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The Man Behinf the Mask: A Principal's Search For a Moral Leadership Purpose

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The Man Behind the Mask:
A Principal’s Search For a Moral Leadership Purpose

by

James F. Lane, Jr.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
College of Education
University of South Florida

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Keywords: Ethical frameworks, autoethnography, constructivism, narrative analysis, school leadership, dilemmas, vignettes

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to several people closest to me, without whom its completion would not have been possible. I first dedicate this to my wife, Janet, whose remarkable patience, tolerance, and support enabled me to persevere and succeed when others would have failed. I also dedicate this to my three wonderful children. This was a journey begun when they were all children and completed with them well ensconced in adulthood, successfully pursuing their own educational and career paths. Finally, I dedicate this quest for professional understanding to Tom Rulison, mentor, friend, role model, and the finest school leader I have ever known.
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THE PURPOSE OF THIS AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE INQUIRY WAS FOR THE RESEARCHER TO DESCRIBE AND EXPLAIN HOW HE DISCOVERED, CONSTRUCTED, AND REFINED HIS SENSE OF MORAL PURPOSE AS A PRINCIPAL DURING HIS SEVEN-YEAR TENURE AT ORANGE PINES MIDDLE SCHOOL. HE INDUCTIVELY ANALYZED AND REFLECTED PRIMARILY ON SELF-AUTHORED TEXTS TIED TO CRITICAL PROFESSIONAL ETHICAL DILEMMAS SO AS TO DISCOVER EMERGENT THEMES, PATTERNS, INSIGHTS, AND EPIPHANIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS PERSONA AS A MORALLY DIRECTED SCHOOL LEADER. HE THEN ANALYZED AND REFLECTED ON HOW HE APPLIED THOSE DEFINED VALUES IN INTERACTIONS WITH GROUPS OF TEACHERS TO DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT ELEMENTS OF SCHOOL REFORM. HE RE-CREATED THESE CRITICAL EVENTS THROUGH DESCRIPTIVE VIGNETTES IN WHICH HE CAPTURED PERSONAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE EXPERIENCES USING CLANDININ AND CONNELLY’S MODEL OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVE SPACE.

IN THIS STUDY THE RESEARCHER PROBED ESPECIALLY PROBLEMATIC ETHICAL DILEMMAS HE EXPERIENCED WHILE WORKING AS PRINCIPAL. HE VIEWED THE EVENTS THROUGH THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS OF CARE, CRITIQUE AND JUSTICE OF STARRATT; THE ETHIC OF COMMUNITY DESCRIBED BY FURMAN; AND THE ETHIC OF THE PROFESSION, POSITED BY SHAPIRO AND STEFKOVICH. INCLUDED IS A DISCUSSION OF MORAL PURPOSE BY FULLAN AND SERGIOVANNI, ETHICS BY BEGLEY, SENGE, AND OTHERS, LEADERSHIP THEORIES, AND PERSPECTIVES REGARDING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND THEIR STAFF. THE RESEARCHER FOUND THE ETHICS
of care, justice, critique, community, and the profession provided a useful framework for his professional reflections. He was able to describe and capture the tensions within the dilemmas through the specific language utilized by Starratt, Furman, and Shapiro and Stefkovich to analyze and understand the issues packed within each dilemma. Through the application of these frameworks he determined that his moral purpose has been to approach the position of school leadership with a combination of compassion and justice, in order to establish a collaborative and synergistic school community that works for the greater good of students.

The study calls for more autoethnographic research into the dilemmas administrators teachers face in their daily practice, arguing that the best way to improve public education in this era of intense scrutiny and accountability is through the qualitative analysis of individual cases. The author places his particular constructivist approach to autoethnographic narrative inquiry within the broader philosophical background of qualitative research. This study contributes to the literature by showing focused insights into how representative ethical conflicts and dilemmas school leaders face during their daily practice can shape and guide their moral pursuit of effective school reform. It also shows ways that theoretical knowledge can inform professional practice.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention’s stay,
Invention, Nature’s child, fled step-dame Study’s blows,
And others’ feet still seem’d but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite--
“Fool,” said my Muse to me, “look in thy heart and write.”

Sydney, *Astrophil and Stella*, Sonnet 1, ll. 9-14

Problem Statement

Public schools are caught in the midst of widespread accountability mandates driven by a government directed post positivistic approach to school reform. These mandates hold principals responsible for and accountable to the academic progress of their students and evaluation of teachers tied to the same standard. Many researchers have underscored the important role principals play in school reform by improving school culture and thereby potentially increasing student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hall & Hord, 2006; Marzano, 2003; Reeves, 2011; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

These reforms include changes in school infrastructures, resources, leadership distribution, and pedagogy. The accountability movement’s strictures apply both tangible incentives and draconian sanctions to enact these reforms. The approach carries the assumption that teachers and principals will be spurred by these incentives and sanctions
to enact the prescribed changes, resulting in improved student academic performance. The error in this thinking is that effective and lasting reforms require an ethical framework and understanding of moral purpose from educators that is not accounted for in this carrot and stick nudging toward school reform. Real change can only be driven by individuals who act from constructs created from their personal values and beliefs, not from the top-down application of market driven concepts. This is especially true of principals, who help set the parameters of any community action.

Researchers describing the challenges and tensions within a school’s culture often address situations in which teachers resist proposed changes in infrastructure or pedagogy (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Pollock & Ford, 2009; Reeves, 2009; Schmoker, 2006). These studies generally recommend various combinations of staff development and democratic leadership to mediate this resistance and implement the desired reforms. While resolving such resistance does present important challenges to principals, even more powerful obstacles arise through unanticipated critical ethical dilemmas that principals encounter in their daily practice. These events usually occur at the most specific level of the school culture through emotionally charged interactions between individuals. Such events carry both destructive risks and constructive possibilities. They have the potential to derail reform efforts by consuming the time, energy, and emotional capital of not only the principal, but of the larger school community. Concomitantly, they offer the chance for the principal to understand his own ethical values and better define his moral purpose in directing ethically inspired school reforms.
Research indicates that principals are least prepared to deal with these ethically challenging and pivotal events (Bass, 1985; Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Craig, 2003; Cuban, 2004; Scribner, 1994). I learned quickly that I was both personally and professionally ignorant and naïve about such tumult, and that I abhorred the tension-filled interactions. I was stunned by the negative effects these events created within and among staff, parents, myself, and, most important, the students. I learned that I was emotionally and morally unprepared to negotiate emotionally these intense ethical dilemmas, which led to confrontation that conflicted with my need to be loved, with my abhorrence of strife, and with my fear of not being respected by the staff. At the same time, I came to see these events as strategic chances for me to construct and refine my moral compass. These events caused me to probe my values and determine what I believed to be true about myself, my motives as an individual and a professional, and about my goals for my school community. The turbulent sea of school reform is fraught with storms of individual and group conflicts. I came to understand that in order to effectively navigate these tempests, I needed to be anchored with a strong rudder of ethical beliefs.

Researchers have created several descriptors as means to explain the various ethical and moral events that occur within school settings. Starratt (1994) proposes a multidimensional structure that encompasses what he calls the ethics of critique, justice, and care. The ethic of critique deals with questions of social justice and human dignity. The ethic of justice implies more specific responses to unethical practices identified through the lens of critique. The ethic of care focuses on relationships from a personal rather than legalistic approach. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) extend the work of Starratt to include the ethic of the profession, under which they subsume the ethics of
critique, justice, and care under the aegis of professional codes. Furman (2004) presents the ethic of community as a means to “complement and extend” the work of Starratt, Shapiro and Stefkovich by focusing on the needs of the communal in examining the moral issues of schooling. I use these ethical frameworks to clarify my reflective analyses of significant ethical dilemmas that helped me define my approach to ethical leadership. I present a more thorough definition of each dimension in Chapter 2.

Lambert describes “reciprocal processes” through which we construct meaning and knowledge, enabling us to “understand how we and others make sense of the world” (Lambert, 2002, p. 45). Cole & Knowles observe, “Life history (and other forms of personal) research demand that stories and Chapters of a life be reopened, re-examined, and retold” (2001, p. 41). Following the direction of those researchers, I looked within myself to discover or re-discover awareness and questions, dilemmas and contradictions, and unresolved issues by closely examining pivotal professional ethical dilemmas that I encountered during my principalship at Orange Pines Middle School. This study demonstrates part of my “quest for personal-professional understanding” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 41). Clandinin and Connelly call this process a “continual reformulation” (2000, p. 156). As I reflected on self-authored texts through vignettes re-constructed from those texts, I sought to “make stronger connections between who I was, am, and may be” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 41).

Sergiovanni observes, “Research and reflecting on personal experience can often provide us with patterns of characteristics to which many are likely to respond in the same way” (2009, p. 7). Thus, by heightening awareness of the internal and external dialectics in which I engaged during significant ethical challenges, my focused insights
demonstrate how constructive reflection can combine with a principal’s prior experiences and values to shape his moral approach to the principalship.

**Study Purpose**

The purpose of this autoethnographic narrative inquiry was be for me to describe and explain how I discovered, constructed, and refined my sense of moral purpose as a principal during my seven-year tenure at Orange Pines Middle School. I inductively analyzed and reflected primarily on self-authored texts tied to critical professional ethical dilemmas so as to discover emergent themes, patterns, insights, and epiphanies in the development of my persona as a morally directed school leader. I then analyzed and reflected on how I applied those defined values in interactions with groups of teachers to design and implement elements of school reform. I re-created these critical events through descriptive vignettes in which I will captured personal and social implications of the experiences using Clandinin and Connelly’s model of three-dimensional narrative space. I inform my reflections with research describing leadership theories, ethical frameworks, and perspectives regarding interpersonal conflicts offered by Blasé and Blasé, Scribner and Layton, Anderson, Malen, and others.

This study contributes to the literature by showing focused insights into how representative ethical conflicts and dilemmas school leaders face during their daily practice can shape and guide their moral pursuit of effective school reform. It also shows ways that theoretical knowledge can inform professional practice. My hope is that other principals and school administrators will see parts of themselves in my experiences, be encouraged to probe their own actions, values and beliefs through the prism of
professional literature, and by their own process of discovery grow personally and
professionally.

Guiding Questions

Creswell (2001) discussed the elements of inquiry and developed a set of central
questions that researchers should consider before conducting a research study. Creswell's
three questions are the following: (a) "What knowledge claims are being made
by the researcher (including a theoretical perspective)? (b) What strategies of inquiry will
inform the procedures? (c) What methods of data collection and analysis will be used?"
(p.5). The first three Chapters are designed to meet this charge. Agee challenges the
researcher to see questions “as tools for discovery as well as tools for clarity and focus”
(Agee, 2009, p. 446).

Here are thoughts from Ellis (2000) that guided my thinking process:
Did I learn anything new about myself? Did I learn more about processes and
relationships? Will the story help others cope with or better understand their worlds? Is it
useful, and if so, to whom? Does it encourage dialogue? Does it have the potential to
stimulate social action? Is it exclusively my interpretation of what is going on? (Ellis,

Research Questions

1. How did I discover, construct, and refine my professional identity as a morally
directed leader during my seven-year tenure as principal of Orange Pines Middle
School?
   a. How did my previous experiences and values guide the construction of my
      sense of moral purpose at Orange Pines Middle?
b. How did I use interactions in critical ethical dilemmas to construct self-knowledge and understanding and define my values as a morally directed school leader?

c. How did I use that knowledge to guide my broader approach to school reform as a morally directed leader?

**Personal and Professional Background**

Ellis (2004) explains that autoethnography is a methodology that begins with the researcher as the site of study. Autoethnography won’t work without the combination of the personal and autobiographical along with the theoretical and analytical. The approach is intended to be evocative, stimulating memories of the past. Those memories may be poignant, painful, and perhaps embarrassing. They reveal the researcher’s vulnerability, but through that revelation he learns more about himself and his practice. The autoethnographer sees the universal through the particular. As the audience reads the text, they generalize it to their experiences, provoking reflection and spurring knowledge development.

The dangers of evocative revelation are solipsism and narcissism. Solipsism is being unduly self-centered, focusing on oneself as the only reality. Narcissism is self-admiration. I consider myself an introspective sort, and my temperament eschews sharing my personal musings with others. The purpose of this study, however, is to discover the extent to which I built a persona as a morally directed school leader. We all bring values with us to our work, and those values are formed through our experiences and studies. Therefore, it is incumbent on me to share both personal and professional history in order to show the experiences, attitudes and beliefs that I brought to the
principalship at Orange Pines Middle. The professional is easier to chart. The personal is considerably less so, but is at least equally important in order for me to frame the package of values that shaped my work. Thus, I will begin with a brief personal history, which I will follow with a more detailed professional chronology.

**My Personal History**

My background begins squarely in the white middle class. My father was a pharmacist and my mother a teacher. Both were born in South Georgia but emigrated to central Florida during the Depression. His father was shot and killed in a bar fight when he was an infant. His mother then married a construction worker who travelled Florida working on highway work crews, including those that built US 19 and US 41. I don’t think the poverty of the depression affected my father’s family much, although the itinerant lifestyle was harsh, placing him, for example, in seven different high schools. My mother’s father was an orange grove worker. He and my grandmother bought some property with insurance money they received when one of their sons was killed in a swimming accident. They cleared the land themselves and planted orange trees, which they maintained until their deaths.

My father’s family paid for him to enter college. He was then drafted and served three years in the army fighting in World War II. After the war he returned to college, completed his pharmacy degree using the GI Bill, and went to work. My mother worked her way through college and began teaching in a small rural school. Along the way they met, married, and had two sons, my brother and me. Like many white parents of the 1950s, they settled into a subdivision and began to raise their family. He worked as a pharmacist, and she stopped teaching to raise my brother and me. We attended the
church in which my mother was raised, went to a newly opened Christian school, and lived in a neighborhood populated with families of similar demographics.

When I was eight, however, this idyllic structure abruptly changed. A victim of asthma and allergies, my mother died of emphysema, an effect, I’m convinced, of my father’s smoking. Her death pushed him into an emotional maelstrom from which he never recovered. After she died, he hired a series of housekeepers to tend to us. He then married a woman who had a son. My new stepmother wanted a more affluent house, and so he sold our home and we moved to a larger, newer house in a rural setting. That marriage was an unhappy union, and they divorced after three years. Soon after the divorce we moved back into the city to be closer to his work. Within three months he married again, this time to a woman with four children. She quickly became pregnant and, tragically, contracted measles during the first trimester of her pregnancy. As a result, her baby was born legally blind and deaf. Thus within a year my brother and I had moved from a family of one stepmother and step brother to just ourselves to another house, location, and family of stepmother, four stepsiblings, and a severely handicapped infant sister.

While my father’s second marriage was unhappy, this third match was a catastrophe. They fought loudly and often, which was something my brother and I had not previously experienced. All this took a severe toll on my father, who deteriorated both personally and professionally. Personally, he committed some actions for which he was legally sanctioned. Although he did not serve any prison time, he carried that stigma for the rest of his life. During the same period he committed some egregious professional ethics violations for which he was stripped of his license to practice pharmacy. His life
was shattered. He lapsed into acute depression, was suicidal, and did not work for two years. After that and until his death, he worked jobs related to the pharmaceutical drug business, but never came near the salary, security, and prestige of being a pharmacist.

These events occurred as I entered high school. Adolescence would have been hard enough without the additional baggage that these experiences incurred. In addition to the changes in family and home, therefore, my brother and I moved to a position of significant financial insecurity. We often had beans and rice for supper and wore donated clothing. We barely had money for essentials, much less any frills that might have been associated with our previous middle class lifestyle. My brother and I both secured part-time jobs, which we held through high school and college. I qualified for a teaching scholarship, which paid for my undergraduate degree. My brother paid for his tuition. In addition, we both left home and moved to apartments as soon as we were financially able. My father eventually moved out of the house to a bedraggled apartment, although he and my stepmother never divorced.

I secured a job teaching high school English and met my future and current wife. We married, bought a house, and began our family of two girls and a boy. I worked to maintain a close relationship with my father. I gradually faded from my second stepmother, step-siblings, and handicapped sister. I regret that I failed to nurture the relationship with my sister. Although my father died several years ago, while he was alive I tried to ensure that my children were close to him and said as little as possible about the past.

When my oldest daughter was one and just starting to walk, she developed juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. For several months she could not bend one knee and cried
when she walked. As an adolescent I had experienced sadness at my mother’s death and fear for my father. Now I experienced fear for my daughter, which was as palpable as anything I had known. My wife and I were frightened for our baby’s future. We had begun going to a local church, and we worried and prayed, both seemingly without ceasing. Slowly she improved, and now 30 years later she is active and bears no memory and little evidence of that period.

Faith and religion have always played an important part in my life. We had always gone to church, and when I was a pre-adolescent we were active in a Southern Baptist congregation. When I grew older, I questioned those fundamentalist teachings and left the church. I continued to be a seeker of spiritual tenets, however. When my wife and I were first married, we joined a group who followed the teachings of a Russian mystic. While that was interesting, it didn’t fit my traditional Christian mores. Then we joined a group of Christian Scientists. That was closer to our protestant roots and helped us work through our daughter’s bout with rheumatoid arthritis. Although I value what I learned in those studies, the basic precepts strayed from some elements of our personal and theological comfort. The result was a return to mainstream moderate Protestantism through membership with a local church, where we raised our children.

I don’t know if a heightened interest in religion and theology is inherited. Two members of my family, a great grandfather and great uncle, were itinerant Baptist preachers in southern Georgia. An uncle through my father’s second marriage was an evangelist. I have the same questions about the teaching profession. Besides my mother, several relatives on both sides of my family were teachers, two of whom became
principals. At any rate, that was part of the milieu in which I grew up, set against a backdrop of domestic strife.

