small knife he had accidentally brought with him to school. Policy dictated zero tolerance, and an automatic suspension. However, I discussed the situation with the student, called his parent with him present, and had the child talk with the parent. I then told the parent
that the child had done the right thing in coming to me, and had them come to pick up the knife.”

“In my experience, I have had a few instances when I was morally conflicted when I know that a teacher wasn’t reporting full and/or accurate depictions of their interaction with students to a parent.”

Note: The narrative text presented represents full or partial accounts of reported critical incidents.

**Justice vs. Critique.** Table 9 presents a sample of responses categorized as justice vs. critique. In addition to the conceptual themes embedded in the ethic of justice, Table 9 introduces conflicts involving the ethic of critique. Recall that the ethic of critique can help to relax the tension of the ethic of justice. It is pertinent to note that this sample of reported incidents also occurs in more than one domain. Conceptual themes associated with the ethic of critique include protections for special populations, social justice, critical pedagogy, and equality.

Table 9

*Sample of responses as justice vs. critique*

“I dealt with several circumstances in regards to advising teachers on whether or not to “pass” students in non-core subjects. Yes, students earn grades, but there are times when teachers can make the difference in whether or not students pass classes and earn credits for graduation. Sometimes it was hard to help teachers understand that with elective courses, sometimes it just does not matter if the child learns the content. [these children were members of gangs].”
“Several MDR meetings come to mind, that would call into the ethical question the use of a long-term suspension as punishment when the student does not see it as a punishment and particularly when the student already has several risk factors that predict a high likelihood of dropping out.”

“A new attendance policy predicated upon students having written excuses from parents predominantly and negatively effects students in a lower socio-economic class.”

“Specifically, an incident which occurred involved a student who as he rounded the corner he “high fived” a teacher. The teacher’s perspective was that the student “touched” her inappropriately.” “The teacher wanted the student expelled.” “The administrative team discussed at length what would be the worse of two evils: suffering the wrath of the staff’s discontent and the effect on the student and the community’s sense that the school treats students unfairly. In addition, the student was an African American male which added another element to the situation.”

“I often work with families from poverty in which their decisions may impact their children’s ability to attend school on a regular basis. In one situation, the mother asks for her older child to watch the younger children when they are home sick because if she does not go to work, she does not get paid.”

Note: The narrative text presented represents full or partial accounts of reported critical incidents.

Care vs. Critique. Table 10 presents reported critical incidents in which the ethic of care and the ethic of critique conflicted. Note that this sample of reported incidents includes elements of contextualization as well as acknowledgement of a special
population. It is useful to note that these incidents also cut across the domains of students, parents, and colleagues.

Table 10

*Sample of responses as care vs. critique*

“In my work with students in higher education, I encounter ethical conflicts when students with psychiatric/mental health concerns appear to be at risk, and parents become involved out of concern. I am bound by FERPA, however must weigh the safety of the student, their right to autonomy, and their risk for harm in making decision to talk with parents or other support persons outside the university.”

“When you look at a teacher’s grades, one assignment is weighed in such a way that it can have a tremendous effect on the students overall grade.” “I have a problem with telling a teacher to change a grade, yet at the same time the student, a senior needing this credit for an advanced diploma, also deserved to pass.”

“A teacher failing to meet the academic needs of students. However, she wanted me to feel sorry for her because she has a disability. Therefore, not holding her responsible for her job duties.”

*Note:* The narrative text presented represents full or partial accounts of reported critical incidents.

In order to gather more information that can be used to describe the ethical conflict that practicing educational leaders experience, it is useful to catorized the incidents by conflicting paradigms in reported incidents and domain of conflict (student, parent, colleague) as shown in Table 11 below.
Table 11

*Incidents categorized by paradigm and domain of conflict*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Colleagues</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice vs. Justice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice vs. Care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice vs. Critique</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care vs. Critique</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In describing the ethical conflict experienced by this sample of leaders it becomes clear that mitigating conflict with colleagues is integral to supporting the best interests of students. As is shown in Table 11, the majority of conflict leaders experience involves colleagues (51%) and of these collegial conflicts 12 (60%) involve the ethic of justice and the ethic of care. Also of note is that the majority of all conflicts (53%) involve the conflicts between the ethics of justice and care and that 26% of conflicts involve conflicts between the ethics of justice and critique. Pertinent to the questions this study pursues, it is useful to learn more about these two types of conflict in terms of the level and context that gives rise to them and to see if there is any pattern in the data.
Table 12

*Justice vs. Care incidents categorized by level and context*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level (Subject)</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elem</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13

*Justice vs. Critique incidents categorized by level and context*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level (Subject)</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elem</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the data presented in the tables above that organized reported critical incidents by level and context, it is interesting to note no clear pattern can be discerned in the data. The relatively small count of incidents perhaps masks any trends that might otherwise develop. Tentatively, it appears that most incidents occur in high schools, but recalling that a significant number of participants reported service in high schools, that assumption is misleading. Similarly, since a significant number of participants serve in suburban settings, it is not plausible to assume that there are more incidents in suburban contexts in general. Although the count of this sub-sample of incidents is relatively
small, the spread of incidents across contexts and levels suggests that leaders can expect ethical conflict in their professional lives regardless of the level or context in which they serve (Begley, 1999).

**Summary.** When acting *in loco parentis*, supporting the best interests of a student means using more than one ethical paradigm. When more than one ethical paradigm is used simultaneously, conflict can result. To investigate this phenomena the critical incident technique was employed to capture and learn about ethical incidents experienced by practicing leaders relevant to students’ best interests. From the target population of 167 a sample size of 42 participants was captured that produced a total of 39 reports of critical ethical incidents. Although the majority of participants served in suburban contexts, the sample was well balanced in terms of gender, and there was a notable spread across the sample in terms of experience and school level served. As shared in the review of literature, people know more than they can tell (Rest et al., 1999). Even if the participants did not call the domains or ethics by name, a description of their experience was captured in their reports. The 42 participants produced 39 descriptions of critical ethical incidents.

**Findings of the narrative inquiry phase of the present study.** Pertinent to the purpose of this study which was to capture and describe the ethical conflict that is experienced by practicing educational leaders and based on the sample of responses captured and analyzed, the following tentative findings are offered. First, it was found that like teachers, ethical conflict experienced by leaders can occur in the domains of student, parent, and colleague. Second, we know that of these three domains, conflict
with colleagues was most prevalent. Third, we know that within the domain of collegial conflict, the interface of the ethics of justice and care most often are the source of the conflict. Fourth, the spread of incidents across levels and contexts as shown prior in Tables 12 and 13, suggests that leaders experience conflict irrespective of the level and context in which they serve.

**Findings and Analysis of Semi-Structured Interview Data**

This section reports the results of data collected via semi-structured interview. Person to person interviews that lasted approximately 60 minutes each were conducted with selected participants. The purpose of the interview was to collect information supplemental to narrative inquiry data. Specifically, data reported more fully explore the relationship that may exist between participants’ self-reported ethical conflict and leadership background, school context, ethical preparation, and professional needs. In addition, the interview probed participants to capture data relevant to whether ideals or principles guided their decision-making and to determine whether they believe the best interests of students were served.

**Interview Protocol**

It is pertinent to the purpose of this study to learn more from leaders who reported an incident in which ethical paradigms conflict with themselves and given the high frequency of incidents involving the ethic of care and the low frequency of incidents dealing with the ethic of critique, it is also relevant to learn more about these kinds of ethical conflict. The original data set was thus consulted to determine which
representative participants provided contact information for interview. As shown in Table 14, a purposeful sample of 4 participants was selected for face-to-face interview.

Table 14

*Identification of interview participants by nature of reported critical incidents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflicting Paradigms</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Care</th>
<th>Critique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Dashes indicate that ethical paradigms did not conflict in reported critical incidents.

**Interview Participants**

The sample of 4 participants for interview included leaders who identified evenly (current position) as assistant principal, principal, central office administrator, and other. Of the 4 participants, 3 were female and 1 was male; years of leadership experience reported, 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 21+ years; and, in terms of leadership context and background 2 participants reported that the majority of their experience had been in suburban middle schools, and 2 participants reported suburban high schools.

