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Ethical and Moral Decision Making: Praxis and Hermeneutics for School Leaders

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Ethical and Moral Decision Making: Praxis and Hermeneutics for School Leaders

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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DEDICATION

To my parents, Frank and Virginia Quinn, you will forever be my moral compass.
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ABSTRACT

There has been a renewed interest in the inclusion of ethics as part of educators’ training and interest in understanding the moral and ethical dimensions of educational practice. This research was designed to study the types of dilemmas school level leaders face, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for leader preparation, professional development, and practice.

In documenting the lived experiences of former school level leaders, the grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry and the critical incident technique (CIT) were employed. Data collected from interview sessions, dialogs, journals and reflections were used to analyze the types of dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for leader preparation, professional development, and practice.

This study confirmed the prevalence of ethical dilemmas for school level leadership. The critical incidents shared by the participants revealed that school leaders were guided by district policies and experienced dissonance or tension between their guiding ethical beliefs and policies or expectations of the district. The data determined that school level leaders sought to act in the best interests of students. Participants acknowledged that the core of their ethical and moral fiber was developed early in their youth and was reinforced by pivotal life experiences. This acknowledgement suggested that pivotal life experiences could influence an individual’s ethical and moral fiber. The findings also indicated that professional development in ethics could be effective for
school level leaders. Additionally, the data revealed a dichotomy around whether ethics could be taught. The findings were inconclusive in determining how race and/or gender played a significant role in the dilemmas that school level leaders face or the resolution of the dilemmas. Further research and study of this issue may be warranted in light of the changing demographics of our schools, communities, and school level leaders. Critical reflection proved to be a process that could benefit practicing and aspiring school level leaders. Exploring how this process could be implemented in school leader preparation and professional development programs is a phenomenon worthy of further research.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This chapter outlines the intent of this researcher’s dissertation study. Included in this chapter is the introduction, theoretical framework, a statement of the problem including literature about the problem, the purpose of the study, the guiding research questions, and the proposed methodology and research design. This study evolved from one of the four questions that framed the course of study for the Pinellas doctoral cohort: How can support for the development of ethical leadership be extended to school leaders? This question also served as the guidepost for this researcher’s study and review of the literature relating to ethics, ethical dilemmas, and the complexity of decisions school level leaders make.

Theoretical Framework

“Ethical issues, problems, and dilemmas are present in every compartment of our lives” (Goree, Pyle, Baker, & Hopkins, 2006, p.13); furthermore, the structure of our society has shifted from an era of simpler times to one that is often driven and dictated by policy, court decisions, and legal mandates. Our schools have not escaped this societal shift that has escalated to the point where school leaders are faced with a myriad of dilemmas. There are dichotomies among the ethical implications of these dilemmas, the societal shift, legal requirements, and educational codes of ethics. As Torres (2004) observes, “it is evident that laws and policies trump acts of caring when social and moral dilemmas arise” (p. 253). As Cranston, Enrich, & Kimber (2003) stated emphatically
Because school leaders are caught at the interface between the system and the school and are accountable to both bodies, they are likely to find themselves juggling a ‘multitude of competing obligations and interests’…this complex and more autonomous operational milieu requires school leaders to confront and resolve conflicting interests as they endeavour [sic] to balance a variety of values and expectations in their decision making. Not surprisingly, the result is often ethical dilemmas for the school leader, arising for example, where conflict and tension may arise as the leader struggles to decide between alternative decisions, one reflecting the immediate operational context of the school and the other a more systemically oriented choice reflecting a political imperative (p. 136).

The changing role of school leadership has increased the expectation for school administrators to be expert managers and skillful instructional leaders, able to balance the critical tensions between competing values in decision-making (Holland, 2004, p. 3). Educators are held to higher standards regarding moral and ethical behavior due to their daily interaction with children (Senge, 2000). The decision in *Adams v. State of Florida Professional Practices Council* declared, “By virtue of their leadership and capacity, teachers are traditionally held to a high moral standard in a community.” Bull and McCarthy (1991) support this declaration when they state:

As employees of public schools, administrators and teachers have responsibilities with regard to public values that go beyond what is expected of other citizens. As public employees, they are entrusted to enforce public values and to an extent not necessary for private citizens, to observe those values in their work (p. 624).
The myriad of dilemmas that school leaders face frequently can be described as “situational ethics” (Goree, Pyle, Baker, & Hopkins 2006; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). National, regional, and local situations and circumstances such as the effects of hurricane Katrina, high stakes testing with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) compliance requirements, school restructuring, federal and state mandates, zero tolerance procedures, increased use of technology, and teacher and administrative shortages add to the driving forces impacting the changes to schools (Starratt, 2004, p. 1). Often, dissonance arises between the ethical implications of the myriad of changes and the ethical principles defined by educational codes of ethics. As states continue to adopt various assessment instruments, identify benchmarks, and embrace strategies to ensure proper compliance by educational professionals in schools, issues of social justice, politics, and capacity arise. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002), Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mandates, and required state assessments (that are correlates to Florida’s FCAT) become morally justified since they are designed “in the best interests” of the academic achievement of all students and “endeavor to raise levels of performance of our underserved populations” (Torres, 2004, pp. 251-254). Thus, the context of schooling at the national, regional, and local levels reflects a plethora of moral and ethical challenges for school leaders.

Do these changes justify our continuation of what Tyack and Cuban (1995) referred to as the “grammar of schooling”, Slattery’s (2006) queries about modernizing curriculum (p. 49), or as Starratt (1991) ardently stated our inability to move from a kind of naiveté about the “ways things are” to an awareness of the ethical challenge of making social changes more responsive to
the human and social rights of all citizens, to enable those affected by social
arrangements to have a voice in evaluating their results and in altering them in the
interests of the common good and of fuller participation and justice for
individuals? (pp. 189-190).

The political and social changes in our society have had a very direct impact on
schools, teaching and learning, the training of educators, and expectations of school
leaders. Somewhere along the way, our moral compass was lost and the 1990’s became a
decade of neglect in terms of leadership (Fullan, 2003). Note the corporate scandals at
Enron and WorldCom, the controversial treatment of prisoners at Abu Graib, sexual
abuse scandals in the Catholic Church, Martha Stewart’s conviction for lying about
personal stock sales, the very public vetting of former President Clinton’s personal
conduct in the White House, and most recently, the Madoff scandal (Pardini, 2004;
Slattery, 2006). Ethical lapses in business [organizations], when they occur, are not
always the result of willful intent by workers to lie, cheat, or steal, but may be
manifestations of incentives unintentionally created by the formal structure of the
organization which often encourages such behaviors (James, 2000, p. 45).

Decision-making has been called “the sine qua non of administration” and
“decision making pervades all other administrative functions as well” (English & Bolton,
2008, p. 96). English and Bolton (2008) also observed that

Humans are therefore almost always confronting moral issues. However, their
freedom to make such choices is somehow positioned between their values and
those placed on them by the organizations in which they are employed….Decision
makers do not always make the best decisions for the organization, but they
almost always attempt to make the best decisions for themselves… Either way, the decision maker and the organization are connected in a kind of dynamic fluid tandem, whether positive or negative – positive, if the decision maker and the organization ultimately benefit; negative, if either one is reduced in effectiveness, short or long term (p. 101).

Several examples illustrate situations where values were placed on leaders and citizens by organizations or government, protecting the well-being of all through laws and policies: Although President Carter, for example, believed abortion is always a tragedy, as president he was sworn to uphold the Constitution and to respect the Supreme Court’s decision in Roe v. Wade (1973). He accepted the Court’s decision that a woman has a right to choose but also did everything in his power to reduce the number of abortions by instituting policies that prevented unwanted pregnancies, promoted adoption and encouraged women to choose life for their unborn children (Carter, 2005). The Jessica Lunsford Act is the result of a heinous crime committed by John Couey but he was guaranteed a fair trial and was deemed “innocent until proven guilty”. In addition, James von Brunn, the gunman who opened fire at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., killing one, was severely wounded when officers opened fire. Both he and the guard he shot was rushed to same hospital and received same medical care (St. Pete Times, 2009). Under Florida’s zero tolerance law, a student who may be at a school function and is in a specific area or room where there is a gun or weapon, may be considered to be in possession of the gun or weapon and could be recommended for expulsion – a decision that must be made and upheld by the school level leader.

As Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003) have found
There is an expectation that those who hold leadership positions will act justly, rightly, and promote good rather than evil. This entails leaders demonstrating both moral and professional accountability to those they serve…Moral accountability is concerned with wanting the best for learners (whether they are students or staff) while professional accountability is concerned with upholding the standards of ethics of one’s profession. Both accountabilities reinforce the notion that education leadership fundamentally has a moral purpose…the focus on management arising from economic rationalism is inconsistent with the professional and personal values of school leaders and can contradict important ethics of care and justice. When contractual accountability, that is accountability to the government or system, is a strong and competing force against other accountabilities (such as moral and professional accountabilities), there is much potential for ethical dilemmas. In this situation, a skillful administrator needs to optimize his or her most valued beliefs, responsibilities, and obligations in ways that minimise [sic] consequences…An ethical dilemma, then, arises from a situation that necessitates a choice between competing sets of principles (pp. 136-137).

There has been renewed interest in the inclusion of ethics as part of educators’ training (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Starratt, 1994) and more researchers have become interested in understanding the moral and ethical dimensions of educational practice (Langlois, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Strike, Holler, & Soltis, 1998). Langlois (2004) also pointed out, “few empirical studies on ethical dimensions have been conducted on school administration” (Langlois, 2004, p. 9). Starratt (2004) suggests that
leadership preparation programs at colleges and universities may need to challenge, continually, prospective educational leaders about their ethical principles and moral values. The research and studies conducted by Covrig (2001), Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (1998) (2002), and Pardini (2004) add support to Starratt’s suggestion for greater emphasis of ethics in leadership preparation.

The Farquhar study (1978) (1981) that was replicated by Beck and Murphy (1993) is a case in point. It has been 26 years since Beck and Murphy’s replication of this study and their prediction of an increasing interest in the study of ethics in leadership preparation:

…that interest in this topic will continue to swell… and that, if this study were to be replicated twenty-five years hence, researchers would uncover widespread beliefs that administrators must be equipped to think and act ethically and to develop structures and policies which support consciously chosen, morally sound values and outcomes (p. 31).

Cranston, Enrich, and Kimber (2003) found that theoretical approaches such as consequentialism, non consequentialism, virtue ethics, and institutional ethics may offer useful framework to better understand ethics and its complexities. They stated, categorically, “in practice, ethical dilemmas faced by educational leaders, for example, are likely to be highly complex and not simply framed by one particular theoretical approach or the other” (p. 139). Their findings support the need for comprehensive ethics in leadership preparation programs.

Holland (2004) posited that the “changing role of school leaders – the expectation to be both expert manager and skillful leaders – puts undue demands on them that often
lead to conflicts between managerial values and instructional leadership.” Nevertheless, Fields, Reck, and Egley (2006) lamented that the “demand for highly qualified, well-trained educational leaders has never been higher than it is today”. Adding that

In an era of high stakes accountability, teacher shortages, enormous external pressures, and increasingly complex role expectations, educational leaders must possess a variety of knowledge and skills to support, successfully, student learning (p. vii).

**Guiding Questions**

One of the four questions that framed the course content and research for this researcher’s doctoral cohort is How can support for the development of ethical leadership be extended to school leaders? This query segues to additional questions: What are the emergent themes that support a need for continued professional development for building principals (school leaders) regarding ethical and moral leadership and decision-making? How can school leaders balance the demands placed on them as supervisors and instructional leaders to enact both managerial and professional values? Although it is not the intent of this study to answer these questions specifically, they have guided this researcher in selecting relevant research, studies, and literature embedded within.

Many researchers have called for additional research on the morality and ethics of leaders. The following are pertinent and guiding questions posed by the researchers who are cited in this study: (1) What are the contemporary challenges for leaders in frontline human service organizations? (2) How are leaders responding to these challenges? (3) What are the ethical dilemmas and underlying values involved in making these responses? (4) How are these challenges impacting contemporary leadership practice? (5)
What are implications of these findings for the preparation and professional development of leaders? (Duignan, 2006). (6) Why is ethical leadership in the best interests of students? (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). (7) What ethical issues are confronted by school principals as they perform their responsibilities? (8) What is the nature of the immediate setting within which these ethical issues arise? (9) How and why do school principals make ethical decisions? (Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 2002). (10) What is the meaning of the construct “moral leadership”? (Greenfield, 2004). (11) Can ethics be taught? (Goree, Pyle, Baker, & Hopkins, 2006; Pardini, 2004). (12) How do administrators go about the task of conceptualizing an ethical school? (Starratt, 1991). (13) What training in ethics is most effective in promoting ethical behavior? (14) How do company managers determine, *ex ante*, which decision-making responsibilities workers should possess and what are the ethical consequences of these processes? (James, 2000).

Additionally, questions posed by Frick and Gutierrez (2008) to participants in their study align to the central theme of this researcher’s proposed study. The findings of the Frick and Gutierrez (2008) study suggested, “…practitioners can articulate a unique moral practice for educational leadership”. The results of their study also emphasized the “importance of morals, values, and ethical bases for educational leadership decision making as well as the need to refine the professional ethic for educational leadership” (p. 32). Their protocol included the following list of questions: “In what ways do you consider your work as a school leader to be moral and ethical in nature? Can you recall and tell me about an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences? Are moral considerations and judgments unique to this profession? (p.
Do principals [school leaders] have a sense of being “duty bound” to rules, policies, institutional procedures and professional expectations while conversely recognizing that these structures and role expectations are, at times and in certain situations, not good or morally right? Is there a “clash between what the organization or professional deems as appropriate or ethical and what an administrator believes is right and good on a personal level?” (p. 55).

Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003) have developed a “model for conceptualising [sic] ethical dilemmas” and modified elements of their model are shown in Appendix E. The original model evolved from their premise that ethical dilemmas and the decision-making processes aligned to resolutions are complex undertakings. These authors also “acknowledge that decisions can have implications and effects on the individual, the organisation [sic] and the community either directly or indirectly” and their attempts to understand this relationship also influenced their development of the model. In essence, this model identifies and describes the range of competing forces that may provide perspectives on the problem or situation or as in this study, the dilemma or critical incident (pp. 139-41). The model is a “graphic organizer” of dissonance in decision-making school level leaders face. The elements of this model offered an additional conceptual framework that informed this proposed study.

How school level leaders think and feel and how they develop their moral and ethical praxis are frameworks worthy of further research and study. As Lashway (1996) stated, “Moral leadership begins with moral leaders…ethical behavior is not something that can be held in reserve for momentous issues…it must be a constant companion” (p. 2). Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (1998) alluded to the need to “capture some of the
dynamics of leadership choices and dilemmas that are “catalysts for examining leadership processes” (p. 96) or in essence, catalysts for examining how administrators think and feel when faced with ethical and moral dilemmas. These questions also formed the conceptual framework for this proposed study.

**Statement of the Problem**

The intent of this research was to provide insights into the complex roles of school level leaders, the dissonance between competing values regarding what is in the “best interests of students” balanced with professional and personal ethics, policy implementation, and organizational imperatives. The complex role of school level leaders is exacerbated by instances of dissonance in decision making with competing elements, such as what is in the best interests of students, organizational and/or professional policies, and personal codes (Cranston, Enrich & Kimber, 2003; English & Bolton, 2008; Frick, 2009; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). This recurring dissonance forms the core of the ethical dilemmas that school level leaders face. Yet it would be a mistake to view all administrators as monolithic (Freire, 1970) although their professional training may be. The ethic and moral fibers of administrators are as diverse as the composite of the schools and communities they serve. The quality of decisions made by school level leaders may express more of their emotional quotient than their intellectual quotient. There should be a balance between “conscience and compliance…theory and practice…praxis and hermeneutics” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 120). Leaders should demonstrate both moral and professional accountability – wanting the best for learners while upholding the standards of the ethics of their profession…necessitating a choice between competing sets of principles (Cranston et al., 2003).
This study was designed to examine the types of ethical dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of typical ethical dilemmas, and the implications for leader preparation and professional development. This study focused on ethical dilemmas identified as especially confounding and difficult for school level leaders. These dilemmas included decisions and situations, shared through the recounting of critical incidents in which the actions and decisions of school level leaders have garnered attention and responses from varying representatives. In other words, the researcher assumed that school level leaders faced numerous ethical dilemmas and sought to identify and examine the most difficult and troubling. An ancillary purpose of this study was to explore implications for preparation and ongoing professional development of school level leaders that build expertise in handling ethical decision-making scenarios.

Many educational philosophers and researchers have argued the importance of including ethical study and reflection in educational preparation programs (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Strike & Holler, 1998). Additionally, the ethical practice of educational administration demands a multidimensional construct that offers practicing administrators a way to think about their work and work place (Starratt, 1991; Brooks & Normore, 2005). An intended outcome of this study is reflected in these two statements in addition to Brooks and Normore’s (2002) concluding comments:

Engaging in reflective practice and problems based learning activities designed to challenge their growing understanding…and supporting each individual’s creation of a coherent ethical system…may prepare school leaders for the “moral imperative” of leading our schools well into the 21st century” (p. 7).

**Research Questions**
The four guiding research questions for this study were:

1. What types of ethical dilemmas do school level leaders face that require assistance or intervention?
2. What actions, decisions, or interventions assist school level leaders with facing these types of dilemmas?
3. What are the implications of the research findings for preparation and professional development of school level leaders?
4. What has been learned by administrators after leaving school level leadership?

**Research Design**

In this qualitative study, data collected from interview sessions using the critical incident technique (CIT), dialogs, and journals were used to analyze the types of ethical dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for leader preparation and professional development. In essence, it would “capture some of the attributes of ethical decision making” (Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 2002, p. 429) and their implications for practice. In documenting the lived experiences of school level leaders, this investigator followed the grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry using the critical incident technique (CIT). The CIT is a structured yet flexible data-collection method for producing a thematic or categorical representation of a given behavior or its components. This technique can be construed as a qualitative approach used to obtain an in-depth analytical description of an intact cultural scene (Redmann, Lambrecht, & Stitt-Golden, 2000, pp. 137-138).
Constructivist grounded theory lies squarely within the interpretive approach to qualitative research with flexible guidelines. Its focus is on theory development that depends on the researcher's view, learning about the experience within embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships, and making visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity. A major challenge associated with constructivist grounded theory is the researcher’s ability to “set aside, as much as possible, theoretical ideas”. By doing so, “analytic and substantive theory” can emerge recognizing that the primary outcome of this study is a “theory with specific components: a central phenomenon, casual conditions, strategies, conditions, and context, and consequences” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 65-68).

In this study, this researcher has provided comments on her past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that may have shaped the interpretation and approach to the study. The researcher has also disclosed in her story and critical reflections potential bias and her stance in relation to the phenomenon. Initially, these biases had the potential of posing difficulty for the researcher during the interviewing sessions with the participants.

**Key Definitions**

For the purpose of this research, the following are the definitions of key and reoccurring conceptual terms referred to throughout this study. The words ethics and morals are used interchangeably but for consistency, principals and school based administrators are referred to generally as school level leaders except when specificity was required for clarity:
**Critical race**: a theoretical lens used in qualitative research that focuses attention on race and how racism is deeply embedded within the framework of American society (Creswell, 2007).

**Dilemma**: a difficult and challenging situation that ‘leaves only a choice between equally unwelcome possibilities’ (Duignan, 2006).

**Ethics**: originating from the Greek word *ethos*; what is morally right or wrong, good or bad; how people ought to act in response to value conflict and dilemmas (Beckner, 2004; Cranston, 2005; Duignan, 2006; Goree et al., 2006; Langlois, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Starratt, 2004).

**Ethical dilemma**: decisions that center upon choosing “right versus right” (Cranston et al., 2006; Lashway, 1996).

**Ethic of critique**: aimed at awakening educators to inequities in society and in particular, in the schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

**Grammar of schooling**: a cultural phenomenon; limited changes in school structure: classrooms, subjects taught, grading, etc. (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

**Justice**: the “state of affairs in which everyone has regard to his own concerns”; not the right of the stronger, but effective harmony of the whole (Beckner, 2004).

**Legalism**: codes and a supplementary collection of rules that govern behaviors (Beckner, 2004; Goree et al., 2006).

**Moral purpose**: acting with the intention of making a difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole (Fullan, 2001).
**Morals**: behaviors judged consistent with good ethical thinking and decision making; applying ethical beliefs and commitments (Goree et al., 2006; Langlois, 2004; Starratt, 2004).

**Paradigm or worldview**: a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Creswell, 2007).

**Praxis**: action, reflection; involves a process of action-reflection-action that is central to the development of consciousness of power and how it operates (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2008).

**Religious or theological ethics**: determining right or wrong based on the teachings of a religion (Goree et al., 2006).

**Social constructivism**: addressing the “process” of interaction among individuals; focus on specific context in which people live and work (Creswell, 2007).

**Situational ethics**: when rules can be broken depending on the consequences of a certain act; determining what is right or good solely based on momentary context (Goree et al., 2006; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

**Spirituality**: feelings of peace, care, and commitment; getting in touch with one’s own soul; the attainment of a certain mode of being and the transformations (Foucault, 1994; Duigan, 2006; Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

**Thoughtful noncompliance**: educational decisions based on thorough assessments and available resources; focusing on need rather than compliance (Stein, 2004).

**Values**: moral qualities such as beliefs, qualities, traditions, or standards that influence actions and are considered important (Boleman & Deal, 2003; Bussey, 2004; Goree et al., 2006).

**Virtue**: character traits that make up a moral life (Goree et al., 2006).
The following are the definitions of key and reoccurring methodological terms referred to in this study:

**Coding**: a process of categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data (Charmaz, 2006).

**Critical** (as in theory, pedagogy, incident, reflection, etc.): careful analysis or judgment (Kincheloe, 2008).

**Critical Incident Technique (CIT)**: an exploratory, qualitative research method used to generate descriptive data on a variety of human activities and behaviors (Johnson & Fauske, 2000).

**Grounded theory**: developing a theory grounded in data from the field; constructing theory rather than testing it (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2007).

**Hermeneutics**: a method of truth seeking with roots in early Greek philosophy; developing rigorous ways of understanding the world to foster change (Henderson & Kesson, 2004; Kincheloe, 2008).

**Heuristic**: exploring methods for solving problems; strategies (Slattery, 2006).

**Lived experiences**: a term used in phenomenological studies to emphasize the importance of individual experiences of people as conscious human beings (Creswell, 2007).

**Memo writing**: a process in which the researcher writes down ideas about the evolving theory; prompts the researcher to analyze data and codes in research process (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

**Open or initial coding**: the process of breaking down responses, examining and comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Saldana, 2009).
Phenomenology: the study of the nature of meaning of everyday experiences (Saldana, 2009).

Purposeful sampling: the inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007).

Responsive interviewing: obtaining the interviewees’ interpretations of their experiences and their understanding of the world in which they live and work (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Selective coding: the researcher takes the central phenomenon and systemically relates it to other categories (Creswell, 2007).

Organization of the Study

This study is comprised of six chapters: Chapter 1 outlines the intent of this researcher’s dissertation study. Included in this chapter is the introduction, theoretical framework, a statement of the problem including literature relating to the problem, the intent of the study, the guiding research questions, and the proposed methodology. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to ethical philosophy and theory as correlated to the practice of school level leadership. Chapter 2 is also designed to demonstrate how the practical aspect of ethical and moral school leadership is not always “black and white” and to provide a foundation for further inquiry and add to the current body of literature. Chapter 3 introduces the proposed methodology and research design, sampling and protocols, the interview process, the limitations of the study, validity, the role and views of the researcher and the researcher’s reflective story and critical incidents. Chapter 4 begins with a review of the study, methodology, participant
selection, protocols; progresses to the interview sessions with the participants and data analysis, and ends with the research findings. Chapter 5 is the discussion of the research findings and the additional emergent themes and their application to the guiding research questions and to the literature and research reviewed for this study. Chapter 6 is comprised of conclusions, implications for further research and the researcher’s final reflections.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The complex role of school level leaders is exacerbated by instances of dissonance in decision making with competing elements, such as what is in the “best interests of students”, organizational and/or professional policies, and personal codes (Cranston, Enrich, & Kimber, 2003; English & Bolton, 2008; Frick, 2009; Shapiro & Stefkovich, .2001, 2005). This recurring dissonance forms the core of the ethical dilemmas that school level leaders faced. The purpose of this research was to study the types of ethical dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for leader preparation and professional development. This study was designed to provide insights into the complex roles of school level leaders, the dissonance between competing values regarding what is in the best interests of students balanced with professional and personal ethics, policy implementation, and organizational imperatives. This study focused on the ethical dilemmas identified as especially confounding and difficult for school level leaders. These dilemmas included decisions and situations, shared through recounting critical incidents, in which the actions and decisions of school level leaders have garnered attention and responses from representatives at the district level. In other words, this researcher assumed that school level leaders faced numerous ethical dilemmas and sought to identify and examine the most difficult and troubling. The ancillary purpose of this study, then, was to explore
implications for preparation and ongoing professional development of school level leaders that build expertise in handling ethical situations.

The four guiding research questions developed for this study were:

1. What types of ethical dilemmas do school level leaders face that require assistance or intervention?
2. What actions, decisions, or interventions assist school level leaders with facing these types of dilemmas?
3. What are the implications of the research findings for preparation and professional development of school level leaders?
4. What has been learned by administrators after leaving school level leadership?

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature related to ethical philosophy and theory as correlated to the practice of school level leadership. This chapter is also designed to demonstrate how the practical aspect of ethical and moral school level leadership is not always black and white; and to provide a “primer” to reconcile the disparity between school level leaders’ belief systems and decision-making. It begins with an introduction and description of how the ethical and moral deficits in the larger society have trickled down to school level leadership and decision-making. Next, the development of guiding questions that emerged from the literature review is explained in detail. The next section of this chapter contains a review of literature and research in the area of ethics and moral leadership. The final section contains a discussion of the implications of this study for further research.

Overview
There is a core of prominent philosophers, practitioners, authors, and researchers in the field of ethical and moral leadership. The substance of their work can be categorized into four frameworks or perspectives: historical, theoretical, empirical, practical.