As I said at the outset of this piece of my narrative, I prefer to avoid focus on myself, and much of what I have shared about my past is unknown to most. I share it now only because I am proposing to write a self-study that probes my development as a morally directed school leader. This chronicles the background, experiences, information, and values that I brought to the job of principalship. While some were initially latent, they emerged in the fires of significant ethical dilemmas with which I was forced to negotiate. In Chapter Two and after I will discuss ethical frameworks of critique, justice, caring, community, and the profession posed by Starratt (1994), Shapiro & Stefkovich (2011) and Furman (2003) as they relate to schools and school leadership. Because of my background and the demographics of the Orange Pines Middle community, I believe I could have approached this study of my job as principal from any of these viewpoints. I understood the concerns of the affluent parents who felt the reputation of their neighborhood school had eroded. I empathized with the many children who did not have enough money to buy stylish clothes. I stood with the parents who fought aggressively for their children and who feared for their mental and emotional safety at the hands of some teachers. And I also empathized with the teachers and staff who faced losing their job and professional credentials as a result of moves I initiated against them, albeit through their own actions. I often saw my father in them. I struggled to understand how seemingly competent people could self-destruct. And yet, I came to understand that my greater duty was to the well being of my students and school community. Each of those issues is related to one or more of the ethical frameworks, which I use to describe and
frame my experiences. I did not know any of this at the time I became a school administrator, however, and I had not learned much of it by the time I became a principal. While I did not see myself as a crusader for any particular stance or cause, however, I do believe that I joined my colleagues in working to establish a morally directed school focus that worked to develop a culture of caring, justice, professionalism, and community for all students and staff. Part of that I brought with me through my personal background, and part was through the culture within the Crestview school district. The process of figuring all that out is part of my professional journey, which I summarize now.

**My Professional History**

It seems the times I needed jobs most came through a combination of hard work and deus ex machina. The translation from Latin is “god from the machine.” The concept comes from Greek drama, when the protagonist would often be saved from certain disaster by deific intervention. The idea later morphed in American vernacular to become “saved by the cavalry,” and the motif remains in different forms today. Anyway, from English teacher to supervisor of secondary language arts to associate principal, I always assumed I was the best for the job, and so I pursued my administrative career with that in mind. Another concept we inherited from the Greeks was that excessive hubris is often punished. I have endured that, as well.

No principal bursts fully formed from the head of the superintendent. All spend varying amounts of time “in the trenches,” generally moving from teacher through lower administrative jobs before arriving at the principalship. This is appropriate, since so much of what principals do in their jobs we learn through on-the-job training. Principals
also lean on our experiences as teachers when we lead their own faculties. Following is a brief account of my own circuitous route leading to the principalship.

Thirty-eight years ago I embarked on my journey as a professional educator. I first worked as an English teacher, including team leader and department head, for twelve years at two different Florida high schools. As a high school English teacher I taught many different courses, from the most basic, remedial grammar to speech, journalism, mass communications, composition, and Advanced Placement English. Along the way I earned two master’s degrees, the first in English and then another in Educational Leadership.

In 1987 I was promoted to the position of Supervisor of Secondary Language Arts for the school district. That was a new position created within the district’s Department of Curriculum and Instruction to meet the perceived need to focus more on literacy at the secondary level. It was my dream job, and I worked hard to succeed. In that capacity I screened applicants, reviewed textbooks, coordinated textbook adoptions, developed curriculum, designed and led various staff development events for teachers, and coordinated a project to establish standards and benchmarks for students in grades 6-12.

I served as Supervisor of Secondary Language Arts for six years, during which time the position of department director came open twice. The first opening was early in my tenure, and I did not apply. Meanwhile my work earned accolades for myself and the district, and the new director and I got along well. I decided that my dream job was to be the department director. When she moved to the position of principal at Francis Middle School, I applied for the director position. The superintendent appointed instead a man who had worked as both a middle school and high school principal. When I debriefed
with the assistant superintendent, she said that in order to advance in the district, I would need to acquire some school-based administrative experience.

“Jim, the jobs at the district office are more complicated than they used to be. We’re here to serve the schools, and you have more credibility with principals and associate principals. If you want their respect and attention, they have to know you’ve walked in their shoes. If you ever want to get a job as a director, you’ll need to have school-based administrative experience.”

Shortly after that conversation my former director, now a principal, offered me a job as associate principal at her school. I took the job at Francis Middle School and entered the wild and wonderful world of school administration. Francis was closer to my home than the district office and was also the zoned school for my children. It seemed the pathway to success was laid out for me. The school housed about 1,400 students from a wide range of economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. To work as an associate principal in any setting is challenging, and that was especially true in that venue.

As occurred when I was a supervisor, the lead administrative position opened twice. Soon after I arrived, the principal who had recruited me moved out of state. Although I applied for her position, I was reasonably compliant when another associate principal with more school-based administrative experience got the job. I worked hard for the new principal, achieved several personal and professional successes, and applied again when that principal moved to open a new high school. I was confident I was the best candidate for the principal job. Thus, I was devastated when the pick went to an associate principal from another school. I screamed, cried, griped, pouted, and sulked. There is ample fodder for evocative reflection in that experience. While that’s not the
focus of this narrative, that experience contributed to the values system I brought to the principalship. I again debriefed with the assistant superintendent, a different person this time and, ironically, the same man who had been promoted previously to the directorship over me. He gave me direct, candid advice on the way I had represented myself in the interview. The conversation went something like this:

Jim, I like you, and I respect you. Because of that, I’m going to do something I don’t usually do. I’m going to tell you exactly how you came across in the interview and how the superintendent reacted. This isn’t a time for you to respond. There’s no dialogue here. Just listen.

He proceeded to tell me of times when he did not get jobs he thought he should have had. He also told me pretty directly about specific statements I had made that had made me appear arrogant and insensitive. He ended by telling me things I needed to do in order to rebuild, move on, and move up. I appreciated his honesty, and it’s a lesson I’ve tried to apply when I’ve counseled teachers and my associate principals. It was difficult, but I went to work to serve the new principal and my school. It seems to me now that in that act he demonstrated the application of two different ethical frames. Through the ethic of the profession, he was telling me why I didn’t get the job and what I needed to do to get the next one. More important, however, he was applying the ethic of care, and that is something I will always remember and cherish.

Three years later the district announced plans to open a new middle school, also within my community. When the job of associate principal was advertised, I did not apply. Even though I knew and liked the appointed principal, I wasn’t going to apply to for the same position I currently held. After all, I reasoned, I was meant for bigger things.
I would wait, I decided, until a principal position opened up. That, I knew, was my destiny. I was surprised, then, when the new school’s principal called me one afternoon. “Jim,” he said, “how’d you like to come over and help me open up Meeks?”

By that time my daughter was attending the high school next door to Francis Middle, where I was then working. She was active in sports, and on most days she stayed after school for practice or games. She didn’t drive yet, so it was convenient for her to ride with me every morning and afternoon. The design worked for both of us. She got to school in the morning with time to spare, and I got to catch up on paperwork in the afternoons waiting for her. It was symbiotic. It seemed like a good plan.

“I don’t know, Wendell. Things are going all right here. And I was really looking for a principal position.”

He sounded surprised, and maybe disappointed. “I had understood you might be ready for a change. Why don’t you think about it, and then give me a call.”

In fact, I was ready for a change, a point that my wife reinforced when I told her about Wendell’s call. “Are you crazy?” she said. “Tell me you didn’t say that. You call him back now and tell him you’ll take the job!” The truth was that for a while I had felt that I was in a situation where I was stagnant, unappreciated, unchallenged, and so on. There was plenty of unproductive self-pity there. Working as an associate principal in a large and challenging school can do that.

“But what about Brenna,” I said. “How will she get to school? And it’s the same job that I have now. It’s not a step up.”
“We’ll figure out the ride to school. You like Wendell, and this is a chance for you to show your talents. This is a great opportunity. Call him back, and take the job!”

So began my transition from Meeks Middle School as associate principal to Orange Pines Middle School as principal, and that journey is the focus of this tale.

My Transition to Meeks Middle School as Associate Principal

In 2001 I moved as associate principal to Meeks Middle School, a new school. That job was a professional breath of fresh air and gave me the chance to use many of the skills I had learned and contacts I had made while working at the district office. The world seemed new and vibrant and full of possibilities. The consensus among most administrators and at least some teachers was that the district was a melting pot of research and innovation. Wendell, the principal, and I enjoyed an excellent rapport and established a friendship that endures today. Wendell was an experienced and strong leader, and I believe I helped him set the foundation for what remains today an outstanding school. During this time I completed course work for my doctorate in Educational Leadership and began my dissertation proposal, “The Opening and First Year of Meeks Middle School: A Case Study.” I conducted surveys and focus groups based on some innovative structures and programs we had implemented at Meeks, and I planned to analyze the perceptions of the parents, teachers, and students to those changes. Although the study did not come to fruition or proceed as planned, I did gain useful information about things we did right, and wrong.
Reform Efforts at Meeks Middle School

We proposed two significant changes to the infrastructure of the school that we thought reflected the innovative thinking of the time. We proposed a modified block schedule, in which classes met for longer periods three days a week. The idea was that because teachers had more time with their students, they could work with their interdisciplinary team to complete projects and integrate more hands-on learning. One element of the schedule was that teachers had to give up one planning period per week to make the schedule work. The teacher’s contract stipulated that any modification in the planning schedule would require approval by 75 percent of the faculty. Because we interviewed and hired with that understanding, the staff approved the variation and block schedule.

The second non-traditional element we introduced was the multi-grade grouping of seventh and eighth graders. The idea was that because students in middle school are at varied developmental levels anyway, teachers would vary activities to meet the academic needs of their students. Our mistake was that we did not offer training for either concept, and both ideas were ultimately unsuccessful. While some teachers liked the extended time, others did not. In the vote in the spring, the measure carried 59 percent of the faculty, a considerable majority, but not enough to approve the modified block for a second year. The mixed grade classes were never popular, either among teachers or students. We were devastated and felt our attempts at making a brave new innovative school had failed.

Despite our desolation, however, we had not failed completely. There were many successes the first year, and they evolved into a vibrant and successful school culture that I returned to inherit seven years later. Sergiovanni says that in order to create a highly
functioning community, the key stakeholders must identify and commit to “core values” (Sergiovanni, 1999, p. 72). I learned in that year that these core values must be developed, not mandated. People may agree to anything in the short term, especially if they want a job. But long-term, when they have to live it, they have to believe it. The ultimate goal, of course, is both student and adult learning. I came to understand that as educators we must not become so enamored of an idea or structure that we forget its purpose, which is to help students learn. Those were painful lessons that I vowed to remember if I ever became a principal.

**My Transition to Orange Pines Middle School as Principal**

At the end of the 2001-2002 school year the position of principal at Francis Middle came open. “Destiny is mine,” I thought. I knew my hard work would finally be recognized and rewarded. I applied, interviewed, and then went on vacation, confident that I had the job. I was stunned, therefore, when the assistant superintendent called me at the beach to tell me I did not get the job. They were transferring the principal of another local middle school.

“The job opening is now at Orange Pines Middle, Jim. You should apply for that.”

“Are you telling me that’s my job?” I asked incredulously.

“I’m just telling you that’s the principal job now open. If you’re interested, apply for it.”

I did apply, and that summer I was promoted to the position of principal of Orange Pines Middle School. Orange Pines is located in in a small town in central Florida and serves a diverse population of students from urban, inner city, and rural areas.
Orange Pines serves a vulnerable population of nearly 70% poverty, 45% minority, including migrants, and 40% students with various learning and emotional disabilities.

I served as principal of Orange Pines for seven years. The work was challenging, exhausting, rewarding, and exhilarating. My experiences were varied, intense and made me aware of the unique issues raised in working with vulnerable students of various ethnic groups. I also became aware of the challenges faced by students for whom English is a second language, many of whose parents were migrant workers. The school’s faculty was entrenched in traditional methodologies and heavily unionized. Many had been there for years, surviving waves of principals. Built in 1948, the school’s physical plant was deteriorating and needed drastic renovations. Ironically, the two schools where I had previously worked as associate principal, Francis and Meeks, had usurped Orange Pines Middle as the pride of the community.

While these were challenges enough, I was not prepared for the most poignant experiences I would face over the next seven years. I had two significant health challenges. In one, I underwent surgery for prostate cancer. In another, I nearly died from a lung infection. Two teachers died, and another lost her son. I hired an associate principal whom I was sure would be a star, but who struggled in her new role. Two teachers were having a extra-marital relationship that they dragged into the community and school. I pressured several staff members to resign. My band director was arrested for having a long-term sexual relationship with a student. Those events presented me with significant ethical dilemmas for which I was unprepared. They caused remarkable pain, reflection, and deep personal examination of my personal and professional moral beliefs. I don’t know of any theoretical design or strategic plan that prepares a school leader for

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those situations. In those dark moments I brought the range of my personal and professional background together to decide what I believed about myself and my work as a principal.

This demanding period also prepared me to negotiate broader efforts of reform within the school structure. We built a learning community that raised the achievement of students and improved the reputation of the school within the community. We established a partnership with a school in China, telecommunicated regularly with Chinese students, and sent 15 teachers and students to Nanjing to teach over two summers. We hosted two Chinese teachers in a Chinese-English summer camp. We hired outstanding teachers who helped catapult us to an A grade in the Florida system, a first for the school. We initiated a complete renovation of the school’s physical plant. Students were featured twice on the Nickelodeon television network and several times in local newspapers.

We worked aggressively in study groups to understand our unique student population, devise strategies to improve the culture of the school and raise student achievement. A large focus of my work at OPMS was to improve the school’s reputation in the community through systemic change in the school’s culture. Our hard work paid off, and we moved the school from a grade of “C” to “A” in Florida’s School Accountability system. After OPMS earned a grade of “A” at the end of Year Seven of my principalship, I returned to Meeks Middle School as principal, a position from which I recently retired.

Looking Ahead

Through his observations of Ed Bell, Wolcott (1973) noted the difference and often disconnect between academic training for the principalship and knowledge of the
daily operation of the school (p. 205). For that, there is little training, other than what is learned on the job. That maxim is changing as we lean more on data to shape instruction, but the lock-step press of school accountability makes the need for practical experience framed by academic research more urgent than ever. Wolcott hoped that his study would “help principals and would-be principals assess the limitations of the position in terms of individual personalities, capabilities, and aspirations” (p. 318). In this study I have used the mode of narrative inquiry through autoethnography to place key events of my experience as principal of a challenging school within contexts of current research. My hope is that others can learn from my experiences and initiate reflective analysis of their own formative events.

Wolcott compared work as a principal to the captain of an ocean liner making a hypothetical series of annual voyages. Once the cruise has begun, captain and crew are committed to stay the course. There is always the hope that lessons learned on that voyage can make each next trip better than the last. That is certainly true when the school is new, as was Meeks Middle when I was associate principal there. It is perhaps even more true when the school culture is established, as it was at Orange Pines Middle and then Meeks Middle when I returned as principal. My goal has always been to make the new cruise smoother and better than the last. That is the premise on which this narrative is based. My cruise began with my appointment as principal of Orange Pines Middle School in July 2001. Now, let the tale of that journey begin.

**Organization and Summary of Chapters Two and Three**

The remainder of this narrative is organized as follows. Chapter Two summarizes professional literature relevant to this research study. This includes thoughts regarding
reflection, moral imperatives, values, and ethics; descriptions of school leadership
theories, culminating in a description of constructivist leadership, the principles of which
will guide this study. Following that I describe concepts of schools as communities and
various ethical lenses through which to view them. I will then review different processes
principals can utilize to negotiate complex ethical dilemmas within the school community.
This discussion will include ideas about power, authority, and conflict. I conclude with a
synopsis of these concepts as they apply to my study.

In Chapter Three I summarize thoughts of key scholars in the field of qualitative
inquiry in order to place my particular constructivist approach to autoethnographic
narrative inquiry within the broader philosophical background of qualitative research.
My discussion moves from the philosophical precepts on which qualitative inquiry is
based to the more specific applications of constructivism through narrative inquiry and
autoethnography. I conclude with an account of the field texts I used as data sources and
describe how I analyzed those texts and then recreated the experiences through reflective
vignettes in an attempt to understand the evolution and application of my moral purpose
as a school principal.

Organization of Chapters Four through Eight

In Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven I describe critical events and ethical
dilemmas I faced in the seven years I served as principal of Orange Pines Middle School.
I begin Chapter Four by describing the diverse communities that comprised the feeder
pattern of the school. This includes physical description of the landscapes, as well as the
typical residents of the communities. The next three Chapters proceed chronologically as
I describe my perceptions of three chronological phases in the development of my
persona as a morally directed school leader. Chapter Five comprises Phase One and describes formative events that occurred during Years One and Two. Chapter Six comprises Phase Two and describes key events during Years Three, Four, and Five. Chapter Seven comprises Phase Three and describes significant events during Years Six and Seven. Within each Chapter I discuss school wide reform efforts conducted by working with groups of teachers. I devote a section to each experience, arranged more or less chronologically, because experiences often overlap. Each section includes one or more vignettes capturing the three-dimensional qualities of the experiences, along with analytic reflection and discussion of the events within the larger constructs of comments from other scholars about the development of leadership, school culture, and the various ethical frameworks of critique, justice, care, community, and profession. As I recount and analyze these critical events, I recall previous experiences and reflect on how they helped craft my responses to that dilemma. My goal throughout is to analyze and describe how these experiences shaped and directed my moral approach to the principalship as I negotiated other events within the culture of the school community.