Recall that participants for interview were selected based on the nature of their critical incident reports; thus, for explanatory purposes each leader is represented as either A, B, C, or D as shown in Table 15 below. As you see in the data, participant D reported a multifaceted incident that involved more than two conflicting elements.
Table 15

*Coding of interview participant data for explanation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflicting Paradigms</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Care</th>
<th>Critique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B, C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Dashes indicate that ethical paradigms did not conflict in reported critical incidents.

**Interview Findings**

This section presents findings from the interview phase of the study. The information is presented in line with the purpose of the interview; that is, whether the natures of these ethical conflicts relate to leadership background and/or school context; the extent to which the reported critical incidents may present implications for leadership preparation and professional development; and, the extent to which ideals and principles guide these leaders’ decisions. While the interview data is essentially grounded in the same critical incident reported by the participant in the prior phase, by its nature the data captured via interview is more contextualized than the data captured via the critical incident report. In order to effectively capture the voice of the participant, it is thus useful to report this section in narrative form.

**Participant A.** This participant is a female assistant principal who reported 6-10 years leadership experience in suburban high school settings. It is important to note that during the course of the interview, this participant indicated that her ethical frame is also
significantly informed by her teaching experience that predominately took place in at-risk middle school settings. The critical incident that participant A reported had to do with balancing the competing values embedded in deontological and consequentialist ethics.

Maintaining a safe, orderly learning environment for every student may conflict with an individual’s best interests. […] So, overall, weighing the best interest of one versus the best interests of many often times brings questions and conflicting emotions.

**Ethical conflict and leadership background.** When asked about her perception of whether leadership background related to the ethical conflict she identified, this participant shared that leadership background and more specifically learning from varied background experiences is essential to ethical growth. From this excerpt, it appears that varied experiences expanded this participant’s scope of justice (Passini, 2010).

But in my experience (this is approximately my seventeenth year as teacher, middle school administrator and high school) and sort of seeing that emotional, social, I guess that academic growth of students over that time period, I have begun to incorporate into my decision making about, or tried to balance more I guess, not only the black/white you broke the rule here’s the consequence, but what does that mean for the individual student. And so I find myself trying to weigh what is the ultimate good for the whole, for everyone, for the student and the organization. If I can find that balance that’s the most ideal; sometimes easier than others.
**Ethical conflict and school context.** In addition to background experiences, this participant shared that the level (high school, middle school, etc) of the student is also a factor that has ethical entailments.

While [students] are older and know right from wrong, generally speaking, and can make decisions they aren’t always reactive…some of it is premeditated. There’s a balance between…they’re still adolescents and we all make mistakes; adult...we’re all human so whether you’re adult or an adolescent you’ll make a mistake, so what is that mistake and should the consequences of that mistake…how should they weigh? So I think yes, being in high school, yeah we are growing, productive citizens, we are teaching them there are consequences for their actions, but at the same time our ultimate goal is to educate them and graduate them, and so…is what they did, should the consequences for that, how deep should they go? And because they are older they make a lot of decisions that have greater implications not only for themselves but for society and other students. So there’s a balance between the consequences, between how deep those consequences and ramifications will go, and what needs to be done for the order and maintenance of the group.

In addition to internal challenges to the best interests of students, participant A acknowledged external pressures. Pressures of the external environment include not only those associated with being a member of a professional community (Shulman, 1998), but also those over which she has no control (Marshall, 1992).
On-time graduation rates and the impact of that and what consequences would be for that student. So there are Central Office pressures, there are community pressures where parents are generally, in this particular context, more involved, many are educated themselves and so they bring an insight and wishes and wants on how they think things should go. And so it’s a balance between the community, between Central Office leadership, between what’s best for our school as a whole, and then the individual student as well. So yes, there are different pressures.

The role of ideals and principles. Participant A related that both ideals and principles impact upon her decision making. This participant shared that normative ideals are an important part of the framework within which she reaches decisions and often times it is in the space between ideals and principles that the role of emotion comes into play. In other words deciding between what one ought to do and what one may have to do causes conflict.

For me one is your personal moral and ethical set of how you make decisions; that’s one for me. Two, it’s what we as a school have decided we are going to use as our guiding expectations and what consequences are going to be; we try to all be on the same page with that. There’s the individual student piece and what that student needs, whether or not it may fit in that paradigm or that framework in which we have established as a school, district expectations and parental expectations too. But trying to weighing all that, I try to see things from various perspectives; from the perspective of the teacher, from the student perspective, the
parent perspective, community perspective, what other students will see as a result of how we responded to that situation in trying to balance all of that for the most good of everyone involved.

**The best interests of the student.** The ebb and flow of factors between ideals and principles causes this participant to experience ethical conflict. Specifically, this participant seems to relay the teleological belief that in some circumstances it is reasonable for an individual to be required to sacrifice their standing as an *agent in themselves* in order to support the greater happiness of the group. Further, when queried on the issue of whether best interests are supported when in the course of mitigating ethical conflict, this participant relates the following.

No, I don’t feel that they are. Often times there are the big picture or the message that it sets or the example that it sets, message it sends – example that it sets, supersedes that individual student’s personal situation. What I try to do when those things are in conflict for me, when I feel like I have to do this…I have to make this decision, follow this course of action because it’s what we’ve decided, because it’s what we have done, because it’s what is expected. I follow through with that because I am a team player in part of a larger organization than just myself.

Although this participant acknowledges that in some cases she renders decisions that are not in line with the best interests of the student, she seems to have found a means to reconcile the conflict for her and the students’ benefit.
However, within those frameworks I then see how can I meet those expectations, how can I do what we have all agreed, yet still somehow come back to assist and work with that student. So after initial recommendations are met, what other supports and services can we offer that student. How can we help acclimate them back, how can we get them caught up? So while here’s a consequence for this; here’s what we’re going to do. How can we salvage, how can we help bring it back?

_Ethical training, professional development, and the relationship of ethics and practice_. This participant’s responses to queries related to ethical training and the perceived relevance of ethics to the practice of educational leadership are not balanced. As you see from the response excerpts below, the participant does not recall significant pre- or in-service training, yet relates the importance of ethics to practice.

I don’t recall a lot of training in my undergrad, my undergraduate in education regarding that. In my master’s program, honestly there may have been a course but it’s not sticking out to me…I don’t recall any formal training. In my post-graduate work I’ve had an experience with one course I remember that was an ethical course. It’s great to help you think of things and see things from a different perspective and discuss with colleagues and reading a variety of pieces of literature for example, but that’s the only formal training that I can recall in my education.

Participant A goes on to share several insights in response to the relevance of ethics to the practice of educational leadership. As you will see from her response below,
she seems to lament that ethics may not provide the objective guidance she once believed. Recalling the Bull and McCarthy’s (1995) call for combining personal and professional ethics, she shares that the idea of right and wrong being malleable and subject to experience, reflection, and context causes her a measure of ethical conflict that she herself must manage while simultaneously fulfilling her professional responsibilities related to supporting the best interest of the student. Regarding the extent to which personal and professional ethics come mingle, this participant shares the following.

I don’t think you can separate the two is my personal thought. I think your ethics and morals are comprised of…it’s who you are. I’m asserting it’s your foundation so I don’t see really how you separate from that. It’s the foundation or springboard in my opinion for how you make your decisions and then your life experiences and/or professional experiences add to that and help to either cement those thoughts and beliefs, or to think ‘what about’ as I become more of a…as my experience and leadership has grown I have found there to be more gray than I thought there was fifteen years ago, let’s say. So, I don’t think you can separate the two, and for me I could not… my heart is involved in what I do. I love what I do and I love working with people so I can’t imagine that not being a component for me. And then if that part of me…I think my conscience, my heart is unsettled, then I couldn’t see how I could continue in that profession, in any profession, if they were always in conflict, and so for me I have to find the balance between that for me and the more black and white objective things. But I see ethics and morals
maybe not as an objective component but more of a subjective side for me, and so I have to balance those two.

**Participant B.** This participant is a female principal who reported 6-10 years of leadership experience primarily in suburban middle school settings. It is useful to note that this participant has a diverse leadership background that includes a principalship at the elementary level and an assistant principalship in an alternative middle school. The critical incident reported by participant B has to do with balancing the ethics of justice and care.

In education, there are rules, policies, and guidelines you are expected to follow. At times, a student has not followed the rules and are supposed to receive a specific consequence. There are times when you know the student’s home life and it is better for him/her to be in school than not, which becomes trivial with finalizing your decision.