The philosophical framework is the historical perspective of Western philosophical ethics founded by Plato and Aristotle that progresses to Kant, Kohlberg, Piaget, and Rest. The published works of Bolman and Deal (2003), Fullan (1995) (2001) (2005), and Starratt (2004) as well as the works of other researchers referenced in this chapter all incorporated a moral and ethical strand in their theoretical definitions of the roles of educational leaders; the review of these works represent a theoretical framework. The practical framework addresses the moral and ethical dilemmas that are embedded in many of the decisions (practice and social relevance) made daily by school leaders and are explored by Beck and Murphy (1993), Blase and Blase (2002), Covrig (2001), and Stefkovich and Shapiro (2001) in their case studies, books, and research articles. While the foci of Begley (2004) is on the cognitive processing in administrative problem-solving and the approach of Langlois (2004) is through applied ethics and moral theory (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007, pp. 206-07), Greenfield (2004) questions the construct of “moral leadership” and Tatum and Eberlein (2007) address the relationship among leadership, decision style, organizational justice and social responsibility.

Bolman and Deal (2003) used the power of reframing an organization as the centerpiece of their book. The authors introduced the four frames, political, human, political, and symbolic and explored how the complex structures of the four frames influences an organization (p. 400). The authors recognized the importance of reframing
ethics and spirit in an organization that easily segues into the practical framework. In addition, in the practical framework Blase and Blase (2002) have studied the effects of the unethical treatment of teachers by their principals and brought to light a sensitive and sometimes ignored topic. Through the review of this literature, this researcher established a strong correlation between ethics and morals; the treatment of staff, students and parents by school level leaders; the elucidation of ethics and morals in administrative decision making; and the implications of administrative ethical and moral decision making on the overall school culture.

**Review of Literature: Right versus Right**

In the first chapter of their book, *Education Ethics Applied*, Goree et al. (2006) give a snapshot of ethics in America. The authors provided a comprehensive working definition of ethics as the “reasoned study of what is morally right and wrong, good and bad” (p. 5) and continued by stating ethics is also a part of the broader field of philosophy. They noted that

Some of the earliest and most thorough writers on ethics in the Western world were the Greek philosopher Plato and his student Aristotle. Plato’s writings emphasized that the four virtues of justice, wisdom, courage, and temperance are the ultimate principles for our universe and they apply to every aspect of community and individual life; ethics was to be the ultimate focus of the educational process. Aristotle’s concept was different from Plato’s, but for him, the ethics environment was no less encompassing. A person’s virtues and moral habits are still the most important aspect of his or her personal development, and the most essential element for success in life. The Aristotelian ethical
environment is inclusive of every aspect of life; in the ethics environment, one should seek a “golden means” between extremes in most things (p. 7).

Goree et al. (2006) also noted that there is a language of ethics: ethical issues, ethical principles, virtues, values, and moral judgments. They noted that there are at least six challenges to ethics: relativism, absolutism, pluralism, materialism, legalism, and evil. The authors posited that ethical issues, problems, and concerns are present in every compartment of our lives: work life, family life, religious life, personal time, etc. (pp. 8-9). In a sub section of this chapter headed, Can Ethics Be Taught?, the authors declared that

There is research suggesting that ethics classes and training can help people develop and grow in moral sensitivity… but the desire and motivation to be a good person has to come from within. And moral character lies still more deeply inside us. Character, like wisdom, develops slowly over time. It was in this regard that Aristotle wrote, “We only learn through pain”. We gain character by learning from our mistakes, and often through the suffering we face because of our mistakes (pp. 16-17).

The reference to Aristotle segues into the philosophical framework of ethics. Deontology has the Greek root deon that means duty. Deontology is widely associated with Kant who espoused the Golden Rule of respect for persons and respecting others. This philosophy is considered non-consequential and autonomous and purports that principles, rules, and moral reasoning with no regard for consequences guide the actions of individuals; emotions are excluded (Beck & Murphy, 1993, 1994; Covrig, 2001; Sousa, 2003; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005).
Applying Kant’s philosophical approach to ethics, a construct of consistency for school level leaders emerges: following the rules, policies, and procedures with a balance between “gray areas” and compliance policies such as zero tolerance. This also means treating staff, students, and parents as one would want to be treated, keeping staff and parents informed and not denying them relevant information – doing what is right (compliance) as opposed to doing the right thing (conscience) (Goree et al., 2006, pp. 160-162).

Teleology has the Greek root teleos, which means goal or purpose. Teleology or utilitarianism is associated with the philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (Goree et al., 2006; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Utilitarianism theorizes that the welfare of individuals is last in the overall good of the group and espouses that people, or individuals, should act to maximize the average happiness or average utility that is seeking the good for all. Actions and behaviors associated with deontology are deemed non-consequential; actions aligned to teleology or utilitarianism are deemed consequential (Goree et al., 2006; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005). This researcher noted that when school level leaders practice utilitarianism, they often have to make decisions for the “good of the group” and the group could consist of staff, students, or parents. In making these decisions, it is important to weigh the final outcome – will it benefit the masses at the expense of a few or just a few at the expense of the masses (critical reflection).

Strike, Haller, and Soltis (2005) have emphasized two related principles in their book: (1) benefit maximization and (2) respect for persons. The authors stated, “These two principles are central to what are probably the two most important views on ethics of
the last century – utilitarianism and Kantianism” (p. 159). Strike et al. (2005) believe that “the cornerstone of utilitarianism is that people should act so as to maximize the average happiness or average utility”. The keys to Kant’s ethics are the categorical imperative (or Golden Rule) and the notion of respect for persons. Strike et al. (2005) also believe that …these principles continue to provide useful lenses for trying to understand what is at stake in ethical issues. Most people employ some variation of these two principles intuitively…the idea that respecting others and the idea that seeking good results is important are both commonplace. Utilitarianism and Kantianism should be viewed as attempts by philosophers to deepen our understanding of these intuitive approaches (p. 159).

In defining virtues, Sousa (2003) noted that “Virtues become habits and involve both feelings and actions; virtues also emphasize the importance of judgment and character (sum of one’s virtues and vices), de-emphasize rules, and are also non-consequential” (p. 195). This researcher surmised that Sousa’s definition of virtue implied that school level leaders are “role models” and are judged by their character on and off the job. This is the most popular form of ethics in education. In addition, that school level leaders should set the tone for the “culture” in their buildings, expecting students and staff to be honest, caring, and fair by modeling these characteristics on a regular basis.

Researchers portray educational leaders as experiencing right versus right dilemmas that often force them to chose or violate a sacred value while trying to respond to another sacred value (Lashway, 1996; Sousa, 2003). These leaders, in turn, face ethical or moral issues characterized by words such as right, ought, just, and fair (Strike, Haller,
& Soltis, 2005). These statements caused this researcher to contemplate whether using critical reflection when conflicted with right versus right dilemmas could clarify these competing values. In addition, to question if these are skills that could be taught.

Beck and Murphy (1993) provided an overview of ethical ideals and the evolution of changes in the academic arena and ethics in educational administration programs. They noted literature that revealed values and behaviors considered desirable in school leaders and literature that described specific efforts to cultivate people capable of manifesting such values and behaviors from the following leading researchers in the field of ethics: Noddings (1992), Sergiovanni (1992) (1993), Shapiro (1989), Starratt (1991), and Strike, Haller and Soltis (1988) (p. 1). Beck and Murphy (1993) cited an early study by Farquhar (1978) (1981) which concluded that little was being done in offering learning opportunities concerned with ethics. Similar findings were made by a comprehensive overview of administrator training programs by Silver and Spuck (1978) (p. 8).

In 1993, Beck and Murphy replicated the Farquhar study (1978, 1981). From analyses of the responses to the open-ended questions in their replication of the study, they were able to identify the following as emerging conceptual themes in ethics and educational leadership:

(a) Many problems facing administrators were either fundamentally ethical in nature or had ethical components;

(b) There was an increased interest in ethics and trends in scholarship and policy; and

(c) Educational leadership, at its core, is an ethical endeavor (pp.11-13).
Beck and Murphy (1993) contend that “viewing school leadership as a moral endeavor and seeking to prepare prospective administrators to function as ethical practitioners are two trends that have widespread support from many sources” (p. 30). Through their research, they were able to predict that

…interest in this topic will continue to swell and that if this study were to be replicated twenty-five years hence, researchers would uncover widespread beliefs that administrators must be equipped to think and act ethically and to develop structures and policies which support consciously chosen, morally sound values and outcomes (pp. 30-31).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) also acknowledged a growing emphasis on ethics and stated that the impetus for their book came from three developments in the field of educational leadership:

(1) Increased interest in ethics among educational leaders.

(2) The use of case studies in dealing with ethical dilemmas.

(3) The change in criteria used to license administrators (p. ix).

The authors defined ethics using the Greek word, *ethos*, which means “customs or usages”. Shapiro and Stefkovich further explained that this meaning evolved to define ethics as the ‘dispositions or character, customs, and approved ways of acting’. They posed two questions based on their definition of ethics - Ethics approved by whom? Right or wrong according to whom? (p. 10). Shapiro and Stefkovich identified four ethical viewpoints that have an impact on education in general and educational leaders in particular from these two questions - the ethics of justice, critique, care, and profession.
The ethic of justice focuses on rights and laws and is part of a liberal democratic tradition that “is characterized by incrementalism, faith in the legal system, and hope for progress”. The ethic of critique is “based on critical theory, which has at its heart, an analysis of social class and its inequities” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, pp. 11-14). The ethic of care emphasizes the importance of relationships and connections that encourages administrators to

…move away from a top-down, hierarchical model for making moral and other decisions and turn to a leadership style that employs multiple voices in the decision making process…collaborate efforts between faculty, staff, and students…promote interpersonal interactions, de-emphasize competition, facilitate a sense of belonging, and increase individuals’ skills as they learn from one another (p. 17).

The ethic of professionalism relates to the professional codes of professions such as law, medicine, dentistry, and even education (p. 18). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) stressed that

…there may be clashes between the ethic of care, the ethic of critique, and the ethic of justice within these professional codes. It is a paradigm shift that expects its leaders to formulate and examine their own professional codes of ethics in light of individual personal codes as well as standards set forth by the profession…which then calls on them to place students at the center of the decision-making process (pp. 10-22).
Torres (2004) emphasized, “The ethic of profession provides a framework for educators and policymakers to think critically and form an appropriate code with the best interests of the student at its core” (p. 256).

Starratt (1991) developed a tapestry of ethical perspectives using the three themes of caring, justice, and criticism (critique). He asserted that the blending of each theme encourages a rich human response to the many uncertain ethical situations administrators face every day in their work. Each theme implies something of the other theme:

…critique assumes a point of view about social justice and human beings and about the way communities ought to govern themselves…justice assumes an ability to perceive injustice in the social order as well as some minimal level of caring about relationships in that social order…caring does not ignore the demands of community governance issues, but claims that caring is the ideal fulfillment of all social relationships even though most relationships among members of a community function according to a more remote form of caring…ethic of justice needs the profound commitment to the dignity of the individual person found in the ethic of caring…ethic of caring needs the larger attention to social order and fairness of the ethic of justice if it is to avoid an entirely idiosyncratic involvement in social policy…ethic of critique requires an ethic of caring if it is to avoid the cynical and depressing ravings of the habitual malcontent…ethic of justice requires the profound social analysis of the ethic of critique to move beyond the naïve fine tuning of social arrangements in a social system with inequities built into the very structures by which justice is supposed to be measured (p. 198).
Starratt (1991) summarized:

In the field of education, talk about ethics and morality tends to divide between public rhetoric and academic theory...literature reflects growing concerns about moral and ethical issues....the much larger ethical task of educational administration is to establish an ethical school environment in which education can take place ethically...educational administrators have a moral responsibility to be proactive about creating an ethical environment for the conduct of education (pp. 188-200).

Gross and Shapiro (2004) referred to the ethics of care, justice, critique and professionalism as the “Multiple Paradigm Approach to Ethics”. The authors acknowledged that the works of Beck and Murphy (1994), Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001), Starratt (1994), and Strike (1991) bring together these paradigms and “help educational leaders solve dilemmas in turbulent times” (p. 47). Gross and Shapiro (2004) added that the ethic of the profession has been developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders:

Standard 5: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (ISLLC, 1996, p.18) (p. 48).

Stefkovich and Begley (2007) reflected on the notion of acting in the best interests of students and explored the “alternate ways ethical school leadership, in the best interests of students, is conceptualized in the educational leadership literature from several foundational perspectives which include philosophy, psychology, critical theory
and case law” (p. 205). In earlier work, Begley and Johansson (1998) and Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) theorized that

…administrators tend to employ ethics as a guide to action at certain times – in situations of high stakes urgency, when consensus is impossible, when responding to unprecedented situations, and for certain hot-button social issues which tend to quickly escalate debate to a point where people seek refuge within an ethical posture (p. 209).

Building on this notion, Stefkovich and Begley (2007) concluded

Educational leaders frequently justify their actions as in the best interests of the student; however in some form, the ‘best interests of students’ is more organizational or policy related rhetoric than a genuine regard for student well being…as in the case of zero tolerance policies…Recognizing that the term ‘best interests’ is not clear and may be used as a ‘good ethic’ at times and at other times as a justification for adult behavior that is not so ethical….What is ethical leadership in the best interest of students? (p. 220).

The guiding premise for the book, Ethical Leadership (Starratt, 2004), is based on the disturbing picture of educational leadership. Starratt introduced Al Arthur as his “everyman”, an educational leader struggling to clarify the moral dilemmas he faced which in turn are symbolic of what many leaders are facing in our state, federal, and local plethora of mandates (p. 9). He acknowledged the struggles of Al Arthur and the administrators Al Arthur represented when he stated

Educational leaders are challenged as never before with the expectations increasing just as rapidly as the demographic changes in our school communities.
High stakes testing, school restructuring, increased use of technology, and teacher and administrative shortages are external factors that also impact the changing culture of schools (p. 1).

Starratt (2004) also acknowledged that

…school leaders are called upon to accommodate these external and internal challenges without considering whether making these adjustments will address the moral vacuum of the school that robs the work of students and teachers of its authenticity and significance (p. 1).

The moral challenges that schools confront form the nexus of Starratt’s (2004) book and he outlined a framework that deals with foundational ethics that is focused particularly on the work of educational leaders when they attempt to lead. He defined ethics as “the study of underlying beliefs, assumptions, principles, and values that support a moral way of life” and defined morality as “the living, the acting out of ethical beliefs and commitments” (p. 5).

Starratt (2004) provided an ethical analysis of the virtues needed to infuse and energize the work of schools and that of the leaders in schools. He identified these virtues as responsibility, authenticity, and presence (p. 9). Starratt also declared that:

Educational leaders must be morally responsible, not only in preventing and alleviating harm, but also in a proactive sense of who the leader is, what the leader is responsible as, whom the leader is responsible to, and what the leader is responsible for (p. 49).

Starratt used this statement as a platform to introduce his concept of critical presence and defined it as a twofold encounter - critical appraisal of oneself as the cause of the
blockage to authentic communication or critical appraisal of something in other’s presence that blocks our mutual ability to communicate authentically (p. 97). Starratt then suggested that the journey of Al Arthur and his peers will direct them “to find a way to confront and accept the limitations of their leadership…What the leader considers failures can sometimes lead to other results considered quite satisfying by others” (p. 145).

Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (1998) also investigated the ethical decision making of school principals. The authors stated that “the need for a project of this kind resulted from a confluence of social, cultural and economic imperatives common in our international, national, and local contexts” (p. 1). For their project, four key questions were asked in face-to-face interviews with principals who were drawn from a representative sample of Queensland state schools:

1. What ethical issues are confronted by school principals as they perform their responsibilities?
2. What is the nature of the immediate setting within which these ethical issues arise?
3. How and why do school principals make ethical decisions?
4. How might the answers to these questions best inform professional development programs? (p. 4)

From the responses to the four questions by the principals who were interviewed in this study, 164 ethical issues were identified; these ethical issues were divided into the following categories: students, staff, finance and resources, external relations, and big picture. Most of the issues identified involved matters related to students and staff and the
least identified were issues involving external relations. The principals who were interviewed reported that most of the student-centered ethical issues they faced were connected with behavior (i.e., enrollment, suspension/expulsion/exclusion, decision making, behavior management, family, cross-culture issues, and special students). The staff centered ethical issues were: human resources, making decisions with staff, seeking support from staff, taking disciplinary action in relations to staff, and special school issues (p. 8).

Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (2002) argued that learning about ethical decision-making is best facilitated through ‘face to face’ interaction (p. 427). These researchers surveyed the participants (again, school principals) and asked them to indicate whether they had any professional development or training specifically related to ethical decision-making and, if so, to indicate the format of the training. Participation rates in six categories of programmes [sic] were provided by the survey data. For all school principals, the participation rates in each of the categories, in order from highest to lowest, were as follows:

(a) 15.8% had undertaken departmental professional development programmes [sic] on ethical decision-making targeted at school principals;

(b) 9.7% claimed to have undertaken postgraduate studies in which ethical decision-making was specifically addressed;

(c) 3.4% indicated that their pre-service teacher education had included training in ethical decision-making;

(d) 2.5% had undertaken departmental professional development programmes [sic] on ethical decision-making targeted at middle managers;
(e) 1.6% had undertaken departmental professional development programmes [sic] on ethical decision-making targeted to teachers; and

(f) 1.1% indicated that they had undertaken other undergraduate studies that had incorporated such training (Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 2002, p. 428).

Langlois (2004) noted “since the 1990s more researchers have become interested in understanding the ethical dimensions of educational practice” and that “few empirical studies on ethical dimensions have been conducted on school administration” (p. 98) and added

One of the ironies of school administration is that despite the numerous rules, regulations, laws and policies that have been established to channel decision-making democratically, it is precisely because of this legal and administrative maze that one’s faculty of judgment could conceivably disappear if everything continues to be codified (p. 78).

Just as Goree, Pyle, Baker, and Hopkins (2006) asked ‘if ethics can be taught’; Langlois (2004) posed a similar query:

In spite of all the rationalities of which our educational institutions abound, it seems necessary to train future educational administrators in moral judgment and in ethics to render them capable of managing according to a renewed and responsible form of leadership (p. 89).

Echoing the argument that learning ethics should be through face-to-face interaction (Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 2002) Fullan (2001) introduced the premise that relationships are the core of a successful endeavor. Fullan posited, “…moral purpose, relationships, and organization success are closely interrelated.” He further stated that
“businesses and schools have much in common and in a culture of change school capacity is noted as a key to schools’ success and effectiveness” (p. 51).

Fullan (2005) noted that the “cornerstone of any process endeavor is its sustainability”. He referred to sustainability, which comes from the Latin word, sustineo – to keep us – as a “rallying concept and an adaptive challenge par excellence” (p. 15). Fullan (2005) identified eight elements of sustainability: public service with a moral purpose, commitment to changing context at all levels, lateral capacity building through networks, intelligent accountability and vertical relationships (encompassing both capacity building and accountability), deep learning, dual commitment to short-term and long term results, cyclical energizing, and the long lever of leadership (p. 14).

Of the eight elements identified by Fullan (2005), two are reoccurring strands in the research and theories reviewed – moral purpose and relationships. Fullan (2001) suggested that moral purpose, relationships, and organization success are closely interrelated (p. 51) and expounded on Goleman’s (1995) theory of emotional intelligence (pp. 71-76). Bolman and Deal (2003) noted the importance of the spirit and soul of an organization and the instilling of caring and love (p. 400). These theories could be the cornerstone of the initial guiding question of this study: How can we sustain ethical leadership?

Similarly, Von Krough, Ichijo, and Nonaka (2001) emphasized the importance of relationships: “Good relationships purge a knowledge-creation process of distrust, fear, and dissatisfaction, and allow organizational members to feel safe enough to explore the unknown territories of new markets, new customers, new products, and new manufacturing technologies” (p. 82).
Goleman (1995) has laid the foundation work on the topic of emotional intelligence (Fullan, 2001, p. 71). According to Goleman (1995), psychologists use the term metacognition to refer to an awareness of thought processes and metamood to mean awareness of one’s own emotions. Goleman preferred to use the term self-awareness, in the sense of an ongoing attention to one’s internal states – self-awareness means being “aware of both our mood and our thought about that mood” (p. 46). Goleman further explained that people tend to fall into three distinctive styles for attending to and dealing with their emotions: “self aware – aware of their moods as they are having them; engulfed – being swamped by emotions and helpless to escape them; and accepting – accepting of their moods and not trying to change them” (p. 47). Additionally, Goleman (1995) stated that “Emotions that simmer beneath the threshold of awareness can have a powerful impact on how we perceive and react; even though we have no idea that they are at work” (pp. 46-55) and provided his futuristic perspective:

…emotional intelligence can be an inoculation that preserves health and encourages growth. If a company has the competencies that flow from self-awareness and self-regulation, motivation and empathy, leadership skills and open communication, it should prove more resilient, not matter what the future brings…The capabilities needed for leaders in the next century will differ radically from those valued today (Goleman, 1998, p. 312).

Thus, the theory of emotional intelligence can contribute to understanding leaders’ behaviors and actions when facing ethical dilemmas.

Bolman and Deal (2003) also explored the power of relationships as a means of reframing an organization. Using their four frames, political, human, political, and
symbolic, the authors explained in detail how the complex structures of the frames impact an organization. The chapter entitled “Reframing Ethics and Spirit” captured the importance of reframing ethics and spirit in an organization. In continuing with their use of metaphor and case studies, the authors presented four images of ethics and spirit: excellence and authorship, caring and love, justice and power, and faith and significance (pp. 400-406). “Organizations have lost their ‘soul’, or reason for being and the authors believe that ethics must be rooted in soul which is an organization’s understanding of its deeply held identity, beliefs, and values” (p. 407). Also, in this chapter Solomon (1993) asserted the need for an “Aristotelian ethic” and viewed justice as the ultimate virtue in corporations (p. 399); Whitmyer (1993) stated that “confronting vulnerability allows us to drop our mask, meet heart to heart and be present for one another” (p. 402). Furthermore, Bolman and Deal (2003) determined that leading is giving and leadership is an ethic, a gift of oneself (p. 399).

**The Study of Ethical Decision Making**

Greenfield (1991) asserted, “Principals experience ethical dilemmas on a daily basis” (p. 1). Lashway (1996) posited that as leaders, “principals have a special responsibility to exercise authority in an ethical way” and cited another assertion of Greenfield (1991): “most of the principal’s authority is moral and that teachers must be convinced that the principal’s point of view reflects the values they support” (p. 2). Lashway (1996) then declared that “moral philosophers generally agree that there is no ethical ‘cookbook’ that provides easy answers to complex dilemmas” and provided the following guidelines suggested by a number of thinkers:
First, leaders should have – and be willing to act on – a definite sense of ethical standards; second, leaders can examine dilemmas from different perspectives; third, leaders can often reframe ethical issues; and finally, leaders should have a habit of conscious reflection, wherever it may lead them (p. 3).

Sergiovanni (1992) similarly noted, “Truly effective schools are those with a shared covenant clearly articulating the school’s core values and providing a standard by which actions will be judged” (p. 2). Lashway (1996) concluded that

…moral leadership begins and ends with moral leaders; great leaders embody the message they advocate; they teach, not just through words, but through actions. This aligns with the virtues of honesty, power with restraint, and stewardship and that whichever virtue is desired, moral philosophers who date back to Aristotle have emphasized that it must become a habit (p. 3).

Pardini’s (2004) research on the subject of ethics, some of which stretches back 36 years, found that school superintendents confronted with ethical dilemmas could be expected to make decisions consistent with the AASA Code of Ethics less than 50 percent of the time (Dexheimer, 1968; Fensternmaker, 1994). The first study was conducted in 1968 and replicated in 1994. In both studies, superintendents were asked to choose one of several suggested responses to what was referred to as “borderline ethical dilemmas” similar to those they might encounter on the job. Their responses were then compared to current AASA ethics codes. A total of 47.3 percent of the superintendents polled in 1968 and 48.1 percent of superintendents polled in 1994 chose the responses considered “ethical.” Additionally, both studies found that less experienced superintendents and those working in larger school districts were more likely to make
decisions in line with the code adopted by association members in 1962. The Pardini research also addressed the issue between principle or problem focused ethics – the way one responds to specific ethical dilemmas and narrative ethics – one’s orientation toward life and surmised that there should be more focus on narrative ethics, social justice, and the inadequacy of the level of ethics training ((Pardini, 2004, pp. 1-3). The question posed by Goree, Pyle, Baker, and Hopkins (2006) and Langlois (2004) – Can ethics actually be taught? – resurfaced in Pardini’s work.

Another dimension of leader action related to ethics and acting for the good of the whole is building social capital. Pastoriza, Arino, and Ricart (2007) introduced the concept of Organizational Social Capital (OSC) and the benefits of this concept to an organization. Social capital can be defined as the “good will that is engendered in the social relations of social systems and that can be mobilized to facilitate collective action” (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p.17). OSC has two main components, the employee’s collective goal orientation–associability–and shared trust (Pastoriza, Arino, & Ricart, 2007, p. 3). Additionally, an OSC can be created and managed based on the following:

(1) Implementing human resource practices that promote stability in the organization’s relationships; this addresses employment practices related to training, group compensation, and job security.

(2) Installing organizational norms of generalized reciprocity that supports the organizations ideology and goals.

(3) Developing rules and procedures that define the organization in terms of positions rather than people (Pastoriza et al., 2007, pp. 3-4).
Pastoriza, Arino, and Ricart (2007) stressed that only when all of the aforementioned processes are in place is the employee ready to make an emotional commitment to the organization. In addition to the employees’ commitment to the good of the organization (utilitarianism), the manager also develops what is referred to as “relational closeness” (Uzzi, 1996, 1997). Pastoriza et al. (2007) explained that relational closeness is defined as:

…the degree of trust and identification that the manager has been able to develop with the employee. And, as this trust and identification relationship develops between the manager and employee, each thinks in terms of the consequences of his actions for the other individual rather than himself (p. 6).

This aligned to Fullan’s (2005) premise that relationships are the core of a successful endeavor (p. 51).

Senge (2002) reflected on the dilemmas faced when educators become aware of conflicting values:

A doctoral student approached me with frustration as he was completing our course work in educational leadership at Miami University. “This program,” he said, “has been troubling for me, because I have worked hard to be a good teacher and a good administrator. But I realize now after all this time that I am part of the problem.” He said that he recognized that many of the instructional practices and organizational structures in his school had created problems for some of the children. But he had seldom questioned those practices; he had accepted them as givens in the system. “My exasperation,” he told me, “is that no one prepared me to raise these kinds of questions earlier in my professional life. Now I feel like I
have conspired to maintain the present schools by not asking difficult questions of myself and other” (p. 276).

Senge (2002) further promotes reflective questioning:

Every occupation needs some form of reflective questioning but it’s particularly important for teaching because teaching is a moral undertaking. Yet the idea of moral responsibility typically is not raised in most educational preparation programs. Nor is it discussed when one enters the teaching field (pp. 276-277).