In Chapter Eight I review my lessons learned and summarize my reflections regarding my journey. Each vignette is my interpretation of events. As I wrote I endeavored to remember Ellis’s guiding questions: Did I learn anything new about myself? Did I learn more about my work as a morally directed school leader? Will my story help other principals cope with or better understand their ethics and values? In sum, my goal has been to provide personal reflections and insights that may improve my profession. I hope to make a difference.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself. Whenever the last trumpet shall sound, I will present myself before the sovereign judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim, thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I.

Rousseau, *Confessions*

**Professional Literature Review Process**

A review of professional literature has given me the language and tools to examine and make meaning of my professional experiences. The thoughts of scholars have helped me shape and verbalize my focus. While I seek to steer onto my own path, it is helpful to know I am walking on a road paved by others.

Onwuegbuzie, et al. (2010) describe the review of professional literature as “an interpretation of a selection of published and/or unpublished documents available from various sources on a specific topic that optimally involves summarization, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis” (cited in Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012, p. 2). Cole and Knowles see literature “as that which more generally informs our perspectives and understanding of the contexts surrounding our work” (2001, p. 64). They note, “The role of previously published scholarship has two main functions: to guide and to inform the
focus of the work, and to provide support and inspiration for processes used” (2001, p. 64). Although I will include a specific literature review Chapter, I will, as Connelly and Clandinin, Cole and Knowles, and other researchers suggest, “weave the literature throughout the dissertation from beginning to end in an attempt to create a seamless link between the theory and the practice embodied in the inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 41).

There is a myriad of resources available to describe the concepts that drive my study. These include constructivist and other leadership theories, ideas about the moral imperatives of school leaders, ethical frameworks that principals can use to guide their leadership practice, and thoughts about various processes to navigate the various microcosms within the school community. Fullan (2002) describes five essential components that characterize effective school leaders: moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to improve relationships, knowledge creation, and coherence making or connecting new knowledge with existing information (p. 17). Sergiovanni (2009) presents eight leadership competencies effective school principals must master. They are the management of attention, trust, meaning, self, paradox, effectiveness, follow-up and responsibility (Sergiovanni, 2009). Furman presents an “ethic of community” (2003) as a framework for viewing specific aspects of ethical school leadership practice. Sergiovanni proposes an overarching framework of moral school leadership that brings together “head, heart, and hand in practice” (2009, p. 3). I will refer to these in the context of my discussion below. Meanwhile, this conceptual range presents both challenge and opportunity to me as an individual principal seeking to
understand my own moral leadership practice grounded in real-life rather than theoretical ethical dilemmas.

Sergiovanni (2009) offers some clarity to this theoretical miasma. He advises the researcher to consider such a plethora of leadership choices as a concept boutique on one hand and a metaphor repository on the other. The idea is to visit the boutique, trying on one idea after another, seeking a fit here or there, and to visit the repository, seeking to create new understandings of situations one faces and new alternatives to one’s practice. As boutique and repository, the role of knowledge about schooling changes from being something that principals apply uniformly to being something useful that informs the decisions they make as they practice. This is the nature of reflective practice (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 3). Begley notes, “As appealing and practical as theories, models, frameworks and procedural guides may be, they must be employed as initial organizers, not as prescriptions or recipes” (Begley, 2006, p. 582). Like Jacob struggling all night with the angel (Genesis 32:23-31), I have pondered the best way to synthesize and organize these thoughts. This is the organizational framework of this literature review.

I begin with thoughts regarding reflection, moral imperatives, values, and ethics, which lie at the heart of this study. I then move to descriptions of the development of leadership theories, culminating in a description of constructivist leadership, the principles of which will guide this study. Following that I describe concepts of schools as communities and various ethical lenses through which to view them. I then review different processes that principals can utilize to negotiate complex ethical dilemmas.
within the school community. This discussion includes research about power, authority, and conflict. I conclude with a synopsis of these concepts as they apply to my study.

**Moral Imperative of School Leadership**

Fullan describes moral purpose as “social responsibility to others and the environment. School leaders with moral purpose seek to make a difference in the lives of students” (Fullan, 2002, p. 17). He charges, “Overcoming the challenge to build cultures on trusting relationships is the moral imperative of school leadership” (Fullan, 2003, p. 45). He says, “Within the organization, how leaders treat all others is also a component of moral purpose” (Fullan, 2003b, p. 452, cited in Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 365). Bryk and Schneider (2003) describe the “moral imperative to take on the difficult work of school improvement” (2003, p. 43). Sergiovanni describes leadership as a “moral craft” (2009, p. 3). “When leadership is morally based, its effect on spirit, commitment, and results is not only strong but obligatory, allowing the school to function with commitment and determination” (Sergiovanni, 2006, p. 138).

For Starratt, the moral obligation for the school is to serve society. He encourages principals to invest their energies “in a collective activity with others that serves some valued purpose beyond self-interest. That common good invests the actions of the individual with higher value, with higher moral quality” (1994, p. 38). Shapiro and Stefkovich conclude, “In educational leadership, we believe that if there is a moral imperative for the profession, it is to serve the best interests of the student. Consequently, this ideal must lie at the heart of any professional paradigm for educational leaders” (2011, p. 25).
Sergiovanni presents the concept of “servant leadership,” a term he borrows from Greenleaf (1977, cited in Sergiovanni, 2009). The idea is based on Jesus’ admonition, “But whoever would become great among you shall be your minister and whoever would be first among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 20:25-27, NIV). Sergiovanni explains, “Servant leadership describes well what it means to be a principal. Principals are responsible for ‘ministering’ to the needs of the schools they serve.” He says they do this by helping parents, students, and teachers, by encouraging teachers to be leaders, and by highlighting and protecting the values of the school.

The principal as minister is one who is devoted to a cause, mission, or set of ideas and accepts the duty and obligation to serve this cause. When moral authority drives leadership practice, the principal is at the same time a leader of leaders, follower of ideas, minister of values, and servant to the followership (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 22).

For Furman, moral purpose is that which “fires the imagination and the heart, that proceeds from a sense of duty and conscience, that inspires, that lets us know we are doing something really important, something that really matters for children!” (Furman, 2003, p. 2). These ideas of moral imperative and moral purpose are consistent among the research about leadership I will discuss below and will weave throughout this study.

**Self Reflection**

Another concept key to this study is the idea of deep personal reflection. The importance of reflection runs consistently through studies of effective school leadership (Starratt, 1994; Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Anderson & Jones, 2000; Blasé & Blasé, 2002; Lambert, 2002; Begley, 2006; Cosner, 2009; Flessas, 2009; Shields, 2010; Starratt,
Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Much of this work is based on the thinking of Schon, who studied the process of reflection in the learning systems of various professionals, including physicians, engineers, and educators (Schon, 1983). Schon observed, “Professional knowledge is mismatched to the changing character of practice – the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice” (1983, p. 14). Schon noted that to remedy that problem, professional practitioners utilize what he identifies as the process of reflection-in-action, “on-the-spot intuitive learning which captures the principal making judgments in the context of his or her work” (Schon, 1984; cited in Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 79). Sergiovanni explains, “Professionals rely heavily on informed intuition as they create knowledge in use. When principals use informed intuition, they are engaging in reflective practice. Knowing is in the action itself” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 9).

Schon (1983) explains how professionals go about this reflective process. They may ask themselves, for example, ‘what features do I notice when I recognize this thing? What are the criteria by which I make this judgment? What procedures am I enacting when I perform this skill? How am I framing the problem that I’m trying to solve?’ Usually, reflection on knowing-in-action goes together with reflection of the stuff at hand. There is some puzzling, or troubling or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal. As he tries to make sense of it, he also reflects on the understandings that have been implicit in his action, understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, re-structures, and embodies in further action. It is this entire process of reflection-in-action which is
central to the ‘art’ by which practitioners sometimes deal with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts” (Schon, 1983, p. 50, as cited in Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 79).

Sergiovanni describes the management of self as one of eight essential competencies for effective school leadership. Management of self involves self-knowledge of the principal and the ability to be introspective and reflective. It also involves insight into others and the understanding of how things work (Sergiovanni, 2009). Begley (2006) presents the notion of what he calls authentic leadership as “a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration” (p. 570). He proposes authentic leadership as “the outcome of self-knowledge” (Begley, 2006, p. 571). These ideas about personal reflection and reflection-in-action are fundamental to the techniques of narrative inquiry and autoethnography, which are central to my study. They are also woven throughout modern ideas of school leadership, which I describe below.

**Theories of Leadership Practice**

Over the past four decades theorists have discussed several key theories of school leadership. These include transactional leadership, transformational leadership, transformative leadership, distributed leadership, and constructive leadership. Each of these ideas is important to my study, and I describe them below.

**Transactional and Transformational Leadership**

Modern theories of leadership have been shaped by a theory of leadership proposed by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 (Bass, 1998; Sergiovanni, 2009). Burns defines leadership as “the reciprocal process of mobilizing various resources in order to
realize goals held by both leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978, p. 425). Burns identifies two forms of leadership, transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership focuses on more basic, extrinsic wants. Bass explains, “Leadership can be understood as a transaction or exchange of material, social, and psychological benefits. In a fair and profitable exchange, the benefits to both the leader and follower exceed their costs (2008, p. 398).

Transformational leadership focuses more on what Burns calls “end values” such as justice and equality. He writes, “Transforming leaders ‘raise’ their followers up through levels of morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 426). Burns believes that transforming leaders are united in the pursuit of “‘higher goals,’ the realization of which is tested by the achievement of significant change that represents the collective or pooled interests of leaders and followers” (Burns, 1978, p. 425). He proposes that leadership becomes “moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and has a transforming effect on both” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). He notes that the leader must take the initiative in making these connections. In transformational leadership, “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, 20). This leadership form is “dynamic,” in that followers become active themselves and create what Burns calls “new cadres of leaders” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Burns proposes that transactional leaders lead by using rewards and punishments, while transformational leaders lead by inspiring those around them to become leaders (Sontag, Jenkins, & White, 2010).

Bass identifies four factors that characterize transformational leaders: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence
Individual consideration is “giving personal attention to members who seem neglected” (Bass, 1990, p. 218). Through intellectual stimulation, the leader enables “followers to think of old problems in new ways” (Bass, 1990, p. 218). Through inspirational motivation the leader inspires high expectations. The leader shows idealized influence by modeling exemplary behavior and achievements (Bass, 1990).

Leithwood built on the work of Burns and Bass to develop the transformational model of school leadership (Marzano, et al., 2005). Transformational leadership, according to Leithwood and Jantzi, “fundamentally aims to foster capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals on the part of the leaders’ colleagues. Increased capacity and commitment are assumed to result in extra effort and greater commitment” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999, p. 453, as cited in Marzano, et al., p. 16).

Transactional and transformational are leadership styles through which principals express themselves. Researchers agree that the complex job of the principalship requires both modes of leadership (May & Supovitz, 2010; Marzano, et al., 2005; Leithwood, et al., 2007; Sergiovanni, 2009). Furman draws a parallel to these two modes in drawing a distinction between what she calls instrumental purposes and moral purposes. She gives as example of instrumental purposes the example of the need for principals to show increased student test scores. These strategies, however, must be driven by a moral purpose. This focus is illustrated in the results of research conducted by Harris and Hadfield (2001). They studied the implications effective leadership in twelve schools whose students demonstrated significant increases in achievement. They found, “The principals were both transactional – ensuring that systems were maintained and
developed, targets were formulated and met and that their schools ran smoothly – and
transformative – building on esteem, competence, autonomy, and achievement: raising
‘the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the led’
(Sergiovanni 1990)” (Harris & Hadfield, 2001, p. 47). These concepts of transactional
and transformational leadership driven by a moral focus are embedded within the
concepts of leadership I discuss below.

**Distributed Leadership**

The concept of distributed leadership has emerged over the past decade as a
conceptual framework through which to study leadership practice and a way to describe
an approach to leadership (Spillane, et al., 2004). It is frequently used as a synonym for
democratic leadership, shared leadership, and collaborative leadership (Spillane &
Diamond, 2007). Gronn pioneered a rethinking of leadership in examining the traditional
leadership roles of “crude dualisms (of) leader-follower” (Gronn, 2000, p. 319). He
noted the naïve belief that a single individual has the skill and charisma to lead an
organization. He described a more realistic view of leadership as “a status ascribed to
one individual, an aggregate of separate individuals, sets of small numbers of individuals
acting in concert or larger plural-member organizational units” (Gronn, 2002, p. 428).
Spillane calls this the “heroics of leadership genre” and argues that this approach does not
effectively capture the dynamics of school leadership. Rather, school leadership is best
understood when viewed in the context of the school’s social and situational venues
(Spillane, et al., 2001). The key precept is that human activity is distributed in an
“interactive web of actors, artifacts, and situations” (Spillane, et al., 2001, p. 23). Various
key players within the school setting collaboratively make decisions for the benefit of the
whole school. Leadership practice involves the interaction of leaders with their “social and material situations” (Spillane, et al., 2001, p. 27). In this framework “leadership is not simply a function of what a school principal, or indeed any other individual or group of leaders, knows and does. Rather, it is the activities engaged in by leaders, in interaction with others in particular contexts around specific tasks” (Spillane, et al., 2004, p. 5).

Smylie, et al. (2007) describe distributed leadership as “the sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles throughout the school organization (p. 471). Thus a key concept for describing distributed leadership is that leadership is “stretched over” or distributed across the various “social and situational contexts of the school” (Spillane, et al., 2004, p. 5). An important aspect of distributed leadership views the study of leadership as transformational, seeing leadership as the willingness and ability to empower others (Spillane, 2001). Consistent with the concept of reflective practice, a distributed model can show leaders how to think and act to change instruction, can help them identify dimensions of their leadership practice, and can help them reflect on and consider ways to change their practices and better lead stakeholders to school improvement (Spillane, et al., 2001).

Lambert studied 15 schools that created a culture of high leadership capacity and increased student performance (Lambert, 2005). Each school demonstrated a “system of shared governance and distributed leadership (that) supported a dynamic leadership culture built around a vision-driven, student-focused conceptual framework for school improvement” (Lambert, 2005, p. 63). Lambert noted that in each school the principal played a key role in building shared leadership and a professional culture. She noted one
principal’s insightful comment: “I’m trying to lead for whenever I may not be here any longer – by building both the capacity of systems through school design choices and people’s capacity for leadership” (Lambert, 2005, p. 63). Lambert notes that while principals varied in their personalities and management strengths and weaknesses, all shared important characteristics that contributed to their schools’ evolving pattern of leadership. These included “understanding of self and clarity of values; a strong belief in equity and the democratic process; strategic thought about the evolution of school improvement; a vulnerable persona; knowledge of the work of teaching and learning; and the ability to develop capacity in colleagues and the organization” (Lambert, 2005, p. 64). I will expand these themes of self-reflection, clarity of values, and personal vulnerability in my discussion below.

**Transformative Leadership**

Shields (2010) sharpens the moral impetus of school leadership in proposing the concept of “transformative leadership.” She explains that transformative leadership “recognizes the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understanding to action—action to redress wrongs and to ensure that all members of the organization are provided with as level a playing field as possible—not only with respect to access but also with regard to academic, social, and civic outcomes” (Shields, 2010, p. 572). Her focus is on the achievement of social justice for the school’s stakeholders, a concept I discuss further in this Chapter and again in Chapter 3. She presents the idea as useful for guiding “the practice of educational leaders who want to effect both educational and broader social change” (Shields, 2010, p. 358).
Constructivist Leadership

The concept of constructivist leadership is central to my study. Lambert (2002) describes constructivist leadership as “the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a shared purpose of schooling” (p. 36). She argues that the concept of leadership transcends the individual leader. Consistent with the ideas of distributed leadership, anyone may emerge as a leader. She distinguishes her ideas of constructivist leadership from transformational leadership. While she agrees the concepts are similar, “transformational leadership situates responsibility for the growth of others in the designated leader. Constructivist leadership separates leadership from leader and situates it in the patterns of relationships among participants. Reciprocity requires that the formal leader is growing and changing in concert with others” (Lambert, 2002, p. 40).

Lambert says constructivist learning theory can be distinguished from other theories by the following principles:

Knowledge and beliefs are formed within the learner. Learners bring experience and understanding. They do not encounter new information out of context but rather apply what they know to assimilating this information, or they accommodate or reframe what they know to match new understandings they have gained.

Learners personally imbue experiences with meaning. The values and beliefs they have already formed help learners interpret and assign meaning.

Culture, race, and economic status affect learning individually and collectively.
Learning is a social activity that is enhanced by shared inquiry. Constructivism advances the idea that learning is a social endeavor requiring engagement with others.

Reflection and metacognition are essential aspects of constructing knowledge and meaning. Learners clarify their understandings when they are able to reflect on their learning and analyze the way they construct knowledge and meaning. (Lambert, 2002, pp. 26-27).