**Ethical conflict and leadership background.** Participant B turned to her experience working in an alternative setting where students have experienced academic and social difficulty over time that has resulted in their alternative placement. Her response to the critical incident clearly stated concerns about home life that she wrestles with when making decisions and she follows up on these concerns as she considers how her leadership background may have brought out an appreciation for the ethic of care.

This relates to my leadership background because I have worked at the elementary level, middle school level and I worked in an alternative school setting. So having that diverse experience and knowing the ins and outs of what
happens in households you automatically think about what’s in the best interests of that child and what you can do to support the child and to make a difference. I have found at times in different settings that you are expected to follow certain procedures; for example working at an alternative school you know that they are in an alternative school for a reason, because they were not meeting…they were not successful in a comprehensive setting. Whereas, they were basically the bottom 10%, those that were having academic challenges as well as behavior challenges. So, putting them into an alternative school is to give them more individualized attention and to keep them in school. They’ve already been suspended several times so when they are in that setting and still not compliant, the ultimate goal is to keep them in school. So what do you do? Do you follow the policies and procedures in the district, or do you make modifications and adjustments for their success.

_Ethical conflict and school context._ In terms of school context and mitigating ethical conflict, participant B acknowledged environmental factors related to the norms in the community that must also be taken into consideration (Marshall, 1992). Complying with such external factors can cause conflict for this leader. For example, in a community that supports _if someone pushes you, then you push them back_, a school leader is faced with the prospect of in some way devaluing a child’s view of their parent’s authority when the child follows the parent’s direction and then receives school consequences.
I think [context does matter] because based on where you are, if it’s urban/suburban, rural and so forth there are underlying messages and thoughts, the environments these students come from, the home environment and the expectations that you have for them in your buildings.

**The role of ideals and principles.** While this participant acknowledges the importance of using policy as a guide, she also seems deeply committed to the ideal of caring for the children in her school.

Long term, especially working at the elementary level, we are building a foundation for these children, so what we do now will ultimately affect how…what will happen in their future. Having the experience of seeing…working in a middle school and seeing kids who don’t like school, who don’t want to be in school, you know that what happened to them in their younger years [caused] them to feel this way at school. It didn’t have anything to do with middle school; it had something to do with their foundational skills, what they learned at the elementary level and even prior to that what they learned at home.

So, long term vision…the decisions we make…can affect them so I’m looking at the big picture long term; what’s going to happen to them.

Recalling the distinction between macro and micro moral reasoning, in lieu of leaning on abstract principles, this leader relies on context and communication to support each child’s growth and development.

But then in regards to the principles rules and what you have to follow – it’s all in how you present it to them. You can talk about the rules, you may not have to
give them the consequence, but you can make sure they understand consequences for their actions. So it’s about that discussion piece, conferencing piece, and then looking at the long term…how this is going to affect this child. Once you are communicating with the child, communicating with the parents and teachers and so forth, what’s going to be best for this child? I take it on a case by case basis for each child.

The best interests of the student. Participant B clearly believes that she knows what is in the best interests of her students due to the fully contextualized relationship she has with them. She seems to believe that relationships are crucial to having an understanding of beneficence and that those (district office personnel) who hold abstract perspectives can cause best interests to be jeopardized. In line with Cope and Watts (2003), ethical conflict for this participant can have emotional entailments “although they say it should not but it does.”

I think what keeps [best interests from being served] are the resources that you have available to you to truly make a difference in public schools. As well as the ultimate support that you have…are you, based on your decisions, are you going to be backed or not from your superiors.

Ethical training, professional development, and the relationship of ethics and practice. Although participant B reported no specific recollection of ethical training in her graduate program or during in-service training, based on her prior responses she is unwittingly conversant in ethical decision-making.
I remember having a class [but] I haven’t had any ethical training since I’ve been a leader and I’ve been in administration…I think this is my seventh year, so I’ve haven’t had any specific ethical training or professional development.

Reflecting on the relevance of ethics to the field of educational leadership, participant B relates that ethics are relevant to “everything you do.” She goes on to share an integrated perspective of professional responsibility in which personal and professional ethics are combined into an ethic of profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011).

We’re here for the best interests of these children each and every day. You have a school of 800 kids you still need to know what’s going on in those children’s lives. So…and you can’t just focus on…it can never be just black and white when you are so instrumental in a child’s life.

**Participant C.** This participant is a male central office administrator who reported 21+ years of leadership experience primarily in suburban middle school settings. It is useful to note that this participant has a diverse leadership background that includes a several principalships three school districts in Virginia, as well as 7 years experience as a director of middle schools in a large school division in central Virginia. The critical incident reported by participant B has to do with balancing the ethics of justice and care.

As a principal, I had a student come to my office and show me a small knife he had accidentally brought with him to school. Policy dictated zero-tolerance, and an automatic suspension. However, I discussed the situation with the student, called his parent, and had the child talk with the parent. I then told the parent that
the child had done the right thing in coming to me, and had them come to pick up
the knife.

**Ethical conflict and leadership background.** In the interview, this participant’s
view of the necessity of ensuring that the school’s approach to management of student
social and academic behavior came through clearly. He made it clear that one size does
not fit all in terms of approaches to decision-making. Decisions that are made in the best
interests of the student should account for the norms in the community and the
circumstances that surround incidents.

They are different circumstances and again, depending on where you’re located
and the mores of the community, in many cases you may make a decision that’s
best for the child within the context of the community, a little different from what
policy or normal procedure dictates.

**Ethical conflict and school context.** Participant C’s response to the question
about how school context may relate to ethical conflict lines up with his earlier remarks
relevant to situational factors that ought to be accounted for when making decisions.
This participant seems willing to embrace the complexity associated with mitigating
conflict.

Most of my background was in middle school but also had many contacts at the
high school level. Obviously there is a difference between the way we may deal
with elementary students – very young elementary students, middle school
students and high school students because of the level the age, the work that
we’ve had with kids. Personally, at one of my schools where I had multiple ages,
I would talk to my eight graders…I had sixth, seventh and eighth graders, and when I would bring in my sixth graders in I would discuss information with them and talk to them about what my expectations where…my expectations were quite different with my eighth graders, particularly those that had been with me for several years and they knew what our rules were, what I would tolerate and what I wouldn’t, and so my expectations were different for the older students than for the younger students. And I think in many cases we see that our expectations would be different for a junior/senior in high school that has seen numerous situations as opposed to a student who is in first or second grade.

It is clear from this excerpt that contextual factors are important to this participant and recalling the critical incident itself that involved a boy scout who brought a pocket knife to school by mistake, relationships and relationship building is important to this leader.

We wanted them to trust us and learn to be able to come to us and talk to us about situations like that so that we could make good decisions, decisions that made sense for children; the best decision for a child as opposed to lock-step/following policy which doesn’t always make for the best decision for kids.

**The role of ideals and principles.** From the response sample below, this participant clearly finds conflict an embedded and perhaps inescapable aspect of educational leadership. In order to avoid ethical pitfalls, this participant primarily relies of normative ideals to guide his decision-making, yet near the end of the response, you will hear consequentialism introduced.
Principles will change; policies and procedures may change depending upon where you are, but your ideals kind of stay with you all the time. Ideals for me basically mean looking at situations and trying to do what’s best for children…do what’s best for kids. I’m constantly trying to balance what’s best for the whole verses what’s best for this individual student; what’s best for the teachers in the teaching environment versus what I’m doing with this one student. But I always try to look at the individual child and make a decision that’s best for the child without creating any kind of major conflict with our procedures, our policies and what we do for the whole.

**The best interests of the student.** In addition to confirming that supporting the best interests of the student is an elusive goal, this participant names policy as the primary obstacle. When asked if he is always able to support the best interests of the students he serves, he responded this way.

Not always. And I think we strive for that as a good administrator and as one who has a good ethical foundation, you are always striving to do what’s best for children, but invariably we do run up against policies and zero tolerance and it forces us to make some decisions that aren’t in the best interest of children.

**Ethical training, professional development, and the relationship of ethics and practice.** Much of the ethical training that this participant recalled is related to action research that is conducted on the job. He was not able to site specific examples of training or the names of ethics courses in which he participated. Pertinent to the on the job ethical training that takes place, it is interesting to note that this participant referenced
how the ethical *culture* of the organization is real and that there should be alignment between one’s personal ethics and the ethics of the organization. That being said, it is plausible that the ethics of the institution can either support or inhibit beneficence according to this participant.