These reflections lead to John Goodlad’s (1990) philosophy of schooling as a moral endeavor encompassing four dimensions consisting of enculturation into a political and social democracy, access to knowledge, nurturing pedagogy, and responsible stewardship of schools. Goodlad sees the first two dimensions, enculturation and access to knowledge as primarily the responsibility of schools while nurturing pedagogy and stewardship represent where teachers must excel in their individual practice. These dimensions prompt reflective questions about how educators go about changing embedded practices and the moral and ethic issues that arise from change (Senge, 2002, p. 281):

We created schools primarily out of concern for the welfare of our culture, particularly in regard to the preservation of our religious and political values. We broadened the purposes over time until they included the whole process of developing effective citizens, parents, workers, and individuals; these are now the educational goals of our school districts as well as our nation. Schools are major players in developing educated persons who acquire an understanding of truth,
beauty, and justice against which to judge their own and our society’s virtues and imperfections…This is a moral responsibility (Senge, 2002, p. 279).

Covrig (2001) identified multiple ethics components that principals face when dealing with teacher competency: human resources, supervision, moral and ethical justification, due process, professional loyalty and relationships. Covrig’s case study noted that during the teacher transfer period, a newly hired principal received a 17-year veteran teacher who needed a “fresh start”. Immediately, the teacher began to have personal (substance abuse, divorce) and professional (verbal abuse to students, falling asleep in class) issues that forced the principal to begin the documentation process. As the documentation continued, the multiple components of this dilemma began to take a toll on the principal resulting in conflicts between the principal’s professional responsibility to the students and staff (ethical judgment and relationships) and having to use unconventional methods to get rid of the teacher (moral dilemma and due process). Covrig (2001) pointed out that this case study raised both simple and complex issues about administrator loyalty in an atmosphere of increased emphasis on accountability. Principals must nurture and help their teachers, even ineffective ones, but they must do so while responding to the needs of students, boards, unions, and the wider community (pp. 6-10).

The origins of two terms used in Covrig’s (2001) case study (p. 8) - deontology (duty or rights based ethics) and utilitarianism (outcome or good-based ethics) - were defined at the onset of this paper. School leaders consider whether they should do the right thing or get the right results (moral and ethical dilemmas), or they weigh their commitment to the good of the organization and developing “relational closeness”
(Pastoriza, Arino, & Ricart, 2007, p. 6). Covrig’s case study also alluded to three of the four frames from Bolman and Deal (2003): human resources, political, and structural. Reviewing these studies of dilemmas while reflecting on the related analyses reinforced the importance of the initial guiding research question for this study: How can we sustain ethical leadership?

Blase and Blase (2003) noted, “…until recently, little attention was paid to the nature and extent of workplace abuse in public schools” (pp. 671-72). They conducted in-depth interviews with 50 teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools who experienced long unfair evaluations listed under what they have designated as Level III Principal Mistreatment Behaviors and is classified as direct, severely aggressive behavior (as opposed to their Level I designations – indirect, moderately aggressive behavior and their Level II designation – direct, severely aggressive behavior). Their data revealed that teachers who were victimized by principals worked in a constant state of fear about unfair evaluations. Blase and Blase (2003) pointed out that in all cases teachers stated that principals included flagrantly false information on their evaluations. The teachers’ fears of unfair evaluations were exacerbated by their belief that no viable recourse existed to overturn such evaluations. The data also revealed that teachers often believed that principals failed to give legitimate reasons, or any reasons whatsoever, when requiring them to submit to extended or special evaluations. Several teachers interviewed reported that unfair evaluations intensified even when their administrators were aware that they were experiencing personal life tragedies (pp. 686-97).

Ethical leadership in schools means providing an environment where ethical principals are encouraged, honored, and modeled. At the very least, it means that
principals must ensure that their teachers are not mistreated due to their behavior or the behaviors of other administrators in the building (Sousa, 2003, pp. 192-93). Sousa’s supposition is in stark contrast to the findings in the Blase and Blase (2003) study.

Begley (2004) strongly believed that it is “important to make a distinction between understanding and responding to ethical dilemmas of school administration” (p. 4). Making this distinction highlights the linkage between motivation and action and facilitates authentic leadership practices by school leaders. Begley provided his thoughts on leadership by adding

Authentic leadership may be thought of as a metaphor for ethically sound, professionally effective, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration. It is leadership that is knowledge based, valued informed, and skillfully executed. These notions generate the following propositions: Authentic leadership is a function of self-knowledge, sensitivity to the orientations of others, and a technical sophistication that lead to a synergy of leadership action.

Sophisticated administrators wisely and consciously distinguish among the multiple arenas of personal, professional, organizational, and social values in their work environments (pp. 4-5).

Begley (2004) also emphasized that

…school administrators increasingly encounter value conflict situations where consensus cannot be achieved, rendering obsolete the traditional rational notions of problem solving. Administrators must now often be satisfied with responding to a situation since there may be no solution possible that will satisfy all (p. 11).
Begley’s emphasis of understanding as a separate element from the actual response is an important distinction that added to informing this study.

In another recent study of administrative decision-making, English and Bolton (2008) explored administrative heuristics in the United States and United Kingdom. They stated emphatically that “decision making has been called the sine qua non of administration” and that “decision making pervades all other administrative functions as well” (p. 96). English and Bolton (2008) concluded

Humans are therefore almost always confronting moral issues. However, their freedom to make such choices is somehow positioned between their values and those placed on them by the organizations in which they are employed…Decision makers do not always make the best decisions for the organization, but they almost always attempt to make the best decisions for themselves…Either way, the decision maker and the organization are connected in a kind of dynamic fluid tandem, whether positive or negative – positive, if the decision maker and the organization ultimately benefit; negative, if either one is reduced in effectiveness, short or long term (p. 101).

A study by Frick (2009) also contributed to “the understanding of moral conflict in school leadership as an intrapersonal moral phenomenon, and how the conflict is resolved in practice, while providing insights into a more recently defined and theorized professional ethic for educational leadership” (p. 1). This study examined “the moral leadership life of principals by exploring, in greater depth than previous research, the reality of intrapersonal moral conflict experience by those who lead schools” (p. 54) and found that
There is an increasing recognition that putatively value free administrative decisions and actions are actually “value-laden, even value-saturated enterprises(s)” that undergird our understanding of what Greenfield (1985) (1999), and others (Green, 1990) have articulated in more precise terms as the careful location of purpose and worth in things, or in other words, “moral education” and “moral leadership” (p. 51).

Additionally, Frick and Gutierrez (2008) studied the moral aspects unique to the profession of educational leadership. Their study used a “phenomenological-like interview technique” and focused on “principals’ interpretations of their work as a unique moral activity in relation to a specific ethical perspective: the ethic of the profession and its associated model for promoting students best interest” (p. 32). Their research found that principals:

(a) Overwhelmingly indicated a commitment for assuming particular responsibilities to children and youth;

(b) Identified themselves as persons entrusted with acting on behalf of students for their benefit;

(c) Saw their moral obligation as pushing people into areas beyond their comfort zone;

(d) Believed that the business of education is about teaching and learning and that the enterprise has profound moral implications; and

(e) Expressed a moral requirement to negotiate compromise and manage intractable competing moral values from a range of stakeholders (pp. 44-47). This study
was foundational to the development of the conceptual framework for this study because it provided a basic framework for approaching the interviews and critical incident data.

Greenfield (2004) questioned the construct of “moral leadership” as applied to school leaders. His study provided “compelling evidence of moral leadership in action, providing insight into complex connections between a principals’ background and past experience, the personal qualities and sensitivities brought to the moment of reflection, and the valuing and intention revealed through action” (p. 189). At the conclusion of his study, Greenfield offered convincing “empirical evidence of the importance of the personal and socio-cultural dimensions of leading in schools, and the interrelatedness of administrators’ values and beliefs, language and action, and managing and leading behaviors” (p. 191). He also noted that “to understand moral leadership requires that one gain an understanding of the perspectives, the lived experiences and subjective meanings, of the participants in the leadership relationship” (p. 191).

In their book and from a national perspective, Lieven and Hulsman (2006) stated “Ethical realism recognizes that in the great majority of humanity, impulses to good and evil are mixed up together” (p. 58). The authors summarized the ethical issues and moral dilemmas that school leaders face daily as part of humanity:

We need to bring morality in American statecraft down from the absolutist heights to which it has been carried, and return it to the everyday world where Americans and others do their best to lead ethical lives while facing all the hard choices and ambiguous problems which are the common stuff of our daily existence…this includes a shrewd awareness that the people who talk the loudest about their own morality are not always those who practice it the best; and that
people are judged not only by what they say they are doing or will do in future, but what they have said and then done in the past (pp. 53-54).

Implications for Further Research

Political and social changes in our society have had a very direct impact on schools, teaching and learning, the training of educators, and expectations of building leaders. Thus school level leaders face dilemmas that test their moral and ethical fibers. Moreover, educators are held to higher moral and ethical standards because of their daily interactions with children (Senge, 2000). However, somewhere along the way there was a loss of our moral compass and the 1990’s became an era of neglect in terms of leadership development (Fullan, 2003) and is continuing into the 21st century.

Ethical lapses that occur in organizations are not always the result of willful intent by workers to lie, cheat, or steal, but are generally manifestations of incentives unintentionally created by the formal structure of the organization which often encourages such behaviors (James, 2000, p. 45). Lipman (2004) extended this premise when reflecting that our educational policies and practices contributed to a shift in our political culture legitimizing the suppression of critical thought and action. Tatum and Eberlin (2007) identified in their article the relationship among leadership, decision style, organizational justice and social responsibility and reported that managers do unethical things, companies cover up their mistakes, and business executives line their pockets. These ethical lapses, illegal actions, or greedy decisions have unintended consequences. What may seem like expediency now could turn a once loyal staff into a suspicious and cynical group (p. 303). Tatum and Eberlin (2007) concluded that
Leaders are expected to create organizational systems that members perceive as fair, caring and open. In a just and ethical organization, the decisions that leaders make should reflect fair treatment of people, concern for employee welfare, and a responsibility to the environment and larger community outside the organization (p. 305).

Bussey (2006) declared “Despite what is known about the role of school leaders’ values and beliefs in effective leadership, most institutions responsible for preparing school leaders do little to explicitly cultivate instructional leadership values and beliefs in pre-service leaders” (p. 1). Nevertheless, Bussey’s declaration can be countered by the descriptions and visions of the ideal ethical organization culture provided by Verbos, Gerard, Forshey, Harding, and Miller (2007):

In a positive ethical organization, the right thing to do is the only thing to do… A positive ethical organization becomes a magnet attracting individuals with the right type of moral mettle through externalizing the ethical organizational identity in corporate identity signals and symbols…Individuals self-select organizations that they believe reflect their values…An organization that has developed a corporate image of high moral character in the marketplace should automatically attract better fitting candidates… A written code of ethics becomes a formality as the living code of ethics becomes a way of life (pp. 10-12).

In addition, that of Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005):

Moral and ethical leadership recognizes schools as organizations for nurturing and developing children…grounded in deep philosophical questions about the purpose of education and schools…centers on the belief that leaders need to ask ethical
and moral questions when making decisions...creates a vision for developing a sense of self-worth and community connections among faculty, staff, and students (pp. 269-70).

Leadership preparation programs at colleges and universities may need to challenge, continually, prospective educational leaders about their ethical principles and moral values (Starratt, 2004). The research and studies conducted by Covrig (2001), Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (1998) (2002), and Pardini (2004) added support to Starratt’s premise. The literature and research reviewed in this study also supported the statement that “Since the 1990s, more researchers have become interested in understanding the ethical dimensions of educational practice” (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001) in addition to Langlois’ (2004) statement that “few empirical studies on ethical dimensions have been conducted on school administration” (p. 9).

It is interesting to note that in the research data cited in the Pardini (2004) article, *Ethics in the Superintendency*, AASA’s first poll was taken in 1968 and the second in 1994, 26 years later and the results from both were alarming and not significantly different. This researcher hypothesized that if the poll were replicated for a third time (and only 14 years after the second poll) that there still would not be much difference in the results. The replication of the Farquhar study (1978) (1981) by Beck and Murphy (1993) is a case in point. It has been 16 years since the Beck and Murphy study and the first part of their prediction “that interest in this topic will continue to swell” rings true. But, should there be an additional 10-year lapse to validate the second half of their prediction “that, if this study were to be replicated twenty-five years hence, researchers
would uncover widespread beliefs that administrators must be equipped to think and act ethically and to develop structures and policies which support consciously chosen, morally sound values and outcomes” (p. 31).

Noremore (2004) wrote

Leadership in any endeavor is a moral task, but even more so for educational leaders whether at the school or the university level. Accordingly, one goal that should be incorporated as part of a leadership preparation program is the opportunity for aspiring leaders to examine beliefs, traditions, and experiences that have shaped their lives. This is critical activity because prospective and practicing educational leaders are not only responsible for the success of their particular institution; their work can have an impact on various other institutions now and in the future (p. 1).

Bolman and Deal (2003), Fullan (2001) (2005), and Starratt (2007) also stressed the importance of sound moral leadership and Goodlad (1990) stated that “Schools are major players in developing educated persons who acquire an understanding of truth, beauty, and justice against which to judge their own and our society’s virtues and imperfections…This is a moral responsibility” (pp. 22-48).

Holland (2004) stated that the “changing role of school leaders – the expectation to be both expert manager and skillful leaders – puts undue demands on them that often lead to conflicts between managerial values and instructional leadership”. His statement is countered by Fields, Reck, and Egley (2006) who lamented that the “demand for highly qualified, well-trained educational leaders has never been higher than it is today”. Their published work addressed the required skills and knowledge of educational leaders in
areas identified by the national standards for educational leadership that were developed by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (pp. vii-viii) also recognizes these standards.

Torres (2004) describes the use of ethical standards to create a framework for school leaders’ decision-making:

…the use of ethics as guiding principles for institutional conduct and judgment in education is not a new notion…cultivating genuine ethical awareness among practitioners demands a modicum of pragmatism not commonly evidenced in forms of ethics training emphasizing justice through abiding by laws, edicts, and policies…ethics provides a framework, not a fixed set of procedures for determining what actions reflect the best interests of the student (p. 251-252).

Armstrong (2004) similarly posited the importance of ethics in school level leaders’ practice:

…to claim that ethics and morality lie at the foundation of effective administrative praxis is neither new nor revolutionary…However, while this knowledge base has contributed invaluable insights into the importance of ethical leadership, it has concentrated primarily on the external aspects of leadership behaviour [sic]…what leaders should do without an in depth exploration of the internal landscape of leadership…how leaders think and feel and how newcomers develop moral praxis in the transition from teaching to administration (p. 1).

psychologists referred to “as an awareness of thought processes”. Lashway (1996) suggested, “leaders should have a habit of conscious reflection” (p. 3) which can be construed as a form of metacognition in addition to Begley’s (2004) “consciously reflective practice” (pp. 4-5).

Additionally, metacognition has been viewed as an essential component of skilled learning since it allows the learner to control a host of other cognitive skills. Likened to the “mission control” of the cognitive system, it enables the learner to coordinate the use of extensive knowledge and many separate strategies to accomplish learning goals. Ann Brown (1980, 1987) described metacognition as having two dimensions - knowledge of cognition or what we know about our own knowledge and regulation of cognition or how we regulate or control cognition (Bruning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004, pp. 81-82).

Cranston, Ehrich and Kimber (2003) have developed a “model for conceptualising [sic] ethical dilemmas”. This model evolved from their premise that ethical dilemmas and the decision-making processes aligned to resolutions are complex undertakings. Cranston et al. (2003) “acknowledged that decisions can have implications and effects on the individual, the organisation [sic] and the community either directly or indirectly” and their attempts to understand this relationship also influenced their development of the model (pp. 139-41).

How school level leaders think and feel and how they develop moral and ethical praxis are frameworks worthy of further research and study. As Lashway (1996) stated, “Moral leadership begins with moral leaders…ethical behavior is not something that can be held in reserve for momentous issues…it must be a constant companion” (p. 2). Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (1998) alluded to the need to “capture some of the
dynamics of leadership choices and dilemmas that are “catalysts for examining leadership processes” (p. 96) or in essence, catalysts for examining how school level leaders think and feel when faced with ethical and moral dilemmas and the implications for practice.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to study the types of ethical dilemmas school level leaders face, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for school level leader preparation and professional development. This research was designed to provide insights into the complex roles of school level leaders, the dissonance between competing values regarding what is in the best interests of students balanced with professional and personal ethics, policy implementation, and organizational imperatives. This study focused on ethical dilemmas identified as especially confounding and difficult by school level leaders. These dilemmas included decisions and situations shared through recounting critical incidents in which the actions and decisions of school level leaders have garnered attention and resolutions. In other words, the researcher assumed that school level leaders faced many ethical dilemmas and sought to identify and examine the most difficult and troubling. The ancillary purpose of this study, then, was to explore implications for preparation and ongoing professional development of school level leaders that build expertise in handling ethical situations.

The four guiding research questions that framed this study were:

1. What types of ethical dilemmas do school level leaders face that require assistance or intervention?
2. What actions, decisions, or interventions assist school level leaders with facing these types dilemmas?

3. What are the implications of the research findings for preparation and professional development of school level leaders?

4. What has been learned by administrators after leaving school level leadership?

In documenting the lived experiences of the participants in this study, this researcher followed the grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry using the critical incident technique (CIT). Data collected from interview sessions, dialogs, journals and reflections were used to analyze the types of ethical dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of these typical dilemmas, and the implications for school level leader preparation and professional development; to “capture some of the attributes of ethical decision making” (Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 2002, p. 429) and their implications for practice. The participants’ responses to the central question: “Can you recall and tell me about an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences” (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008, p. 42) and their responses to follow up questions and probes that were developed by this researcher and any related conversations were recorded and transcribed.

The differences between qualitative and quantitative research can be summarized as follows: *Quantitative* research uses statistics to analyze data that answers questions about who, where, why, how many, and how much and also investigates the relationships between specific variables. It starts with a clearly stated hypothesis, narrows the scope of
the research as a way of controlling which variables are studied, and tests the hypothesis using data gathering instruments such as surveys and questionnaires to determine the relationships between the variables. *Qualitative* research is more holistic, relies on the researcher as a research instrument. Qualitative researchers are often immersed in their study, rely on deductive thinking, approach data as iterative and consider participants as co-researchers (Permuth, 2006; Janesick, 2004). The research design of this study called for qualitative methods that allowed for broad stroke data collection with emergent coding and analysis.

### Research Design

Qualitative research is based on small, nonrandom samples suggesting that qualitative research findings are not often much generalized beyond the local research participants (Permuth, 2006, p. 100). According to Creswell (2007), Janesick (2004), and Permuth (2006), qualitative research can be conducted in several ways. In documenting the lived experiences of selected administrators, this researcher followed the grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry using the critical incident technique.

Flanagan’s (1954) critical incident technique (CIT) is an exploratory, qualitative research method used to generate descriptive data on a variety of human activities and behaviors. The CIT represents a structured yet flexible data-collection method for producing a thematic or categorical representation of a given behavior or its components. This technique can be construed as a qualitative approach used to obtain an in-depth analytical description of an intact cultural scene (Redmann, Lambrecht, & Stitt-Golden, 2000, pp. 137-138).
The critical incident technique has five distinct components, each modified to meet the needs of a given situation: “(a) defining the specific tasks or behavior to be described; (b) identifying incidents which provide examples of this behavior from which a description can be induced; (c) articulating a data collection protocol that delimits the subjects of data, sample size, and data collection methods such as interviews, questionnaires, document analysis and others; (d) articulating the rules and logic of data collection; and (e) data analysis” (Johnson & Fauske, 2002, p. 5).

The CIT necessitated a thorough review of existing empirical and theoretical literature that sensitized this researcher to the data without predefining codes, themes, and findings. Data reduction and related analysis revealed descriptive patterns and themes that ultimately led to an emergent grounded theory about the phenomenon under study – in this case, the confounding ethical dilemmas faced by school leaders. Creswell (2007) pointed out that “in contrast to the a priori, the intent of a grounded theory is to move beyond description and to generate or discover a theory”. Conceptually, the theory is “generated or grounded in data accrued from the participants’ experiences” (pp. 62-63).

According to Charmaz (2006):

Constructivist grounded theory lies squarely within the interpretive approach to qualitative research with flexible guidelines, a focus on theory developed that depends on the researcher's view, learning about the experience within embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships, and making visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity. Charmaz places more emphasis on the views, beliefs, values, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals than on the methods of research (Creswell, 2007, p. 65).
This researcher was fully cognizant of the challenge associated with constructivist grounded theory - “setting aside, as much as possible, theoretical ideas”. Thus, by doing so, “analytic and substantive theory” emerged. Subsequently, this researcher acknowledged that the primary outcome of this study was a “theory with specific components: a central phenomenon, casual conditions, strategies, conditions, and context, and consequences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 68).

**Interviews**

This researcher supplemented the CIT by using Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) responsive interviewing model. The following are characteristics of the responsive interviewing model:

1. Responsive interviewing is about obtaining interviewees’ interpretations of their experiences and their understanding of the world in which they live and work.

2. The personality, style, and beliefs of the interviewer matter. Responsive interviewing is an exchange, not a one-way street; the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is meaningful, even if temporary. Because the interviewer contributes actively to the conversation, he or she must be aware of his or her own opinions, experiences, cultural definitions, and even prejudices.

3. Because responsive interviews depend on a personal relationship between interviewer and interviewee and because that relationship may result in the exchange of private information or information dangerous to the interviewee, the interviewer incurs serious ethical obligations to protect the interviewee.
Moreover, the interviewer is imposing on the time, energy, emotion, and creativity of the interviewee and therefore owes loyalty and protection in return.

4. Interviewers should not impose their views on interviewees. They should ask broad enough questions to avoid limiting what interviewees can answer, listen to what interviewees tell them, and modify their questions to explore what they are hearing, not what they thought before they began the interview.

5. Responsive interviewing design is flexible and adaptive. Because the interviewer must listen and intently follow up insights and new points during the interview, the interviewer must be able to change course based on what he or she learns. Interviewers may need to change whom they plan to talk to or where they plan to conduct an interview as they find out more about their research questions (p. 36).

Informed Consent, Sampling, and Protocols

Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at USF and this researcher completed the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course. Additionally, permission to use district employees in this study was obtained from the selected district’s office of research and accountability.

This researcher used a non-random and purposeful selection process to identify participants for the study. Since the purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze data gathered from the stories, narratives, and lived experiences of practicing administrators and their reflections on how these experiences influence them in their current roles of supervising school leaders in their practice, there was a limited “pool” of viable
participants. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) have alluded to “interviewees should be experienced and knowledgeable in the area in which they are being interviewed” (p. 64). The participants had been school level leaders and are currently in district level positions in a large, southeastern school district in the United States. A description of the district demographics, structure, and context is included in Appendix A.

The qualitative research model encouraged the careful selection of each participant. The sample was purposefully selected based on access of this researcher to the participants who had rich experiences and were willing to participate in the study. Their gender, race, and ethnicity; length of time as school principals (a minimum of five years) and district administrators (a minimum of three years); and their management of the size, scale and level of dilemmas associated with the district’s complex organizational structure was additional criteria used in their selection. In the selected school district, there were seven district administrators meeting the criteria listed who were formally invited to participate in this study; five of the seven invitees agreed to participate in the study. Table 1 displays the demographics of the participants.
Table 1

Demographics of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years of Experience as an Educator</th>
<th>Years of Experience as a School Principal</th>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>Years of Experience as a District Leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Middle and High</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>ESE K-12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>ESE K-12 and Middle</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selected participants also had shared common experiences among themselves and with the researcher. Their willingness to participate and accessibility was in part due to the professional rapport and relationship with the researcher. The names and exact titles of all of the participants remained confidential and the participants had an opportunity to review the findings to be assured that their anonymity was protected.

Qualitative research questions are often open ended, evolving and non-directional. There is usually a central question with issue sub-questions that address the major concerns and perplexities to be studied and analyzed (Creswell, 2007, p. 109). Charmaz (2006) emphasized that “questions must explore the interviewer’s topic and fit the participant’s experience” (p.29). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggested that the interviewer’s questions be brief and simple and include an introductory question with combinations of follow up, probing, specifying, or direct and indirect questions. These
questions should be more reflective than interrogatory and elicit dialog, conversation, and narrative responses (pp. 135-136). The participants were asked this introductory question: “Can you recall and tell me about an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences?” (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008, p. 42). In the tradition of effective interviewing, the protocols were semi-structured, allowing for rich responses and for additional probing (Spradley, 1989). Below are the direct, indirect, probing, and follow up questions that were developed by this researcher and asked of the participants:

- What was the date of this incident?
- What helped or hindered you most in responding to the dilemma?
- As the dilemma was resolved, did you seek or receive guidance from anyone? If so, what was the relationship between you and the parties at the time?
- Did district policies or representatives play a role in your decision-making around the incident(s)?
- Have you experienced dissonance between personal beliefs, values or morals and what has been required of you by policy, practice or expectations in your administrative role? If so, give an example.
- How did you learn to make ethically and morally sound decisions? What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making?
- What role, if any, did gender or race play in the incident or your resolution of it?
As you reflect upon your experiences as a school leader, what have you learned that specifically relates to ethical and moral decision making?

The participants were given copies of the questions prior to each of their interview sessions.

The interview sessions were recorded and the participants’ responses were transcribed, analyzed, and coded based on themes, patterns, and trends. The researcher approached the data through open coding and constant comparative analysis. Additionally, the researcher searched for non-examples or conflicting data and accounted for all of the data through coding. The researcher took field notes during the sessions and these notes became part of the study’s narrative as well as provided a means for triangulating data. The participants were provided copies of the findings and conclusions that served as a form of member checking and assured rigor in the data analysis. Participants also received a copy of their taped interview upon request.

The characteristics of the responsive interviewing were embedded throughout the interview processes that ensured “an experience that was first hand for those who have thoroughly immersed themselves in a critical incident; observing and describing it in narrative form with a reflective analysis” (Permuth, 2005).

Limitations

As defined earlier, qualitative research is typically based on small, nonrandom samples and qualitative research findings are often not very generalized beyond the local research participants (Permuth, 2005, p. 100). Additionally, qualitative researchers often engage in “learn by doing” data analysis which leads critics to claim that qualitative research is largely intuitive, soft, and relativistic or that qualitative data analysts fall back
on the three “Is” – insight, intuition, and impression. “Qualitative researchers are known to preserve the unusual and serendipitous, and writers craft each study differently, using analytic procedures that evolve in the field” (Creswell, 2007, p. 180). This researcher became the instrument and this required the utmost diligence and ethics during the data-gathering phase.