She argues that the concept of constructivism has redefined leadership by suggesting that leadership is “embedded in the patterns of relationships.” She calls these relationships “reciprocal processes (which) enable participants in a community to construct meaning and knowledge together” (Lambert, 2002, p. 42). She notes these reciprocal processes include listening, questioning, reflecting, and facilitating. When these activities “are framed within a constructivist learning design, they are understood as those that

- Evoke potential in a trusting environment
- Inquire into practice, thereby reconstructing old assumptions and myths
- Focus on the construction of meaning
- Frame actions that embody new behaviors and purposeful intentions


These ideas of constructivist leadership are consistent with other ideas of school leadership discussed below. Blase and Blasé make connections between “facilitative, democratic leadership and the notions of caring, ethical, moral, constructivist leadership” (2001, p. 150). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) advise school leaders to be reflective,
process oriented, and constructivist and to reflect on experiences and through them derive meaning from what they have learned. These ideas are also consistent with the approach of narrative inquiry and autoethnography applied in my study. Through this analytic process I examine my actions to create new understandings and meanings. I also consider the extent to which I applied constructivist concepts as I interacted with individuals and groups during emotionally charged interactions.

**School as Community**

The image of a school as a community is another concept consistent across research about reflective school leadership. Sergiovanni observes that schools have been traditionally considered formal organizations. He argues that if one used the metaphor of a school as community “a new management and leadership would need to be invented” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. xiv). The mindset of a school as an organization that learns how to improve began in 1990 with the publication of Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline*. Senge described a learning organization as one in which workers are committed to expanding their capacity and productivity by continually learning how to learn together (Senge, 1990). For Senge, such learning engenders systemic and systematic change in which people learn to change their reality to achieve their collective vision. These ideas provide a structure for all other concepts of schools as communities.

**Professional Learning Communities**

Since the publication of *The Fifth Discipline*, many writers and researchers have advocated for schools to become “learning organizations” that can develop innovative structures and processes in order to develop the professional capacity to learn in, and respond quickly and flexibly to, their unpredictable and changing environments” (Giles &
Hargreaves, 2006, p.127). An idea prominent among school reform is the concept of a school as a professional learning community. The idea is that through this new systemic thinking, teachers and administrators will see how the relationships and artifacts within the school are related symbiotically and contribute to the collective learning of the institution. In this model positive change occurs over time as the institution builds professional capacity.

Dufour and colleagues have pioneered much work in the area of schools as learning communities. They describe a school learning community as based on the concepts of a focus on learning, collaborative teams, collective inquiry, action orientation, and continuous improvement (Dufour, et al., 2006, p. 5). In their words. educators “make collective commitments clarifying what each member will do to create such an organization, and they use results-oriented goals to mark their progress” (Dufour, et al., 2006, p. 3). These processes are consistent with the constructivist thinking of Lambert, who notes, “To understand meaning-making as the primary energy source of a community is critical to the understanding of constructivist leadership, which relies on communities in motion” (2002, p. 50).

**School Culture**

Culture is a term often used to describe a school community. In their meta-analysis of studies of effective school practices, Marzano, et al. list culture as one of 21 “responsibilities of the school leader” that connect strongly to student achievement. They define culture as “the extent to which the principal fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation” (Marzano, et al., p. 42). They note, “An effective culture is the primary tool with which the school leader fosters change” (Marzano, et al., 2005, p.
48). Blasé and Blasé (1998; 2001; 2002; 2003) have written extensively about school community and culture in their discussions about conflicts between principals and staff members, concepts I discuss later in this study.

**Relationships**

Another concept related to the discussion of community and culture is that of relationships within the school community. Begley observes that “authentic” leaders must demonstrate “sensitivity to the orientations of others” (Begley, 2006, p. 571). Foster notes, “Leadership is founded on the fact of moral relationships; it is intended to elevate people to new levels of morality” (Foster, 1983, p. 61).

For Sergiovanni, “Communities are organized around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 110). He explains, “The web of relationships that stand out in communities . . . result in a quality of connectedness that has moral overtones. Because of those overtones, members feel a special sense of obligation to look out for each other” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 113).

Marzano, et al., cite the building of relationships as another connection between school leadership and student achievement. Relationships describe “the extent to which the principal demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff” (Marzano, et al., 2005, p. 43). They say specific behaviors of the principal include being informed about significant personal issues within the lives of staff members; being aware of their personal needs; and maintaining personal relationships with staff” (Marzano, et al., 2005, p. 59).

Starratt posits, “Relationships of community constitute not only necessary interdependencies but an intrinsic good. Relationships – even in conflict and struggle –
define the context of human moral striving, the effort to agree on what constitutes our common good” (1994, p. 37). Blasé and Blasé have analyzed relationship conflicts and struggles in great detail in their discussions of school politics and micropolitics. While my discussion does not focus specifically on issues of politics, the work of Blasé and Blasé does help illuminate the dynamics of relationships, especially those in conflict. I will discuss their work in more detail later in this discussion and show how relationships in conflict can affect the greater school community.

Starratt reinforces the idea that all relationships are centered within the ethic of care. He continues,

Responsibility emphasizes our positive obligations to care for each other. A sense of responsibility urges us to think of others, to help others in need, to honor a contract with another person, to be loyal and trustworthy. Whereas the virtue of respect counsels us not to engage in racial stereotyping, the virtue of responsibility counsels us to build community with all people. Not only am I obliged not to hurt someone; I am obliged to care for them (Starratt, 1994, p. 6).

Foster concludes, “Leadership, in the final analysis, is the ability of humans to relate deeply to each other in the search for a more perfect union” (Foster, 1983, p. 61). Fullan says simply, “If relationships improve, schools get better. If relationships remain the same or get worse, ground is lost” (Fullan, 2002, p. 18). My lessons learned from ways I interacted with others, individually and collectively, through my relationships with staff, are the core of my study.
Trust

Another key theme running through these concepts of reflective, transformative and community-oriented leadership is the element of trust. Sergiovanni (2009) notes that in a healthy school community, trust is essential. Another of his eight competencies of effective school leadership is “the management of trust” (Sergiovanni, 2009), which he describes as the ability to be seen as credible and honest. He draws a strong correlation between the amount of “relational trust” in a school and student and staff performance (Sergiovanni, 2006, p. 135). The principal must work to create a climate of trust.

Smylie, et al. (2007), believe that trust lays the basis for social activity. Individuals who trust each other exert less defensive energy and are more focused on their work. They note that an environment of trust is less likely to contain bureaucratic barriers that could impede cooperation (Smylie, et al., 2007).

Trust is seen as a measure of school capacity or social resource. Cosner (2009) studied the work of eleven high school principals regarded by their colleagues for their expertise in building reform capacity through trust. The principals identified trust as a central feature in their leadership reform efforts and especially important in any collaborative effort. Cosner also noted that trust is an important factor in conflict resolution and contributes to a sense of “psychological safety,” concepts that I will discuss below. Trust has been linked to healthy and open school climates, justice, and improved student achievement (Cosner, 2009). In short, Cosner notes, “Research on school reform and organizational change points to the importance of collegial trust as a social resource and dimension of school capacity” (Cosner, 2009, p. 257).
Lambert identifies trust as an element essential to constructivist leadership. Bryk and Schneider (2003) argue, “Social trust among teachers, parents, and school leaders is a key resource for reform. Talking honestly with colleagues about what’s working and what’s not means exposing your own ignorance and making yourself vulnerable. Without trust, genuine conversations remain unlikely” (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 43). They acknowledge the important role principals play in developing and sustaining relational trust within the school community. “Principals establish both respect and personal regard when they acknowledge the vulnerabilities of others, actively listen to their concerns, and eschew arbitrary actions” (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 43).

Blasé and Blasé note,

Without trust, people are likely to close up, keep to themselves, even close ranks in cliques or special interest groups. Without trust, issues are seldom discussed and never resolved. Without trust, a school cannot improve and grow into the rich, nurturing micro-society needed by children and adults alike” (2001, p. 22).

Trust is clearly at the bedrock of establishing productive relationships and is an important element within the ideas I discuss below.

**Ethics and Values**

Undergirding all discussion of transformational, democratic, reflective, and constructive leadership practice is the importance of ethics and values, both to individuals as followers and leaders and to the greater school community. These concepts are often used interchangeably. There is a strong sense across the literature that leadership should maintain a high ethical focus grounded in the democratic values within a community, working for both the individual and public good (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Hoffman &
Burrello, 2004; Shields, 2010; Sontag, Jenkins, & White, 2010). Burns argues that transformational leadership is grounded in a moral base. He says leaders must choose “ethics over effectiveness and altruism over self-interest” (Sontag, Jenkins, & White, 2010, p. 240).

Roberts (1994) provides a succinct description of values that captures values thinking across the research:

Values are deeply held views of what we find worthwhile. They come from many different sources: parents, religion, schools, peers, people we admire, and culture. As with all mental models, there’s a distinction between our ‘espoused’ values – which we profess to believe in – and our ‘values in action,’ which actually guide our behavior. These latter values are coded into our brains at such a fundamental level that we can’t easily see them. We rarely bring them to the surface or question them. That’s why they create dissonance for us (in Senge, et al., 1994, p. 209).

She includes a “values list” of 80 proposed professional and personal values, ranging from achievement, adventure, and community to truth, wealth, and wisdom. Roberts acknowledges her list of values is just a start and invites the reader to add his or her own. The individual must decide which are most important, what they mean, what his or her life would mean if lived in accordance to them, and what life would mean without them (Senge, et al., 1994).

DuFour, et al., define values as “the specific attitudes, behaviors, and commitments that must be demonstrated in order to advance the organization’s vision” (p. 67). Begley argues, “The study of ethics should be as much about the life-long personal
struggle to be ethical” (2006, p. 571). He notes that a key agenda for both researchers and practitioners should be “to promote reflection on personally held values by individuals” (2006, p. 571). He believes it essential that school leaders understand “how values reflect underlying human motivations and shape attitudes. Leaders should know their own values and ethical predispositions” (Begley, 2006, p. 575). He sees ethics as “highly relevant to school leadership as rubrics, benchmarks, socially justified standards of practice, and templates for moral action” (Begley, 2006, p. 575). He concludes, “There is no reliable catalog of correct values that school leaders can adopt as some sort of silver bullet solution to the dilemmas of administration. School leadership situations are too context-bound to permit this kind of quick fix” (Begley, 2006, p. 584).

Starratt observes, “Even in the most diverse of communities, one can find agreement on basic ethical values. There may be differences in determining what specific behaviors constitute absolute violations of those values, or to what extent one is obliged in every case by those values, but they can agree on the value itself” (Starratt, 1994, p. 8). He notes, “Ethical persons are autonomous, independent agents who act out of an intuition of what is right or appropriate in a given situation” (1994, p. 31). He continues, “the truly ethical person acts as an autonomous agent, acts within the supports and constraints of relationships, and acts in ways that transcend immediate self-interest. In other words, the ethical person has developed relatively mature qualities of autonomy, connectedness and transcendence” (Starratt, 1994, p. 31). In their study of the connection between principals and effective schools, Harris and Hadfield (2001) noted that values, rather than a particular leadership practice, drove their work. Values drive constructive
school reform and are the basis for ethical frameworks and perspectives, which I discuss in the following sections.

**Ethical Frameworks**

Starratt proposes a multidimensional framework that combines several ethical themes to provide “a richer response to the complex ethical challenges facing contemporary society” (Starratt, 1994, p. 45). He identifies these comprehensive themes as the ethics of critique, justice, and caring (Starratt, 1994). He argues that this framework describes “the irreducible assumptions and myths about what is valuable in human life” (Starratt, 1994, p. 46). These are important concepts, which other scholars have extended. They are also prominent reference points for my study. I summarize each below.

**Ethic of critique**

The ethic of critique deals with questions of social justice and human dignity. Examples include sexist, class, and racial biases and the abuses of power. The argument is that no social structure is neutral. The goal of the ethic of critique is to “enable those affected by social arrangements to have a voice in evaluating the consequences and in altering them in the interest of the common good and of fuller participation and justice for individuals” (Starratt, 1994, p. 47). He notes that each concept is embedded within the other two. Together they form a comprehensive lens through which to view ethics, personal and professional, individual and communal.

**Ethic of justice**

The ethic of justice implies more specific responses to unethical practices identified through the lens of critique. The ethic of justice addresses both the needs of
the individual and the needs of the community. Thus, it “demands that the claims of the institution serve both the common good and the rights of the individual in the school” (Starratt, 1994, p. 51).

**Ethic of care**

Starratt (1994) notes that claims of injustice are often in conflict. What is right for one might be wrong for another. He argues, therefore, “In order for an ethic of justice to serve its more generous purpose, it must be fulfilled in an ethic of love” (Starratt, 1994, p. 52). This ethic focuses on relationships from a personal rather than legalistic regard. This view recognizes the “intrinsic dignity and worth” of each individual and is “grounded in the belief that the integrity of human relationships should be held sacred” (Starratt, 1994, p. 52).

**Ethic of the profession**

Shapiro and Stefkovich extend the thinking of Starratt to include what they call the ethic of the profession. They explain,

> The ethic of the profession would ask questions related to justice, critique, and care posed by the other ethical paradigms but would go beyond these questions to inquire: What would the profession expect me to do? What does the community expect me to do? And what should I do based on the best interests of the students, who may be diverse in their composition and their needs?”(Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 27).

They note that most states have professional codes of ethics for both teachers and administrators. These often subsume the ethics of critique, justice, and care, and may mandate legalistic approaches to specific issues. Beyond those, they argue it is important
for educators to understand our own personal and professional ethics. They advise educators to be reflective, process oriented, and constructivist — to reflect on experiences and through them derive meaning from what we have learned.

**Ethic of community**

Furman argues for a leadership framework that she calls the ethic of community (Furman, 2003; Furman, 2004). She defines the concept as “the moral responsibility to engage in communal processes as educators pursue the moral purposes of their work and address the ongoing challenges of daily life and work in schools” (Furman 2004, p. 215). Furman builds on the thinking of Starratt and Shapiro and Stefkovich, explaining that much of the conversation about ethics of critique, justice, care, and the profession can be subsumed under the concept of ethic of community (Furman, 2004). She argues, “The ethic of community is a needed complement to the other ethical frames typically used in education” (Furman, 2005, p. 215). The concept focuses on the communal over the individual. She believes the study of leadership should focus on the values and ethics of the school leaders themselves (Furman, 2005) and cites Sergiovani in calling for ‘leadership based on “moral authority” that can be the engine for significant school reform, and make the school a catalyst in social reform. (Sergiovanni, 1992). Under this concept, all leaders within the school adopt the goals of the school as moral imperatives, striving for the better good of all stakeholders.

Furman concludes,

The ethic of community captures the centrality of this need for communal processes in a way that the ethics of justice, critique, care, and the profession do not. Thus, the ethic of community is a missing link in thinking about the
relationships among ethics, leadership practice, and the moral purpose of schooling” (Furman, 2004, p. 230).

Reflective Framework

I use these five ethical dimensions to clarify my reflective analyses of significant ethical dilemmas that helped me define my approach to ethical leadership. Although Furman argues that the ethic of community and Shapiro and Stefkovich argue the ethic of the profession each subsumes all other ethical frameworks, I consider each as a separate construct with its unique characteristics. I use the frameworks as an overarching model to analyze ethical dilemmas I recreate through descriptive and reflective vignettes. I have crafted the following graphic in Figure 1 to represent this framework:

![Ethical Frameworks](image)

**Figure 1** Ethical Frameworks

Dilemmas

Educational leaders, and especially principals, are presented regularly, sometimes daily, with ethical dilemmas that are at the least uncomfortable or worse and may be ethically ambiguous. “Foster (1986) expressed the seriousness and importance of ethics in educational administration when he wrote, ‘Each administrative decision carries with it
a restructuring of human life: that is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas’ (p. 33)” (cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 1).

Starratt notes that claims of injustice are often in conflict. Shapiro and Stefkovich observe, “Dilemmas in educational institutions can be complicated and may naturally lead to the use of two or more paradigms to solve problems. Today, with the complexity of situations and cultures, it seems more important than ever for educational leaders to think more broadly and go beyond “self” in an attempt to understand others (2011, p. 8).

Sergiovanni describes the “very messy work context” in which a principal makes judgments regarding “complex problems that exist in turbulent environments under indeterminate conditions” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 79). Harris and Hadfield (2001) use the same term to describe leadership as “a complex, messy, and, at times, wholly non-rational activity that is value laden and value driven” (p. 55). Anderson and Jones (2000) describe the job of school administrator as “fraught with unique epistemological, methodological, political, and ethical dilemmas” (p. 431). Shapiro and Stefkovich agree, noting, “Dilemmas in educational institutions can be complicated. Today, with the complexity of situations and cultures, it seems more important than ever for educational leaders to think more broadly and go beyond ‘self’ in an attempt to understand others” (2011, p. 8). More specifically, Malen notes that school leaders often face “complex, competing demands, chronic resource shortages, unclear technologies, uncertain supports and value-laden issues” (1994, p. 148).

Some of the most serious dilemmas come when the principal must decide whether a staff member should lose his or her job. Harris and Hadfield clearly present the
problem when they ask, “What does the principal do with a staff member whose poor performance or actions is badly affecting the education of students, and whose performance isn’t improving regardless of the interventions? This presents a dilemma within the moral framework of their leadership” (Harris & Hadfield, 2001, p. 50). They point out the conflict this creates between the principal’s espoused commitment of care to everyone in the learning community and his ethics of justice and the profession. Lambert charges that in order to build the leadership capacity within the school culture to effectively mediate such dilemmas, the principal must learn continually, think strategically, and be value and vision driven (Lambert, 2005). He must use his formal authority to implement communal decisions, to mediate external pressures, and work with less competent staff (Lambert, 2005).

This last duty, working with incompetent staff, often presents principals with the most challenging and emotionally charged ethical dilemmas. I analyze several ethical dilemmas in which employees ultimately left their positions. As I noted earlier, relationships in conflict can be better understood through the perspectives of school politics, aspects of which I describe below.