After becoming a teacher, obviously in your education classes there’s some ethics training that takes place early on, and then as I moved forward in my master’s and doctoral programs there can be an ethics class here and there, but generally the ethical training that we get is inane and innate; its working with other people within an organization feeding off of them and seeing what the culture of the community and what the culture of the organization. Culture sometimes can create problems where you don’t feel comfortable in staying with an organization because your ethical background and your ethics are different from that of the organization or system and so that creates problems that you have trouble dealing with. But I think in many cases it’s a very informal training that leaders go through working with peers and trying to develop and figure out if the ethics of the organization matches with the ethical background that you’ve got in whatever training you may have had as you’ve come through.

This participant goes on to say that ethics is an important part of the practice of good educational leadership. Near the end of this excerpt a reference to the ethic of care as being essential to making decisions that are in the best interests of the student can be heard.
I think ethics are the center piece, and should be the center piece of any administrator who deals with children. If you are working in education and you’re dealing with children, if ethics is not something that’s at the forefront of each and every decision that you make then I think you’re in the wrong profession. I think we’ve got to look at that because that is the basis for making decisions that are best for children. Obviously we’re going to have policies, we’re going to have procedures, we’re going to have things that are going to be the framework and the parameters that we’ve got to work within, but I think as a good administrator that cares about kids you’ve got to figure ways of maintaining your ethics and working to make sure the decisions you make are best for kids.

**Participant D.** This participant is a female who reported 0-5 years of leadership experience primarily in suburban high school settings. It is useful to note that this participant is currently working in higher education after having recently completed her Ph.D. The critical incident reported by participant D has to do with balancing the ethics of justice, care, and critique.

I dealt with several circumstances in regards to advising teachers on whether or not to “pass” students in non-core subjects. Yes, students earn grades, but there are times when teachers can make the difference in whether or not students pass classes and earn credits for graduation. Sometimes it was hard to help teachers understand that when dealing with elective courses, sometimes it just does not matter if the child learns the content. Harsh, I know.
Before exploring specific areas of the response from this participant it is helpful to explain why this incident involves the intersection three ethics. It appears that this incident would only pertain to the intersection of justice and care. Justice ethics relate to the perspective that students must meet certain standards in order to earn credit and in the event that they do not meet this standard the student justifiably does not earn credit regardless of what the potential impact may be on the student’s future. The ethic of care relates to the understanding of the likelihood of dropping out of school if the student fails to graduate and the accompanying long-term hardship that is most likely occur as a result. Two additional pieces of information that came through in the interview introduce the ethic of critique. First, this incident has to do with at-risk, gang related students who are seniors in high school. Thus, this incident includes elements of social justice and protection of minority/special cases.

**Ethical conflict and leadership background.** As you will see in the response below, this participant explicitly references the importance of appropriately contextualized relationships with students as integral to empathic decision-making. In addition, the response suggests that for this participant leadership background played an essential role in forming her ethical stance.

My background is in working with youth who come from urban areas that are members of gangs and who are at risk, so when I started in schools that’s what I was doing, I was working with these kids who had been in big trouble and that’s where I was an administrator for the first time. So I think working in that population I realized that sometimes it’s not about the grade or the content but the
relationship that you build with the students and helping them learn life skills and building their confidence, and loving them for who they are. So that’s where my background is.

**Ethical conflict and school context.** It appears that work in high school settings has also informed this leader’s ethical stance. The goal of meeting graduation requirements and the opportunities that it can provide far outweigh other institutional considerations in the view of this leader.

Yes. I’ve mostly worked with secondary school students and middle school students. I was at a private school for about three years and then a public school for seven as a theater teacher so I was a non-core teacher. And as a leader it just became more important to me that these non-core teachers worked with a student where they were, no matter where that was; unless you’re talking about a child that wants to be an actor, I’m not as worried about the content. I have a specific memory of this student who was trying to get through his degree through the tech center but also finishing up at the high school where I taught, and he wanted to work in HVAC…that’s what he wanted to do. He knew as soon as he graduated he was going to work with his dad and was probably going to make more money than I ever will…and he had to take the Fine Arts elective and ended up taking Graphic Arts and he was terrible at it, he didn’t enjoy it, he and the teacher clashed, and the teacher actually wanted to hold him back and not let him graduate because he didn’t learn the content… And so these circumstances were
not common, but I’d [also] say at least once a year we’d have some sort of issue
dealing with students with needs outside of the elective course teachers.

The role of ideals and principles. When considering whether ideals or principals
guide her decision-making, this participant shared a view that favors a balanced
approach.

Both. Absolutely both. I think it depends on the circumstances. There are times
where your ideals should be first place, and there are times where your principals
should be first place. There are times where you have to care about the student
first and there are times where you have to follow the rules first.

I think you have to gather as much information as you can, get insight from as
many people who are involved in the circumstance, look at the consequence of
your decisions…potential consequences because of course you never really know,
and just gather as much information as you can and make the best judgment call
for the circumstance at hand.

The best interests of the student. This participant acknowledged that making
decisions that are in the best interest of the student not easily done. There are
combinations of factors both internally and externally that impact on this leader’s ability
to support beneficence.

Well I mean there certainly were situations where I think I called it wrong. There
were certainly times where circumstances were outside of my control. There are
times when it doesn’t matter what I think; whoever is ahead of me and gets
involved and makes a decision, it doesn’t matter what my input is. Sometimes
people who supervise us have rules and policies that we don’t understand, things
that we don’t get so see in the big picture, and so there were times I felt student’s
needs were not served because of those circumstances. But I do feel in both teams
I was at, both my public and private school, we worked very well together to
serve student’s needs. There were just times that things were outside of our
control.

Another interesting insight pertinent to supporting students adds context to the
response offered prior in which she indicated that both principles associated with justice
and ideals associated with care are important to making good decisions. In this response
is information that acknowledges the way in which justice reasoning is relevant to
making decisions that are in the best interest of the student when it is supplemented with
logic from other approaches.

I think it’s dangerous to go too far either way. I think about the administrators in
the building where I just was, and each of them had strengths which lead to an
awesome united team. There was one administrator that was by the book…didn’t
matter, he followed the rules and that was that. There was one administrator on
the opposite end of this spectrum…students first, you’ve got to love them, here -
have a granola bar type of administrator. So, it really worked well when we
would bring all the administrators together; here’s the circumstance, here’s the
student, here’s what we know…what’s the best solution and then kind of work
together to solve those problems. It’s important to have everybody.
Ethical training, professional development, and the relationship of ethics and practice. While participant D completed ethics graduate courses, she indicates that applying that knowledge through reflective teaching and practice were empowering.

In my preparation plan I got both my master’s and Ph.D…so I took the mandatory classes [for] them, and then actually before I finished by Ph.D I started teaching ethics [at the university level]. I taught ethics…for about seven years. And I think I learned more about being a good leader and ethically looking at issues through my instruction with graduate students. So that’s really where I got most of my training.

I did have a good ethics course…that helped, but I feel like you can’t really see the full spectrum until you’re in the middle of it and have to really sort through things, and consider, and think…

Like other interview participants, this leader was clear about the importance of ethics as it relates to professional practice and acknowledges the power of institutional values. Like participant C, this leader believes that the overlap of personal and professional ethics is important to success as a leader.

I don’t think you can be a school leader and not look at all issues ethically. I think if you…it has to do with your morals, your moral compass and your value system, but also the value system of the place where you work. You have to consider what their values are; like I couldn’t go into a Christian school and not follow their value system if I’m an atheist.
Summary. Prior to beginning analysis of interview data, it is important to return to limitation outlined in the methods chapter. The structure provided at the outset of the study particularly in terms of the precast nature of the interview questions may obscure other possible interpretations. The connection of the narrative inquiry and interview phases of this study would be strengthened if the interview questions were developed following the analysis of data from the first phase. This aspect will be addressed more in a later section.