The selected participants had shared common experiences among themselves and with this researcher. Their willingness to participate and accessibility was in part due to the professional rapport and relationship with this researcher. Although these two criteria used in the selection of the participants did not pose any significant limitations in this study, the relationship between this researcher and the proposed participants could be challenged and construed as researcher bias. Another limitation of the study could be the number of participants although Weiss (1994) states, “qualitative interview studies collect more material from fewer respondents” (p. 32). An additional limitation of this study to consider is the structure of the protocol questions. The questions were standardized and designed to investigate, specifically, the overarching goal of this research that was to study the types of dilemmas school leaders faced, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for leader preparation and professional development. The questions were not open-ended and did not provide for participant reflection beyond their context. Furthermore, this research employed the Critical Incident Technique and the participants were asked to recall incidents from their experiences as school level leaders. The reconstruction of the incidents shared by the participants during their interview sessions may also be construed as a limitation. Finally, the dates of the incidents shared by the participants occurred between 1970 through 2010; the
participants’ recall of incidents that occurred more than ten years ago could also be construed as a limitation.

**Validity**

To ensure the validity, authentication, and trustworthiness in qualitative studies, Creswell (2007) has identified eight strategies that are frequently used by qualitative researchers: (a) building trust with participants; (b) triangulation; (c) peer review or debriefing; (d) negative case analysis; (e) clarifying researcher bias; (f) member checking; (g) rich, thick description allowing for transferability; (h) external audits. Creswell also suggests that qualitative researcher engage in at least two of these strategies in a given study (pp. 207-09). The following are four of the eight listed strategies that this researcher employed in this study:

*Triangulation*: the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2007, p. 208).

This researcher used the taped and transcribed responses of the participants in addition to her own recorded notes and reflections. The researcher employed within and cross data analyses processes to ensure authentic coding, themes, patterns, and identification of relevant text.

*Peer review or debriefing*: provides an external check of the research process; this peer can be described as a “devil’s advocate”, an individual who keeps the researcher honest (Creswell, 2007, p. 208).

This researcher’s committee members functioned in this role in addition to a trusted expert who was not part of the study or committee.
Clarifying researcher bias: the researcher provides comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that may have shaped the interpretation and approach to the study (Creswell, 2007, p. 208).

This researcher disclosed in her story and critical incident reflections potential bias and her stance in relation to the phenomenon. This researcher also had a professional rapport with the participants; was employed in similar professional roles as the participants; and had some familiarity with several of the critical incidents shared by the participants. These biases did not pose difficulty for the researcher during the interview sessions nor did they significantly influence the outcome of this study.

Member checking: the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2007, p. 208).

Each participant was mailed a copy of their transcribed interview and was asked to review the transcript for credibility, clarity and accuracy of the responses provided during the interview session. Each participant was also asked if there was a need to edit or omit any of the responses; there were no edits sent to this researcher by the participants. The findings of this study were also shared with each participant to assess accuracy, possible breeches of confidentiality, and to solicit their agreement and any additional views.

Role and Views of the Researcher

Two underlying themes in this qualitative study were critical pedagogy and the ethic of critique. In critical pedagogy, the theoretical domain interacts with the lived domain, producing a synergy that elevates both scholarship and transformative action. Critical pedagogy mandates that schools do not hurt students nor blame students for their
failures (Kincheloe, 2008, pp. 12-13) or in essence mandates that the adults in “charge” make sound, ethical decisions that are truly in the best interests of students. Kincheloe further stated that

Advocates of critical pedagogy are aware that every minute of every hour that teachers teach [school leaders lead], they are faced with complex decisions concerning justice, democracy, and competing ethical claims…they must concurrently deal with what John Goodlad (1994) calls the surrounding institutional morality. A central tenet of critical pedagogy maintains that the classroom, curricular, and school structures teachers enter are not neutral sites waiting to be shaped by educational professionals (p. 2).

Additionally, scholars who espoused the ethic of critique (e.g. Apple, 1998; Bakhtin, 1981; Bowles & Gintis, 1988; Foucault; 1993; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1994; Greene, 1988; Purpel & Shapiro, 1995), as applied to this study, “found tension between the ethic of justice, rights, laws, and the concept of democracy”. In responding to this tension, these scholars and this researcher raised difficult questions by “critiquing both the laws themselves and the process used to determine if the laws were just” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 13). These scholars, and in practice this researcher, also challenged the status quo by seeking an ethic that dealt with inconsistencies, formulated the hard questions, and debated and challenged the issues. With the intent to awaken us to our own unstated values and make us realize how frequently our own morals may have been modified and possibly even corrupted over time (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 13). The researcher embraced these themes in professional practice as well as in this research study.
Social constructivism is defined as a worldview in which individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). This view aligned to the philosophical approach of this researcher and supported another focus of this qualitative study: to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views and experiences in order to identify and characterize the types of dilemmas school level leaders face (Creswell, 2007). In addition, this researcher acknowledged that one knows and sees the world from a situated stance that is grounded in lived experiences. This researcher has shared her story to enable readers to become more attuned to that lived experience, situated stance, and potential bias.

Foucault (1994) defines spirituality as “the subject’s attainment of a certain mode of being and the transformations that the subject must carry out on itself to attain that mode of being” (p. 294). Marshall and Oliva (2006) stated, “Anchoring spirituality are feelings of peace, care, and commitment that rise from one’s belief in a higher being” (p. 42). Bolman and Deal (2003) added that being a spiritual leader

…does not mean promoting religion or a particular theology…but bringing a genuine concern for the human spirit…the dictionary defines spirit as ‘the intelligent or immaterial part of man’, “the animating of vital principal in living things”, and the “moral nature of humanity”. Spiritual leaders help people find meaning and faith in work and help them answer fundamental questions that have confronted humans of every time and place: Who am I as an individual? Who are we as a people? What is the purpose of my life, of our collective life? What ethical principles should we follow? What legacy will we leave? (p. 406).
As I begin to share my reflections and critical incidents, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that spirituality forms the core of my personal and professional ethical codes. There is a connectedness in my work and my relations with others. I value honesty, trust, social conscience, and justice in all my interactions. I strive to help others define the meaning and purpose in what they do… and I truly believe that I am making a difference and that I am leaving a legacy for others…this is my “spirituality”…my balance between conscience and compliance….praxis and hermeneutics. Below is my personal code of ethics that I adopted years ago, Mahatma Gandhi’s “Resolution”:

Let the first act of every morning be to make the following resolve for the day:

I shall not fear anyone on earth.

I shall fear only God.

I shall not bear ill toward anyone.

I shall not submit to injustice from anyone.

I shall conquer untruth by truth.

And in resisting untruth, I shall put up with all suffering.

**Researcher’s Reflective Story and Critical Incidents**

There was a family, a mother, father, and three daughters, who lived in an urban community with a neighborhood school that was within walking distance of their home; two of the daughters were of school age. Every morning, after the father made preparations and left to go work, the mother began her daily task that was to walk two of her three daughters, one in kindergarten and the other second grade, one mile to catch the city bus to attend another school. Two bus transfers and an hour later, the two sisters would arrive at their designated school. They would repeat this ritual in the afternoon and
their mother would meet them at the bus stop for the mile walk home. Although the family lived in a community with a neighborhood elementary school that they could see “up the hill” from their yard, and the family drove by that elementary school on their way to church, to run errands, and to do all the other things that a family would do together, the two sisters could not attend the school. The sisters could see the school with its magnificent white steeple, the wonderful playground, the pretty green lawn, and could watch the other children in the neighborhood walk to the school up the hill. They never questioned their parents about why they could not attend that school – because at that time, that is just the way it was. The family was the wrong color; the school was for white children only. The school that they did attend did not have a pretty green lawn, magnificent white steeple, or a wonderful playground; it was for black students. But a strange thing happened the following year. For some reason unknown to the two sisters at that time, they were allowed to attend the school up the hill. They finally were able to enter that school at top of the hill with the magnificent steeple, the pretty green lawn, and wonderful playground. The year was 1954, the city was Washington, D.C. and “with all deliberate speed” all schools were integrated. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court made it clear that

Segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race…deprives the children of the minority group equal education opportunities. To separate black children from others of similar age and qualifications generates a feeling of inferiority…that may affect their hearts and minds in ways unlikely ever to be undone.
This story notes a historical political and social event in our society that had a direct impact on our schools and served as an attempt to ease “tension between the ethic of justice, rights, laws, and the concept of democracy” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, p. 13). This story was also shared at the dedication of Thurgood Marshall Fundamental Middle School on October 14, 2004, fifty years after Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) by this researcher, the founding principal of that middle school.

When the district was granted unitary status one of the stipulations of the agreement was that the district builds three new south county schools. This was an attempt to replace pupil stations that were lost. This lost was due to many of the south county schools’ conversion to magnet schools. In addition to opening as a fundamental school, Thurgood Marshall would be the first middle school in the district to implement a 4x4/block schedule. Another debated issue was whether the school would open servicing all grades or begin with just a sixth grade class; it was decided that Marshall would accommodate all grade levels. Designed to for a student enrollment of 1400 students, Thurgood Marshall is situated on 20 acres in an inner city community of the school district. It was built on the site of a former elementary school and additional acreage was purchased through eminent domain. This community borders on another inner city community of the district and according to the 2000 Census information, the zip code and census tract where Marshall is located has one of the highest crime rates in the incorporated area of the city. Thurgood Marshall was staffed for 400 students its first year and projected for incremental growth until it reached a program capacity of 1000 students. However, since this was the district’s first year for Choice, Marshall was the only middle school in attendance Area A with open seats. By the ten-day count, the
enrollment swelled to 630 students and 53% were from families who did not choose Marshall because it was a fundamental school. During that initial year, I struggled with multiple dilemmas: keeping the “integrity” of the fundamental concept in addition to hiring and maintaining a quality staff as the enrollment increased. The ‘fundamental concept’ entailed dismissing students who were not in compliance with the strict discipline and dress codes, daily homework, and demerit system or due to their parents not attending the required parent conferences or mandatory monthly PTSA/SAC meeting. This was a community of parents and students either who did not want to be there or who were there but had difficulties adjusting to the “fundamental way”.

In a career in education that spans over thirty-five years, I have been a classroom teacher, middle school dean, middle school and elementary school assistant principal, elementary and middle school principal, and district administrator. I have faced numerous dilemmas that have allowed me to “challenge the status quo while seeking an ethic to deal with inconsistencies, formulate hard questions, debate and confront issues, and realize how “frequently my own morals have been tested over time” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001).

I began my educational career as a preschool teacher in an inner city school in Washington, D.C. My classroom, located on the second floor of a three story brick school, consisted of 15 three and four year old students who lived in the housing “projects” surrounding the school. The school was not designed to accommodate preschoolers. The classrooms were small, the hallways were dark and the older students often wandered around unsupervised, the bathrooms and cafeteria were located in the basement, the playground was used as the staff parking lot because it was fenced in and
the entry gate would be chained and locked after the start of school. All of the students in my class lived in single parent settings. None of the mothers had completed high school and the majority were unemployed, received “government subsidies”, and food stamps. A goal of the program was to encourage the mothers to become more engaged with their child’s growth and development and to improve their own literacy and parenting skills. The preschool teachers were required to schedule monthly visits to their students’ homes; the visits were very structured, focused on the academic and social development of the students and reinforcing positive parenting skills. All home visits had to be approved by the program director and documented. Over a period of several weeks, one of the students in my class, who was somewhat precocious, would frequently talk about a “boyfriend” and during nap time was observed exhibiting very disturbing “sexual” behavior. Concerned about both, I decided to make an “unannounced” and “unscheduled” home visit to discuss this with the students’ mother. The student lived about two blocks from the school and one afternoon, during naptime, I walked to the complex where the student lived. A teenaged male answered the door; I identified myself and asked if the student’s mother was home. He said ‘no’ and I asked him to tell the student’s mother that I had stopped by; I then left. The student was absent for about a week after my visit but this was not an unusual pattern for this student nor the other students in my class. The teacher assistant, who lived in the community, saw the student’s mother at a store in the neighborhood and asked about the student. The mother nonchalantly replied that her daughter had an “infection” and the doctor at the clinic told her to keep her daughter home until it cleared up. I would later learn that the “infection” was a venereal disease that her daughter had contracted from the teenaged male who answered the door when I
made my “unauthorized” home visit. He was the brother of the mother’s boyfriend and had been sexually abusing the four-year-old student for several months. This was my first “critical incident” as an educator and as I often reflect upon this, I realize that this was also my first act of what Stein (2004) refers to as “thoughtful noncompliance” – focusing on the student’s needs in lieu of policy (p. 102). Little did I know that I was also beginning to formulate my own personal and profession codes of ethics.

While continuing to teach in D.C., I earned my master’s degree in early childhood education and soon after relocated to Florida. Because the state of Florida did not have licensing reciprocity at that time, I had to take several courses to meet the state’s teacher certification requirements. I managed a Head Start Center and worked as a college counselor while completing the required certification courses. I was eventually hired as a kindergarten teacher and assigned to a “kindergarten center”. The center was a former “black” elementary school that had been closed the previous year and repurposed as an early childhood center. The center housed six kindergarten classes, six Head Start classes, and a parent outreach center. The school was located in the middle of a housing project and all of the students lived within walking distance of the school. The student population was all black…the year was 1975…the school district had been court ordered to desegregate their schools in 1972…eighteen years after Brown v. Board of Education (1954). I had personal conflicts with this in light of what I had experienced as a kindergartner and being fully aware that the Brown decision was the impetus for me to attend an integrated school “with all deliberate speed”.

I continued to take classes and earned my Education Specialist (Ed.S.) degree; I also took classes for administrative certification. My first administrative position was in
1979 at a middle school. I transitioned from a kindergarten teacher to a middle school dean. The school was located in a middle class community and, coincidentally, the black students bused to this middle school lived in the housing projects surrounding the “kindergarten center” where I had previously taught.

Each grade level, sixth, seventh, and eighth, at this middle school was designated as a “house” and I was the administrator for the 7th grade house. The Sixth Grade Pool Party was an annual end of the year tradition, a rite of passage that all of the sixth graders looked forward to this yearly event. The 6th grade administrator coordinated this event that was always scheduled during the last week before summer break. The pool was within walking distance of the school and adequately staffed with lifeguards. I asked the principal if I could take a few minutes from my duties to walk over to the pool to observe the festivities. As I stood by the pool’s edge talking with the 6th grade administrator, a female student who was exiting the pool in a two-piece bathing suit caught my attention. I asked the 6th grade administrator if he knew that the student was pregnant. He looked at me and then at the student and stated that she did not look pregnant to him and maybe she just has put on some weight. He added that she was a very good student from a good family and she did not “mess” with the boys. The next day, I shared my observation with the principal and 8th grade administrator and their responses were the same as the 6th grade administrator. I boldly asked if I should talk with the student or call the parents and was told unequivocally “no”. A few days later, against the advice of the administrative team, I called the student’s mother and shared my observation and concern. I suggested to the parent that she have a talk with her daughter and take her to her physician for a pregnancy test. A week later the mother called to thank me and to let me know that her
daughter was six months pregnant and that the family would be sending her to an out of
state home for unwed pregnant teenagers. I asked the parent if her daughter knew who the
father of the baby was and she replied that it was a student at the school. This was
another situation in which I would plead “thoughtful noncompliance”. I went against the
advice of my immediate supervisor and peers; I also delved into the personal life of the
student. Again, my concern was in the best interests of this student. I also questioned if
my race and gender had any bearing on my administrative peers reticence in addressing
this issue: I was the lone female administrator on team with three white males; I was the
school’s first minority administrator; the student was white.

My first principalship, in 1986, was at a former black inner city school that had
been converted into a magnet school. Magnets were established in schools in the inner
city or at repurposed schools in the inner city to encourage integration by “choice” thus
attracting white students and softening the impact of “forced bussing”. The total student
population at this school was 450 students: 420 white student and 30 black students…
and the efforts of the district to integrate the school by choice were declared a success.

About that same time, a high school student in my district was suspended from
school for using profanity towards a teacher. The morning of February 11, 1988, he broke
into a County Sheriff Deputy’s home and stole two .38-caliber revolvers. School officials
saw the student on campus and called the police for assistance with issuing a trespassing
charge. The two assistant principals then confronted the student about being on campus
when he should not be. It was about 11:50 a.m. and nearly 500 students were eating lunch
in the cafeteria when things went bad: shots were fired from one of the stolen revolvers.
A student, teacher, and three administrators had been wounded. A week later, one of the
assistant principals would die from wounds inflicted by the student with the gun. The district was one of the first in the nation to experience this type of tragedy and immediately established a zero tolerance gun policy: As a result, any student possessing a gun, real, toy, or facsimile and regardless of the intent, would be automatically suspended from school for ten days, recommended for expulsion, and reassigned to an alternative school.

At the time of this incident, I was in my second principalship at another inner city elementary school; this particular school was not a magnet. During that time, schools were still under court ordered bussing for desegregation. Because of this school’s location, the white students were on a two-year bussing rotation to the school and the black students who lived within walking distance attended the school. In addition to being a Title I school the school’s diverse demographics supported a myriad of programs: English for Speaker of other Languages (ESOL), Even Start, Pre-K Early Intervention, a primary and an intermediate Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH) class, and an Early Success Program (ESP). One morning, the primary EMH teacher came into my office with a look of fear on her face and immediately shut the office door. One of the students in her classroom had a toy gun in his backpack. The teacher was aware of the consequences for this but was more concerned about how the consequence would affect the student. About six months later, a third grade student brought his father’s gun to school; it was loaded. He showed the gun to several students on his bus ride home. I debated about invoking the zero tolerance policy and weighed the situation and consequences for these students.
Another challenge arose when it came to my attention that two male staff members were engaged in activities that many of the staff members construed as professionally and ethically inappropriate. One of the offending parties was a classroom teacher; the other was the night foreman. Both were African American, worked at the school for many years, and were “best friends”. Conversations with the school secretary concurred that the staff’s concerns have been an issue for as long as she has been at the school. She also added that the former principal was afraid of the night foreman and that she had witnessed the night foreman verbally and physically threatening him. She shared that the head plant operator had tried on numerous occasions to get support and assistance from the previous principal and the district plant operations’ supervisor about his behavior and job performance, but to no avail. She added that the principal prior to my predecessor had taken the building keys from the night foreman and were returned a week after my predecessor’s arrival. The plant operator’s school file contained written statements and other information relating to the staff’s concerns. There were several documented incidents of insubordination with the former principal, two letters of caution and one formal reprimand. Annual evaluations were very inconsistent and did not reflect the issues of the alleged staff harassment, poor job performance, and insubordination.

A behavior that was a frequent complaint of the teachers was the long conversations the night foreman engaged them in when they were working late in their classrooms or leaving to go home. If the teachers did not entertain him he often retaliated by not cleaning their classrooms. The night foreman also learned my work schedule and would often show up just as I was leaving work to talk. In addition to these long conversations with me and the classroom teachers, he and the classroom teacher, who
was his friend, would meet after school, in the evening, or at night in the custodian
“break room” for philosophical discussions and their Bible lessons. Additionally, during
the day and during his planning and lunch, the classroom teacher would go to the break
room to read the Bible. That in itself was not an issue, but he would then put Bible verses
on the chalkboard for his discussions with the night foreman later in the day. Staff
members who would use the room began to complain about this activity.

Meetings with the night foreman, the school based union representative, and me
were always counterproductive and the night foreman would balk at any suggestions for
improvement. He continued to write accusatory letters and I continued to respond to in
writing as required. This generated additional paper work for me and the school
secretary. His evaluations began to reflect his true work performance.

One afternoon the night foreman walked into my office stating that he wanted to
talk with me. He sat down and began to recap what led to where we were. He then
backtracked to his difficult and dysfunctional upbringing and shared how he had risen
above that situation to become a productive citizen, raise a family, etc. He even shared
with me that his sister, who was a teacher, helped him with his reading and writing. I was
aware of all that he was sharing with me and I listened intently. He continued to plead his
case and asked why I would not just let things remain as they were. I began to respond
but before I could finish my first sentence, he jumped out of the chair, lunged toward me
with a raised fist, mumbled something about making some contacts and then stormed out
of my office.

The quality and quantity of most peoples’ performance at their place of
employment is often contingent on the type of environment they work in. It was very
evident that there was a conflict between the night foreman, his friend, the classroom teachers, and me as to what we valued in the workplace. Good work habits and work ethics, a humane work environment, detecting and resolving human problems, and discerning co-workers’ positive and negative motives lead to creating a work environment for the good of the group: this was my dilemma.

In 2007, the superintendent appointed me to a district level position. Another major transition and this one was from a school based leadership role to district based leadership role. The position was newly established and was designed to support the middle school reform initiatives and mandates stemming from recently passed state statutes. The primary function of this position was managing the district’s 22 middle schools; specific tasks included goal setting, planning, controlling, directing, staffing, coordinating, decision-making, communicating, and evaluation the function of all middle school operations. It also required that I work directly with the Deputy Superintendents to develop systematic approaches to evaluate and improve teaching and learning, to determine the most effective means of closing the achievement gaps, and to increase the level of achievement for every student in a safe learning environment.

As with teachers, principals often share confidential and personal information with their immediate supervisors, and confidentiality is respected when this occurs. I received an anonymous letter expounding on what the writer perceived as “unethical” and “unprofessional” behavior by a middle school principal. The author of the letter was alleging that the principal created a hostile work environment, misappropriated PTSA funds, used her position for personal gains, and used the school for her church’s revival. The district does not require any official response to anonymous complaints, but because
the school leader in question was a neophyte, I shared the letter with the principal in question. This principal had experienced a personal tragedy and had shared some events relating to the tragedy with me. A month after the anonymous letter incident, I received a very startling phone call. The caller identified himself and his position and began to provide me with detailed information that would substantiate his client’s complaint against one of the district’s middle school principals. The caller was well aware of the district’s policy regarding anonymous complaints and knew that by giving me information that would verify who he was his call could not be classified as an anonymous complaint. In addition, principal in question was the same one referred to in the anonymous letter; the issues were the same and included some events related to the principal’s personal tragedy and as severe as the principal’s personal tragedy was, I had a moral and ethical obligation to the students and staff. Initially, there was also doubt in the “community” about the severity of the allegations and underlying distrust about the intent of the investigation because the principal, the Office of Professional Standards’ administrator, and I were of the same race.

My dilemmas confirm that “school leaders are caught at the interface between the system and the school and are accountable to both bodies and are likely to find ourselves juggling a ‘multitude of competing obligations and interests’”. These dilemmas also support the premise that “school leaders must confront and resolve conflicting interests while balancing a variety of values and expectations in our decision making” (Cranston, Enrich, & Kimber, 2003, p. 136).

**Significance of the Study**
Because of her considerable experience in education, this researcher is cognizant of the realization that school level leaders faced a myriad of ethical and moral dilemmas that may be similar to those shared in her story. The data accrued will either affirm or disaffirm this realization and allow for an exploration of the decisions, consequences and patterns of response gleamed from the data shared by the administrators selected to participate in this study. This data will also inform future directions in research, leader preparation and practice. In addition, exploring the dimension of race and its interrelationship with ethical and moral dilemmas will contribute to a full immersion in and analysis of the data collected around these important research questions.

The methods used in this study offer a research paradigm for probing and understanding how school level leaders process and interpret their world and how they assign meaning to their lived experiences and the resulting actions. This researcher’s ultimate goal, therefore, was to design a significant study, collect and analyze pertinent and relevant data, and then use deductive thinking and reasoning to present her findings from the subjects’ points of view.

The story is paramount for qualitative researchers and nothing is as important to this study and this researcher as the words and stories of the participants. An additional intent of this study was to “capture the dynamics of leadership choices” when dealing with critical incidents and to reinforce Freire’s (1970) statement and this researcher’s premise that “dialog is an indispensible component of both learning and knowing…it transforms lived experiences into knowledge and uses the already acquired to unveil new knowledge” (p. 17) for future practice.
CHAPTER 4

Findings and Results

Introduction

The underlining purpose of this chapter is to share the findings resulting from this qualitative study of the types of ethical dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for school level leader preparation and professional development. This chapter is presented in the following segments: an overview of the study, the methodology, participant selection and protocols, interview sessions, data analysis, and the research findings.

Overview

This study was designed to provide insights into the complex roles of school level leaders, the dissonance between competing values regarding what is in the “best interests of students” balanced with professional and personal ethics, policy implementation, and organizational imperatives. This study focused on ethical dilemmas identified as especially confounding and difficult by school level leaders. These dilemmas included decisions and situations, shared through recounting critical incidents, in which the actions and decisions of the selected administrators garnered attention and action. Based on a review of previous studies as well as personal experience, the researcher assumed that school level leaders faced numerous ethical dilemmas and sought to identify and examine the most difficult and troubling shared by participants in this study. An ancillary purpose of this study was to explore implications for preparation and ongoing professional development of school level leaders that build expertise in handling ethical situations.
The four guiding research questions that framed this study were:

5. What types of ethical dilemmas do school level leaders face that require assistance or intervention?

6. What actions, decisions, or interventions assist school level leaders with facing these types of dilemmas?

7. What are the implications of the research findings for preparation and professional development of school level leaders?

8. What has been learned by administrators after leaving school level leadership?

**Methodology**

In documenting the lived experiences of the selected administrators, this researcher followed the grounded theory approach to qualitative inquiry using the critical incident technique. Data collected from interview sessions, dialogs, journals and reflections were used to analyze the types of dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for school level leader preparation, professional development and practice. The semi-structured interviews were the main data collection instrument due to the large amounts of data that could be generated about the participants lived experiences using the interview process. The interview process also allowed for immediate follow up and clarification by this researcher when needed (Cranston, 2005, p. 109).

The participants’ responses to the central question: “Can you recall and tell me about an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences?” (Frick &
Gutierrez, 2008, p. 42), additional follow up questions and probes that were developed by this researcher, and related conversations explicit to the school level dilemmas that were shared were recorded and transcribed. As Weiss (1994) pointed out, “the use of a tape recorder made it easier to attend to the participants and just relying on hand written notes tend to simplify and flatten the participants’ speech patterns, spacers are dropped and the vividness of speech disappears” (p. 54).