**Relationships and Politics in Schools**

Blasé and Blasé (2002), Flessas (2009) Malen (1994) and others have written extensively about conflicts within individual relationships between school leaders and followers. As discussed above, these interactions often present the school leader with complex ethical dilemmas that involve the application of power and authority. These critical interactions often occur through personal conferences held between the staff member and school leader. Conferences in which leaders are critical and negative can
evoke severe emotional, psychological, and physical consequences with the staff member. I discuss these concepts and processes below.

Marzano, et al. address similar concepts in their description of Situational Awareness as one of 21 responsibilities that connect to actions of school leaders to student achievement. They explain Situational Awareness as “the extent to which the principal is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems” (Marzano, et al., 2005, p. 43). Behaviors and characteristics of the situationally aware principal include accurately predicting what could go wrong from day to day; being aware of informal groups and relationships among staff; and being aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord (Marzano, et al., 2005, p. 60).

The overarching concepts of power, authority, conflict, interventions, and the emotional and physical effects of stress are important to my study. I will describe each of those as they relate to the practice of the principalship.

Power and Authority

As noted above, the perspectives of justice, critique, and care are all connected in some way to issues of power and authority. Malen (1994) identifies power as a key component of school politics. Bass posits, “Power is force giving one person the potential to influence others. Power can be personal (expert and referent) and positional (reward, coercive, and legitimate)” (Bass, 2008, p. 290). Bredeson argues that power shared through transformative and distributive brands of leadership empower teachers and depart from the “win-lose” concept of power. He notes, “Power as shared sees
power as an infinite resource with the possibility of releasing untapped reserves of creativity and energy” (Bredeson, 1989, p.10).

Sergiovanni views power from the perspective of morality. He notes,

> Whenever there is an unequal distribution of power between two people, the relationship becomes a moral one. Whether intended or not, leadership is an offer to control. The follower accepts this offer on the assumption that control will not be exploited. In this sense, leadership is not a right but a responsibility. The test of moral leadership under these conditions is whether the competence, well-being, and independence of the follower are enhanced as a result of accepting control and whether the school benefits (2009, p. 5).

Blasé and Blasé (2003) describe social power as the capacity to influence others, exercised through social interaction (p. 22). They note that by virtue of their position, principals “hold enormous power that may be used in constructive or destructive ways” (Blasé & Blasé, 2003, p. 22). They identify several ways that principals can harm others through misuse of their formal and personal types of power:

> Principal mistreatment includes indirect and moderately aggressive behaviors, such as ignoring, insensitivity, stonewalling, nonsupport in confrontations with parents, withholding resources, withholding professional development, withholding and taking credit, and favoritism; direct and moderately aggressive behaviors, such as spying sabotage, destroying teacher aids, staling, and publicly and privately criticizing; and direct and severely aggressive behaviors, such as lying, being explosive and nasty, threatening, writing reprimands, giving poor
evaluations, mistreating one’s students, forcing one out of a school or teaching job, sexual harassment, and racism” (Blasé & Blasé, p. 23).

In sum, they argue that interpersonal relationships are influenced by what people “have strong feelings about, but what is so often unspoken and not easily observed” (Blasé & Blasé, 2002, p. 30). I will discuss part of the process of negotiating those events of “strong feelings” in the following section.

**Personal Conferences**

Sergiovanni notes, “One of the persistent problems of administration is obtaining compliance, which is at the heart of the principal’s role. Invariably, compliance occurs in response to some sort of authority, but not all sources of authority are equally powerful or palatable” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 15). He accents moral focus as he describes four sources of authority through which principals attempt to gain compliance: bureaucratic, personal, professional, and moral. He asserts that the principal who applies moral authority subordinates all stakeholders to a set of ideas, ideals, and shared values and asks them to “respond morally by doing their duty, meeting their obligations, and accepting their responsibilities. The art of administration is balancing the four in such a way that moral and professional authority flourish without neglecting bureaucratic and personal authority” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 15).

A principal often applies these various types of authority during individual conferences, which have the potential to build staff-leader relationships. As noted above, recent requirements for increased teacher observation cycles and school accountability have called for a significant increase in the number of formal instructional conferences. These conferences focus on a teacher’s instruction and, although tied to performance
evaluation, are designed to be constructive and supportive. In some conferences, however, a principal must address issues connected to the larger issues of critique, justice, or professionalism noted above. These may be issues identified by students, parents, other staff members, or by the principal himself or herself. Bass describes these applications of educational authority in theoretical terms:

Leadership can be understood as a transaction or exchange of material, social, and psychological benefits. In a fair and profitable exchange, the benefits to both the leader and follower exceed their costs. In the transactional process, leaders and followers reinforce each other’s behavior with either reward or punishment – preferably reward, and preferably reward that is contingent on fulfilling the transacted role arrangements. But the exchange may be less rewarding; it can involve management by exception or punitive discipline (Bass, 2008, p. 398). Blasé and Blasé (2003) note that when interpersonal interactions are negative, those interactions usually occur during private meetings between school leaders and individual staff members. While these interventions are, as Bass notes, a transactional function of supervision, they also may be generated by the principal’s moral and professional ethic to protect the interest of students or other staff members. It is here that the principal must delve into the parameters of the ethical frameworks to seek the best resolutions to complicated situations.

Blasé & Blasé (1998) collected perceptions about positive and negative leader-staff conferences from more than 800 teachers enrolled in graduate programs from across the U.S. Their research indicated “ineffective principals who criticized teachers privately often failed to provide them with alternative suggestions to what they were doing and
threatened them instead” (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 130.) In the views of the teachers in their study, some principals were also hostile, authoritarian, and bureaucratic without getting the facts as the teachers perceived them. On the other hand, principals perceived to be effective leaders praised teachers in a variety of ways, both informally and formally. Their methods were general and specific, public and private, and included comments passed on from students, parents, and colleagues. Not surprisingly, teachers reacted to such praise with motivation, confidence, and enhanced self-esteem. Exceptions occurred when teachers found such praise “patronizing,” and insincere, although they still appreciated the positive attention (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 124).

Blasé and Blasé recognize that principals must balance a range of perspectives and approaches within an effective conference. They note,

Principals who are good instructional leaders develop a deep appreciation for the potential artistry of an instructional conference with a teacher – that magical, creative, intuitive, and reflective talk – as they discover the complexity and challenge of conducting an effective conference. Principals struggle to balance content with direction, human concerns with organizational goals, the need for growth with the press of inertia, and formal structure with creativity” (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 19).

They note that principals described in their study found the work of preparing an effective conference both intimidating and motivating, but they recognized it as important for their professional growth, as well as for constructing positive relationships. Their research indicated that conducting a successful conference required knowledge and mastery of a number of complex skills. These included data gathering and analysis,
teaching skills, communication skills, and awareness of the personality and professional comportment of the teacher (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 20). They determined, “attaining deep reflection and free exchange (emphasis in original) in conference situations – recognized goals of the instructional conference – are, at best, difficult to achieve and are profoundly complicated by, for example, how participants use power to achieve their goals (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 24). As a corollary, Bass notes, “negative feedback is often distorted by both the leader who sends it and the subordinate who receives it” (Bass, 2008, p. 398).

Blasé and Blasé succinctly capture the research of themselves and others about the processes and effectiveness of personal conferences:

As a critical component of instructional leadership, the instructional conference should be positive, reflective, and motivating to a teacher. Our findings persuade us that solid efforts by principals along these lines can produce significant results for teachers’ classroom performance. Conversely, abandonment of teachers or an attitude of condescension on a principal’s part can cause significant damage to teachers and, ultimately, the students with whom they work” (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 47).

In this stance, the researchers are assuming an unprofessional and abusive application of power by the principal, an issue to be addressed through the ethical frameworks of justice and critique. In other discussions, however, they acknowledge that principals must identify the shortcomings of their staff. Bryk and Schneider note that if a staff member is not competent, the principal must act – “uncaring and incompetent teachers” must not be allowed to continue (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 42). In these
situations principals are not necessarily abusive and unfair, even though the staff member may have that perception. Whether justified or not, however, negative encounters can create significant stress for both the principal and the staff member, evoking severe emotional, psychological, and physical duress within both parties. I discuss the potential effects of such stress below.

**Emotional and Physical Results of Job-Embedded Stress**

When school leaders critique the shortcomings of teachers or other staff members, such criticism can have a palpable effect on the emotional, psychological, and physical health of both the principal and the staff member. Even if the principal believes the criticism is accurate, justified, and necessary when measured through his various ethical frames, his or her application of power and authority through these social transactions may have serious effects on both the individual and the school community.

Malen notes that principal-teacher interactions can be “a major source of stress for principals and a force that has organizational effects” (Malen, 1994, p. 159). Bass observes, “Individuals confronted with threats to their well-being will experience stress. Leadership can be the source of increased stress, negative emotions, and negative outcomes” (Bass, 2008, p. 812).

Stress symptoms include increased emotional arousal, frustration, defensiveness, faulty decision making, and physiological symptoms like sweating, heavier breathing, and increased heartbeat. The stress shows itself in subordinate dissatisfaction, negative emotional reactions, moods, and feelings, and psychosomatic and physical symptoms, particularly if quitting is not possible.
Anxiety, anger, depression, negativity, and loss in self-esteem may be further consequences of continuing stress” (Bass, 2008, p. 812).

Blasé and Blasé note that initially, these staff members may feel “wounded.” Their emotional responses may include feeling trapped; fearful and angry or outraged; preoccupied, stressed and traumatized; corrupted and guilty; shock and disorientation; humiliation; and loneliness. They experience injured self-confidence and self-esteem and a diminished sense of professionalism (Blasé & Blasé, 2003, p. 25). As criticisms from the principal continue, they may move into the category of “severely damaged teachers.” As such they may experience fear and anxiety, anger, depression, including feeling isolated, trapped, or unmotivated. They may experience physical and physiological problems, as well as effects on their personal and family life, with all this accompanied by “oceans of tears” (Blasé & Blasé, 2003, p. 25).

Several researchers have noted that these adversarial situations present principals with complex ethical dilemmas where resolutions may not be positive for all concerned (Malen, 1994; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cosner, 2009). When the greater school community perceives someone to be a problem, however, the principal must act. Failure to act may imply weakness and prompt members of the staff and outside community to question why the principal would allow such unprofessionalism or incompetence to occur. At the same time, negative interventions by the principal, even though acknowledged as necessary by the staff, sends their own negative ripples through the school community. Staff members realize they are not as professionally secure and psychologically safe as they may have previously believed (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).
Thus are critical ethical dilemmas with which principals must grapple. Sadly and tragically, I have observed such individual and collective responses as the result of my own actions. These events caused me to search my own personal and ethical frameworks in order to determine my leadership focus and are the central impetus for this study.

**Doctoral Student Research**

Wolcott (1973) set the stage for principals to use autoethnography to reflect on their work for the academic benefit of their peers, introducing the opportunity for an era of auto-ethnographic reflections by principals. Anticipating that, as part of a research effort by a task force of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) on how to improve the research base and knowledge production in educational administration, Anderson and Jones (2000) reviewed 50 dissertation abstracts of studies done by administrators within their own settings. The authors conducted an “exhaustive search” for these dissertations. Surprisingly, only 25 were written by principals. The others were by school administrators or different roles, including associate principals, superintendents, and district staff.

In my search, I found relatively few dissertations written by principals using an autoethnographic approach to examine the formation of their leadership values through their personal and professional experiences. I searched for dissertations using the terms “school principals, “autoethnography,” “moral leadership,” and “constructivist leadership.” My search revealed 16 morally reflective dissertations written by school principals that I deemed relevant to my study.

Many are traditional in design, although Harting (2011) employs a narrative style throughout to tell the story of his reformation efforts in a high school. While varied in
purpose and form, all discuss their personal challenges and insights framed in current research. The goal of each is to add to the field of research by providing their personal learnings, and that will also be my goal.

Dethloff (2005) reflected on his transition from one elementary school to another. His data sources included a reflective journal, his personal calendar, faculty agendas, staff memos, and reflective analysis. Oakley (2010) included herself in drawing composite typical experiences from portraits of five young female principals. Carrico (2009) examined her beliefs as she mentored teachers in developing a literacy program. Her data sources included interviews, observations, and personal reflections. Woods (2007), Meigs (2008) and Ray (2012) analyzed the challenges they faced and lessons they learned as a first-year principals. Data sources include personal calendars, meeting minutes and journal entries.

Griffin (2012) analyzed her leadership style in transforming a low-performing school into a high-performing school over a three-year period. Sources included emails, agendas, performance evaluations, meeting minutes, letters, notes, newsletters, and a school video. Degenhardt analyzed the change process she led over a five-year period in a Catholic all-girls boarding school. Kelley reported her leadership of the change process in a small rural school over a ten-year period. Her data source was her reflective journal.

Prince (2006) explored her leadership style and effective school practices and student progress over the period of one year. Her primary resource was her reflective journal. Mundell studied his use of transformational leadership in a middle school over a three-year period, analyzing his knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment; his ability to work as an intellectual stimulator and change agent; and his ideals and beliefs.
Davis (2011) used critical race theory to explore his “whiteness” as an associate principal. Amato (2008) analyzed her leadership style in three years of reform in a struggling urban school. Data sources included journal notes, meeting notes, emails, surveys, and other documents. Alwin (2009) reflected on the development of his leadership ethos of social activism through key life experiences over the span of his career of 30 years as a school leader. His primary resources are his personal memories. Boltz (2008) reflected on his efforts to lead school reform efforts and develop student literacy over a 22-year period as a principal in a school on a native American reservation.

The overarching theme of these first-person narrative accounts seems to be the principals examining what they learned about themselves as they applied various transformational leadership strategies within one or more schools. Some span the length of one year. Some cover several. Two cover experiences over 22 years or more. Some are novice principals, while others are seasoned veterans. Some adopted activist causes, while others charted their leadership growth. Data sources varied across the range of reflective journals, meeting agendas, notes, memos, emails, and personal calendars. All used the data from these sources to recreate scenes in vignettes, through which they reflected on the experience. All frame their reflections in professional literature.

I see my study as similar to these in several ways. Mine is an autoethnographic narrative in which I examine events I experienced as a middle school principal in a demographically challenging school over a seven-year period. Like these principals, I draw on memos, emails, notes, agendas, and reflective journals to create reflective vignettes. Like them, I frame my reflections with references to current research. Most of these studies, however, cover a wide span of experiences to show how they transformed
their schools. Although I do not include myself in the camp of those who were crusaders for social justice, I work to define the ways that I established my moral purpose and implemented that focus into my leadership practice. I believe my study is unique, however, in that I focus in depth on a few specific conflicts that posed ethical dilemmas for me and helped me define my moral leadership style, framed in research describing ethical school leadership. I did not find any other dissertation taking that specific approach. I did not find any dissertation written by a principal researching the specific micro-level of emotionally charged interactions that I propose to study. Like my leadership colleagues, I learned more about my own growth as a school leader by examining my own experiences. In turn, I hope these lessons will enhance the larger body of research into the practice of the principalship.

The Need for My Study

The researchers I have described above call for more practical research about the specific types of personal and professional ethical conflicts and dilemmas school leaders face that I am proposing to study. Anderson and Jones assert, “Professional wisdom is about particular events, people, and conditions.” They argue that administrator research “better reflects the kinds of concerns and dilemmas that administrators struggle with (and reflect) deeper understandings of practice, the acknowledgement of new dilemmas and contradictions, gaps between espoused theories and theories-in-use, new self-understandings, or new, more complex questions” (Anderson & Jones, 2000, p. 437). Despite these needs, they lament, “rigorous accounts by administrators that shed light on how administrators frame problems, engage in day-to-day problem solving, and achieve outcomes informed by data are rare” (Anderson & Jones, 2000, p. 434). Riehl, et al., call
for more knowledge from administrative practitioners, describing and analyzing “enduring conditions and dilemmas in school administration that are relatively stable across time and space,” expressed both as “theoretical knowledge to inform the profession (and) the particular, situated expressions of knowledge that inform the personal practice of individual administrators” (Riehl, et al., 2000, p. 395).

Research of Blasé and Blasé and others suggest that administrators, and especially those new to the role, are often unprepared to deal adequately with issues of interpersonal conflict (Blasé & Blasé, 2002). Flessas (2009) argues that despite this problem, most discussions of school leadership devote “virtually no explicit attention to … conflict (p. 336). He believes that without attention to stressful and potentially unresolved encounters “may leave practitioners with the assumption that when conflict arises within their own setting, something is either wrong with them, their school leaders, or with their distribution of leadership” (Flessas, 2009, p. 331). Indeed, my study revealed that I often questioned my own ability to lead.

Synopsis and Closure

Researchers who studied the daily practice of morally driven and effective school principals unveil the practical application of a somewhat eclectic approach to school leadership.

Sergiovanni presents a moral metaphor to describe school leadership that personifies “head, heart, and hand in practice” (2009, p. 3).

As with heart and head, how we choose to manage and lead are personal reflections not only of our vision and our practical theories but also of our personalities and our responses to the unique situations we face. In this
idiosyncratic world, one-best-way approaches and cookie-cutter strategies do not work very well. Instead, diversity will likely be the norm as principals practice. Each principal must find her or his way, developer or his approach, if the heart, head, and hand of leadership are to come together in the form of successful leadership practice (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 3).