For now, it is helpful to briefly return to the literature to establish context for the analysis of interview data. When reading the major findings below, recall that postmodern reasoning introduces human variables into the equation that produces action. Taking the perspective of others often generates the emotion that supplies volition to act (Dawes et al., 2007; Johnson, 1993; Lakoff, 2008; Passini, 2010). Iacoboni (2008) finds that although people are born wired with the capacity for assuming the perspective of others, being wired does mean that such perspective taking is automatic. Singer and Lamm (2009) relate that perspective taking is malleable in response to certain factors including contextual experiences. In the field of professional education, Cruz and Patterson (2005) favor multicultural learning via an experiential approach as a means to develop ethical understanding. Therefore, it is plausible that professional experiences can enable responses that are in line with best interest decision-making. Leadership background and context thus influences the conflicts leaders face.

Also, pertinent to the role of ideals and principles, it is worth returning to Taylor (1991) who advances a dialogical approach as a means of ethical development. Taylor’s
work addresses some problems of modernity like radical individualism. According to Taylor (1991) professional ethics develop when agents ebb and flow between the particular to the aggregate, or in this case between contextual experience and abstract principles or norms. The dialogical process opens space where people can become increasingly aware of the relationship between the particular and the abstract. In this way, dialogue is social rather than individual. Participant reports of applying both ideals and principals suggest that they were engaged in such a dialogical process which signals toward a grasp of professional ethics as proffered by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011).

**Findings of the interview phase of the present study.** The goal of the interview portion of the study was to learn more from certain leaders based on their critical incident report. The critical incident data was consulted to identify four participants for interview. The interview questions were created in advance of the comprehensive analysis of narrative data and sought to capture insights relevant to whether leadership background or context influenced the nature of the incident they reported. The questions also targeted leadership preparation and professional development as a means to learn more about participants’ understanding of professional ethics.

Based on the information captured via interview the following tentative findings are offered. First, leaders strongly believe that leadership background and experience in context empower them to mitigate conflict to the benefit of the student. Such background and contextual experience with students, parents, and colleagues enhances their cache of knowledge in the area of applied ethics. Second, in situations in which the best interests of students are not served, leaders attribute the malfeasance to
external/institutional factors. Third, based on data captured during interviews, the ethic that is the strongest in terms of its influence on the decisions of leaders selected for interview was the ethic of care. Finally, the descriptions of ethical conflict that were provided in narratives and in interviews suggests that leaders in this sample have an awareness of applied ethics; however, they do not attribute their awareness to pre- or inservice training.

The Connection of Narrative and Interview Findings

This study was conducted using the methods of narrative inquire and semi-structured interviews. There were some correspondences and differences in the data captured by these methods.

It is suggested that the information captured in the narrative and interview portions correspond in significant ways. Both the reported critical incidents and the interview data told stories that clearly indicate that participants knew they were involved in making important ethical decisions. Although many of the leaders shared incidents in which the best interests of the student were not served, each had a normative awareness of an alternative course of action. Such alternative courses of action may be pursued ex post facto given the pressures many leaders face to conform to distorted institutional and professional norms.

Although not specifically pursued, the narrative inquiry and interview data both contain undercurrents of issues related to social justice. For example, both sets of data include references to race and social class. The finding that ethical conflict is spread
across levels and contexts suggests that factors such as race and social class may be significantly connected to the ethical conflict leaders’ experience.

Concern for the student via the ethic of care is a predominate value that emerged in both the narrative inquiry and interview portions of this study. The leaders’ perceptions of care, however, are incomplete because neither the critical incident data nor the interview data contain the voice of the student. Because of this, leaders’ conceptualizations of care are often based on inferred rather than expressed needs (Noddings, 2008). Since the ethic of care is integral to revealing the voice of injustice (Shapiro & Stefovich, 2011) leaders who fail to consider the expressed needs of students may simultaneously fail to support their best interests.

A difference between the sets of data is also noted. Recall that in the narrative portion, most ethical conflict that practicing educational leaders in this sample experienced occurred in the domain of colleague. In the interview portion, participants do not explicitly point to collegial conflict as a reason that the best interests of students are not served, but rather signal toward policy and/or institutional norms. Contrary to the ethos of professionalism, even when they believe they have ethical standing leaders are reluctant to advocate against collegial points of view particularly when the colleague is perceived to occupy a higher organizational standing. Rather than confronting colleagues, these leaders thus make believe that the best interests of students can be served via unethical means.
CHAPTER FIVE. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter uses the data already reported and relates it to the specific research problem and questions. Recall that the problem this study addresses has to do with the expectation that educators are called to achieve contradictory goals (Colnerud, 1997). Not only are they accountable to the institution, but they are also accountable to support the best interests of students. Even when in the course of supporting the best interests of students via the multiple ethical paradigm of ethics, leaders experience ethical conflict because drawing from multiple perspectives to reach decisions creates conflict in itself. Perhaps this is a reason why many scholars such as Begley (1999) suggest that mitigating ethical conflict is persistent in the lives of educational leaders.

The rationalism of modern theory has produced institutional norms that are the source of the uniformity that can be found in schools. Institutional norms, such as zero-tolerance policies, can jeopardize the best interests of students. Educational leaders experience a level of ethical conflict when making such decisions because value-free reasoning is neither capable of capturing the entire nuance nor the voices associated with supporting the best interests of students. As a supplement to a purely rational approach, the multiple ethical paradigm of ethics has been proposed (Starratt, 1991). By supplementing rational/value-free justice reasoning with the ethics of critique and care, the multiple ethical paradigm of ethics can help leaders make decisions that are in the best interests of the student. The confluence of these ethical streams can also cause leaders to experience ethical conflict as students, parents, colleagues and leader all have a
certain ethical standing and do not always agree in terms of best interests. Conflict is part of the landscape of educational leadership and not enough is known about it. The present study thus sought to capture and describe the ethical conflict experienced by a sample of practicing educational leaders. From this basis, responses to the following questions can be offered.

**What is the nature of ethical conflicts that practicing educational leaders experience?**

To foreground the answer to this question it is helpful to recall that the core of decision-making in the best interests of the student is the concept of *in loco parentis*. School officials including teachers and administrators act in the place of parents when students are under their supervision. The obligation of the school leader *in loco parentis* is to support the welfare of the student.

The findings of the narrative portion suggest that the majority of ethical conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders in this sample involved colleagues and that, within the domain of colleague, the majority of conflict involved the collision of the ethics of justice and care. A reason why conflict involving colleagues is problematic is because when a second set of values are introduced (the values of the colleague), the leader is called to negotiate between and among three sets of values (i.e., institutional values, their own values, collegial values) in order to support the interests of the student. The inclusion of others in the leader's scope of justice as suggested by Passini (2010), results in conflict with which the leader must wrestle. A second reason why collegial conflict is problematic is because the values of the leader and colleague are both held *in*
loco parentis and therefore each actor may feel as though their recommendation has ethical warrant. That being said, much of the conflict involving colleagues that practicing educational leaders in this sample experienced is more closely related to Samier’s (2008) notion of moral inversion. Although leaders are inclined to advocate differently, the tension generated by conflict can lead them to rely on rational approaches which are typically more efficient.

Similarly, parents and acting parents (leaders) share an interest in supporting the best interests of the student. The amount of conflict with parents that leaders in this sample experienced is less than that experienced with colleagues. A reason for this may be because leaders do not perceive there to be a conflict in fact, since parents do not occupy commensurate ethical standing as perceived by the leader. Thus, when in the course of mitigating conflict with parents, leaders may tend to acquiesce toward the efficiency of justice reasoning.

Leaders in this sample also do not report a high incidence of conflict with students perhaps because they do not perceive that students have ethical standing. Thus, absent other informed sets of values there are only institutional values with which to negotiate in order to meet the leader’s best interest standard. Leaders in this sample were adept at applying the ethic of critique and the ethic of care when dealing with conflict in the domain of student.

The nature of the ethical conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders can be described as being riddled with embedded conflicts of interest. Such conflicts of interest can move leaders to rely on value free rational approaches which not only tend to
be more efficient but also make it difficult to support the best interests of the student in some cases.

**Is the critical incident technique a tool relevant to the purpose of capturing ethical conflict as perceived by practicing educational leaders?**

Recall from Flanagan (1954) that there are three assumptions associated with the critical incident technique: the incident should correspond to a clearly articulated case; if the respondent cannot produce a clear account of what occurred, then the case is not valid; and the unit of analysis is the critical incident itself. Based on these assumptions, the critical incident technique is proposed to be a valid means to collect data on decision-making behavior.