**Participant Selection and Protocols**

This researcher used a non-random and purposeful selection process to identify participants for the study. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated, “…interviewees should be experienced and knowledgeable in the area in which they are being interviewed” (p. 64). The selected participants had been school level leaders (principals) and are currently in district level positions in a large, southeastern school district that is located in the United States.

Qualitative research encourages the careful selection of each participant. The study sample was selected purposefully based on access by this researcher to the participants who had rich experiences and were willing to participate in the study. Additional selection criteria included gender, race, and ethnicity; length of time as school principals (a minimum of five years) and district administrators (a minimum of three years); and their management of the size, scale and level of dilemmas associated with the district’s complex organizational structure. In the selected school district, seven district administrators met the criteria listed. The seven were formally invited to participate in this study; five of the seven invitees agreed to participate in the study (see Table 1).
The selected participants also had shared common experiences among themselves and with this researcher. Their willingness to participate and accessibility was in part due to the professional rapport and relationship with this researcher. Charmaz (2004) emphasized Blumer’s (1969) insistence that social scientists establish intimate familiarity with their studied phenomenon. This also aligned with Charmaz’s (2004) first principle in the practice of qualitative research: *Intimate Familiarity with the Phenomenon Forms the Foundation of Qualitative Inquiry* that translated to gaining a level of knowledge and understanding that penetrated the experience (p. 984).

**Interview Sessions with Participants**

This researcher scheduled the interview sessions with each of the five participants. The interview sessions were directed by the researcher and scheduled between April and June 2010. Sessions were scheduled at a time and location amenable to each participant. Two of the participants scheduled their interview sessions at their place of work but after their scheduled workday. Another participant also scheduled the session at his place of work late in the afternoon, prior to attending an evening school board meeting. The participants scheduled the remaining two sessions on Saturdays that each felt was more convenient and less of a time conflict with professional and personal responsibilities. One scheduled the session as a Saturday morning “coffee” at a restaurant located in close proximity to his residence. The other participant scheduled the session on a Saturday afternoon at his residence.

All participants were provided a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix B) that outlined the purpose of the study, the study procedures, risks (which were minimal), and benefits in participating in this study. The consent form emphasized
the confidential components of this study with assurances that no information would identify the participants. The participants were given copies of the nine protocol questions prior to each of their scheduled interview sessions. The participants were also given copies of this researcher’s critical incidents that are included in the Researcher’s Reflective Story and Critical Incidents in Chapter 3 of this study. The researcher’s intent in providing the participants with this information was twofold: to serve as a form of reciprocal sharing of lived experiences and to further broaden the participants of the understanding of the significance, importance, and impact of sharing their lived experiences (critical incidents) with this researcher for this study. The participants received no compensation for their participation in the study.

Because of this researcher’s professional relationship with participants, no formal or professional introductions were required prior to the start of the interview sessions. What was potentially researcher bias due to this relationship became an asset during the interview sessions. The existing comfort level established between this researcher and the participants stemming from our professional interactions as well as mutual respect and trust forged with this researcher through these interactions and the reassurances of confidentiality outlined within the consent form contributed to the openness and frankness of their responses. Additionally, this researcher had broad background knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences that the participants shared which allowed her to be in a position to note, as Goffman (1989) described,

their gestural, visual, bodily responses to what’s going on around them and you’re empathetic enough – because you have been taking the same crap they’ve been
taking – to sense what it is they’re responding to. To me, that’s the core of observation (pp. 125-126).

Weiss (1994) confirmed the advantages of the researcher as an insider when he stated:

…it is better to be an insider to the milieu in which the respondent lives, because it is easier than to establish a research partnership with the respondent…but it is also beneficial to be an outsider who may need instruction in the respondent’s milieu (p. 137).

Qualitative research questions are often open ended, evolving, and emergent. There is usually a central question with issue sub-questions that address the major concerns and perplexities to be studied and analyzed (Creswell, 2007, p. 109). Charmaz (2006) emphasized that “questions must explore the interviewer’s topic and fit the participant’s experience” (p. 29). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggested that the interviewer’s questions be brief and simple and include an introductory question with combinations of follow up, probing, specifying, or direct and indirect questions. These questions should be more reflective than interrogatory and should elicit dialog, conversation, and narrative responses (pp. 134-36). The participants were asked this introductory question, “Can you recall and tell me about an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences?” (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008, p. 42). Additional direct and indirect, probing and follow up questions developed by this researcher that were also part of the protocol were:

- What was the date of this incident?
- What helped or hindered you most in responding to the dilemma?
• As the dilemma was resolved, did you seek or receive guidance from anyone? If so, what was the relationship between you and the parties at the time?

• Did district policies or representatives play a role in your decision-making around the incident(s)?

• Have you experienced dissonance between personal beliefs, values or morals and what has been required of you by policy, practice or expectations in your administrative role? If so, give an example.

• How did you learn to make ethically and morally sound decisions? What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making?

• What role, if any, did gender or race play in the incident or your resolution of it?

• As you reflect upon your experiences as a school leader, what have you learned that specifically relates to ethical and moral decision making?

All of the participants were asked these nine questions although there were some variations in how the questions were introduced due to the length and content of their responses to each question. The questions were designed to investigate, specifically, the overarching goal of this research that was to study the types of dilemmas school level leaders face, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for school level leader preparation and professional development. Although the questions were not open-ended and did not provide for participant reflection beyond the context of the questions, their design allowed the participants to remain focused on the responses to each question.
This researcher’s familiarity with some of the critical incidents the participants shared provided the opportunity to ask, if needed, additional probing, direct, and indirect questions that were deemed pertinent to the intent of this study. Each participant was asked to provide additional demographic information that was specific to the participant selection criteria (see Table 1): years of experience as a district employee, years of experience as a school level leader, school level, and years of experience as a district administrator. Although it was not part of the protocol each participant was asked if there was anything else that he would like to share. This allowed this researcher to transition the session to a close. This also provided an opening for the participants to give additional information (Janesick, 2004, pp. 73-77).

Each interview session conducted with the participants was one-on-one, face to face; semi structured, and averaged an hour in length. Each participant consented to have the session recorded. The participants responded to the nine questions during their interview sessions. Some provided more detail and supporting scenarios than others did. Four of the participants shared two incidents that accounts for more incidents than participants in the study. This researcher recorded the interview sessions. Prior to and after each session, this researcher checked the tape recorder to ensure that it was operating and that the dialog was properly recorded. This researcher also transcribed the participants’ responses; the tapes and transcripts are secured at the residence of this researcher. During the transcription phase, this researcher discovered, as pointed out by Kvale and Brinkman (2009), that

Researchers who transcribe their own interviews will learn much about their own interviewing styles; to some extent they will have the social and emotional aspects
of the interview situation present or awakened during the transcription, and will already have the analysis of the meaning of what was said (p. 180).

Each participant was mailed a copy of the transcribed interview and was asked to review the transcript for clarity and accuracy of the responses during the interview session. Each participant was also asked if there was a need to edit or omit any of the responses. Each participant was provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope and this researcher’s personal email address to use to provide this researcher with any additional, edited, or corrected data (see Appendix D). The participants were provided copies of the findings and conclusions that served as a form of member checking and assured rigor in the data analysis. None of the participants expressed any concerns about the content or confidentiality. The participants also received a copy of the taped interviews upon their request.

**Data Analysis**

Initially, this researcher used open or initial coding which is defined as the process of breaking down responses, examining and comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Saldana, 2009, p. 81). Additionally, this researcher looked for non-examples or conflicting data and accounted for all of the data through coding and cataloging. This researcher took field and reflective notes during and after the each interview session, while transcribing the interviews, and during replays of the participants’ interview sessions. Furthermore, this researcher utilized memo writing - writing down ideas about the evolving theory. This process, which is highly suggested by Charmaz (2006), helped to clarify and direct the coding processes and made the writing
process more concrete and manageable (pp. 72-82). These multiple data formats became a part of the study’s narrative and provided a means for triangulating the data.

Within and cross case analyses was also applied to the critical incidents by looking at each incident individually and then comparing patterns across incidents. This process allowed for additional coding and for identifying emerging themes and patterns in the experiences that shaped the participants lived experiences (critical incidents). The interview tapes were replayed several times during the data analyses phases to again gain insight into what Weiss (1994) termed the “vividness of speech” (p. 54). The data were organized in a matrix around each protocol question and each critical incident. Open coding was used to identify patterns that emerged within each incident as well as across incidents and participants. Thus, the primary data source was the transcribed interviews of the participants with cross case and within case analyses of each critical incident and the protocol questions. Central themes and patterns were teased from these analyses. This researcher also identified relevant texts and repeating ideas (emergent themes) which were used to respond to the nine protocol and four guiding questions. The analysis of the data was constant comparative (Creswell, 2007, pp. 45-47), with the researcher coding and categorizing over time through several lenses: the critical incidents themselves, the individual protocol questions, patterns across incidents, patterns across protocol questions, and finally, overarching themes in answer to the guiding questions. As Weiss (1994) stated

The kind of story the investigator can tell must be consistent with the kind of data that has been collected”. The investigator will develop insights, speculations, and small-scale theories beginning with the first pilot interview or before…but it is
likely to be only after interviewing has ended that the investigator can give full attention to analysis and writing (pp. 151-153).

This researcher ended the interviews when no new codes were emerging, when patterns became redundant, and when the data were deemed sufficient to answer the research questions.

**Findings**

The findings are presented by nine descriptive coded themes: prevalence of dilemmas, age of incidents, compliance with policy, seeking guidance, support from district, dissonance with personal beliefs, learning to be ethical, learning from dilemmas, and can ethics be taught. Individual questions and critical incidents are discussed within the context of each theme.

**Prevalence of Ethical Dilemmas**

The immediate responses to Interview Question 1 showed that these participants were no strangers to ethical dilemmas in the workplace. Interview Question 1 was, Can you recall and tell me about an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences?

Participants’ responses to this question provided data used to “catalog” the primary themes of the critical incidents that were shared. Additionally, their responses provided data that answered the guiding research Question 1, What types of ethical dilemmas do school level leaders face that require assistance or interventions? All participants were able to identify at least one ethical dilemma they identified as the most troubling. Two participants, P1 and P3, shared dilemmas that occurred early in their
administrative careers and stated during their interview sessions that the resolutions of the dilemmas were still disconcerting to them.

Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (1998) investigated the ethical decision making of school leaders and found that the dilemmas shared by the participants in their study centered on human resources, taking disciplinary action in relations to staff and students (behavior), and special school issues (p. 8). Research into the ethical dilemmas faced by school leaders conducted by Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2006) found similar multi-themed dilemmas: supervisor misbehavior, accountability, student welfare/behavior, and professional ethics. The foci and themes of the nine critical incidents that the participants identified as the most troubling to them were also very similar to the themes identified in the Dempster et al. (1998) and Cranston et al. (2006) studies.

Table 2 indicates the specific number of incidents shared by each participant. Table 3 provides a summary and the foci of the nine most challenging critical incidents shared by the participants and the emergent themes of each incident. Table 4 shows the grouping of the critical incidents into three primary coding categories: Personnel, Policy, and Process. Beyond these initial categories, all of the incidents shared by the participants had multiple recurring themes. All incidents are true but specific elements have been omitted to protect the confidentiality of the participants.
Table 2

Number of Critical Incidents by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Number of Incidents Shared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Summary of Critical Incidents and Emergent Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Critical Incidents</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Zero tolerance and compliance with school board policy; student behavior and welfare (gun brought to school by student)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 1: A black male kindergarten student brought a gun to school When the student went to p.e. he put the gun to three students’ heads and pulled the trigger each time.</td>
<td>Inconsistencies with following human resources processes; personnel; accountability (salary dispute)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 2: P1 had been promoted to a district level position. Individuals she supervised and her two counterparts were being paid more than she was. P1 is a black female and her counterparts were males.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Incident 3: P2 was checking messages on the computer of the assistant principal, when she hit the mouse pad to recall his last email, several pictures that were inappropriate popped up on the screen. P2 was the newly appointed principal, the assistant principal</td>
<td>Conduct unbecoming a school board employee; personnel; professional ethics (inappropriate use of electronic device)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was a seasoned, veteran administrator
scheduled to retire in three months.

Participant 3
Incident 4: As a first year teacher, P3 was
assigned to an all black inner city school. A
newspaper reporter was writing a series of
articles about the inadequate education a
budding athlete received due to segregated schools and the student had attended that elementary school. P3 had interned in several all white schools and had taught the reporter’s daughter in one of the schools; P3 is black and the reporter and his family were white.

Incident 5: During P3’s first year as an assistant principal, a black male student was sent to his office for allegedly hitting a white female student. The female student admitted to kicking the male student first. P3 wanted to give both students the same consequence but the principal told P3 to suspend the male student for ten days.

Racial tensions at the onset of desegregation in district schools; personnel; professional ethics; personnel conflicts (internal conflicts between white and black staff members)
Participant 4

Incident 6: P4 was asked to work with a cross functional team tasked with identifying problematic students in the district’s middle schools and then finding alternative placements for the students. A majority of those identified were ESE students. P3 was then informed that the cross functional team would function as the students’ IEP team which she knew was illegal and non-compliant.

Inconsistencies with following school board policies; accountability; student welfare (compliance with ESE policy and procedures re: IEPs)

Incident 7: The district was facing significant budget reductions and was reviewing numerous services provided including transportation. Three magnet schools in the district traditionally housed full time ESE programs. Removing transportation for students would significantly control the opportunity for ESE students to attend these magnet schools; P4 knew that moving the ESE programs to non-magnet schools would be discriminatory.

Inconsistencies with following school board policies and processes; student welfare; accountability (compliance with ESE policy and procedures re: equal access to programs)

Participant 5
Incident 8: A director and assistant director, working within the same department were having an affair. P5 was newly appointed in a position that required him to uphold ethical standards in the district and had to resolve a situation with serious political and ethical implications. Conduct unbecoming a school board employee; personnel; professional ethics (inappropriate relationship between district administrators).

Incident 9: A school district construction manager was falsifying work hours. Daily he would drop his daughter off at school, visit a few of his project sites until about noon; go to a park neighboring park until dismissal time for his daughter, pick her up and then go home. After tracking him for several weeks, he was confronted with what was found. Falsifying information; professional ethics; personnel; accountability (employee reporting incorrect work hours).
Table 4

Themes of the Critical Incidents Shared by Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant and Incident</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 5</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 6</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 7</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 9</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age of the Incidents

Participants were asked to give the date of each incident in Interview Question 2 of the protocol. The incidents shared by the participants occurred between 1970 and 2010. The reconstruction of the incidents shared by the participants during their interview sessions could be construed as a limitation and particularly the incidents that occurred more than ten years ago. However, the participants’ recall of incidents that occurred more than ten years ago may be an indication that they were still troubled by either the incidents, how the incidents were resolved, or both. This was directly alluded to by P1 and P3 in their narratives. In addition, any interview data is constructed by the respondent
and interviews about lived experience is always retrospective. Table 5 shows the wide range in the dates of the occurrences of the critical incidents shared by each participant.

Table 5

*Range of Dates of Critical Incidents in Five-Year Increments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant and Incident</th>
<th>0 to 5 Years</th>
<th>5 to 10 Years</th>
<th>10 to 15 Years</th>
<th>15 Years +</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Compliance with Policy**

In responding to Interview Question 3, What helped or hindered you most in responding to the dilemma?, the participants revealed that following district and school policy guided their responses to the critical incidents. The participants’ responses to this question indicated that what helped the most was that they felt bound to act prudently in order to address the policies and procedures that were being violated. Some degree of hesitancy was experienced when they were initially confronted with their dilemmas.
(which are addressed with more specificity in Interview Question 6). However, the participants indicated that they relied on following and/or complying with policy and procedures and striking a balance and flexibility between doing the right thing and right vs. right decisions (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2006, pp. 111-116). Two emergent themes from the analyses of the responses to this question were moral purpose and decisions made in the “best interests of students”. The participants’ responses to Question 3 also provided relevant data to address guiding research Question 2, What actions, decisions, or interventions assist school leaders with facing these types of dilemmas?

P1:

“I thrive on trying to be honest…doing what's right…and like I said, the thing that almost hindered me is my personal experiences with some of my family members. But I knew I had to do the right thing. But when the teacher did not want me to do it…that was one of the things that almost prevented me...because she is a great teacher and had worked really hard with this child. But I knew I had to do the right thing. I had to go back and really search myself about my morals and values and what I really, truly stood for and believed in. And I knew at that point that I had no choice but to follow policy. But it also reflected back on some incidences that had happened in my family being in trouble with the law and I did not want to see a kindergartener arrested.”

P2:

“Well, again what helped me was I knew that what I had seen was totally inappropriate; what hindered me again was here is a veteran person who has been in the system much longer than I, who’s at the end of a career that storied or
stellar was still the end of his career. And I did not want to do anything that would impact that. So that was what hindered me. Again, what helped me was the policy...that it was wrong and you just couldn’t do that.”

P3:

Again, I think past experiences, knowing different people, um, that helped quite a bit. Some of the things that may have hindered was the fact that I did not have a close relationship with some of the African American staff as I would have liked to have had.

P4:

PI: “In listening to you, I see two incidents: what helped and also what hindered you in responding to the dilemma? And if I was hearing you correctly, what helped you was not being in compliance with IEP regulations and least restrictive environment and all of that. What hindered you was the committee was not also seeing what they were doing that was supplanting or usurping what normally goes on. Do you want to expound on that a little bit more or did I kind of capture everything?”

“I think that you are right; that no matter how I tried to explain it and they tried to tell me ok. And probably the biggest piece being that…the piece that they did not understand, is that we are required to implement interventions to help a child be successful and even though they were suspended, that’s not considered an intervention. It had to be something with a positive behavior support that they really did not understand.”
“…I have to go by what the laws say and what is required. And some of the parents with concerns. The other piece is being able to guide the decision-makers of some of the potential implications and dissatisfaction that families would raise.”

P5:

“Well, yeah…I mean you’ve got politics…played heavily into the blocking of the, you know, whether to continue forward or not. I am sure publicity played into it…what appeared to be publicity about it. Probably politics, that…still didn’t matter to me…that doesn’t override anything you know…the thing that I have always felt is that you do what’s right and that’s it, you know, nothing else can do that. I mean everybody knew about this. The whole morale of the department was, was that way…it was thrown up in their face…people were mistreated and it just wasn’t right to allow that to continue and it wasn’t going to, so…”

Seeking Guidance

Interview Question 4 asked, As the dilemma was resolved, did you seek or receive guidance from anyone? If so, what was the relationship between you and the parties at the time? Table 6 displays by incident the individuals each participant sought for guidance. The individuals sought out and their relationships with the participants varied. Based on the data collected, the resolutions of their dilemmas were not directly influenced by these individuals. The individuals appeared to serve as a “sounding board” or quasi-mentor with the exception of P3. The participants’ responses to Interview Question 4 also produced relevant data to address guiding research Question 2, What
actions, decisions, or interventions assist school level leaders with facing these dilemmas?

Table 6

*Individuals Sought for Guidance by Participants and Their Relationship to Participant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant and Incident</th>
<th>Individual Sought</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 1</td>
<td>Assistant principal</td>
<td>Subordinate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 2</td>
<td>HR Representative</td>
<td>Peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 3</td>
<td>Area Superintendent</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Office of Professional Standards</td>
<td>Support service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 5</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 6</td>
<td>School board attorney</td>
<td>Peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 8</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School board attorney</td>
<td>Peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident 9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following are data relevant to the participants’ responses to Interview Question 4:

P1
Incident 1: “It was my assistant principal…my assistant principal was there and I shared with her about my personal experiences with dealing with the law. And she said that's why you're struggling with it? And I said yes.”

Incident 2: “I went to Personnel and I spoke with the associate superintendent at that time and I shared with her my concerns. And I guess maybe a month went by and nothing had occurred. So, I spoke with the superintendent.”

P2

Incident 3: “What I did was I called my superintendent, my area superintendent. …and so that advice gave me some importance and some command to follow through. Having done that, talking to him, I called the Office of Professional Standards.”

P3

Incident 4: “Well…I don’t know if they did directly. I think that the principal invited…I think that he invited community reps in…I know there were some ministers who came in and spoke with the faculty as a whole…talked about getting along and working together. But, at that point I was like a new teacher, who did not have a lot of credibility. And I remember in staff meetings when it would get heated at one time I raised my hand and said, Can I, um, said, can I say something? Because at that time we weren’t getting along real well and one of my peers said to me look…you really don’t have an opinion here…you just arrived here at this place.”

Incident 5: “And the principal called me in and he said he wanted that child to have ten days.
P4

Incident 6: “Prior to my going into the meeting, I talked to the school board attorney….”

P5

Incident 8: “I talked to my partner up there…and the staff attorney at the time.”

Incident 9: “We tracked him, he was followed, did all of the staff and when we finally said ok, we have enough, it wasn’t a fluke, it’s been repeated enough and…he was confronted with it.”

**Support from District**

Interview Question 5 explored what people, policies or processes influenced the participants’ decision making around the critical incident and asked, Did district policies or representatives play a role in your decision making around the incident? As with Interview Question 3, four of the participants’ responses to Question 5 indicated that they felt bound to act prudently or to do what they perceived as ethically moral in order to address the policies and procedures that were being violated per the dilemmas shared. As Starratt (1991) stated, “educational administrators have a moral responsibility to be proactive about creating an ethical environment for the conduct of education” (pp. 188-200). Senge (2002) referred to this as a moral responsibility (p. 279). P3 did not receive support from peers with the dilemma experienced in Incident 4. Furthermore, P3 did not receive support from the immediate supervisor for the initial resolution of the dilemma in Incident 5 although P3 indicated that the resolution was in compliance with policy. P2 sought reassurance from the immediate supervisor that the response to and resolution of the dilemma was, in fact, appropriate. The participants’ responses to Interview Question
P1

Incident 1: “I knew I had to follow policy because if I didn’t, it’s almost like you are out on a limb by yourself. You can always go back to policy and you are going to be supported by the district. But when you stray, it is almost like you are on your own, and it could jeopardize my job.”

Incident 2: “I told her that my morals and values would not allow me to do that. By my speaking up, if it didn’t help me, it would help the next person in line…

P2

Incident 3: “Yes, absolutely…once I spoke to the representatives, and even before that, I knew I had to talk to someone because that was something that I had never experienced, but I was compelled by policy and just needed to have some confirmation that what I was doing was what I should be doing and that I shouldn’t feel guilty about it. That I shouldn’t feel conflicted about what I had to do.”

P3

Incident 4: “I don’t know if they did directly. I think that the principal invited…community reps in. I know there were some ministers who came in and spoke with the faculty as a whole…talked about getting along and working together. I don’t remember a lot of support and initiative from people from the district level coming in and doing anything. And I remember in staff meetings when it would get heated at one time I raised my hand and said, Can I, um, said,
can I say something? Because at that time we weren’t getting along real well and one of my peers said to me look…you really don’t have an opinion here…you just arrived here at this place.”

P4

Incident 6: “Apparently, when I left, they called the school board attorney in and I did not know that until later. And they asked him and he confirmed what I had said. And so he explained the differences. But the rules are significantly different for a student that has an IEP. So…I did go and verify those pieces to make sure that the attorney and I were in the correct wave length. And so I knew before I went in what the parameters were.”

Incident 7: “…and I have to go by what the laws say and what is required. And some of the parents with concerns. The other piece is being able to guide the decision-makers of some of the potential implications and dissatisfaction that families would raise.”

P5

Incident 8: “Ultimately, yes…the policy had been violated, that was clear. Whether or not we pursued the violation of the policy is where the people in the district get involved. I was the only one wanting to go forward. I said you cannot do this, you cannot ignore it, you can’t allow it and then all of a sudden, I convinced them, you know.”

Incident 9: “We tracked him, he was followed, did all of the staff and when we finally said ok, we have enough, it wasn’t a fluke, it’s been repeated enough and…he was confronted with it.”
Dissonance About Personal Beliefs

Interview Question 6 asked Have you experienced dissonance between personal beliefs, values or morals and what has been required of you by policy, practice or expectations in your administrative role? If so, give an example. All of the participants experienced some level of dissonance between their personal beliefs, values, or morals and what had been required of them in policy, practice, or expectations. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) stressed that “educators may experience clashes between the ethic of care, the ethic of critique, and the ethic of justice within these professional codes. Also, that it is a paradigm shift that expects its leaders to formulate and examine their own professional codes of ethics in light of individual personal codes as well as standards set forth by the profession” (pp. 10-22). Each participant provided an example other than the critical incidents shared in Interview Question 1 and with each example, the underlying inner conflict was how their actions impacted students.

P1:

“I had to go back and really search myself about my morals and values and what I really, truly stood for and believed in. And I knew at that point that I had no choice but to follow policy. But it also reflected back on some incidences that had happened in my family being in trouble with the law. Because to see someone so young being arrested it just really brought back memories that I never want to live again...knowing that family members had gone through an incident of being arrested, but not with a gun. It's just the mere fact, really, of an African American male being arrested. And when they took him away, they told me that they had to
handcuff him and I broke down in tears because I did not want him, a kindergartener, to leave my school in handcuffs.”

P2:

“I would say yes and no. In this case, I think it was a clear case so the conflict was internal and would I have an impact on affecting someone’s career as affecting it? So that was the conflict but not really a personal belief or value. I have had incidences of dissonance when in different situations you are called upon to mete out some circumstances that the Code of Conduct dictates that you ought to do. For instance, if there is a weapon or something that commands that the student be expelled. In the investigating process, sometimes we find out things that would extenuate or mitigate the circumstances. While my heart bleeds for that situation and had I had any other choice, perhaps I would have chosen not to the route expulsion, reassignment, but because of code and policy and law, I am compelled to do something else. Those are the instances in where I have conflict. Like the student has done something that requires him or her to be dismissed from a program, a magnet or fundamental, or whatever program that is. And I think that the program where he or she is will better serve that student to be successful, but I’ve got my policy or my practice to do that. I don’t want to set a precedent in some circumstances…I want to keep going. So yes, a long answer to a short question.”

P3:

“I really struggle sometimes with the idea about zero tolerance…that has been a struggle for me especially at the elementary level. So I have seen that and I have
to be honest when at times, I have not been as consistent with the policies as I should have been…ok…since I have been here. When we have kids bring in their book bags, when no one really found out about it, these toy guns. The first time I had that happen…before I had gotten involved in it, they had already called campus police and they were here and everything and they were having this chat…and I said we’re not, kicking this kid out of school. I said he did not threaten anybody, he did not use it in any way and I am not going to do anything. And the lady said to me…you know, normally what we do, we give these kids ten days. Well, we are not going to do that, ok…some kid picked up an old broken down BB gun at the dumpster and brought it in and we found it…and I said we are going to throw it in the trash. What he did was stupid. I contacted his parents and did all those kinds of things. So I struggle with those kind of things from time to time.”