Sergiovanni’s metaphor represents the concepts that the ethical frameworks of care, justice, critique, community, and the profession describe more specifically. This study of my leadership practice is informed by research describing moral purpose, leadership theories, power and relationships described above. I frame my discussions within the five ethical frameworks. I found those frameworks to be useful and effective tools in my quest to discover, construct, and describe my professional identity as a morally directed school leader. A discussion of the methodology I applied in my study follows in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Long have you timidly waded holding a plank by the shore,
Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,
To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod to me, shout,
and laughingly dash with your hair.

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself, Stanza 46, ll. 35-38*

**Overview of Study Purpose and Methodology**

In this autoethnographic narrative inquiry I describe and explain how I discovered, constructed, and refined my sense of moral purpose as a principal during my seven-year tenure at Orange Pines Middle School. I analyze and reflect primarily on self-authored texts tied to critical professional ethical dilemmas so as to discover insights into the development of my persona as a morally directed school leader. I alternate those descriptions and reflections by considering how I applied those defined values in interactions with groups of teachers in order to design and implement elements of school reform.

Ellis (2004) explains that autoethnography is a methodology that begins with the researcher as the site of study. Employing a qualitative storytelling structure shows as well as tells, building inquiry by eliciting a relationship between the audience and the research. The autoethnographer sees the universal through the particular. As the audience
reads the text, they generalize it to their experiences, provoking reflection and spurring knowledge development. To achieve that end I have re-created these critical events through descriptive vignettes in which I captured personal and professional implications of the experiences using Clandinin and Connelly’s model of three-dimensional narrative space. I used as a conceptual structure the ethical frameworks of critique, justice, care (Starratt 1994), community (Furman (2004), and the profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001) to guide the study of my leadership practice. In the following discussion I describe more specifically the methods I used to conduct this study.

In Chapter Two I traced a range of ideas and principles that will guide this study. I began with thoughts regarding the importance of reflection, moral imperatives, values, and ethics. I then described current theories of school leadership, culminating in a description of constructivist leadership. Following that I described concepts of schools as communities and various ethical lenses through which to view them. I then reviewed different processes principals can utilize to negotiate complex ethical dilemmas within the school community, illuminated by concepts of power and conflict. My focus in that discussion was to frame the ideological grounding of my particular approach to the principalship within the broader field of ethics and school leadership.

Within the discussion I introduced several educational research concepts central to my study. These included post positivism, constructivism, autoethnography, and personal narrative inquiry. These approaches are all techniques rooted within the broader field of qualitative research. In the following discussion I will summarize thoughts of key scholars in the field of qualitative inquiry in order to place my particular constructivist approach to autoethnographic narrative inquiry within the broader philosophical
background of qualitative research. My intention is to move from the philosophical precepts on which qualitative inquiry is based to the more specific applications of constructivism through narrative inquiry and autoethnography. I will conclude with an account of the field texts I will use as data sources and describe how I will analyze those texts and then recreate the experiences through reflective vignettes in an attempt to understand the evolution and application of my moral purpose as a school principal.

**Philosophy and Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 4) have written extensively about qualitative research. They explain qualitative research this way:

The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational restraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

Denzin and Lincoln draw an important contrast with quantitative research, which they identify as the favored tradition in the physical and social sciences. “Quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Proponents of such studies claim their work is done from within a value-free framework” (2008, p. 41).
Strauss and Corbin call qualitative research “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (1998, p. 10). They note, “Qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (1998, p.11). Merriam calls qualitative research “an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena“ (1988, p.2). She observes, “Qualitative research assumes there are multiple realities – the world is a function of personal interaction and perception” (1988, p.17). According to Merriam, beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception, and qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of their lives through their perceptions (1998). Goetz and LeCompte note that the purpose of qualitative research is to “provide rich, descriptive data about contexts, activities, and beliefs of participants in educational settings (1984, p.17). Denzin & Lincoln (2008) summarize by defining qualitative research as consisting of “a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 4).

**Philosophical Beliefs**

Creswell, Denzin, Lincoln, Guba and others have played a prominent role in summarizing the philosophical frameworks that guide the various modes of qualitative inquiry. In the following discussion I will lean on these scholars to interpret these frames of thinking, first in the general realm of qualitative research and then specifically as they apply to constructivism, narrative inquiry, and autoethnography. At the most general
level, Cresswell defines philosophy as “the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research” (2013, p. 16). He highlights the importance of the beliefs and philosophical assumptions that researchers bring to their work. These beliefs are woven inside the frameworks we choose to define our research topics and guide our studies. In sections below I describe the general characteristics of qualitative research, discuss the philosophic assumptions that guide that research, and describe interpretive frameworks or paradigms that I believe are relevant to my study.

According to Creswell (2013), “qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem” (p. 44). Embedded within these frameworks or paradigms are fundamental philosophical beliefs. Creswell divides these beliefs into four categories and essential questions (Creswell, 2013, p 21). I summarize those below:

**Ontological**: What is the nature of reality? Is there a single, objective reality, or are there different realities, depending on the positions of the participant and researcher?

**Epistemological**: What counts as knowledge? How are knowledge claims justified? What is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched? Is knowledge verified through objective facts and statistics or shaped through the biased interpretation of individual experiences?

**Axiological**: What is the role of values? Does the researcher remain detached and his biases controlled, or does he acknowledge that research is value-laden and that biases are present.
Methodological: What is the process and language of the research? Is the researcher using a more traditional scientific method, e.g., testing theories and identifying variables? Alternately, does the researcher use inductive logic, studying the topic within its context through an emergent design?

Interpretive Frameworks

Creswell explains that the way a researcher answers these philosophical questions frames his philosophical approach to a research problem. They are key premises embedded into these interpretive frameworks, called interpretive because they reflect a specific interpretation of qualitative philosophy (2013). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 105) call these “questions of paradigm . . . the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.” They define for the researcher “the nature of the ‘world,’ the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (p. 107).

Creswell (2013) describes several major interpretive frameworks used by qualitative researchers. I have chosen to describe four frameworks or paradigms that I believe provide perspective for my study. They are post positivism, social constructivism, transformative/postmodern, and critical, race, feminism, queer, and disabilities. I have borrowed Creswell’s model to summarize the important characteristics of those in Table 1. As noted above, the current school accountability movement is centered in the philosophy of post positivism. My study is specifically tied to the concepts of constructivism. The urgent activism that drive the ethics of critique and social justice are
based in transformative, critical, and related frameworks. I follow Table 1 with a discussion of each framework and its relevance to my study.

**Table 1 Interpretive Frameworks and Associated Philosophical Beliefs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretive Frameworks</th>
<th>Ontological Beliefs (The nature of reality)</th>
<th>Epistemological Beliefs (how reality is known)</th>
<th>Axiological Beliefs (role of values)</th>
<th>Methodological Beliefs (approach to inquiry)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post positivism</td>
<td>A single reality exists beyond ourselves, “out there.” Researcher may not be able to understand it or get to it because of lack of absolutes.</td>
<td>Reality can only be approximated. But it is constructed through research and statistics. Interaction with research subjects is kept to a minimum. Validity comes from peers, not participants.</td>
<td>Researcher’s biases need to be controlled and not expressed in a study.</td>
<td>Use of scientific method and writing. Object of research is to create new knowledge. Method is important. Deductive methods are important, such as testing of theories, specifying important variables, making comparisons among groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social constructivism</td>
<td>Multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others.</td>
<td>Reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences.</td>
<td>Individual values are honored, and are negotiated among individuals.</td>
<td>More of a literary style of writing used. Use of an inductive method of emergent ideas (through consensus) obtained through methods such as interviewing, observing, and analysis of texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative/Postmodern</td>
<td>Participation between researcher and communities/individuals being studied. Often a subjective-objective reality emerges.</td>
<td>Co-created findings with multiple ways of knowing.</td>
<td>Respect for indigenous values; values need to be problematized and interrogated.</td>
<td>Use of collaborative processes of research; political participation encouraged; questioning of methods; highlighting issues and concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical, Race, Feminist, Queer, Disabilities</td>
<td>Reality is based on power and identity struggles. Privilege or oppression based on race or ethnicity, class, gender, mental abilities, sexual preference.</td>
<td>Reality is known through the study of social structures, freedom and oppression, power, and control. Reality can be changed through research.</td>
<td>Diversity of values is emphasized within the standpoint of various communities.</td>
<td>Start with assumptions of power and identity struggles, document them, and call for action and change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Creswell, 2013, pp. 36-7)*

Guba and Lincoln (1994) define post positivism as emerging from the thinking of positivism, the view that reality and truth can be established, a view they say “has
dominated the formal discourse in the physical and social sciences for some 400 years” (p. 108). Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 14) argue that both positivism and post positivism hold to naïve and critical realist positions concerning reality and its perception. In the positivist version it is contended that there is a reality out there to be studied, captured, and understood, whereas the post positivists argue that reality can never be fully understood, only approximated.

Denzin and Lincoln see that post positivism “represents efforts of the past few decades to respond in a limited way (that is, while remaining within essentially the same set of basic beliefs) to the most problematic criticisms of positivism” (2008, p. 109). In Guba and Lincoln’s view, post positivism attempts to portray reality, but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable” (1994, p.109). Objectivity remains a “regulatory ideal,” subject to validation from multiple sources.

Creswell explains that post positivism “has the elements of being reductionistic, logical, empirical, cause-and-effect oriented, and deterministic based on a priori theories” (2013, p. 24). He says most post positivists are working in areas where qualitative research plays a “supporting role” to quantitative research and “must be couched in terms acceptable to quantitative researchers and funding agents” (2013, p. 24). Creswell’s reference to “funding agents” connects the concerns of other qualitative scholars and, in my opinion, highlights the need for more constructivist studies in education. Writing in 1994, Guba and Lincoln presaged our current didactic and prescriptive legislative culture by observing,

The ‘received view’ of science (positivism, transformed over the course of this century into post positivism) focuses on efforts to verify (positivism) or falsify
(post positivism) a priori hypotheses, most usefully stated as mathematical (quantitative) propositions or propositions that can be easily converted into precise mathematical formulas expressing relationships. Formulaic precision has enormous utility when the aim of science is the prediction and control of natural phenomena . . . There exists a widespread conviction that only quantitative data are ultimately valid, or of high quality (Sechrest, 1992) (p. 106).

Writing more than a decade later, Denzin and Lincoln reiterate these concerns as they pinpoint the conflicts between quantitative and qualitative approaches, noting, “They return always to the politics of research and who has the power to legislate correct solutions to social problems” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). They note, “The scientifically-based research movement (SBR) initiated in recent years by the National Research Council (NRC) has created a hostile political environment for qualitative research. Connected to (NCLB) SBR embodies a re-emergent scientism (Maxwell, 2004), a positivist, evidence-based epistemology. The movement encourages researchers to employ ‘rigorous, systematic, and objective methodology to obtain reliable and valid knowledge’ (Ryan & Hood, 2004, p. 80)” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 11). They highlight a concern that is one impetus for my study.

Under such a framework, qualitative research becomes suspect. The observations and measurements of qualitative scholars are not based on subjects’ random assignment to experimental groups. Qualitative researchers do not generate ‘hard evidence’ using such methods. The epistemologies (of constructivist and interpretivist) are rendered useless by the SBR perspective, relegated at best to the category of scholarship, not science (Denzin & Lincoln, 2004, pp. 11-12).
While these thoughts capture the manic urgency gripping both the state of Florida and the nation to endorse data-driven models of school reform, I believe they underscore even more the importance of qualitative studies such as mine that focus on the perspectives of individuals.

In a discussion of principal leadership, Sergiovanni joins Denzin and Lincoln in drawing a clear line between post positivist and constructivist viewpoints. He summarizes the distinction metaphorically in contrasts he makes between what he calls Neats and Scruffies, whom he describes as follows:

Neats hold the view that educational administration resembles an applied science within which theory and research are directly related and linearly linked to practice. The former always determines the latter, and thus knowledge is superordinate to the principal and designed to prescribe practice.

Scruffies hold the view that educational administration resembles a craft-like science within which practice is characterized by interacting episodes of reflection and action. Theory and research are only one source of knowledge. This knowledge is subordinate to the principal and is designed to inform but not to prescribe practice. Tacit knowledge and intuition develop and strengthen as they are informed by theory, research, experience, and the craft knowledge of others (2009, p. 77).

My sense is that Sergiovanni’s description of the Neats corresponds to positivists and post positivists, and that of the Scruffies corresponds to thinking in line with constructivists, interpretivists, and postmodernists. Sergiovanni’s thoughts regarding the appropriateness of a post positivist approach to educational practice is in line with the
thoughts of Lincoln, Guba, Denzin, and others outlined above. He posits, “How does the view of the Neats fit the real world of practice? Not very well. Patterns of school practice are actually characterized by a great deal of instability, complexity, and variety. Value conflicts and uniqueness are accepted aspects of educational settings” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 78). I analyze the unique value conflicts that I experienced as principal.

In this study, therefore, I have applied a strategy of social constructivism to study the development of my professional identity as a morally directed school leader. Social constructivism comes under the headings of more general concepts such as poststructuralism, interpretivism, and postmodernism, which hold that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only the observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2004, p. 29).

Through the approach of social constructivism, as with other constructivist or interpretivist approaches (Schwandt, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), multiple realities are constructed through one’s lived experiences and interactions with others. Reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences. Individual values are honored and negotiated among individuals. These explanations are consistent with those presented by Lambert (2002) in Chapter Two. In this framework the researcher combines more of a literary style of writing and applies an inductive method of identifying emergent ideas through data gathering activities such as interviewing, observing, and analysis of texts.
Schwandt notes that constructivists “share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (1994, p. 118). He says that constructivists examine “the world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings . . . That is, particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and action” (p. 118). I found this approach to be effective as I examined specific events in my professional life in order to learn more about myself and the development of my professional practice.

Finally, Creswell calls attention to “critical theory perspectives . . . concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race class, and gender (Fay, 1987)” (2013, p. 30). Included in these are race, queer, and disability theories. Although each differs in specifics, each addresses power and identity struggles through the filters of its respective issues. Creswell calls these “social justice theories, which seek to bring about change or address social justice issues” (Creswell, 2013, p. 23). I discussed the ethical impetus of such approaches in my review of the ethical frameworks of critique, justice, care, professionalism, and community in Chapter Two. Although social injustice was not my primary focus in this study, I mention these viewpoints to show how the realities of my study could be manifested in different ways. For example, because I am a white male, a researcher could filter my study through a framework that would discuss historic authoritarianism and oppression rendered by white male principals. Another researcher could view these experiences through a lens of the conflicts between males and females. Because some of my pivotal conflicts involved Hispanic men and women, a researcher could view the events by looking for themes of
racial discrimination and inequality. Because through my father I have observed the effects professional censure, I could have approached my study through a lens of the justice or injustice of professional scrutiny.

I did not, however, see these issues as the focus of my study, because my a priori assumptions were not the abuses of power or of subjugated groups. In addition, because I conducted my personal history inquiry through an autoethnographic approach, this strategy put me too close to the subject, me, to use those viewpoints. I think an outside observer would better conduct such an approach. My biases were too entrenched in the phenomenon to determine whether my actions were jaundiced or oppressive. They might have been, and I have tried to be sensitive to those elements, since that is the essence of the emergent process, but here is where the acknowledgement of multiple realities becomes important. A different researcher looking through a different lens might tell a different story. My responsibility to readers, as well as to myself, was to try to be responsive to the research texts and to the ethics of transparency and truth. Mine was a social science approach, rather than a social justice approach. I did not have an a priori presumption that injustices occurred. At the same time, I did not attempt to paint myself as a moral crusader fighting for the rights of the subjugated. I came to see my sense of moral imperative as a broader concern and compassion for all students and staff and a commitment to seek justice for all students. Through the constructivist approach of narrative inquiry and autoethnography I have attempted to clarify what influences shaped my actions and what I learned through my experiences.
Method

Narrative Inquiry

My study is a personal history inquiry and autoethnography applying the methodology of narrative inquiry. As such, the study focused on my own experiences and reflections, drawing primarily on self-authored narrative field texts. Those included notes, memos, emails, and observations that I transcribed during the events, along with memories and reflections written several years later but cued by those narrative texts. Texts also included agendas and notes generated from other staff meetings, as well as my reflections on those texts and events.

In order to understand narrative inquiry, one must first understand narrative. At its simplest level, a narrative is a story. Connelly and Clandinin say that narratives are the “stories of experiences that make up people’s lives” (2000, p. 20). Narrative inquiry is, they say, trying to make sense of life as lived” (2000, p. 78). For Creswell, narrative “might be the phenomenon being studied, or it might be the method used in a study” (2013, p. 70). He agrees that “narrative stories tell of individual experiences, and they may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves” (p. 71). Riesman traces the concept of narrative from Aristotle, who said the narrative writer creates a representation of events, experiences, and emotions, held together with a plot, which chronicles the beginning, middle, and end of the story. For Aristotle, narrative may convey a moral, as well as the unexpected (Riesman, 2008, p. 4). Riesman notes that narratives can pertain not only to individuals, but groups, organizations, and nations. They can cover a brief period or span a lifetime. Narrative, Connelly and Clandinin (2000) tell us, is everywhere.
Riesman notes that narrative inquiry is “grounded in the study of the particular . . .
how and why incidents are storied, not simply the content to which language refers”
(2008, p. 11). Clandinin and Connelly define narrative inquiry as “trying to make sense
of life as lived” (2000, p. 78). For them,
narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration
between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and
in social interactions with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and
progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living
and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up
people’s lives . . . Simply stated, narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (p. 20).
Lawrence-Lightfoot stresses that narratives must be depicted in context. She
explains, “By context, I mean the setting – physical, geographic, temporal, historical,
cultural, aesthetic – within which the action takes place . . . It is used to place people and
action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they do” (1997, p. 41).
Cole and Knowles conduct what they call “life history,” which “acknowledges not only
that personal, social, temporal, and contextual influences facilitate understanding of our
lives and phenomenon being explored” (2001, p. 10). Ellis and colleagues call for
“layered accounts” that merge data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature alongside
“vignettes, reflexivity, and introspection” (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 278).