From the 42 participants who accessed the survey, 34 provided a written account of a critical incident (80.9%). Of the 34 respondents, 5 (14.8%) provided 2 accounts of ethical incidents which brought the total count of incidents to 39. This rate of participation suggests that the solicitation for the critical incident was easily understood by the participants. In addition, the leaders provided full accounts of incidents that were meaningful to them. All reported critical incidents thus included enough information to make coding and organizing possible. Such coding and organizing require course-rather than fine-grained inferences. Thus, while coarse-grained data is relevant to the purpose of coding and organizing, sense-making calls for data that is more contextualized.

The critical incident technique suggests that conflict experienced by school leaders occurs in the domains of student, parent, and colleague. The nature of conflict experienced by practicing leaders is informed by the multiple ethical paradigm of ethics.
Even if participants did not call the ethics of justice, critique, and care by name, the themes embedded in them came through with clarity in the reported critical incidents. While not used prior as a tool to capture ethical conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders, the critical incident technique proved to be an adequate means to collect such data which often lies at the phenomenological level (Cope & Watts, 2003).

In line with prior research (Pope et al., 2009) the critical incident technique captured information that enabled substantive findings to emerge from the data. First, based on data captured by this study we now tentatively know that like teachers, leaders can experience ethical conflict in the domains of student, parent, and colleague. We also tentatively know that conflict with colleagues is particularly problematic for educational leaders and that such conflict experienced by the participants in this sample involved a conflict between the ethics of justice and care.

Based as they are on reconstructions of past events, one limitation of this research was suggested to be the ability of participants’ to accurately recall incidents that cause them conflict. While the written reports of critical incidents may not have been a precise reflection of the intensity of the event, the interviews provided an opportunity for such feelings to come through. Overall, the critical incident technique is an effective tool for capturing ethical conflict perceived by practicing educational leaders.

**How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to leadership background?**

In this study, leadership background is defined as elementary, middle, or high school. At these levels, leaders share that the nature of conflict can vary. For example, participant A and C who serve at the high school level, site graduation requirements as an
important external accountability measure that tends to influence their decision-making, particularly as it relates to seniors (12th grade). Because graduation can be more important to some seniors than others, the external accountability related to graduation requirements is an example of an institutional norm that can lead decision-makers toward choices that are grounded in the ethic of critique. Thus, when leaders are pressured to conform to the idea that it is acceptable for particular seniors not to graduate, the ethic of justice can conflict with the ethic of critique. In this example, applying the ethic of critique can relax the tension in the ethic of justice by providing a pathway that supports the best interests of the student.

Similarly, at the elementary level internal professional norms that often summon the ethic of care and can likewise jeopardize the best interests of the student. These norms can conflict with such things as the principles of education and of upbringing (Colnerud, 1997). Thus, relying on the ethic of care (only) can compromise the virtues of the others. Recalling Shulman (1998) is helpful in this regard. No ethical approach can do all things in all situations; hence, one ethical size does not fit all situations. Justice reasoning, like the ethics of critique and care, is useful to student best interests.

**How does the nature of these ethical conflicts relate to school context?**

Used here, school context refers to the distinction between urban, suburban, and rural settings. While each interview participant indicated that the majority of their experience had been invested in suburban settings, their experience also included tenures in other settings. School context informs the nature of the ethical conflicts due to the values that are held in the community. In line with Marshall (1992) leaders often have
little or no control over such communal values. In some cases leaders are thus called to balance competing collegial, parental, and communal interests. Since leaders themselves are not devoid of a particular ethical perspective, it logically follows that experience in varying school contexts impacts upon not only the nature of conflicts experienced, but also on the ability of the leader deal with the conflict to the students’ benefit. Some school contexts may include amplified and/or unrealistic expectations for students, while others may not. The important finding regarding context is that the pattern of results found in this study and presented in Tables 12 and 13 prior suggests that ethical conflict is spread across all contexts and that there is not one predominate type of conflict that presents in a particular context. Leaders thus need to be prepared to mitigate all types of conflict regardless of the context in which they find themselves.

**What are the implications for leadership preparation, professional development, and future research?**

Based on the responses of these participants, and in line with Campbell (2008), it seems that leadership preparation was not a strong influence in leaders’ professional ethical development. Based on the tentative findings of this research, it is clear that preparation and training in ethical decision-making remains pertinent. Interview participant B shared that most administrative training has focused on “curriculum and use of data”, at the expense of serious consideration of ethics.

Unlike ethics in teaching, the body of educational leadership literature pertaining to ethics is thin. Campbell (2008) thus considers literature on ethics in educational leadership to be a field that parallels ethics in teaching.
While the language used may be shared, the conceptual frameworks that interpret
the language are not, and the literature base continues to represent a range of
theoretical positions from the traditional to the critical on the meaning of moral
and ethical educational leadership. And, in some cases, the language of morality
and ethics is used without substantive grounding conceptually or philosophically,
and any meaning of what it is about the leadership described that makes it moral
or ethical is obscured.

There is anecdotal evidence that suggests that most educational leaders are the
products of the teaching ranks. Given the gap in the literature relevant to ethics in
educational leadership, leaders can be routed to the literature related to professional
ethics in teaching. On the bright side, one of the important books in this area is Strike
and Ternasky’s (1993) *Ethics for Professionals in Education: Perspectives for
Preparation and Practice*. While this book does not deal with ethics in educational
leadership per se, it does deal with normative concepts that are parallel to the field such
as the philosophical connection of ethics and schools, pre-service ethical instruction for
teachers, and professional ethics.

Most ethical training does not include significant consideration of the dark side of
ethics (Campbell, 2008). Such a dark side is characterized by the ethical conflicts and the
kinds of situations that teachers and leaders face that cause them to compromise the best
interests of the children they serve. Pre- and in-service training that aims toward bringing
out theses blind spots holds great potential as a force for good. In terms of pre-service
training, the educational leadership and foundations departments of the university that
served as the host may benefit from reading this study. Given the lack of specific information that leaders were able to share regarding the ethical training that they received in their preparation programs, this study can potentially alert university faculty relevant to the ethical conflict faced by educational leaders in practice. Such faculty may be able to use this information to make firm connections between ethics in theory and ethics in practice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 1991). Developing the ability of future leaders to use the ethics of justice, critique, and care will help them to support decision-making that has the potential to promote the best interests of the students they serve.

From the professional development perspective, the interview portion of the study suggests that not only is experience as an educational leader in general integral to the task of making balanced decisions, but that experience across levels and contexts is also important. Such experience in various levels and contexts can help leaders to understand the ethical perspectives of the students, parents and colleagues that often differ in nuanced ways across communities. For example, experience at the elementary level where care can be an important ethic can assist leaders when in the course of serving high school students where the ethic of justice can be strong.

In terms of areas ripe for future research, there is a need for inquiry that amplifies the voice of students in terms of recognizing them as having ethical standing and thus, shared decision-making. For example, this study can be replicated featuring the student as participant. Remember that Iacoboni (2008) found that while humans are born wired with the capacity for assuming the perspective of others being wired does not also mean...
that such perspective taking is automatic. Care and empathy are integral to supporting the best interests of students and affective factors such as these are enabled when leaders are able to take the perspective of the student (Johnson, 1993; Singer & Lamm, 2009). Recalling Johnson (1993), it is hard to imagine being able to assume the perspective of students without talking with them first.

Pertinent to leader background variables, another area ripe for research is the study of whether and how participant background variables (i.e., race, gender, etc.) are related to ethical conflict and decision-making. Learning more about ethical conflict and decision-making from the point of view of a particular subsample of leaders would enhance the field’s grasp of the ethical dimensions of educational leadership and also build on theory that informs the profile of an ethical educational leader (Marshall, 1995; Vitton & Wasonga, 2009).

Given the findings of this study, it may be useful to incorporate parts of its design into a research program designed to more fully and completely understand the kinds of ethical conflicts that are faced by practicing educational leaders, particularly in the domain of colleague. For example, this study can be replicated in one or more large school districts using the district’s practicing leaders as the sample of participants. This strategy may not only be likely to net a larger sample of participants but may also capture critical incidents that are pertinent to a particular community. In this way, participants may be more likely to share powerful ethical incidents when they know that others may face the same types of issues and space may be created in which important discussions about the sample of conflicts that cause student best interests to be jeopardized can take
place. One part of its design that should not be replicated has to do with the precast nature of the interview questions. Rather than developing interview questions in advance of the outset of the first phase of the study, it would have been better to develop them after the analysis of narrative data was complete. This would be a better approach because the immersive nature of analyzing the critical incidents would have enabled the development of questions pertinent to emergent topics (e.g., student voice). With this adjustment, more powerful data could have been captured via interview.