P4:

“We can go into…because that seems to be another hot topic right now. The district is facing significant budget reductions. They are looking at all of the transportation concerns. We have a couple of schools in the district that have traditionally housed full time ESE programs that are fundamental schools; a high school, and a middle school. And as transportation is being reviewed, they are considering removing that as an option. My personal belief is that…I believe children should have any and all options available to them. When they remove the transportation mode, then that significantly controls the opportunity for ESE students to attend these fine programs…magnet programs…that they would be
eligible to attend. But when we…when I approach it…I really have to take out my personal view of wanting to have those full experiences and really look at what we are required to do. And when I look at it from a requirement perspective, putting those programs would mean that we are discriminating against those ESE children because technically we have allowed them not to access those fundamental programs…they don’t have transportation to get to those places. So, I have to remember to keep my personal feelings out of it and say…well, you design all of these great programs for all these other children…what about the ESE child?”

P5:

“First, throughout my career, I think I was faced with these policy type decisions; whether it was a principal in ESE, whether it was an expectation that we, you know, you can’t do that. Yeah, we can do that. Whether it was with kids, because we owe the ESE kids, you know a certain level of service and to not provide it was not acceptable. We had things back in the day with time out rooms that…they were not supposed to be locked. We had people that would prop boards under the doors and go off and leave them. And those types of things we unacceptable. Coming into that one specific case that I talked about, policy was there saying, no you cannot do it. The practice was there that we disciplined people that had done it…people knew about it…it was out there…to ignore it said we don’t, you’re not important to us. So, those were all of the things we had to …that I brought into picture to say what is everybody else going to think that…did it took ‘A’ to get to that level…”

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Learning to Be Ethical

Participants uniformly described learning to be ethical in childhood, reinforced by family expectations and events over time. Interview Question 7 asked How did you learn to make ethically and morally sound decisions. What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making?

This researcher noted that Greenfield’s study (2004) provided “compelling evidence of moral leadership in action, providing insight into complex connections between a principals’ background and past experience, the personal qualities and sensitivities brought to the moment of reflection, and the valuing and intention revealed through action” (p. 189). At the conclusion of this study, Greenfield offered convincing “…empirical evidence of the importance of the personal and socio-cultural dimensions of leading in schools, and the interrelatedness of administrators’ values and beliefs, language and action, and managing and leading behaviors” (p. 191). He also noted that “to understand moral leadership requires that one gain an understanding of the perspectives, the lived experiences and subjective meanings, of the participants in the leadership relationship” (p. 191). In reviewing and analyzing the responses to Interview Question 7, there were emergent and repeating themes, characteristics, and similarities in the stories that each participant shared: their views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making were shaped early their childhood by some form of adversity, family, faith and beliefs, or their immediate community. This was in close alignment to the notation and conclusion found in Greenfield’s (2004) study.

P1:
“I think it may have started as far back as my childhood. When I started out I was an all black school. In fourth grade, my mom moved me to an all white school…. I think back to the times in the classroom, the kids would tease me because I would not read as well as they. The teachers in all the classes would allow them to do that. Going through that experience, I vowed to never, and it doesn’t matter what color, to treat a child or an adult the way I was treated growing up. I think my morals and values began to develop then because it gave me the opportunity to see that some people are very mean, cruel, had no morals or values because if they did, they would not have allowed, first of all, for me to be mistreated…it doesn’t matter what my race is. Because I often think, what if I had not had that experience as well as my parents. You know, because they were always in church, as well. Always teaching me what’s right…what’s wrong. Even though you are being treated that way, I expect for you to respect the teacher. I expect for you to treat the other kids right. It was always instilled in me from a child that you must always do the right thing, regardless. I think that’s where a lot that helped to shape my moral and ethical…and the person who I am today…just going through the experience as a child.”

P2:

“I think that how I have learned it is by living, by believing. As far as relation to values and morals, I believe in the law of divine reciprocity, what you give out you are going to get it back. I believe that you ought to treat folk, someone said the Golden Rule is to treat people how you want to be treated, but I think the Silver Rule is to treat people how you think they want to be treated. That even
goes beyond. So just treating people the way that you would want to be treated and giving them respect.

But the sense of faith that I have, that’s how I have learned it. From watching other people that I want to emulate, that’s how I learned it. You learn a whole lot more by what people do than what people say, and so…we are talk among ourselves and we say you have all kinds of leaders and you can learn all kinds of things from leaders. Some things you learn that you ought not do and some things are things that you want to do. So you take all kinds of learning nuggets from examples and non-examples.”

P3:

“The only thing is about my faith…I think again, it started with my upbringing but continued to grow is my faith in God…there are certain things that like treating people right and doing things the right way. I had my grandparents who were really strong in my life about what things to value, principles, and things like that. They also held me responsible for my own behavior. So as a child growing up, I am the oldest in my family, my mother had nine children and I am the oldest; so I was always given a lot of responsibility. But the best experience I had was at Tuskegee Institute. What was critical for me about that is that it was like an oasis in the delta, Tuskegee was…had a lot of tradition and everything and the professors came from all over the world…it was a small school of about 2,500 students and pretty soon you knew everybody. There was a lot of collaboration, but the biggest thing they brought in was some very high expectations in terms of principles and concepts.”
P4:

I am going to say that probably it’s the way I was raised. I am the legal guardian of my adult, disabled sister. She has very significant disabilities and she is in the adult system. She went through the school system in Illinois. So, as a family member, I know the challenges that my family experienced and now there are no other family members. It’s just she and I…growing up in a household and seeing that there were some decisions that were not ethical. For example, when my sister was six my family, my mother, wanted to get her into school. And the school said she is not toilet trained, she cannot come to school. And my mother said what if she never gets toilet trained? At that time, there were no Federal laws, now there are Federal laws and I have learned those very, very well. And I make a point of knowing the most current changes in the regulations and its implementation and impact on families and on school districts.”

P5:

“That’s probably very easy…that goes back to my grandfather. He was fine, upstanding, never anything to harm anybody person in my life. So…my father was killed when I was ten, he was a police officer and so my grandfather is who I had. That’s who I looked up to. He was very, very, special man… I think I’ve taken after him which I kind of like…which is ok with me. His beliefs, his…I’d never wanted to disappoint that man, never wanted to. And if I did, I felt worse for what I did to him than what I had done.”

Influence of Gender and Race
The response to Interview Question 8 was mixed. Interview Question 8 asked What role, if any, did gender or race play in the incident or your resolution of it? P1 and P3 indicated that both race and gender influenced their incidents and their resolutions; P2 stated that gender might have initially affected the reaction to the incident shared but not the resolution of it. P4 and P5 strongly expressed that neither their race nor gender played a role in their incidents or their resolutions. It was interesting to note that the three participants who felt that either their race and/or gender played a role in the incident of resolution of it were black and two of the three were female. The two participants who expressed that neither their race nor gender had an impact were non-black; one was female and the other male. Table 7 provides a graphic of this data. All participants provided additional dialog that supported their statements.

Table 7

*Number of Incidents and Number of Incidents Impacted Due to Gender and/or Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number of Incidents</th>
<th>Number Impacted Due to Race and/or Gender</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
P1:

“Because I am an African American, I am telling you that every one of them played a key role when I think about it. I reflect back, even with the student, because if they are in my family, of course, it is an African American child and it was an African American with the gun. And knowing that African American boys sometimes have it so difficult in society, I was just trying to really weigh that and say…am I doing the right thing. Definitely about…and the pay…it was very obvious. I mean with the pay and the males versus the female…in HR who was Caucasian and of course, I’m African American, so race played a big part in all three of those. Even with the student, with me growing up and going to an all white school.”

P2:

“Yeah, I hate to say it, but yes. But I think in the initial incident that, and if I say this, I may sound gender-biased; I think that not necessarily race in this particular case, but gender, yes. Because had I been of a male persuasion, I probably would have seen these pictures and said…and…you know, maybe, but again, I may be biased. So, it all depends on if the background of the person, the purpose for doing the investigation, for seeing it. If I say a blanket yes, then I would be biased myself, but I will tell you that, depending upon the circumstances, and the individual person, that yes, race and gender do play a part. But, in the particular situation, yeah, I think it did play a part, not race but just gender. I was appalled by what I had just saw.”

P3:
“Yeah, I think it sometimes, race has played a part. And gender somewhat in that last one because it was a girl...I think sometimes that also makes people respond a little differently. I definitely think that race still plays a part. It plays a part even in this present environment. It’s that we expect kids of certain experiences to behave in certain ways and so we keep putting them back in that same mold, over and over again...you know, they had an incident and they did something. And in the next incident they are already back to that role. And pretty soon, that is the only way anybody ever sees them. And I’d like to say...I’d like to take each incident as an individual incident...don’t connect it to the last thing. Because, you prejudice your thoughts with what you see sitting in front of you. And a lot of times, it has to do with the skin color...has to do with poverty...has to do with gender.”

P4:
“I don’t think it...gender or race, played a role in any of those scenarios. In education, as a female, I am kind of in the norm...not too many males...and it’s never been an issue to me. And I think race - well I am Hispanic...so I guess that would have been considered a minority, but that’s never affected me either. So, I can’t say that any...either of those factors affected any of the decisions that I’ve made in any of these scenarios.”

P5:
“I can’t think of any...I’m not sure how race or gender would have played into anything because what I did was not dependent on my race or gender or anybody else’s race or gender. It was what’s right. Personally, I feel what’s right is right
for everybody, it’s not different rights. It’s not…well ok, for you to do this because you are a woman…it’s not ok because you are a man or because you are black or Hispanic, or some other viewpoint. It’s never really played into my life.”

What Was Learned from the Dilemmas?

Participants were forthcoming and introspective on what they believed themselves to have learned from encountering these ethical dilemmas. Interview Question 9 asked As you reflect upon your experiences as a school level leader, what have you learned that specifically relates to ethical and moral decision making?

Kant’s theory that ethics are the categorical imperative (or Golden Rule) and the notion of respect for persons and Strike, Haller, and Soltis (2005) beliefs that these principles continue to provide useful lenses for trying to understand what is at stake in ethical issues (p. 159) are both reflected in the participants’ responses to this question. All of the participants were extremely introspective and retrospective and the responses went well beyond their localized “professional experiences” to encompass their global “life and lived experiences”. Several participants alluded to making right vs. right decisions, self-knowledge, honesty, and respect. These finding reinforced Fullan’s (2005) concept that educational leadership has a strong moral purpose (p. 51). Their responses also provided relevant data to answer guiding research Question 4: What has been learned by administrators after leaving the school level leadership?

P1:

“Life is about choices. And you’re, right, so with people their morals and values and their ethical behaviors are not in line. So they find it very difficult to believe that it is a person that can be morally and ethically sound. And I believe there are
some out there but they are few and in between. It was always instilled in me from a child that you must always do the right thing, regardless. I just always err on the caution of doing what’s right and especially when you are an African American, you have to tow the line. We have to give 250 percent, not 100 percent. Whereas, other races, they only give 100 percent. And I know when to stride and when to stroke.”

P2:
“I even thought about it and wrote it down. If you do what’s right by and for others, people may not understand it, they may not like it, but they will learn to respect it and expect it. So just try to treat folk like I know they want to be treated. And respecting them, we may differ, but we can share the same respect. But, just doing what is right and what is just, fair, and doing it consistently. The answer may not be what they want it to be, but they can respect it because it is done in a uniform and fair and consistent way.”

P3:
“I think the big thing you learn that is the foundation that helps you to be successful as a leader as well as a person. That, if the other people respond to you when they look at you from your core, they know whether you have made ethical or moral decisions. I think that’s important that people see you that way. Then, you can have conversations with them beyond that. If they think that it is driven by something else, you kind of like the star for the day…ok. But many people are going to look to your core to find out. I really do appreciate it when somebody says I know that you cared about the children.”
“That you really need to know yourself…you need to know where you stand and you need to know that you are going to be strong enough, regardless of what happens, to do the right thing. And particularly be driven by the student, for me, that disabled student that I represent. No matter who I have to go up against….I have to do it, because there is not anyone else who is going to do it for them…but you have to be very clear about how you are going to approach this. You know…the other piece is to do it in a professional manner…try to maintain that professionalism. Because for me, it’s a very passionate…emotional piece. But that passion and emotion does not solve conflicts…that I have to do it in a very rationale/conflict resolution manner. I think my biggest piece that has helped me is that I have had so much training in behavior, conflict resolution; my background has been very behavioral and so I approach everything in a behavioral manner. And I can even catch myself getting caught up in power struggles and it is that little voice inside that says, you know, is this the hill you want to be on…you know, let this one go…you know…is this the hill you want to die on…ok, yes…absolutely this one you can’t walk away from them.”

“That if you set your standards and never waiver from them your decisions are easy…you never have to worry about them. Because you are always making the same and right decisions…you don’t let it cloud, it doesn’t get involved in guessing…people know what I am going to do. You know, when I was a principal and teachers wanted to do things…I said, we will work on anything you
want...just tell me how it affects kids...cause they knew they had to. Base it around kids. Don’t bring me something if it can’t be based around kids. And probably early on in my career when I first became an administrator...did a workshop...it was no guts, no glory. And that was like if you were afraid to make the right call, you will never live to regret it, so that just reinforced what I felt.”

**Ethics Can be Taught - Maybe**

During the course of the study, a question that was central to the findings, Can ethics be taught? (Goree et al., 2006; Langlois, 2004), was posed to the participants. Interview Question 7 explored this aspect of the study: How did you learn to make ethically and morally sound decisions? What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making? This question was asked during the first interview session conducted by this researcher. The participant’s response focused on how adversity, family, faith and beliefs, and the immediate community influenced this development. This response prompted this researcher to probe further and ask if the participant felt ethics could be taught and if individuals could be trained to be ethically and morally sound. Subsequently, this question was asked of the other four participants after each responded to Interview Question 7. The other participants also stated that, in their own lived experiences, ethics were learned early on. None of the participants stated directly that ethics could not be taught but data analysis revealed that all of participants believed that ethics can be developed in the early stages of childhood and that it can be continually modeled, practiced and refined throughout adulthood. The responses to this inquiry provided data to address guiding research Question 3, What are the implications
of the research findings for preparation and professional development of school level leaders?

P1:
“That’s a tough one…from childhood on up, yes. But once you get to adulthood, if it is not ingrained in you, no. You can disguise being ethical and moral, but not for long if it is not part of you or your upbringing.”

P2:
“I think that you believe what you believe from learning in childhood and seeing examples. I think that, can it be taught…it can be practiced; you can read about it and learn about it, but I’m thinking that, I don’t know, that’s a hard question. Can morals and ethics be taught? They can be demonstrated, but I can’t make you believe it. I can give you great examples of it, but I believe from broad levels, as you grow up, it is kind of innate. People get brainwashed all the time and they believe different things. But I think innately…I am wrestling with myself with this question…to a degree they can be taught. But what makes them morals and ethics, you can be taught the practice, you can be taught what’s right and the appropriate actions and behavior…but what turns them from practices and lessons into beliefs and what becomes an innate part of you…So, yes, you can be taught the strategies, the tools for making ethical decisions, but the practice of making ethical decisions can contribute to your ethics if that makes any sense.”

P3:
I think they were taught situational ethics and situational morals. That this may not apply for that, but it is okay over here. And I think that’s modeled by
everybody…a lot of people. So, no, I do think you can. I think our attempts with things like character education and things like that…enforce your skills. I think we can teach it. If I didn’t believe we could do that, then a population like the one I have here, is hopeless…they don’t have a chance. Because the experiences they are bringing is situational…that’s the one their parents live in…if things are going good, we will do this. So, I do believe you can teach, it takes time because it’s not…whatever morals or values or ethics, I think they learned it, but they can be taught a different one…it’s not easy.

P4:
“I think the training helps you understand what it should be. I think internally, you have to have it or you don’t have it. I think that a major character piece that you either have or don’t have…and it’s not always easy.”

P5:
“Exposure…it’s very hard to teach others to be an adult, you know. I think your ethical makeup is formed very, very young, you know. What you stood for and what you believe in and what…what are you willing to die for…it’s what makes you up. This is what I’m willing to do…I can’t compromise, it’s what you won’t compromise, and right or wrong to others, or the situation, if you have to compromise.”

Emergent Themes

The nine protocol questions posed by this researcher were designed to elicit responses specific to the intent of the study. In addition to providing sufficient relevant data to address the nine protocol and four guiding research questions this researcher made
note of additional repeating ideas or emergent themes across incidents that informed this study as well: spirituality, moral purpose, best interests of students, pivotal life events, and personal dissonance. These emergent themes were embedded in the responses given by participants during their interview sessions and provided the basis for developing grounded theory surrounding school leaders’ responses to ethical dilemmas. The six overarching themes are introduced here, and further discussion of these themes will be provided in Chapter 5.

**Spirituality**

Foucault (1994) defined spirituality as “the subject’s attainment of a certain mode of being and the transformations that the subject must carry out on itself to attain that mode of being” (p. 294). All of the participants voiced some level of spirituality as they responded to the questions posed to them; consistently doing what is fair, right, and just. The crux of their dialogs was what Bolman and Deal (2003) referred to as “bringing a genuine concern for the human spirit”:

P1:

Because I often think, what if I had not had that experience as well as my parents. You know, because they were always in church, as well. Always teaching me what’s right…what’s wrong. Even though you are being treated that way, I expect for you to respect the teacher. I expect for you to treat the other kids right. It was always instilled in me from a child that you must always do the right thing, regardless.”

P2:
“But the sense of faith that I have, that’s how I have learned it. From watching other people that I want to emulate, that’s how I learned it. You learn a whole lot more by what people do than what people say, and so…we are talk among ourselves and we say you have all kinds of leaders and you can learn all kinds of things from leaders. But, just doing what is right and what is just, fair, and doing it consistently.”

P3:

“The only thing is about my faith…I think, again, it started with my upbringing but continued to grow is my faith in God…there are certain things that like treating people right and doing things the right way.”

P5:

“What you stood for and what you believe in and what…what are you willing to die for…it’s what makes you up. This is what I’m willing to do…I can’t compromise, it’s what you won’t compromise, and right or wrong to others, or the situation, if you have to compromise…”

**Moral purpose**

Fullan (2001) defined moral purpose as acting with the intention of making a difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole and posited “moral purpose, relationships, and organization success are closely interrelated.” (p. 51). All of the participants tried to keep this balance in responding to their dilemmas, their moral purpose.

P1:
“Life is about choices. And you’re, right, so with people their morals and values and their ethical behaviors are not in line. So they find it very difficult to believe that it is a person that can be morally and ethically sound. I just always err the caution of doing what’s right.”

P2:

“If you do what’s right by and for others, people may not understand it, they may not like it, but they will learn to respect it and expect it. So just try to treat folk like I know they want to be treated. And respecting them, we may differ, but we can share the same respect. But, just doing what is right and what is just, fair, and doing it consistently.”

P3:

“That, if the other people respond to you when they look at from your core, they know whether you have made ethical or moral decisions. I think that’s important that people see you that way. Then, you can have conversations with them beyond that. If they think that it is driven by something else, you kind of like the star for the day.”

P4:

“That you really need to know yourself…you need to know where you stand and you need to know that you are going to be strong enough, regardless of what happens, to do the right thing. And particularly be driven by the student, for me, that disabled student that I represent. No matter who I have to go up against….I have to do it, because there is not anyone else who is going to do it for them. You
know…the other piece is to do it in a professional manner…try to maintain that professionalism.”

P5:

“That if you set your standards and never waiver from them your decisions are easy…you never have to worry about them. Because you are always making the same and right decisions…you don’t let it cloud, it doesn’t get involved in guessing…people know what I am going to do.

**Best interests of students**

Torres (2004) emphasized, “…the ethic of profession provides a framework for educators and policymakers to think critically and form an appropriate code with the best interests of the student at its core” (p. 256). In their responses to Interview Question 6, three participants expressed some level of dissonance or “tension” with zero tolerance issues and its impact on students; all participants stated that their ultimate responsibility was to act in the best interests of students.

P1:

“Deep down in my heart, I knew it was the right thing to do, but I was trying to have sympathy, empathy with the teacher because I knew she was a great teacher…she had worked so hard with this student and I did not want to disappoint her…The percentage of free and reduced lunch was one of the highest…and being of poverty could have played some part in it. I’m always for the underdog because I’ve been there.”

P2:
“…whether it’s your first year, or your fortieth, if you are here on the job and getting paid, providing services to students and to staff and to the whole school district, then you still ought to give it your all as opposed to being lax and lackadaisical and just so you can draw a paycheck.”

P3:

“I’ve been to situations and I know the child was wrong…expulsion hearings and things like that where you listen to the whole situation, the child had been having kids attacking him over long periods of time and nobody really stepping up to say a thing about it, and then, one day they fought back and then they got expelled because…they were afraid. And I thought that was not in the best interest…but…I understood why it had to be done…but it created a conflict in me. And, it also teaches me that one of the things that I have always practiced that of a child says that he is having a problem with something, you have to address it…you can’t ignore it. I really do appreciate it when somebody says I know that you cared about the children.”

P4:

“Because, they try so hard and they want so much, but I have to really make sure I’m really following the rules and know that when I get home at night, that yes, I did the right thing by the child and by my responsibilities to the job. And when I went home that day, I thought this is why I do this job…to make opportunities available for kids…No matter who I have to go up against….I have to do it, because there is not anyone else who is going to do it for them.”

P5:
“You know, when I was a principal and teachers wanted to do things…I said, we will work on anything you want...just tell me how it affects kids…cause they knew they had to. Base it around kids. Don’t bring me something if it can’t be based around kids.”

**Pivotal life events**

The participants’ lived experiences were voiced through the sharing of their critical incidents. Each one of them, through dialog and reflection on the critical incidents, acknowledged that the core of their ethical and moral fiber was developed during their youth and was ultimately reinforced by a significant event during that time.

P1:

“In fourth grade, my mom moved me to an all white school…. I think back to the times in the classroom, the kids would tease me because I would not read as well as they. The teachers in all the classes would allow them to do that. Going through that experience, I vowed to never, and it doesn’t matter what color, to treat a child or an adult the way I was treated growing up.”

P3:

“I had my grandparents who were really strong in my life about what things to value, principles, and things like that. So as a child growing up, I am the oldest in my family, my mother had nine children and I am the oldest; so I was always given a lot of responsibility. But the best experience I had was at Tuskegee Institute. What was critical for me about that is that it was like an oasis in the delta.”

P4:
“I am the legal guardian of my adult, disabled sister. She has very significant
disabilities and she is in the adult system. She went through the school system in
Illinois. So, as a family member, I know the challenges that my family
experienced and now there are no other family members. It’s just she and
I…growing up in a household and seeing that there were some decisions that were
not ethical.”

P5:

“So…my father was killed when I was ten, he was a police officer and so my
grandfather is who I had. That’s who I looked up to.”

Dissonance

All of the incidents revealed that school level leaders experienced dissonance in
addressing their ethical dilemmas. Dissonance or the “tension between the ethic of
justice, rights, laws, and the concept of democracy” in resolving dilemmas was
also referenced in the work of scholars such as: Apple (1998), Bakhtin (1981),

P1: “I had to go back and really search myself about my morals and values and
what I really, truly stood for and believed in. And I knew at that point that I had
no choice but to follow policy.”

P2:

“I would say yes and no. In this case, I think it was a clear case so the conflict was
internal and would I have an impact on affecting someone’s career as affecting it?
So that was the conflict but not really a personal belief or value. I have had

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incidences of dissonance when in different situations you are called upon to mete out some circumstances that the Code of Conduct dictates that you ought to do.”

P3:

“I really struggle sometimes with the idea about zero tolerance…that has been a struggle for me especially at the elementary level.”

P4:

“But when we…when I approach it…I really have to take out my personal view of wanting to have those full experiences and really look at what we are required to do. So, I have to remember to keep my personal feelings out of it.”

P5:

“First, throughout my career, I think I was faced with these policy type decisions; whether it was a principal in ESE, whether it was an expectation that we, you know, you can’t do that. Yeah, we can do that. Whether it was with kids, because we owe the ESE kids a certain level of service and to not provide it was not acceptable. And those types of things we unacceptable.”

Summary

As posited by this researcher at the onset of this study, “ethical issues, problems, and dilemmas are present in every compartment of our lives” (Goree, Pyle, Baker, & Hopkins, 2006, p. 13) and the structure of our society has shifted from an era of simpler times to one that is often driven and dictated by policy, court decisions, and legal mandates. Our schools have not escaped this societal shift, which has escalated to the point where school level leaders are faced with a myriad of dilemmas. This study confirmed the prevalence of ethical dilemmas for school level leadership. The changing
role of school leadership has increased the expectation for school administrators to be expert managers and skillful instructional leaders, able to balance the critical tensions between competing values in decision-making (Holland, 2004, p. 3). The findings and results of this study were indicative of these statements. The incidents here revealed that school leaders are guided by district policies and sought guidance from other district administrators, either supervisor or peers, when working through a dilemma. These data also showed that school leaders often experienced dissonance or tension between their guiding ethical beliefs and policies or expectations of the district. The incidents exemplified the tension around right versus right (Cranston, Enrich, & Kimber, 2003). Clearly, these incidents supported the notion that school level leaders sought to act in the best interests of students. Finally, the data revealed a dichotomy around whether ethics can be taught. On the one hand, examining ethics in professional development and leader preparation was strongly encouraged. Yet, all participants suggested that, in their own lived experiences, ethics were learned early on. In Chapter 5, the implications of these findings are explored further.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of findings of this study and the application of the findings to the guiding research questions, literature, and research that was reviewed in Chapter 2. The emergent themes and their characteristics in addition to the repeating ideas generated from the analyses of the data from this study are also explicated in this chapter.

Overview of the Study

This study was designed to analyze the types of ethical dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for school level leader preparation and professional development. This study focused on dilemmas identified as especially confounding and difficult for school level leaders and evolved from one of the four questions that framed the course of study for the Pinellas doctoral cohort: How can support for the development of ethical leadership be extended to school leaders? This question also served as the guidepost for this researcher’s study and review of the literature relating to ethics, ethical dilemmas, and the complexity of decisions school level leaders make.