**Three-dimensional space**

These frameworks fit conceptually with a narrative model recommended by
Clandinin and Connelly (2000). They explain that the premise of narrative inquiry – and,
it seems to me, could be said for all qualitative inquiry about education – comes from the
thoughts of John Dewey, who believed that examining experience is the key to education (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xiii). They describe a model of what they call a “metaphorical three-dimensional space” to describe their approach to narrative inquiry. In this model temporality or time falls along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along a third. Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by its three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places” (2000, p. 50).

This is an important concept and central to the model I applied in order to mine the most value from my experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly explain that they are following Dewey’s notion of interaction, by focusing on what we call four directions in any inquiry: Inward and outward, backward and forward. By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hope, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality – past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

They continue that to adequately understand an experience or event, one must “experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way”. Thus, the researcher must write “a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and to its future” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). “In this
model, place attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (p. 51). I have created the following graphic in Figure 1 to represent their model:

![Figure 2 Three-Dimensional Space](image)

**Figure 2 Three-Dimensional Space**

To illustrate, they describe a story about a heated conversation a colleague had with her principal about the value of report cards. The colleague first described the events as they unfolded between her and the principal. She then included memories of earlier experiences in school that the event triggered. The authors note that the account slides back and forth in time, as well as inward to feelings and outward to external events and their ramifications, all the while staying rooted in the place of school.

“Our hope is that on balance the idea of a three-dimensional space will open up imaginative possibilities for inquirers, possibilities that might not as easily have been seen without the idea” (2000, p. 89). I saw this as an effective model to capture and reflect on the insights and poignancies I felt while in the midst of ethical conflicts, but which I could not pursue, due to the pressures of the moment.
Personal narrative

Personal narrative analysis is based on the process of personal reflection, which I discussed in Chapter Two. Alexander says that the personal narrative “is a reflection of an individual’s critical excavation of lived experience and the categorizing of cultural meaning” (Alexander, 2008, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 91). He continues, “The personal narrative always stands in relation to the master narrative, which is the reflection of culture and our relation to/in culture. Hence the personal narrative is always a reflection on and excavation of the cultural contexts that give rise to experience” (p. 92).

Richardson describes what she calls “the narrative of the self . . . a highly personalized, revealing text in which an author tells stories about his or her own lived experience” (p. 517, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). She says of the approach, “I write in order to learn something that I didn’t know before I wrote it” (p. 517). Creswell notes, “The focus of a narrative is on the life of an individual “ (2013, p. 121). “Within the story may be epiphanies, turning points, or disruptions in which the story line changes direction dramatically. In the end, the narrative study tells the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived experiences” (2013, p. 75).

The idea is based on Schon’s concept of “reflection-in-action,” through which professionals learn the practical application of theory (Schon, 1983).

Cole and Knowles argue, “To understand some of the complexities, complications, and confusions within the life of just one member of a community is to gain insights into the collective . . . every in-depth exploration of an individual life-in-context brings us that much closer to understanding the complexities of lives in communities” (2001, p. 11).
Ellis and Bochner (2000) define personal narratives as “critical autobiographical stories of lived experience” (Alexander, 2008, p. 91). “Langlier (1989) writes that like most narratives, the personal narrative ‘does something in the social world . . . (it) participates(s) in the ongoing rhythm of people’s lives as a reflection of their social organization and cultural values’ (p. 261)” (Alexander in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 91).

**Autoethnography**

Personal history inquiry and autoethnography are approaches that share similar characteristics that were appropriate for my study. Autoethnography is a form of narrative study that is written and recorded by the individual who is the subject of the study (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Creswell, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2006) define the approach as “engaging in ethnographical practice through personal, lived experience; writing the self into the ethnographic narrative” (p. 379). Spry calls autoethnography “a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (2001, p. 710). But that is just the beginning of an explanation of this personal, emotional, analytic, and often evocative approach to ethnographic research.

Jones calls autoethnography a “blurred genre overlapping writing practices in anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, journalism, and communication” (Jones, 2005, p. 765). For Tedlock (2005, p. 467), it is “connecting the autobiographical impulse (the gaze inward) with the ethnographic impulse (the gaze outward).” Anderson observes that the autoethnographer must be “visible, active, and reflexively engaged in the text” (2006, p. 383). He notes that a key characteristic is that “the researcher’s own feelings and experiences are incorporated into the story and considered as vital data for understanding
the social world being observed” (2006, p. 384). Anderson notes that a key element of autoethnography is the researcher’s “quest for self-understanding” (2006, p. 386). This self-understanding “lies at the intersection of biography and society: self-knowledge that comes from understanding our personal lives, identities, and feelings as deeply connected to and in large part constituted by – and in turn helping to constitute - the sociological contexts in which we live” (Anderson, 2006, p. 386).

Ellis and colleagues (2011, p. 273) describe autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).” They agree that the process challenges “canonical ways of doing research” and “treats such research as a political, socially just, and socially conscious act” (2011, p. 273). They note that the autoethnographer uses aspects of autobiography, making the approach “both process and product . . . Through that approach the researcher’s goal should be to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal an interpersonal experience” (2011, pp. 273-277). The researcher’s goal is to use life experience to generalize to a larger group (Ellis, 1999).

Thus the writer is both researcher and participant. Cole and Knowles note, “An autoethnography places the self within a sociocultural context. . . . (It) uses the self as a starting or vantage point from which to explore broader sociocultural elements, issues, or constructs” (2010, p. 16). This concept aligns with Clandinin and Connelly’s model of three-dimensional space, moving from the inside of oneself out to broader cultural issues back and forth across time. In addition, this view allowed me to compare my discoveries
about the development of my personal and professional insights as principal to the broader research describing school culture and leadership.

First person, evocative autoethnography

By definition as a personal account, autoethnography is written, at least in part, in first person. It may often include conversations as a way to illustrate or recreate a scene, and as a way to combine the “showing” with the “telling” of an event. First person makes the text more “evocative,” which is a key aspect of autoethnography. Researchers may also use third person to “establish context for an interaction, report findings, and present what others do or say” (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 277).

They note, “Autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist” (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 274). But how much emotion is too much? Indeed, is there any limit on the self-revelatory nature of social research? Denzin notes that the differences in definitions and approaches to auto-ethnographic products can be as different as “apples and oranges,” (2006, p. 420). He and many others show that approaches range from the evocative and narcissistic to the much less personal, analytical, and theoretical.

Ellis, Boechner, Richardson, and several others argue for a highly expressive and evocative approach to autoethnography. Ellis, Bochner, and Adams describe the evolution toward an evocative approach in that by telling narratives or stories, researchers “wanted to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience” (2011, p. 274). Richardson calls the approach “highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived
experiences, relating the personal to the cultural” (2000, p. 11). She calls evocative writing “a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct (our view of) the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science” (Richardson, 2000, p. 5).

**Analytic autoethnography**

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Anderson proposes the concept of analytic autoethnography as an alternative to the evocative camp (Anderson, 2006). Anderson is concerned that autoethnography has become too closely identified with the purgative (2006). He notes accounts in the research of “emotionally wrenching experiences, such as illness, death, victimization, and divorce,” and argues for a more analytic approach to personal reflection (2006). Anderson proposes five key features of analytic autoethnography. They are (1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006, p. 378). In his first four criteria, he is consistent with Ellis, Bochner, Richardson, Jones, and their fellow evocateurs. For Anderson and the others, CMR status is the “most obvious” and definitive characteristic of autoethnography, in which the researcher is a “complete member of the social world under study” (Anderson, 2006, p. 379). He notes Adler and Adler’s observation (1987) that the autoethnographer must sometimes engage in a nearly “schizophrenic” dichotomy between documenting and analyzing action and engaging in it. He observes that these “multiple foci” necessarily separate the researcher from other participants. As a complete member the researcher recognizes that there may be various and conflicting opinions and interpretations within the group. As such, “The
autoethnographer is a more analytic and self-conscious participant in the conversation than is the typical group member . . . The autoethnographer’s understandings, both as a member and as a researcher, emerge not from detached discovery but from engaged dialogue” (Anderson, 2006, p. 382).

**Personal history inquiry**

Cole and Knowles describe personal history inquiry as a specific type of narrative study. They explain, “Similar to autoethnography, a personal history is an account of one’s life or segments of one’s life written or told for purposes of understanding oneself in relation to a broader context – familial, institutional, and societal, for instance” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 21). They draw a distinction with life history research. “Personal history inquiry is like life history research with its focus on life in context; unlike life history, however, personal history inquiry is usually self-conducted and more focused. Its purpose is to illuminate the meanings of past experiences as they influence future actions” (2001, p. 21). For Cole and Knowles, life history extends narrative research because it not only makes meaning of individuals’ experiences, but “draws on individuals’ experiences to make broader contextual meaning” (2001, p. 20).

I must admit that I have struggled with the distinctions between personal history inquiry and autoethnography. Fortunately, Clandinin and Connelly give me some relief. They explain, “Although it may be interesting, we do not think it is very helpful to begin with a search in which we sort and place theoretical methods beside one another. Beginning narrative inquirers frequently worry their way through definitions and procedures of different methodological theories, trying to define narrative inquiry and to distinguish it from each of the others, trying to find a niche for narrative inquiry amid the
array of theoretical qualitative methodological frames presented to them, but we do not encourage this approach” (2000, p. 128).

The approaches of autoethnography and personal history inquiry clearly aligned with the purpose of my study, which was to explore how critical experiences shaped my professional persona. As a principal I held a unique inside view of the problems principals face each day. Because I am now removed from the scene of these actions as well as from the people involved by both space and time, I was able to more accurately analyze data created by me that was created to record the details of the ethically and emotionally-charged experiences as I perceived them at that point in time. The distance of space and time allowed me to reflect more impartially and, hopefully, more presciently. I believe any insights I gained will be helpful to other principals and school administrators as they face events that were similarly pivotal in their professional development. In addition, both approaches also were compatible with Connelly and Clandinin’s model of using three-dimensional space to describe the context of significant events.

**Philosophical assumptions of autoethnography and personal history inquiry**

When viewed through the prisms of autoethnography and personal history inquiry, the framework of constructivism becomes more focused. The philosophical assumptions embedded within a framework of constructivism are honed as follows through an autoethnographic lens. I have used as a frame Creswell’s verbiage, adapted as appropriate to the concepts of autoethnography (2012).
Ontologically, the nature of reality is seen through the eyes of the researcher-participant. The researcher may nonetheless report different perspectives as themes develop in the findings.

Epistemologically, because in autoethnography the researcher and the researched are one, the autoethnographer’s realities are constructed through his lived experiences and interactions with others. The evidence is subjective, with no distance between the researcher and that being researched. The researcher relies on his own writings, observations, and reflections as evidence.

Axiologically, the query of values plays a significant role. The researcher acknowledges that the research is rife with his values and biases. He openly discusses and probes his values that shape the narrative and interprets events through his own perspectives.

Methodologically, the researcher will use more of a literary style of writing. He may analyze texts written primarily by himself through inductive logic, studying the topic within its context and utilizing an emerging design. The researcher will work with details before generalizations and describe in detail the context of the study. He may revise questions based on the results of his research, reflections, and interpretations. For easier scrutiny I have displayed these comments in Table 2:
Table 2 The Interpretive Framework of Social Constructivism and Philosophical Beliefs Focused Through an Autoethnographic Lens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontological Beliefs (The nature of reality)</th>
<th>Epistemological Beliefs (how reality is known)</th>
<th>Axiological Beliefs (role of values)</th>
<th>Methodological Beliefs (approach to inquiry)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reality is seen through the eyes of the researcher-participant. The researcher may report different perspectives as themes develop in his findings.</td>
<td>Because in autoethnography the researcher and participant are one, the autoethnographer’s realities are constructed through his lived experiences and interactions with others. The evidence is subjective, with no distance between researcher and researched. The researcher relies for evidence on his own writings, observations, and reflections.</td>
<td>The query of values plays a significant role. The researcher acknowledges that the data are rife with his values and biases. He openly probes the values that shapes the narrative and interprets events through his own perspectives.</td>
<td>The researcher will use more of a literary style of writing. He may analyze texts written primarily by himself through inductive logic, studying the topic within its context and utilizing an emerging design. The researcher will work with details before generalizations and describe in detail the context of the study. He may revise questions based on the results of his research, reflections, and interpretations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Creswell, 2013)

Thus my discussion has moved more or less linearly from philosophy to interpretive framework to approach to strategy. I summarize that path in Figure 2 below:

![Figure 3 Philosophical Progression](image-url)

Qualitative research

Social Constructivism

Narrative inquiry

Personal history narrative

Autoethnography

93
Philosophical Metaphor

Here is another metaphor I have designed to help me visualize the different approaches a researcher may take to viewing and interpreting an event or experience. Consider a pivotal or critical experience as a play involving one or more performers. The performance occurs in a particular place. The venue has different sorts of seating: Near to the stage, further away, orchestra, mezzanine, balcony, middle seat or aisle. Different seats provide different perspectives. One may want to be close to get a good look at the set, costumes, or performers’ expressions. Another may choose to be further away for a more comprehensive look at the performers, the set, the peripheral aspects of the setting, and even the reactions of the other members of the audience. In addition, one’s perspective may be shaped by the experiences he brings to the performance. If the play describes divorce, for example, the viewer who has experienced divorce may interpret events differently than one who has not. That perception would be shaped further by whether the viewer lived the experience as child or adult. If it involves the death of a loved one, a person who has lost someone dear may judge the characters differently, through a different prism, than one who does not share that experience. In addition, the performance might be viewed differently by the makeup artist who must patronize cranky actors or the wardrobe manager or choreographer or writer analyzing how well the performers interpret their work. And so it goes. In this study, I was the central actor of my play and interpreted my interactions through my own perspective. I acknowledge others may see my performance differently. This view has been mine alone.
Critical Events or Ethical Dilemmas

In a normal day, as well as a week or month, a principal encounters many situations, events, stories, or dilemmas that involve conflict. Sergiovanni observes, “In the actual world of schooling, the task of the principal is to make sense of messy situations by increasing understanding and discovering and communicating meanings” (2009, p. 78). He notes that these situations or events “are typically characterized by unique events (in which) uniform answers to problems are not likely to be helpful” (2009, p. 78). Jones advises the researcher to examine points of crisis, which she defines as “a turning point, a moment when conflict must be dealt with, even if we cannot resolve it . . . Auto-ethnographic texts focus on creating a palpable emotional experience as it connects to, and separates from, other ways of knowing” (Jones, 2005, pp. 766-7).

Shapiro and Gross (2013) propose the concept of turbulence to describe critical events. They describe them as “volatile conditions” that affect the school culture (p. 8) and describe four levels of turbulence that contextualize specific problems. While I did not see their Turbulence Theory as specifically germane to my discussion, I did find useful their concept of turbulence as creating some element of disharmony or disruption in the school culture. Shapiro and Gross note, “Those facing ethical dilemmas in the midst of busy organizational lives need to respond on a deeply reflective, systematic fashion as well as take into account the emotional context of decision making” (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, pp. 9-10).

An important question, then, was which experiences to analyze, as there are too many in any span of time to adequately consider. Cole and Knowles offered some guidance: “If we accept the premise that all memory is selective, a reconstruction or
perhaps a creation of mind and, therefore, a fiction, then we should assume that the remembrances selected and told earn their status as memorable and significant events for good reason. The stories we remember and tell about our lives reflect who we are, how we see ourselves, and, perhaps, how we wish to be seen” (Cole & Knowles, 119).

Thus, I chose particular stories – alternately called incidents, conflicts, experiences, or dilemmas – because they are the ones I continually circle back to in my thinking. While some were memories of successes, more often, they were stories that carried emotional pain: The pain of missed opportunities, the pain wrought within me and others for things I did; or pain inflicted for things I failed to do. They were ethical dilemmas because issues of truth, justice, and professionalism were not always clear. Cole & Knowles see these as “critical incidents” or “critical phases,” from which can result significant epiphanies or insights. Clandinin and Connelly call them “the tensions and dilemmas in studying the parade of which we are a part (2000, p. 80).

What I have called an experience or dilemma was a story – a series of events displayed more or less chronologically. Thus the terms event, experience or dilemma refer variously to a single event or a narrative experience that unfolded in multiple iterations over an extended period of time. The context and details of the experience frame the event as an ethical dilemma.

In Chapter Two I discussed the process of mediating critical dilemmas through individual conferences between myself and individual staff members. These events were centered initially in meetings in my office. The meetings may have been initiated by an outside party, usually a parent or another staff member. These were circumstances that demanded a response – by parents, by other staff, by my district supervisors. They could
not be ignored. I faced these events with the understanding that my interactions would be creating a crisis in their lives. That was the rub for me. I did not like conflict, and I did not want others to suffer. But there were likely several sufferers in the situation. They may have included the child, the parent, and the accused staff member. I hurt for all of them, and I hurt for myself; however, these staff members were either directly causing others to suffer or by their poor performance preventing their students and/or the school from prospering as they should. My obligation as principal forced me to take action. In these scenarios I applied concomitantly the ethics of critique, justice, care, and professionalism as appropriate to frame the events and understand my actions, the other participants’ actions, and the impact of the events on the school culture.