Beyond urban, suburban, and rural contexts, we can press further into new territory by studying ethical conflict and decision-making based on the actual make-up of the school. For example, racially or economically segregated school settings might be purposively selected based on their ability to shed new light on decision-making. Another interesting setting is the school within a school concept particularly when the make-up of the students in each context differs along racial and/or socio-economic lines (as is normally the case). In a similar way, this study may produce useful information if it were to be conducted as designed, using leaders who serve at a specific level. For example, a larger sample of participants may show that the kinds of ethical conflict faced by practicing leaders at the elementary level differ from the kinds faced by middle and high school leaders. Extending this logic, it is also useful to learn more about the similarities and differences in the kinds of incidents faced by urban, suburban and rural leaders who serve in the same district.

As noted prior, the narrative inquiry and interview phases were both based on the same critical incident report. By conducting this study as designed yet developing the
interview questions after the analysis of the critical incidents, the connection of these portions of the study can be strengthened to reveal additional information that is useful. In this way, more information pertinent to the connection between social justice and decision-making that is in the best interests of the student might be revealed. This is important because the discourse that surrounds social justice often favors abstract structures and conditions that create or perpetuate inequality. Research is needed that explores the how the critical component of social justice is operationalized via the ethic of critique at the level of the student. Such research may serve to elevate the consideration of ethics and ethical decision-making to a higher level cultural status in schools (Sichel, 1993).

The purpose of this study was to capture and describe the ethical conflict experienced by a sample of practicing educational leaders through a multidimensional ethical lens purported to support the best interests of students. Serious inquiry into this topic is largely absent in the educational leadership literature. Although study of the normative side of ethics in educational leadership brings with it ideal visions of how things ought to be, the dark side of ethics in educational leadership ought not to be a secret that the field keeps from itself. While this dark side of ethics is unseemly and complex, by acknowledging that it exists and by illuminating and wrestling with its complexity, practicing educational leaders and the institutions that serve students benefit. By taking up the dark of ethics in educational leadership, the literature receives a modest yet important contribution from this study.
List of References


Murphy, L., (Eds.), *Cognitive perspectives on educational leadership and administration.* New York: Teacher College Press.


Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

On December 19, 2012, the following research study was approved by expedited review according to 45 CFR 46.110 Category 7. The approval reflects the revisions received in the Office of Research Subjects Protection on December 8, 2012. This approval includes the following items reviewed by this Panel:

RESEARCH APPLICATION/PROPOSAL: None

PROTOCOL (Research Plan): Negotiating the Double Mandate: Mapping Ethical Conflict Experienced by Practicing Educational Leaders, received 12/8/12, version 2, dated 12/7/12
- VCU IRB Study Personnel Roster, received 11/2/12, version date 10/22/12
- Research Participant Interview Protocol, received 11/2/12, version date 10/22/12
- Online Survey Preview, received 11/2/12, version date 10/22/12

CONSENT/ASSENT (attached):
- Consent Information (contained within first 2 pages of Online Survey), received 11/2/12, version date 10/22/12, 2 pages
- Waiver of Documentation of Consent for Online Survey (Phase 1): One of the conditions set forth in 45 CFR 46 117(c) (2), for waiver of documentation of consent has been met and the IRB Panel has waived documentation of consent.
- Research Participant Information and Consent for Interview, received 12/8/12, version date 12/8/12, 3 pages

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS (attached):
- Advertisements/Subject Recruitment Material, received 11/2/12, version date 10/22/12

This approval expires on November 30, 2013. Federal Regulations/VCU Policy and Procedures require continuing review prior to continuation of approval past that date. Continuing Review report forms will be mailed to you prior to the scheduled review.

(Continued...)

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The Primary Reviewer assigned to your research study is Salvatore Lupica, JD. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Lupica at salvatorelupica@comcast.net; or you may contact Jennifer Rice, IRB Coordinator, VCU Office of Research Subjects Protection, at irbpanelsb@vcu.edu and 828-3992.

Conditions of Approval:

In order to comply with federal regulations, industry standards, and the terms of this approval, the investigator must (as applicable):

1. Conduct the research as described in and required by the Protocol.

2. Obtain informed consent from all subjects without coercion or undue influence, and provide the potential subject sufficient opportunity to consider whether or not to participate (unless Waiver of Consent is specifically approved or research is exempt).

3. Document informed consent using only the most recently dated consent form bearing the VCU IRB “APPROVED” stamp (unless Waiver of Consent is specifically approved).

4. Provide non-English speaking patients with a translation of the approved Consent Form in the research participant’s first language. The Panel must approve the translated version.

5. Obtain prior approval from VCU IRB before implementing any changes whatsoever in the approved protocol or consent form, unless such changes are necessary to protect the safety of human research participants (e.g., permanent/temporary change of PI, addition of performance/collaborative sites, request to include newly incarcerated participants or participants that are wards of the state, addition/deletion of participant groups, etc.). Any departure from these approved documents must be reported to the VCU IRB immediately as an Unanticipated Problem (see #7).

6. Monitor all problems (anticipated and unanticipated) associated with risk to research participants or others.

7. Report Unanticipated Problems (UPs), including protocol deviations, following the VCU IRB requirements and timelines detailed in VCU IRB WPP VIII-7):

8. Obtain prior approval from the VCU IRB before use of any advertisement or other material for recruitment of research participants.

9. Promptly report and/or respond to all inquiries by the VCU IRB concerning the conduct of the approved research when so requested.

10. All protocols that administer acute medical treatment to human research participants must have an emergency preparedness plan. Please refer to VCU guidance on http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/guidance.htm.

11. The VCU IRBs operate under the regulatory authorities as described within:
    a) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Title 45 CFR 46, Subparts A, B, C, and D (for all research, regardless of source of funding) and related guidance documents.
    b) U.S. Food and Drug Administration Chapter I of Title 21 CFR 50 and 56 (for FDA regulated research only) and related guidance documents.
    c) Commonwealth of Virginia Code of Virginia 32.1 Chapter 5.1 Human Research (for all research).
Appendix B

Advertisements/Subject Recruitment Material

Negotiating the Double Mandate: Mapping Ethical Conflict Experienced by Practicing Educational Leaders
22 October 2012

ADVERTISEMENTS/SUBJECT RECRUITMENT MATERIAL
An email will be sent to the target population inviting participants to the online survey which is hosted by Survey Monkey. The email will provide a brief overview of the project, the name of the principal investigator, acknowledge that participation is voluntary, explain that data will be protected, and provide a link to the online survey. Follow-up emails will be sent to the same population during the second and third week following the original message. The same target population will receive follow-up emails because there will be no way to distinguish between those who have and have not completed the survey. Below is an example of an original and follow-up email.

Original Email:
In partial fulfillment of VCU requirements for the degree of Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, I am coordinating a research study about ethical conflict faced by educational leaders. To provide insight into this topic, you are invited to participate in a nine item survey. By volunteering to participate, you will be asked to do three things: provide information related to your professional profile, provide a narrative statement related to ethical conflict you have faced in your role as a school leader, and indicate whether you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview. The final item on the survey asks whether or not you wish to view the final report after the study is completed. In this way, the research method and findings are accessible to the participants in the study. I hope that this study will advance understanding about how educational leaders mitigate ethical conflict to support the best interests of students. The online survey can be accessed at (URL Address Here) and ought to take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

Because it will be impossible to identify the participants who volunteer to complete the survey, you may receive email reminders even if you have already completed it. Only participants who agree to participate in a follow-up interview can be linked to data. More information regarding the protections embedded in this opportunity is provided in the survey (URL Address Here). If you have questions or experience difficulty related to the online survey, please contact Kurt Stemhagen at 804-827-8415.

Follow-up Email:
This is a reminder of the VCU dissertation study about ethical conflict faced by educational leaders. If you have already completed the survey at (URL Address Here), please disregard this message. The survey ought to take no more than 15 minutes to complete and can be accessed at (URL Address Here). If you have questions or experience difficulty related to the online survey, please contact Kurt Stemhagen at 804-827-8415.