This initial query segued to the following probing questions: What are the emergent themes that support a need for continued professional development for building principals (school level leaders) regarding ethical and moral leadership and decision
making? and How can school leaders balance the demands placed on them as supervisors and instructional leaders to enact both managerial and professional values? Although it was not the intent of this study to specifically answer these questions they guided this researcher in selecting relevant research, studies, and literature embedded within this study. In addition, through the review of the literature in this study, this researcher established a strong correlation between ethics and morals, the ethical treatment of staff, students and parents by school level leaders, the elucidation of ethics and morals in administrative decision making, and the implications of administrative ethical and moral decision making on the overall school culture.

The four guiding research questions that evolved from the theoretical frameworks and research, studies, and literature reviewed for this study were:

1. What types of dilemmas do school level leaders face that require assistance or intervention?
2. What actions, decisions, or interventions assist school level leaders with facing these dilemmas?
3. What are the implications of the research findings for preparation and professional development of school level leaders?
4. What has been learned by administrators after leaving school level leadership?

This researcher used a non-random and purposeful selection process to identify participants for the study. The selected participants had been school level leaders and are currently in district administrative positions in a large, school district located in the southeastern region of the United States. The qualitative research model encouraged the
careful selection of each participant. The sample was selected purposefully based on access of this researcher to the participants who had rich experiences and who were also willing to participate in the study. Seven district level administrators were formally invited to participate in this study; five of the seven invitees agreed to participate in the study.

As suggested by Creswell (2007), this researcher used a central question with issue sub-questions that addressed the major concerns and perplexities that were both reviewed and analyzed (p. 109). Charmaz (2006) emphasized that “questions must explore the interviewer’s topic and fit the participant’s experience” (p. 29). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggested that the interviewer’s questions be brief and simple and include an introductory question with combinations of follow up, probing, specifying, or direct and indirect questions. The participants were asked this introductory question: “Can you recall and tell me about an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences?” (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008, p. 42). Additional direct and indirect, probing and follow up questions developed by this researcher and asked of the participants were:

- What was the date of this incident?
- What helped or hindered you most in responding to the dilemma?
- As the dilemma was resolved, did you seek or receive guidance from anyone? If so, what was the relationship between you and the parties at the time?
• Did district policies or representatives play a role in your decision making around the incident(s)?

• Have you experienced dissonance between personal beliefs, values or morals and what has been required of you by policy, practice or expectations in your administrative role? If so, give an example.

• How did you learn to make ethically and morally sound decisions? What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making?

• What role, if any, did gender or race play in the incident or your resolution of it?

• As you reflect upon your experiences as a school leader, what have you learned that specifically relates to ethical and moral decision making?

The data were organized in a matrix around each protocol question and each critical incident. Open coding was used to identify patterns that emerged within each incident as well as across incidents and participants. Thus, the primary data source was the transcribed interviews of the participants with cross case and within case analyses of each critical incident and the protocol questions. Central themes and patterns were teased from these analyses. This researcher also identified relevant data and repeating ideas (emergent themes) which were used to respond to the nine protocol and four guiding questions. The analysis of the data was constant comparative (Creswell, 2007, pp. 45-47), with the researcher coding and categorizing over time through several lenses: the critical incidents themselves, the individual protocol questions, patterns across incidents, patterns across protocol questions, and finally, overarching themes in answer to the guiding
research questions. This researcher also identified, via relevant data, repeating ideas and emergent themes that became rich data. This data were used to respond to the nine protocol and four guiding research questions.

**Discussion**

Many of the findings in the study reflect findings and theoretical frameworks offered in previous studies. A summary of the similarities is offered in Table 8.

Table 8

*Findings in this Study Correlated with Literature and Research Cited in the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings Identified by Researcher for This Study</th>
<th>Research Cited in Study Relevant to Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School level leaders’ resolutions of dilemmas were guided by district policies</td>
<td>Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003), Starratt (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School level leaders experienced dissonance or tension between their beliefs and policies or expectations of the district</td>
<td>Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their youth formed the core of the school level leaders’ ethical and moral fiber

School level leaders strived to strike a balance with their conscience, customers, and compliance – moral purpose

School level leaders expressed a commitment of caring and in consistently doing what is right, just, and fair - spirituality

School level leaders acted in the best interests of students

School level leaders believed that ethics could be taught and should be consistently modeled

The discussion here highlights those similarities and is organized around the four guiding research questions. The first question was What types of dilemmas do school level leaders face that require assistance or intervention?

Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003) stated that

Because school leaders are caught at the interface between the system and the school and are accountable to both bodies they are likely to find themselves...
juggling a ‘multitude of competing obligations and interests’. This complex and more autonomous operational milieu requires school leaders to confront and resolve conflicting interests as they endeavour [sic] to balance a variety of values and expectations in their decision making…the result is often ethical dilemmas for the school leader, arising, for example, where conflict and tension may arise as the leader struggles to decide between alternative decisions…one in the operational context of the school and the other reflecting a political imperative (p. 136).

Additionally, Greenfield (1991) asserted, “principals experience ethical dilemmas on a daily basis” (p. 1).

Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber’s (2003) theory and Greenfield’s (1991) assertion were applicable to the critical incidents as told by the five participants in this study. The five participants shared a total of nine critical incidents or dilemmas during their interview sessions. Although each incident was unique in and of itself, analyses of the relevant data indicated that the major themes of the incidents shared by the participants were personnel, policy, and process.

Personnel issues seemed easier to resolve than those impacting students did. The participants struggled with zero tolerance issues and issues that conflicted with decisions they felt made the balance between best interests of students and policy more difficult.

The ethic of professionalism relates to the professional codes of professions such as law, medicine, dentistry, and even education; Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) stressed that …there may be clashes between the ethic of care, the ethic of critique, and the ethic of justice within these professional codes. It is a paradigm shift that expects
its leaders to formulate and examine their own professional codes of ethics in light of individual personal codes as well as standards set forth by the profession…which then calls on them to place students at the center of the decision-making process (pp. 10-22).

This held true for the participants in this study. However, with staff and personnel issues the participants had less empathy. The participants felt that these individuals should have known better, that these individuals exhibited an air of “entitlement” and immaturity, and that their behaviors had negatively affected overall staff morale.

The second guiding research question was What actions, decisions, or interventions assist school level leaders with facing these dilemmas? The critical incidents showed that the participants were cognizant of the steps that had to be taken to resolve their dilemmas and that their actions would cause some level of dissonance or inner conflict between their personal beliefs and what was required of them by policy and/or procedures. Although the participants sought out someone to “explore” their dilemmas with and the relationship between them varied (see Table 5) these individuals did not directly influence or impact the final resolutions of the dilemmas. Furthermore, none of the dilemmas required assistance or interventions from additional staff or personnel. Any additional assistance that the participants sought out was primarily to follow up on policy and/or procedures via other departments within or outside of the school district. Finally, the dilemmas shared were not because of inappropriate actions or decisions made by the participants. The dilemmas were mainly due to the inappropriate actions or poor decision choices of others. This researcher determined from the data analyzed in P3’s response to Interview Question 3 that P3 did not receive support from
his peers with the dilemma experienced with Incident 4. The analysis also determined that P3 did not receive support from the immediate supervisor for what was initially determined as the correct resolution of the dilemma in Incident 5.

Reliance on district policy and procedures helped to resolve a majority of the dilemmas. The participants stated that what helped them the most was that they felt bound to act prudently in order to address the policies and procedures that were being violated. Although some level of hesitancy was experienced when they were initially confronted with their dilemmas, the participants, including P3 with Incident 5, indicated that they relied on following and/or being in compliance with policy and procedures and “doing the right thing” in their responses to Interview Question 3. The critical incidents revealed this tension between policies or expectations and doing what the participants thought was the “right thing”. This recurring dissonance in decision making with the added competing elements such as the best interests of students, organizational and/or professional policies, and personal codes as alluded to by Cranston, Enrich, and Kimber, (2003), English and Bolton, (2008), Frick, (2009), and Shapiro and Stefkovich, (2001) (2005) formed the core of the ethical dilemmas the school leaders faced.

This researcher posed the following to P2: “Now this question isn’t in here, but the conversation you are sharing with me leads me to ask this question: Do you believe the district provides a lot of guidance in handling these types of dilemmas?” The participant’s response and rationalization were also characteristic in the responses, actions, and decisions of the other participants in this study:

P2:
“The district tells us by virtue of our ethical guidelines or whatever…they remind us that we have to be prudent in our decisions. That we need to follow the policy, and follow the practice, that the guidance, no….I think that what were guidelines, and I think this is true, we go to schools, we go to meetings, we go to professional development, but nothing will ever train us like the personal experience we have and that is just life.”

The third guiding research question was What are the implications of the research findings for preparation and professional development of school level leaders? A goal of this researcher was to design a significant study, collect and analyze pertinent and relevant data, and then use deductive thinking and reasoning to present her findings from the subjects’ points of view. Another goal of this study was to capture the dynamics of leadership choices when dealing with critical incidents and to reinforce Freire’s (1970) statement and this researcher’s premise that “dialog is an indispensable component of both learning and knowing…it transforms lived experiences into knowledge and uses the already acquired to unveil new knowledge” (p. 17) for future practice.

Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (2002) argued that learning about ethical decision-making is best facilitated through ‘face to face’ interaction (p. 427). Lashway (1996) suggested, “…leaders should have a habit of conscious reflection” (p. 3). Begley (2004) alluded to the use of “consciously reflective practice” (pp. 4-5). Greenfield (2004) noted that “to understand moral leadership requires that one gain an understanding of the perspectives, the lived experiences and subjective meanings, of the participants in the leadership relationship” (p. 191). Brooks and Normore (2002) concluded
Engaging in reflective practice and problems based learning activities designed to challenge their growing understanding…and supporting each individual’s creation of a coherent ethical system…may prepare school leaders for the “moral imperative” of leading our schools well into the 21st century (p. 7).

This study was an exercise in face-to-face reflective dialog for the participants. It afforded each with the opportunity to set aside time dedicated from their busy schedules and reflect upon incidences in their professional careers that they identified as especially confounding and difficult. The study found that the use of reflective practice and dialog could be a means of supporting and developing sound ethical decision-making practices. Thus, the interview itself provided a learning opportunity for both the participants and the researcher, highlighting the notion that one’s sense of ethics is refined over time. The following statements voiced by the participants stressed the importance of this premise:

P1:

“But I knew I had to do the right thing. So, reflecting back on that, looking at the policy, knowing that my job could be on the line really, if I did not really do the right thing, and it did not feel right.

I certainly enjoy your sitting here and having this conversation. It just helps me to think back and reflect on some things that sometimes I don’t want to think about but I know they helped shape me to be the person I am.”

P2:

“A principal right now that I am working with, I believe that principal is, has a heart, that is right. Has a heart that…works and wants to work for children, but some decisions have been made that were not quite judgmentally sound. Had that
person had the opportunity to go back knowing what he or she knows right now, I think the decision would be made.”

“…You just made me think about some things that I had not thought about in a long time.”

P3:

“When I reflect on that, probably what I would do differently is probably try to spend more time understanding what the people’s concerns were…and have a better picture about where the district was going. See...because I think that was happening, this is the other part of that dilemma…”

Starratt (2004) recommended that leadership preparation programs at colleges and universities may need to challenge continually prospective educational leaders about their ethical principles and moral values. Also, the research and studies conducted by Covrig (2001), Dempster, Freakley, and Parry (1998) (2002), and Pardini (2004) supported Starratt’s recommendation for greater emphasis of ethics in leadership preparation. Fields, Reck, and Egley (2006) lamented that the “demand for highly qualified, well-trained educational leaders has never been higher than it is today”. Their published work addressed the required skills and knowledge of educational leaders in areas identified by the national standards for educational leadership that were developed by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (pp. vii-viii) also recognized these standards. Finally, Goree, Baker, and Hopkins (2006) declared that ethics could be developed over time:

There is research suggesting that ethics classes and training can help people develop and grow in moral sensitivity… but the desire and motivation to be a
good person has to come from within. And moral character lies still more deeply inside us. Character, like wisdom, develops slowly over time (pp. 16-17).

Further, Noremore (2004) highlights the importance of ethics for educational leaders:

Leadership in any endeavor is a moral task, but even more so for educational leaders whether at the school or the university level. Accordingly, one goal that should be incorporated as part of a leadership preparation program is the opportunity for aspiring leaders to examine beliefs, traditions, and experiences that have shaped their lives. This is critical activity because prospective and practicing educational leaders are not only responsible for the success of their particular institution; their work can have an impact on various other institutions now and in the future (p. 1).

The data accrued from this study strongly supported what these researchers have either recommended or stated regarding training and professional development for school level leaders. Based on these two sources, this researcher identified the following implications for practice:

**Selection**

In meeting the increased demands for highly qualified and well-trained school level leaders screening potential candidates is important. Through their critical incidents, participants described learning to be ethical at an early age. This highlights the need for careful screening both in the admission process for leadership preparation programs and in the selection for leadership positions in schools.

**Developing Ethics and Expectations for Ethical Behavior**
Although the critical incidents showed that ethics are learned early, the findings also indicated that ethics could be refined and strengthened over time. As discovered in this study, pivotal life experiences can and do influence an individual’s ethical and moral fiber. School districts can ensure that the professional development training for school leaders embeds the required skills and knowledge of educational leaders in ethics. One source of guidelines in this area is the national standards for educational leadership developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders. This training can also reinforce the local and state professional ethics standards and expectations.

**Modeling Ethics**

All participants perceived that ethics were developed in the early stages of childhood; they also implied that it could be continually modeled, practiced, and refined throughout adulthood. Therefore, the training in ethics should be delivered by individuals familiar with the standards developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders as well as the ethical and moral culture of the school district. Critical incidents showed that modeling ethics and setting high expectations is important to the ongoing development of ethical frameworks. The finding inferred that those who teach in preparation programs or conduct professional also practice and model these attributes on a continuing basis. Sharing pertinent and related
research with students in educational leadership programs enhances their awareness of the high standards placed on school leaders and the varying levels of dissonance they will face. Both district and university school level leader preparation and training could benefit from simulations (role-playing) using ethical dilemmas. Additionally, both preparation programs would benefit from inviting practicing school leaders as well as former school to participate in forums designed for them to shared experiences (critical incidents) that would elicit the appropriate dialog and reflection.

The final guiding research question was What has been learned by administrators after leaving school level leadership? Interview Question 9 elicited data on this topic. As you reflect upon your experiences as a school leader, what have you learned that specifically relates to ethical and moral decision making? The participants’ responses to this question provided relevant data to answer this guiding research question. All of the participants were extremely retrospective when responding to Interview Question 9. This question also gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their practice, which was not separated from their “lived experiences”. In fact, several responses went beyond their localized “professional experiences” to encompass their global “life and lived experiences” thus making their professional practice a reflection of their lived experiences. These data align with Freire’s (1970) notion of ongoing learning through dialogue and reflection.

In reviewing and analyzing the responses to Interview Question 7, How did you learn to make ethically and morally sound decisions? What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making?, there were repeating themes,
characteristics, and similarities in the stories that each participant shared: their views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making were shaped early in their childhood by some form of adversity, family, faith and beliefs, or their immediate community. The participants did not refer to participation in ethics’ courses or training during their undergraduate, graduate, or leadership preparation programs. P4 did indicate other forms of training that may have helped make ethically and morally sound decisions: “I think my biggest piece that has helped me is that I have had so much training in behavior, conflict resolution; my background has been very behavioral and so I approach everything in a behavioral manner.”

P1:

“Life is about choices. It was always instilled in me from a child that you must always do the right thing, regardless. I just always err on the caution of doing what’s right and especially when you are an African American, you have to tow the line. We have to give 250 percent, not 100 percent. Whereas, other races, they only give 100 percent. And I know when to stride and when to stroke.”

P2:

“If you do what’s right by and for others, people may not understand it, they may not like it, but they will learn to respect it and expect it. So just try to treat folk like I know they want to be treated. And respecting them, we may differ, but we can share the same respect. But, just doing what is right and what is just, fair, and doing it consistently.”

P3:
“I think the big thing you learn that is the foundation that helps you to be successful as a leader as well as a person. That, if the other people respond to you when they look at from your core, they know whether you have made ethical or moral decisions. I think that’s important that people see you that way. I really do appreciate it when somebody says I know that you cared about the children.”

P4:

“That you really need to know yourself…you need to know where you stand and you need to know that you are going to be strong enough, regardless of what happens, to do the right thing. And particularly be driven by the student, for me, that disabled student that I represent. No matter who I have to go up against….I have to do it, because there is not anyone else who is going to do it for them…but you have to be very clear about how you are going to approach this.

P5:

“That if you set your standards and never waiver from them your decisions are easy…you never have to worry about them. Because you are always making the same and right decisions…when I was a principal and teachers wanted to do things…I said, we will work on anything you want…just tell me how it affects kids….”

In retrospect, much of what has been learned by these participants’ responses to critical incidents has been explored, researched, or addressed by scholars in this field (see Table 8). Holland (2004) expounded on the “changing role of school leaders and the expectation that they be both expert manager and skillful leaders.” He added that this “changing role puts undue demands on school leaders which that frequently leads to
conflicts between managerial values and instructional leadership” (p. 3). Applying Kant’s philosophical approach to ethics, a construct of consistency for school level leaders emerged: following the rules, policies, and procedures with a balance between “gray areas” and compliance policies such as zero tolerance. Similarly, the findings here revealed that school level leaders’ moral and ethical fibers were challenged daily; that school level leaders often experienced dissonance or tension between their guiding ethical beliefs and policies or expectations of the district policies. Additionally, the findings revealed that school level leaders sought to act in the best interests of students; and that school level leaders sought guidance when working through a dilemma.

**Emergent Themes for Grounded Theory**

This researcher made note of several repeating ideas or emergent themes that informed this study; these emergent themes were gleamed from the critical incidents provided by participants during their interview sessions: spirituality, moral purpose, best interests of students, pivotal life events, and personal dissonance. These themes are the basis for development of grounded theory that synthesizes previous research findings with those from this study. A statement of grounded theory in italics heads the discussion of each of the themes.

**Spirituality**

*School leaders acknowledge spirituality in responding to ethical dilemmas.*

All of the participants voiced some level of “spirituality” as they recounted their critical incidents. The crux of their dialogs was what Bolman and Deal (2003) referred to as “bringing a genuine concern for the human spirit” and was supported by Foucault’s (1994) definition of spirituality: “the subject’s attainment
of a certain mode of being and the transformations that the subject must carry out on itself to attain that mode of being” (p. 294). The statement of Marshall and Oliva (2006) further supported this finding: “Anchoring spirituality are feelings of peace, care, and commitment that rise from one’s belief in a higher being” (p. 42). Bolman and Deal (2003) add that being a spiritual leader “…does not mean promoting religion or a particular theology…but bringing a genuine concern for the human spirit” (p. 406).

P1:

“It was always instilled in me from a child that you must always do the right thing, regardless.”

P2:

“You learn a whole lot more by what people do than what people say, and so…we are talk among ourselves and we say you have all kinds of leaders and you can learn all kinds of things from leaders… But, just doing what is right and what is just, fair, and doing it consistently.”

P3:

“The only thing is about my faith... there are certain things that like treating people right and doing things the right way.”

P4:

“That you really need to know yourself…you need to know where you stand and you need to know that you are going to be strong enough, regardless of what happens, to do the right thing.”

P5:
“What you stood for and what you believe in and what…what are you willing to
die for…it’s what makes you up. This is what I’m willing to do…I can’t
compromise, it’s what you won’t compromise, and right or wrong to others, or the
situation, if you have to compromise…”

Moral Purpose

*School leaders act with moral purpose and intent in responding to ethical dilemmas.* Fullan (2001) defined moral purpose as acting with the intention of making a difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole and also posited that “moral purpose, relationships, and organization success are closely interrelated.” (p. 51). The ethic and moral fibers of administrators are as diverse as the composite of the schools and communities they serve. The quality of decisions made by school leaders may express more of their emotional quotient than their intellectual quotient. There should be a balance between “conscience and compliance…theory and practice…praxis and hermeneutics” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 120). All of the incidents showed that participants strived to keep this balance, their moral purpose, as they responded to their dilemmas. The data relevant to this finding follows:

P1:

“I thrive on trying to be honest…doing what's right…

P2:

“I knew that what I had seen was totally inappropriate; what hindered me again
was here is a veteran person who has been in the system much longer than I, who’s at the end of a career that storied or stellar was still the end of his career.
And I did not want to do anything that would impact that. So that was what hindered me. Again, what helped me was the policy...that it was wrong and you just couldn’t do that.”

P3:
“That, if the other people respond to you when they look at from your core, they know whether you have made ethical or moral decisions. I think that’s important that people see you that way. Then, you can have conversations with them beyond that. If they think that it is driven by something else, you kind of like the star for the day…”

P4:
“That you really need to know yourself…you need to know where you stand and you need to know that you are going to be strong enough, regardless of what happens, to do the right thing.”

P5:
“…the thing that I have always felt is that you do what’s right and that’s it, you know, nothing else can do that. The whole morale of the department was, was that way…it was thrown up in their face…people were mistreated and it just wasn’t right to allow that to continue and it wasn’t going to, so…”

**Best Interests of Students**

*School leader focus on what is best for students when responding to ethical dilemmas.* The critical incidents in this study revealed a pattern of ethical decision making that centered on doing what was in the best interests of students. This finding correlated with findings in other studies. Stefkovich and Begley (2007) reflected on the notion of acting in the best interests of students and Torres (2004)
emphasized, “…the ethic of profession provides a framework for educators and policymakers to think critically and form an appropriate code with the best interests of the student at its core” (p. 256). Embedded in the participants’ responses were references to making decisions that had a positive impact on students (e.g. “providing services to students”; “and I thought that was not in the best interests”; ”...to make opportunities available for kids…”; “just tell me how it affects kids”). In their responses to Interview Question 6, three participants expressed some level of dissonance or tension with zero tolerance issues and its impact on students. Additionally, Frick and Gutierrez (2008) studied the moral aspects unique to the profession of educational leadership. Their research found that principals overwhelmingly indicated a commitment for assuming particular responsibilities to children and youth and identified themselves as persons entrusted with acting on behalf of students for their benefit (pp. 44-47).

Pivotal Life Events

School leaders cited pivotal life events that developed their code of ethics. The participants’ lived experiences were voiced through the sharing of their critical incidents. Each participant, through dialog and reflection, acknowledged that the core of their ethical and moral fiber was developed during their youth and was ultimately reinforced by a significant event during that time. The story is paramount for qualitative researchers and nothing was as important to this study and this researcher as the words and stories of the participants. This study provided this researcher the vehicle to capture the dynamics of leadership choices when school level leaders are faced with critical incidents. It has also provided the
vehicle that reinforced Freire’s (1970) statement and this researcher’s premise that “dialog is an indispensible component of both learning and knowing…it transforms lived experiences into knowledge and uses the already acquired to unveil new knowledge” (p. 17) for future practice. Pardini (2004) also addressed the issue between principle or problem focused ethics – the way one responds to specific ethical dilemmas and narrative ethics – one’s orientation toward life and surmised that there should be more focus on narrative ethics, social justice, and the inadequacy of the level of ethics training (p. 3).

P1:
“When I started out I was at an all black school. In fourth grade, my mom moved me to an all white school…. I think back to the times in the classroom, the kids would tease me because I would not read as well as they. The teachers in all the classes would allow them to do that. Going through that experience, I vowed to never, and it doesn’t matter what color, to treat a child or an adult the way I was treated growing up.”

P3:
“I had my grandparents who were really strong in my life about what things to value, principles, and things like that. They also held me responsible for my own behavior. I am the oldest in my family, my mother had nine children and I am the oldest; so I was always given a lot of responsibility. But the best experience I had was at Tuskegee Institute. What was critical for me about that is that it was like an oasis in the delta.”

P4:
“I am the legal guardian of my adult, disabled sister. She has very significant disabilities and she is in the adult system. She went through the school system in Illinois. I know the challenges that my family experienced…. It’s just she and I…growing up in a household and seeing that there were some decisions that were not ethical.”

P5:

“So…my father was killed when I was ten, he was a police officer and so my grandfather is who I had. That’s who I looked up to.”

**Dissonance**

All of the incidents revealed that *school level leaders experienced dissonance in addressing their ethical dilemmas*. Dissonance or the “tension between the ethic of justice, rights, laws, and the concept of democracy” in resolving dilemmas was also referenced in the work of scholars such as: Apple (1998), Bakhtin (1981), Bowles and Gintis (1988), Foucault (1993), Freire, (1970), Giroux (1994), Greene (1988), and Purpel and Shapiro (1995). In essence, it did foster the realization of how “frequently our morals and ethics have been tested over time” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Interview Question 6, Have you experienced dissonance between personal beliefs, values or morals and what has been required of you by policy, practice or expectations in your administrative role? was asked of the participants. It was evident from their responses that they all faced instances of dissonance that tested their morals and ethics. Most notably were the conflicts between the right versus right decisions, zero tolerance, and resolutions in which they felt were not really in the best interests of students. That the participants
experienced varying levels of dissonance was not unique to them but to all school level leaders as pointed out the by the researchers and scholars that were cited in this study. It must also be noted, as was also emphasized by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001), that it is indeed a “paradigm shift that expects its leaders to formulate and examine their own professional codes of ethics in light of individual personal codes as well as standards set forth by the profession” (pp. 10-22).

Additionally, in reflecting on critical incidents, participants voiced concerns about the use of selective or situation ethics, attitudes of entitlement, bouts of immaturity, and a lack of workplace ethics by individuals who fell under their direct supervision. The participants were acutely aware that as educators, they were held to higher moral standards; that the public views, perceptions, and expectations of educators were not at the same level of what was accepted of others (Bull & McCarthy, 1991; Senge, 2000). They knew that these expectations were primarily due to their daily interaction with children and acting in the best interests of students (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Torres, 2004) which they observed was not an awareness exhibited by some of the individuals they supervised. Therefore, an implied finding of this study was to stress in the preparation and professional development components the common occurrence of unethical and thoughtless behaviors that school level leaders face. A summary of the participants’ responses to Interview Question 6 follows:

P1: “I had to go back and really search myself about my morals and values and what I really, truly stood for and believed in. And I knew at that point that I had no choice but to follow policy.”
P2:

“I would say yes and no. In this case I think it was a clear case so the conflict was internal and would I have an impact on affecting someone’s career as affecting it? So that was the conflict but not really a personal belief or value. I have had incidences of dissonance when in different situations you are called upon to mete out some circumstances that the Code of Conduct dictates that you ought to do. For instance, if there is a weapon or something that commands that the student be expelled. In the investigating process, sometimes we find out things that would extenuate or mitigate the circumstances.”