Approved
12-9-12
Appendix C

Research Participant Professional Profile/Ethical Conflict

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY
The purpose of this study is to capture and describe ethical conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT
Your involvement in this study may include one or two phases. In phase one, you are asked to complete a six item online survey. Five of the items are related to your professional profile and one item is open-ended/free response related to ethical conflict you have experienced. The survey ought to take less than 15 minutes to complete.

At the conclusion of the survey, you are asked if you are willing to participate in phase two which is a follow-up interview (if selected). To volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview, you are asked to confirm your willingness by providing your name and contact information. This consent information applies ONLY TO THE SURVEY PORTION OF THE STUDY.

RISKS, DISCOMFORTS, AND COSTS
Any risk or discomfort resulting from your participation in this study is extremely minimal and not expected to exceed that experienced during reflection on regular leadership practice in context or in an educational leadership classroom setting. There is no cost associated with participation in this study other than the time invested.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS
The findings from this study will be reported in a dissertation completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU); thus, findings can be public and assessable to participants. The results of the study should advance understanding of decision-making in the best interest of the student.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information that you provide will be confidential. You are not required to provide any identifiable information to complete the survey that follows. It will not be possible to link responses to individual participants unless you choose to volunteer contact information. Contact information will only be available to researchers authorized by the VCU IRB who may contact a sub-sample of participants for a brief follow-up interview. All identifiers will be stripped from the data upon the completion of the study and all data reporting will be anonymous. Qualitative data will be reported at the aggregate level and pseudonyms will be used when presenting quotations and/or paraphrases.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you volunteer to participate in the survey, you may stop at any time without penalty and may skip or choose not to answer particular questions. You may volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview (if selected) by providing contact information and you may decline participation if contacted.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**
The alternative to participation in this study is not to participate in one or both phases. If you do not wish to volunteer to participate in the online phase of this study, please close/exit this survey link now. If you do not wish to volunteer participate in the interview phase of this study (if selected), do not provide contact information.

**QUESTIONS**
For questions about participation in this study, now or in the future, contact:

Kurt Stemhagen, Principal Investigator  
VCU School of Education  
P.O. Box 842020  
Richmond, VA 23284  
E-mail: krstemhagen@vcu.edu  
Phone: 804-827-8415

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study, contact:

VCU Office of Research  
800 East Leigh Street  
P.O. Box 980568  
Richmond, VA 23298

**CONSENT**
I ACCEPT the terms of this consent form.

1. What is the job title for your current position?  
   _____ Assistant Principal  
   _____ Principal  
   _____ Central Office Administrator  
   _____ Other

2. What is your gender?  
   _____ Male  
   _____ Female

3. How many years as an Educational Leader do you have?
4. In what context has the majority of your experience as an educational leader been invested?
   - Urban
   - Rural
   - Suburban

5. At what level has the majority of your experience as an educational leader been invested?
   - Elementary/Primary (K-5)
   - Middle (6-8)
   - High (9-12)

6. In fulfilling professional responsibilities, school leaders can experience ethical conflict in their interaction with students, colleagues/teachers, and parents. Briefly describe a situation or a kind of situation in which you find it difficult to know the right or wrong thing to do from a moral/ethical point of view in relation to student best interest. Feel free to describe a first-hand experience with ethics and the best interests of the student or more general ethical issues you have encountered with student best interest.

7. Based on responses, a sub-sample of participants may be selected for a brief follow-up interview. Of the four interview questions, two are related to the relationship that may exist between the ethical conflict you experienced and your professional profile and two are related to applied ethics. If you are willing to participate in an interview (if selected), please provide contact information in the space below. If you are not willing to participate in an interview (if selected), please leave the space below blank and click "Done".
Appendix D

Research Participant Information and Consent for Interview

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

TITLE: NEGOTIATING THE DOUBLE MANDATE: MAPPING ETHICAL CONFLICT EXPERIENCE BY PRACTICING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY (VCU) IRB NUMBER:

If this participant information and consent form contains language or words you do not understand, please ask for clarification.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to capture and describe ethical conflict experienced by practicing educational leaders.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

In phase one of this study, you completed a short online survey. As part of the survey you indicated an interest in participating in a follow-up interview by providing an email address and were selected for participation. The interview includes four questions and will take less than an hour. Two questions are related to the relationship that may exist between the ethical conflict you experienced and your professional profile and two are related to applied ethics. With your permission, the interview will be recorded.

RISKS, DISCOMFORTS AND COSTS

Any risk or discomfort resulting from your participation in this interview is extremely minimal and not expected to exceed that experienced during reflection on regular leadership practice in context or in an educational leadership classroom setting. There is no cost associated with participation in this study other than the time invested.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

McGee_Standard Consent for Interview 8 December 2012

APPROVED

12/09/12
The findings from this study will be reported in a dissertation completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (VCU); thus, findings can be public and assessable to participants. The findings of the study should advance understanding of decision-making in the best interest of the student.

**PRIVACY**

Participation in this interview will require that respondents provide potentially identifiable information (consent form and recordings). All data is collected for research purposes only. Participant response data will be disguised by a respondent identification code/number. All electronic data will be password protected and audio recordings and consent forms will be secured in a lockable storage cabinet and destroyed within three months completion of the study. Only researchers prescribed by the VCU Institutional Review Board will have access to data.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information that you provide in this interview is confidential. All identifiers will be stripped from the data upon the completion of the study. All data reporting will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be used when presenting quotations and/or paraphrases.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You may stop at any time without penalty and may choose not to answer particular questions.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The alternative to participation in this interview is not to participate.

**QUESTIONS**

For questions about participation in this study, now or in the future, contact:

Kurt Stemhagen, Principal Investigator
VCU School of Education

McGee_Standard Consent for Interview 8 December 2012

APPROVED

\[\text{Signature}\]
For questions about your rights as a participant in this study, contact:

VCU Office of Research
800 East Leigh Street
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study and my involvement in it. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature indicates that I am willing to participate in this interview. Two copies of this consent form will be signed; one of which will be maintained by the researcher and one to be provided to the participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name (printed)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Address</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent (printed)</td>
<td>Signature</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

McGee Standard Consent for Interview 8 December 2012

APPROVED

12-19-12 / se / jcs
Appendix E

Research Participant Interview Protocol

Introductory Script

“This interview is part of a research project that focuses on ethical conflict faced by practicing educational leaders. Based on your response to the Professional Profile/Ethical Conflict solicitation, you have been selected for interview. You have been selected for interview because you may have specific insight pertinent to the questions this research pursues. This interview ought to take no more that 45-60 minutes to complete. With your consent, I will record our conversation for research purposes only and to make sure that your responses are captured accurately. Only researchers will hear our conversation during which you are asked to refrain from identifying yourself or others by name, school district, or school name. Do you have any questions before I begin recording?”

Questions

“To begin I would like to return to the critical ethical incident you reported to find out more about why you felt that the reported incident was an ethical dilemma in the first place and to determine whether your professional background and school context have anything to do with your perception.

[read response to critical incident]

1. How does the nature of this ethical conflict relate to your leadership background?

2. How does the nature of this ethical conflict relate to school context?

Probing questions:

a. Do ideals or principles guide your decision-making?
b. Do you feel that the best interests of students are always served?

I would like to ask you two general questions about ethics and your preparation and training for school leadership.

1. Describe the ethical training you received in your preparation program and any professional development related to ethics and educational leadership since becoming a leader?

2. How are ethics relevant to your role as an educational leader?
Jeffrey Warren McGee was born September 19, 1964 in Richmond, VA. After graduating from high school, he entered the United States Army in 1983. Following graduation from the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center, he served in the Fifth Special Forces Group. Subsequent to his military tenure, Jeff earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education from Virginia Tech in 1990 and a Master of Education Degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1995. Upon the acceptance of this dissertation, Jeff will have earned a Ph.D. in educational leadership from Virginia Commonwealth University. Jeff has more than 20 years professional experience as a high school teacher, coach, and administrator as well as experience via four middle school principalships in Virginia and in the U.S. Department of Defense Schools. These tenures included center-based settings for highly gifted learners as well as experience in urban, suburban, rural, and international settings. Jeff currently serves as the director of a magnet high school that serves gifted learners.