P3:

“I really struggle sometimes with the idea about zero tolerance…that has been a struggle for me especially at the elementary level. So I have seen that and I have to be honest when at times, I have not been as consistent with the policies as I should have been…ok…since I have been here.”

P4:

“But when we…when I approach it…I really have to take out my personal view of wanting to have those full experiences and really look at what we are required to do. And when I look at it from a requirement perspective, putting those programs would mean that we are discriminating against those ESE children because technically we have allowed them not to access those programs. So, I have to remember to keep my personal feelings out of it.”

P5:
“First, throughout my career, I think I was faced with these policy type decisions; whether it was a principal in ESE, whether it was an expectation that we, you know, you can’t do that. Yeah, we can do that. Whether it was with kids, because we owe the ESE kids a certain level of service and to not provide it was not acceptable. And those types of things we unacceptable. Coming into that one specific case that I talked about, policy was there saying, no you cannot do it, you’re not important to us.”

**Race and Gender**

In briefly exploring the dimensions of race and gender and their interrelationship with ethical and moral dilemmas this researcher found that, in reflecting on the critical incidents, three of the participants felt that their race and/or gender played a role in their incidents or the resolutions (see Table 7). Therefore, it cannot be concluded from this study that race and/or gender played a significant role in the dilemmas that minority school level leaders face or the resolution of the dilemmas. Furthermore, in the research and literature reviewed by this researcher for this study, there were no references to this phenomenon. Nonetheless, in this study’s sample size of five participants, three alluded to this phenomenon. Interestingly, this researcher noted that the three participants who felt that either their race and/or gender played a role in the incident or resolution of it were black and two of the three were female. The two participants who expressed that neither their race nor gender had an impact were non-black; one was a White male and the other female and of Hispanic origins.

This researcher was intrigued by this phenomenon and returned to the data to seek out any evidence that could explicate these observations. Data showed that although not
all participants may have acknowledged and articulated the influence of race and gender, it was indeed evident in their critical incidents. For example, one black male participant shared an incident concerning an altercation between a black male and white female and how the administrator and teacher, who reported the incident, insisted on punishing the black male due to the teacher’s prior experience of being attacked by a black male as a young student. Similarly, a black female participant shared a story of discovering her assistant principal, who was a white male, viewing pornography on his work computer. This participant voiced the discomfort of being both female and black in addressing this incident. Clearly, these factors play a role in the lived experiences of school leaders as they faced ethical dilemmas. Yet, the literature is almost silent on the influence of race and gender in the ethical development in school leaders. This researcher has determined that the data presented does warrant further research on this topic.

In reviewing the data responding to the question of whether race or gender influences their actions, this researcher noted that the three black participants affirmed this influence while the other two did not. The three black participants were very specific in stating that race and gender impacted the incidents they shared. Conversely, one participant, who is a white male, was adamant in stating that race “has never really played into my life.” He noted growing up in a segregated community and being raised by his grandfather who “taught me to be colorblind.” Yet, the data showed several actions that revealed the influence of race and gender on school leaders’ responses to ethical dilemmas.

As stated, it was not the intent of this study to address, fully, issues of race and gender. Rather, this was an emergent theme that warranted a careful review of the data
searching for evidence to support or refute the participants’ claims that race and gender did or did not influence responses to critical incidents. The data showed several instances where race and gender appeared to have influenced action, but some participants did not acknowledge this potential influence. This contradiction led the researcher to explore additional literature for a possible explanation. Critical race theory (Creswell, 2007) may offer some insight. Critical race theory posits that race may limit one’s range of responses, especially when situated in institutionalized environments (Creswell, 2007, p. 28) such as schools and other educational organizations. Given that premise, this researcher was able to draw additional inferences from the data.

The black male participant stated “I have not been as consistent with the policies as I should have been…ok…since I have been here.” This participant also stated, in reference to the scenario he shared about the two students that “I think sometimes that [race] also makes people respond a little differently.” In this example, the participant perceived that he must follow policies. Other data supported the notion that participants saw themselves as change agents, protecting students and choosing the right path. This contradiction can be explained as a tension between staying within the institutional boundaries while attempting to implement change. In other words, the participants were attempting to change the system from within, acting on conscience but complying with policy. This balance between conscience and compliance, right versus right, theory and practice, praxis and hermeneutics, is at the core of how race influences school leaders’ responses to ethical dilemmas.
Could the participants be grounded in marginality, bound to do what some in the majority would do? As one of the minority participants stated, “I do what we are required to do…I look at it from a policy requirement.”

Do the participants view advocating for change, based on their race and/or gender, as part of a process or a problem? Is the white male participant, who claimed to be color blind, an extension of institutional color blindness? All of the participants felt bound to follow policy and procedures when seeking resolutions to their dilemmas. Could the black participants’ race be a limitation or liability with their becoming advocates for change? These and related questions get at the heart of facing ethical dilemmas in professional settings. Future research and analysis of these notions through the lens of critical race theory can offer insight and implications for leader preparation and professional development.

**Summary**

The renewed interest in understanding the moral and ethical dimensions of educational practice (Langlois, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Strike, Holler, & Soltis, 1998) as well as the inclusion of ethics as part of educators’ training (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Starratt, 1994) helped form the impetus for this researchers study. This study was designed to analyze the types of dilemmas school level leaders faced, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for school level leader preparation and professional development. The participants and this researcher, via the critical incident technique, had the opportunity to reflect on our lived experiences as school level leaders. Thus, by doing so provided insights into the complex roles of school level leaders, the dissonance between competing values regarding what is in the best
interests of students balanced with professional and personal ethics, policy implementation, and organizational imperatives. The data from this study will also inform future directions in research, leader preparation and practice.

This study confirmed the prevalence of ethical dilemmas for school level leadership. The critical incidents shared by the participants revealed that school leaders are guided by district policies and that school leaders often experienced dissonance or tension between their guiding ethical beliefs and policies or expectations of the district. These incidents supported the notion that school level leaders sought to act in the best interests of students. Furthermore, the data revealed a dichotomy around whether ethics can be taught. On the one hand, examining ethics in professional development and leader preparation was strongly encouraged. Conversely, all participants suggested that, in their own lived experiences, ethics were learned early on. Yet, each of the participants also acknowledged the benefits of professional development around ethics. The researcher concludes that these two learning processes are not mutually exclusive but are complementary. Learning ethics at an early age is as important as continuing to reflect on ethics as one matures, especially in a professional context.

Findings from this study were inconclusive in determining whether race and/or gender played a significant role in the dilemmas that school level leaders faced or the resolution of the dilemmas. However, in reviewing the data, this researcher observed that three of the five participants in this study indicated that they felt that either their race and/or gender influenced the dilemmas they shared or their resolutions. Interview Question 8 asked, What role, if any, did gender or race play in the incident or your resolution of it? P1 and P3 indicated that both race and gender influenced their incidents
and their resolutions; P2 stated that gender might have initially affected the reaction to
the incident shared but not the resolution of it. P4 and P5 strongly expressed that neither
their race nor gender played a role in their incidents or their resolutions. The three
participants who felt that either their race and/or gender played a role in the incident of
resolution of it were black and two of the three were female. The two participants who
expressed that neither their race nor gender had an impact were non-black; one was
female and the other male. It is possible that these participants were not overtly conscious
of the effects of race and gender on critical incidences shared since this topic was not
specific to the intent of this study.

This study provided this researcher the vehicle to capture the dynamics of
leadership choices when school level leaders are faced with critical incidents.
Furthermore, this study provided the vehicle that reinforced Freire’s (1970) statement and
this researcher’s premise that “dialog is an indispensible component of both learning and
knowing…it transforms lived experiences into knowledge and uses the already acquired
to unveil new knowledge” (p. 17) for future practice. Additionally, research methodology
acknowledges that each of us is shaped by lived experience and “sees” the world from a
situated stance that is the total of that lived experience, including race and gender. This
was evident in critical incidents that the participants shared in addition to their responses
to Interview Question 7 that asked, How did you learn to make ethically and morally
sound decisions. What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral
decision making? Participants uniformly described learning to be ethical in childhood,
reinforced by family expectations and events over time. Greenfield (2004) determined
that “to understand moral leadership requires that one gain an understanding of the
perspectives, the lived experiences and subjective meanings, of the participants in the leadership relationship” (p. 191). In the research and literature reviewed by this researcher for this study, there were no references to the “silence” around race and gender in relation to ethics. This researcher has determined that the data presented does warrant further research on this topic as well as the importance of employing Freire’s (1970) notion of dialogue and reflection as a continuous cycle in leadership preparation and development.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Implications

This study evolved from one of the four questions that framed the course of study for the Pinellas doctoral cohort: How can support for the development of ethical leadership be extended to school leaders? This question also served as the guidepost for this researcher’s study and review of the literature relating to ethics, ethical dilemmas, and the complexity of decisions school level leaders make. Because of her considerable experience in education, this researcher is cognizant of the realization that school level leaders faced a myriad of ethical and moral dilemmas that may be similar to those shared in her story. The data collected and analyzed during this study affirmed this realization and allowed for an exploration of the decisions, consequences and patterns of responses gleamed from the interview data shared by the administrators selected for this study. This data can inform future directions in research, school leader preparation and practice. The methods used in this study offered a research paradigm for probing and understanding how school level leaders processed and interpreted their world and how they assigned meaning to their lived experiences and the resulting actions. This researcher’s ultimate goal of designing a meaningful and rigorous study, collecting and analyzing pertinent and relevant data, and using deductive thinking and reasoning to present her findings from the subjects’ points of view was met in the end. Further, the findings from this study answered the four guiding research questions posed for this study:
1. What types of dilemmas do school level leaders face that require assistance or intervention?

2. What actions, decisions, or interventions assist school level leaders with facing these dilemmas?

3. What are the implications of the research findings for preparation and professional development of school level leaders?

4. What has been learned by administrators after leaving school level leadership?

The findings and results gathered from the study’s data were also supported by theories from scholars in this field (see Table 8): The moral dimensions of educational practice (Covrig, 2001; Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2003; Fullan, 2001, 2005; Kincehloe, 2008; Lashway, 1996; Senge, 2002; Starratt, 1991, 2002); dissonance (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001); ethics as part of training and professional development for school level leaders (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Starratt, 2002); spirituality (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Foucault, 1994; Marshall & Oliva, 2006); best interests of students (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Torres, 2004); ethics could be taught and consistently modeled (Goree, Pyle, Baker, & Hopkins, 2006; Langlois, 2004; Pardini, 2004); school level leaders faced a myriad of ethical dilemmas (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2003, 2006; Dempster, Freakley, & Parry, 1991; Greenfield, 2004; Holland, 2004).

Two additional themes or questions emerged that warranted additional research: (1) Can ethics be taught? and (2) How does race and/or gender influence ethical decision making? The first was suggested in but not fully supported by the literature and research
reviewed and cited in this study; there were no references to the second in any of the literature or research reviewed in this study.

The participants’ lived experiences were voiced through the sharing of their critical incidents. Each of them, through dialog and reflection, acknowledged that the core of his ethical and moral fiber was developed during his youth and was ultimately reinforced by a significant event or pivotal life experience during that time. The participants, reflecting on critical incidents and ethics in school level leadership, also suggested that professional development in ethics could be effective for school level leaders. As discovered in this study, pivotal life experiences could and did influence an individual’s ethical and moral fiber. Moreover, critical reflection was perceived to be a process that could benefit practicing and aspiring school level leaders. Exploring how this process could be implemented in preparation and professional development is a phenomenon worthy of further research.

Findings from this study were inconclusive in determining whether race and/or gender played a significant role in the dilemmas that school level leaders faced or the resolution of the dilemmas. However, this researcher has noted that three of the five participants in this study indicated that they felt that either their race and/or gender impacted the dilemmas they shared or their resolutions. Research methodology acknowledges that each of us is shaped by lived experience and “sees” the world from a situated stance that is the total of that lived experience, including race and gender. It is possible that these participants were not overtly conscious of the effects of race and gender on their responses to critical incidents. In any case, sufficient evidence pointed to race and/or gender as a potential influence in certain dilemmas that school level leaders
faced. Further research and study of this issue may be warranted in light of the changing demographics of our schools, communities, and school level leaders.

The participants interviewed in this study faced a myriad of ethical dilemmas and struggled to forge a balance between ethics and morals, their personal beliefs and the institutional policies and procedures they were obliged to uphold. In addition, analysis of critical incidents revealed that personnel issues were easier to resolve than those impacting students were and the participants struggled with zero tolerance issues. The participants also struggled with ethical decisions producing conflict related to the balance between the best interests of students and institutional policy. The dissonance or tension rooted in striking this balance is a phenomenon that caused the inner most conflicts as the participants responded to the critical incidents. Another factor to note is that the participants’ recall of incidents that occurred more than ten years was an indication that they were still troubled by either the incidents, how the incidents were resolved or both.

Last, the individuals sought out for guidance and their relationships with the participants varied. However, data analysis showed that these individuals did not directly influence the resolutions to their dilemmas. Participants ultimately made their own decisions. The individuals sought out for guidance appeared to serve as a sounding board or quasi-mentor, which again supported the importance of a critical friend and critical reflection. Through their reflections on critical incidents, the participants exhibited a “balance between conscience and compliance…theory and practice…praxis and hermeneutics” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 120), a balance that is characteristic of having a moral purpose.
In this study, this researcher has provided comments on her past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that may have shaped the interpretation and approach to the study. This researcher disclosed in her story and critical reflections, potential bias and her stance in relation to the phenomenon. In several of the dilemmas shared in her story, this researcher also struggled to forge a balance between ethics and morals, her personal beliefs and the institutional policies and procedures she was obliged to uphold. Furthermore, this researcher acknowledged that the core of her ethical and moral compass was developed during her youth and was ultimately reinforced by a significant event during that time and that her race and/or gender strongly affected several of the dilemmas she faced in addition to their resolutions.

The participants and this researcher, via the critical incident technique, had the opportunity to reflect on our lived experiences as school level leaders and by doing so provided insights into the complex roles of school level leaders. Ethical issues, problems, and dilemmas continue to be present and school level leaders continually face moral and ethical dilemmas and challenges. School level leaders continue to be held to higher standards regarding moral and ethical behavior due to their daily interactions with children (Senge, 2000). The political and social changes in our society will continue to directly impact the training, professional development and expectations of school level leaders. Fullan (2003) lamented the loss of our moral compass that resulted in the 1990’s becoming a decade of neglect in terms of leadership We must find and recalibrate our moral compass that Fullan (2003) declared was lost in the 1990’s.

Epilogue
To complete the full circle journey and story of this researcher, outcomes of the several critical incidents shared in her story follow:

I was the kindergartener in the story. I attended Langdon Elementary School from the first through fifth grades and then my parents enrolled my younger sister and me in parochial schools where we completed our formal schooling. On my frequent visits to my hometown, I always drive by the “school at the top of the hill”…the signage on the school’s marquee announces that it is a Blue Ribbon School.

The Thurgood Marshall staff agreed to implement fully the fundamental guidelines. This resulted in the dismissal of 250 students from the program our first year in addition to 300 out of school suspensions. However, this also sent a message to the students and the community that we were not going to lower our expectations. Additionally, Marshall’s school grade for that year was a “C” that numerically was just 3 points from a “D”. By the third year, the total of the number of suspensions and dismissals were less than 100 and Marshall earned an “A” grade.

The preschool student eventually returned to school and unabashedly announced to the class that she had “gotten VD” from her boyfriend. The preschool program offered extensive counseling to the student but because of her mother’s lack of concern about the long term impact of this event on her daughter, the counseling sessions were discontinued.

The middle school student gave birth during the summer; the baby was given up for adoption. The student returned to school; the administrative team never discussed the event or its outcome. This event is an authentic example of the importance of school leaders engaging in reflective dialog and what Starratt (1991) refers to as “critical
presence” - critical appraisal of oneself as the cause of the blockage to authentic communication or critical appraisal of something in other’s presence that blocks our mutual ability to communicate authentically (p. 97).

I did not suspend the kindergarten student. I also chose not to suspend the third grader but recommended to assign the student to an “alternative” education program housed at another elementary school.

I contacted the district’s Office of Professional Standards and the night foreman was suspended for three days for his actions in my office. His behavior and job performance continued to deteriorate and he and the classroom teacher filed with OEO for sexual harassment and a hostile work environment against me. I recommended him for non-rehire, which the board approved. The classroom teacher was transferred to another school. Both died mysteriously within a year of each other.

The middle school principal was suspended while the accusations against her were investigated. All of the accusations were founded and a recommendation was made to the superintendent to dismiss the principal – which was supported by the superintendent and the board. This was the first time in the district’s history that a principal was recommended for dismissal with the support of the superintendent and board. When the findings of the investigation became public record, the “community” realized that there were no “ulterior motives” on the part of the OPS investigator or me.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

The School District

Vision: The School District unites with the community to provide a quality education enabling each student to succeed.

Mission: The mission of the School District is to educate students by creating systems that align all resources to assure that each student achieves at her or his highest level.

This award winning School District has been recognized on the national and state levels for its strong efforts and dedication of its students, teachers, and staff. The District is located on Florida’s west coast and is the seventh largest school district in the state and the 25th largest out of more than 16,000 districts in the United States. Its current enrollment in grades K-12 is 103,500 students and is the largest employer in the county with more than 17,000 teachers, administrators, and support staff.

The School District had a long history of successfully maintaining one of the strictest court-ordered desegregation plans in the nation. From 1971 until the fall of 1999, all schools in the district had to adhere to a court ordered maximum of 30% African-American students as well as meet annually adjusted minimum percentages. The basis of this desegregation plan was established in a 1965 US District Court order. In 1984, the district began implementing magnet programs. These programs were intended to entice majority students to voluntarily choose to attend schools located in minority communities. These theme based magnet programs were able to increase the number and percent of majority students at their respective sites, thus reducing the need to “force bus” an increasing number of students to these schools.

Seventy-five percent of the district’s graded public schools received an “A” or a “B” in the Florida A+ Plan. The overall district grade was a “B” or 523 points, which was
Appendix A (Continued)

up three points from the previous year and only two points below earning an “A” district grade. There are 478 National Board Certified teachers in the district and thirty-four students were named 2009 National Merit semifinalists by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

The School District has strong community support with more than 30,000 volunteers donating 1.1 million hours the assist students, teachers and staff members. Business and organizations are involved in more than 5,400 partnerships providing volunteer service to classrooms, departments, and schools.

Additional facts about the School District:
Student Population: 62% white, 18.6% black, 9.3% Hispanic, 3.9% Asian, 5.1% multiracial, .3% Native American
Schools: 74 elementary schools, 21 middle schools, 17 high schools, 5 exceptional schools, 1 secondary school, 12 charter schools
Post Secondary: 1 adult learning center, 2 technical education centers, 2 adult education centers, 3 community schools
Class size target: K-3 – 1:18, intermediate (4-8) – 22:1, high school – 25:1
Accreditation: All District high schools and postsecondary centers, in addition to one middle school, are members of and accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)
Transportation: The District currently operates more than 5000 home-to-school routes daily, transporting approximately 42,650 students twice per day. This does not include
countless shuttles, activity runs, athletic trips and field trips operated to support school programs. The transportation department operates six compounds throughout the county.
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Dear Colleagues,

Your initial intent to participate in my proposed doctoral study entitled: Ethical and Moral Decision Making: Praxis and Hermeneutics for School Leaders is sincerely appreciated. Enclosed with this letter is the participant’s Informed Consent to Participate in Research. This document includes all of the pertinent information related to the study.

USF, via their Institutional Review Board (IRB), has stringent guidelines that researchers, either directly or indirectly affiliated with the university, must abide by. The enclosed Consent document is anchored around meeting one of these guidelines: protecting the rights of research participants.

As you read this information, you will note that your participation is voluntary; your personal and professional identities will remain confidential; and there are no risks involved if you elect to participate in this study.

The interview sessions will be audio recorded and transcribed by me. In addition, there will be no written reference to you or your job descriptions. The focus of this study is to code and analyze data accrued from your critical incident(s).

If you agree to participate in this study, please return the enclosed form to me at your earliest convenience. I will then contact you to schedule your initial interview. All interviews will be at a time and location amenable to your professional and personal schedules. Additionally, I will provide you with a copy of the questions (which are also embedded in the Consent document) so that you will have time to reflect upon your critical incident(s).
Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to review the enclosed data
and giving further consideration for participation in this study.

Respectfully,

Joan Q. Minnis, Ed.S.
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Florida
Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study # _______________

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study.

I am asking you to take part in my dissertation research study entitled: Ethical and Moral Decision Making: Praxis and Hermeneutics for School Leaders. I will be the Principal Investigator in charge of this research study. The research will be done in Pinellas County.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to study the types of dilemmas school leaders face, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for leader preparation and professional development. The design of this research will be to provide insights into the complex roles of school leaders, the dissonance between competing values regarding what is in the “best interests of students” balanced with professional and personal ethics, policy implementation, and organizational imperatives. This study will focus on dilemmas identified as especially confounding and difficult for school leaders. These dilemmas will include decisions and situations, shared through recounting critical incidents, in which the actions and decisions of school leaders have garnered attention and action. In other words, the research assumes that school leaders face many dilemmas and seek to identify and examine the most difficult and troubling.

Study Procedures

In this qualitative study, data collected from interview sessions using the critical incident technique, dialogs, and journals will be used to analyze the types of dilemmas school leaders face, the characteristics of typical dilemmas, and the implications for leader preparation and professional development; to “capture some of the dynamics of leadership choices and dilemmas” and their implications for practice.

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in two scheduled interview sessions. The sessions will be scheduled at a time and location amenable to you. Each session should take no more than an hour to complete. The initial interview
session will be face to face and semi structured and will be followed by a second focused interview. You will be asked this central question in the first session:

Can you recall and tell me about an instance in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision that involved important moral and ethical consequences? Follow up questions to the central question will be:

- What was the date of this incident?
- What helped or hindered you most in responding to the dilemma?
- As the dilemma was resolved, did you seek or receive guidance from anyone? If so, what was the relationship between you and the parties at the time?
- Did district policies or representatives play a role in your decision-making around the incident(s)?
- Have you experienced dissonance between personal beliefs, values or morals and what has been required of you by policy, practice or expectations in your administrative role? If so, give an example.
- How did you learn to make ethically and morally sound decisions? What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making?
- What role, if any, did gender or race play in the incident or your resolution of it?
- As you reflect upon your experiences as a school leader, what have you learned that specifically relates ethical and moral decision-making?

Sub questions will be developed from the data collected in the first interview cycle for use in the subsequent interview session. You will be given copies of the questions prior to each of your interview sessions.

The interview sessions will be recorded and your responses will be transcribed, analyzed, and coded based on themes, patterns, and trends. The tapes, transcriptions, and any additional data collected during the study will be housed at my residence. Your names and exact titles will be confidential and you will have an opportunity to review the findings to be assured that your anonymity is protected. You will be provided copies of the findings and conclusions that will also be published in my dissertation. You may also receive a copy of your taped interviews upon request. There are no known risks associated with this study. All data will be retained for the prescribed five-year period and will then be shredded.

**Risks**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Benefits**

Many educational philosophers and researchers have argued the importance of including ethical study and reflection in educational preparation programs. You will be involved in a study that explores implications for preparation and ongoing professional development of school leaders that build expertise in handling ethical situations.
Questions/Concerns

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, please contact the PI, Joan Q. Minnis.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

**I freely give my consent to take part in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

______________________________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

______________________________________________
Date

______________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

- What the study is about.
- What procedures/interventions/investigational drugs or devices will be used.
- What the potential benefits might be.
- What the known risks might be.

______________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

______________________________________________
Date

______________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Participant:
Position:
Date:
Location:
Time:
Questions:
1. Can you share an incident in your professional experience that obliged you to reflect on a situation and make a decision involving an ethical or moral dilemma?
2. What was the date of this incident?
3. What helped or hindered you most in responding to the dilemma?
4. As the dilemma was resolved, did you seek or receive guidance from anyone? If so, what was the relationship between you and the parties at the time?
5. Did district policies or representatives play a role in your decision-making around the incident(s)?
6. Have you experienced dissonance between personal beliefs, values or morals and what has been required of you by policy, practice or expectations in your administrative role? If so, give an example.
7. How did you learn to make ethically and morally sound decisions? What has shaped your views and approaches to ethical and moral decision making?
8. What role, if any, did gender or race play in the incident or your resolution of it?
9. As you reflect upon your experiences as a school leader, what have you learned that specifically relates to ethical and moral decision making?
Appendix D

Notification to Participants

Dear Colleague,

Enclosed is a copy of the transcription of you interview. I transcribed your interview and the cassette of your interview and the original transcription are stored at my home. Please review this document to ensure the accuracy of your responses given during your interview session. After your review and if you note that there are any comments or statements requiring additional clarification or editing, please send that information to me. I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for your use in sending your written comments to me. You may also send your comments to me via my personal email: jqminnis@gmail.com.

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to review the enclosed data and for being a participant in my doctoral study entitled *Ethical and Moral Decision Making: Praxis and Hermeneutics for School Leaders*.

Respectfully,

Joan Q. Minnis, Ed.S.

Doctoral Student

University of South Florida
## Appendix E

**PI Notes**

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Appendix F

Modified Elements of the Cranston Model

Research Elements

Critical Incidents
- Professional Codes
- Gender and/or Race
- Moral Purpose
- Best Interests of Students

Ethical Dilemmas
- Policy and Procedures
- Pivotal Life Experiences
- Dissonance
- Societal Influences

Themes

Personnel Policy Procedure

Cranston et al. 2003, p. 140
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joan Quinn Minnis was born in Washington, D.C. and earned her B.S. and M. Ed. degrees from Howard University and Ed.S. from USF. She began her career in education as a classroom and retired as an assistant superintendent. She received the Commissioner’s Recognition for High Performance and Increasing Statewide Student Achievement for increasing Thurgood Marshall’s school rating by two letter grades in 2005-06; the school was also recognized by Governor Bush as one of the top 75 middle schools in the state of Florida. She also received the Mayor’s Apple Award in recognition of the learning gains made by the students at Thurgood Marshall. She served as president of the Florida Association of School Administrators, Pinellas Administrators Association, Pinellas County Elementary Principals Association, and Pinellas Alliance of Black School Educators. She was appointed to the Constitutional Accountability Commission and served on the Chancellor’s Middle Grades Reform Task Force, the High School Reform Task Force, and the Secondary School Improvement Award Work Group, and was a member of the Advisory Committee to the Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability. She currently serves on USFSP’s Education Leadership Advisory Board.