**Cycle of events**

A typical scenario evolved in the following pattern: Someone complained, someone was angry and described their concern to me, the principal. Typically the complainant was a parent or staff. I took notes to record their thoughts, as well as my own. I then met with the individual(s) involved, explained the concerns, and recorded their responses. I then recorded the events and dialogue in a memo that I shared with the person or people involved. I then followed up to determine if their behaviors changed. This judgment may have come through observation, although it was more likely determined by whether I received any more complaints. If I did, the cycle began anew. In the pivotal narrative experiences I chose to analyze, interactions moved through many cycles. I represent this typical plot or event cycle in Figure 3:
As I considered these events, I came to understand them in terms of Clandinin and Connelly’s sense of three dimensional inquiry space in the tensions of temporality, people, action, and certainty. There are multiple versions of the same event to describe. These can include the experience as described by the initiator, the event as described by the respondent, and the experience as recorded by me through notes and summary memos.

Of course, there is another unavailable version, which might be an “objective, post positivist view” of the event, perhaps a video sound recording of the story, an “instant replay” of the sort we expect in sporting events. As we know, however, even in those situations, expert observers often disagree about the facts displayed in the recorded reality, as well as how to interpret them. Nonetheless, without any tangible evidence, I was left with the renderings of the events as represented by my notes and memos.

These field texts recorded the different views of the experience, told by the initiator and the respondent and recorded by me. A third aspect was my summary and interpretation of what each said and responded to me. This typically came after meetings

**Figure 4 Narrative Cycle**
and reflection by me on my notes. The next steps in the process were the respondent’s reaction, the initiator’s response, my intervention, and so on, until the crisis reached a resolution.

These scenarios I chose to analyze were significant because they included smaller narratives wrapped in larger narratives, individual events that became part of larger patterns of crisis, stretched across time, something like individual skirmishes within larger battles or wars. Each critical ethical dilemma may have reached a temporary resolution, but each also fit into a larger pattern or gestalt. These patterns were documented in notes and memos I kept throughout each long-term narrative experience. Shapiro and Gross make the point that complex ethical problems are not easily solved. They coin the term “(re)solved” to indicate problems that may reach temporary solutions but may recur (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. x). Such was the case with the extended ethical narratives I chose to tell.

**NEAT Process**

The formal procedure that I as a school administrator utilized to record the iterative cycles described above reflects an application of the ethic of the profession and requires some explanation. All employees are assured a system of due process. The basic concept is that when facing a complaint, individuals have the right to understand the charges leveled against them and defend themselves. The process, protected by instructional and non-instructional contracts, helps ensure that individuals understand the complaints brought against them and have a chance to refute charges against them and improve their performance.
In the Florida public school system, school personnel hold different types of contracts, depending on their job role and date hired. Non-instructional staff, including custodians and administrators, hold the weakest contracts. Although they are ensured due process, an administrator may recommend their dismissal after following a clear trail of evidence of poor performance.

At this writing contract language in Florida continues to change. At the time described by my vignettes, the teachers described by my narratives, Tom Byrd, Rita Hablaro, and Jon Strictor, held “continuing contracts,” which require laborious, multi-year documentation of egregious acts, including “immorality, misconduct in office, incompetency, gross insubordination, willful neglect of duty, drunkenness, or being convicted or found guilty of, or entering a plea of guilty to, regardless of adjudication of guilt, any crime involving moral turpitude” (2012, Florida Statutes, 1012.33). The system at that time made it unlikely that a teacher’s job would be terminated for acts other than immorality, drunkenness, or a criminal offense.

The goal, of course, is for an employee’s job performance to improve. If after an initial meeting an employee’s performance remains unsatisfactory, however, the principal or supervisor must apply a more structured approach. This approach is identified by the acronym NEAT, which represents the concepts Notice, Explanation, Assistance, and Time (District School Board of Crestview County). In the NEAT process the supervisor holds a meeting with the employee and a witness. In the meeting he notifies the employee of his concerns, explains the details of poor performance, sets goals for improvement, offers assistance for the worker to improve and reach these goals, and provides a reasonable time frame for the performance to improve. The principal also
summarizes the results of this meeting in a letter. This letter is usually considered informal and not placed in the employee’s official personnel file. The supervisor then schedules another meeting with the worker, at which time the supervisor expects improvement. In the interim the principal reviews the staff member’s work and may use various formative evaluation tools to help describe the quality of the work. If the worker’s performance does not improve to the expected level, the principal may write a more formal reprimand in a NEAT letter. This letter again outlines the details of the worker’s unsatisfactory performance and offers a time-bound plan for improvement, but is placed in his or her official district personnel file. Should the worker’s performance continue to be unsatisfactory, the principal then describes the problems in a formal letter of reprimand. The principal includes with the formal letter a completed summative evaluation instrument on which one or more descriptors are marked as “Unsatisfactory.” At this point the employee is again given a time-bound plan for improving his or her performance. If at the end of this period the worker’s performance remains unsatisfactory, the principal may recommend to the superintendent that the worker’s employment be terminated. I applied this process in my attempts to resolve each of the problems I have chosen to analyze. These meetings generated the field texts that I used to recreate the events through descriptive vignettes.

In addition to these intense personal encounters, I analyzed and reflected on a series of interactions in which I worked with groups of teachers to design and implement elements of school reform. The texts used to record these events included public agendas, notes, and PowerPoint presentations. These were less evocative and emotionally revelatory and included fewer documents, and I devoted less attention to their analysis. I
reflected on the events they represented, however, as they captured the greater macrocosm of school reform. They served to help me reconstruct the way I applied values learned through the intense encounters in a broader scope of morally directed school leadership.

**Data Collection**

Creswell notes, “Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and established patterns or themes” (2013, p. 44). Cole and Knowles posit, “Qualitative research approaches in general are based on a principle of emergent design. It is not possible to anticipate how the research process will unfold, because of the unpredictability and messiness of research into the human condition” (2001, p.64). The events I analyzed were recorded through various documents, both formal and informal. While those documents were created to represent an accurate and objective accounting of phenomena, they stimulated richer interpretations, represented through my analyses and reflections dispersed throughout my discussion.

**Data sources and field texts**

I chose to tell my story primarily through the analysis of my own self-authored documents. I identified particular events or experiences of conflict as represented primarily by notes and memos that I wrote during or immediately following the events in order to capture my perceptions of key details. I used for my reflections analyses of those texts, as well as observations and memories cued from them. Other scenarios I described documented significant events in the greater reform movement of the school and their
effect on the school culture. Some of these were confrontational, and some were joyful. All created opportunities for growth. I learned from each and combined those lessons with those learned through the individual interactions to shape my approach to morally directed leadership. These larger meetings were documented through agendas, notes, and emails. I included with those analyses individual reflections.

Clandinin and call these documents “field texts” and say of them, “These records . . . freeze specific moments in the narrative inquiry space” without the nostalgic gloss of time (2000, p. 83). “Our field texts of that day, unchanged by the passing years, uninfluenced by intervening experiences and memories, may show a more complex, perhaps even different, picture of the day’s events” (2000, p. 83). Emphasizing the need for documents, they continue, “Field texts help fill in the richness, nuance, and complexity of the landscape, returning the reflecting researcher to a richer, more complex, and puzzling landscape than memory alone is likely to construct” (2000, p. 83). Cole and Knowles recommend collecting data over an extended period of time. Data can include interviews, documents, and observations. “These data are then thematically interpreted and considered in relation to relevant discipline-based theories, and represented in the form of detailed and rich life history accounts (2001, p. 13).

This is a good example of the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative space. I viewed in retrospect notes that summarized an event or events that had already occurred. Documents recording conferences generally included a summary of the event that caused the meeting. In addition to recording facts, they often explained why I reprimanded them, what I said, how they reacted, what I did, and their reaction. Documents recording committee meetings were less provocative but did indicate school reform efforts
reflective of my moral purpose and the ethical direction of the school culture. Additional field texts for both types of events included reflective, analytic memos that I wrote as I reflected on each set of documents.

Clandinin and Connelly remind us, “Contrary to the sense that research data are audience-free, in narrative inquiry, audience is always a presence and interpretively shapes the field texts constructed” (2000, p. 102). Although memos I wrote were to the respondents in my events, I always wrote with the understanding that there could potentially be other audiences for my writing. They could have included union officials, district administrators, as well as the superintendent, school board members, and attorneys. Notes written to record committee meetings were also written to preserve the events for a larger audience and to serve as references for future work. My study of these texts helped mitigate the loss of objectivity that came with reliance on memory alone, which became “not so serious after all in the presence of field texts and what attention to them entails” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). I had assumed that because these events have been so troubling to me and, I thought, indelibly seared in my subconscious, I assumed I would have a thorough recall of the events. As I reviewed the documents I was often surprised at the important details I had missed. For me this underscored the importance of narrative analysis in creating an autoethnography that reflected the authenticity that I hoped to present.

**Catalog of field texts**

Clandinin and Connelly warn that one danger of reviewing field texts is that they may seem so compelling that we are tempted to
“let them speak for themselves. As researchers, our task is to discover and
construct meaning in those texts. Field texts need to be reconstructed as research
texts. As we move from field texts to research texts, our field texts are the texts
of which we ask questions of meaning and social significance. What are the
meanings of the memos, notes, etc.? Why does it make a difference to figure out
possible meanings? These are the general questions that drive the transition from
field texts to research texts as analytical and interpretive matters come to the fore”
(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 130)

Qualitative scholars recommend creating an archival system to organize and keep
track of the numerous field texts. I created such a system, which I represent in
Appendices A, B, C, D, and E. Categories include the type of document, date, title,
people involved, and topics dealt with. These lists identified and helped me keep track of
the various documents related to each event.

Recursive cycles of reading and reflection

Many researchers (Riesman, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000;
Strauss & Corbin, 1998) describe the reading and analysis of field texts as a cyclical,
recursive act. “Rarely is the first cycle of (analysis) perfectly attempted. The second
cycle (and possibly the third and fourth, and so on) further manages, filters, highlights,
and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating themes and
concepts, grasping meaning (Saldana, 2009). Cole and Knowles advise against “taking
information and slicing it into discrete bits and storing the pieces in separate containers,”
arguing for a holistic approach to understanding the experiences portrayed in the texts.
Their point is that understanding through reflection and analysis is an emergent process,
and the best approach becomes clear through recursive cycles of reading and reflection. Riesman describes this entire process as a way of understanding narrative by moving from the story of an event to narrative data to narrative analysis, the systematic study of narrative data (2008, p. 6). I applied that recursive process to gain a better understanding of the development of my moral leadership purpose.

For Clandinin and Connelly the initial analysis often deals with matters such as character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, and tone. Sergiovanni observes, “Conventional wisdom tells us that leadership is about finding solutions to the problems that people face. But in reality leadership is more about helping people gain an understanding of problems they face and about helping them manage these problems and even learn to live with them” (2009, p. 9). I believed one of my goals has always been to help people, and so I looked for that motive in relation to Starratt’s ethic of care. In addition, I noted in Chapter Two that Roberts listed more than 80 values, and my discussion of the concepts of power and authority generated another list of emotions that arise in the discussion of school culture. These could include emotions such as fear – of reprisal, of embarrassment, of not being liked, of what other staff might say or might think, anger, guilt, resentment, frustration, pride, the need to be liked, etc. Also arising through these are topics attached to the ethics of critique, justice, community, and the profession. Thus, I began my reading with an awareness of these concepts while maintaining sensitivity for others that might arise. As I read, I focused my reflections on several goals: I noted not only any emotions expressed in my field texts, but I also worked to remember and describe the emotions that I remembered feeling then; that I perceived the person felt; and that I felt or saw anew in reflection.
Clandinin and Connelly stress that we must be sure to see “specific experiences, as storied lives in storied ways, not to represent storied lives as exemplars of formal categories. Things that are seen clearly from a distance and prior to fieldwork as understandable or researchable or interpretable in theoretical terms lose their precision when the daily life of field experience is encountered” (2000, p. 141). As I read memos and other documents, I searched for patterns in my thought process - in the ways I approached my respondents. Did my tone or approach change over time? Did I show a maturity or progression in thinking? Some missives were framed by formulaic writing dictated by district staff. I considered how those professional structures characterized the events I analyzed, the extent to which I summarized the respondents’ side, and remarks they said to me. I worked to capture any patterns I remembered in the ways I mediated or worked through these conflicts and to note any ways those elements were reflected in the documents. I utilized the documents to stimulate my perceptions about what I was thinking and feeling at the time.

**Analytic memos and reflective journals**

Saldana recommends writing what he calls analytic memos, which he defines as a place to reflect on “how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, themes, and concepts in your data . . . Your private and personal written musings before, during, and about the entire enterprise is a question-raising, puzzle-piecing, connection-making, strategy-building, problem-solving, answer-generating, rising-above-the-data heuristic” (2009, p. 32). He says analytic memos are similar to researcher journal entries, which are described by Clandinin and Connelly and others as “a place to ‘dump your brain’ about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and
thus writing and thus thinking even more about them” (2000, p. 32). “These journal-style reflections on . . . experience of the experience help maintain a sense of moving in and out of the experience. . . Practitioners in any field maintain an educative sense of critique and growth about their experience by being reflective on it – field notes turned outward and journal reflections turned inward (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 87).

As I read my documents I used reflective journals to record my emotions and memories, which evolved into my final analyses and reflections. I kept running notes in several categories. As I read text documents related to each event, I recorded insights, memories, emotions, and any comments I thought might work to elucidate the event. I kept a separate log in which I recorded metacognitive observations about the process of the analysis and reflection. Many of the thoughts I recorded in Chapter Eight came from that metacognitive log. Finally, I maintained a daily journal in which I recorded other thoughts related to the process. I continue to live in the Orange Pines community. As Clandinin and Connelly remind us, narrative is everywhere, and a variety of external stimuli worked to stimulate my reflections.

Data Analysis Summary

I focused my rhetorical analysis on two types of documents. To describe my interactions with individuals, I analyzed notes and memos that I wrote during or immediately following the events. I had originally created the documents in order to capture my perception of the events. To describe school-wide reforms I relied on notes, agendas, emails, and presentations created by myself and others, created at the time to describe the events. Because both types of documents were created in the midst of or
closely following particular events, they served as excellent resources to help me
construct and analyze my perceptions.

I read each document numerous times, making notes that included my memories,
insights, emotions, and other thoughts that elucidated the events. I made copies of all
documents, and initially I wrote my comments directly on those documents. I underlined,
circled, highlighted, and wrote notes in the margins. This process recreated the events
for me in a compressed, condensed form, and I found that I thought about them
constantly. Thus, I recorded my perceptions in two journals. One was a daily journal in
which I recorded insights as they came, which were sometimes often. I also recorded my
thoughts about the metacognitive process in a separate journal. Some of those thoughts
are recorded here.

I then arranged the documents chronologically. I began thinking about and
constructing each event by writing in an almost stream of consciousness style about each
experience. I began each by writing a chronological narrative in which I recreated each
scene, complete with description and conversation as recorded in the documents. For
each scenario I created documents that were as long as 50 pages. These were clearly too
long. I thus re-read and re-wrote, choosing to highlight particular events while
compressing others. I had originally thought to discuss my experiences with each
individual or event separately. As I worked through the documents and reflected of the
experiences and the evolution of my thoughts, it became clear to me that a better format
was to portray the events in context chronologically. From this process emerged the
vignettes that I describe below.
Vignettes

As described above, field notes - my notes, memos, and reflective journals - guided my recreation of these experiences through descriptive, chronological vignettes. “In narrative inquiry, our field texts are always interpretive, always composed by an individual at a certain moment in time” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 83). “We are reminded that there is no one true version of events that happened fifteen years ago . . . We tell stories of past events and then ‘slip’ back to field notes to fill in details . . . not in search of a truth or one true version or to correct each other’s story of what happened then and how we got to where we are now, but rather to understand the story . . . We tell stories, remake the past” (85). Ellis notes, “Auto-ethnographies show people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and what their struggles mean . . . Writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain” (2007, p. 26). For Ellis and colleagues, the understanding gained through autoethnography can be expressed through descriptions of epiphanies, defined as incidents of insight or revelation that changed the way the researcher viewed himself or his culture (Ellis, et al., 2008). Jones follows, “Texts aspire to purposeful and tension-filled ‘self-investigation’ of an author’s (and a reader’s) role in a context, a situation, or a social world . . . that is, seeing ‘one’s own part in the situation’ – particularly ‘one’s own frightened or cowardly or self-deceived part (pp. 35-36) – in creating the dynamic and movement of a text” Jones, 2005, p. 767).

Cole and Knowles note that thematic interpretations are finally represented “in the form of detailed and rich life history accounts” (2001, p. 13). Clandinin and Connelly point to the importance of places and objects as triggering memories and emotions. They
call them “memory boxes” in which the people and events of today are retold and rewritten into the research texts of tomorrow” (2000, p. 66). These details and memories can be woven throughout stories and vignettes. I found those memory boxes to very effective reminders as I worked to probe the recesses of my mind and soul.

To that end, I created through my vignettes descriptions of the places of interaction as well as the surrounding physical environment. In Chapter Four I attempt to use rich detail to describe the disparate neighborhoods that contributed students to Orange Pines Middle School. I also work to describe the specific physical elements of the school building itself. Some vignettes describe the physical appearance and actions of the interactors themselves as I attempted to capture the experiences according to Clandinin and Connelly’s three dimensional narrative model.

Those researchers explain, “Once this narrative process takes hold, the narrative inquiry space pulsates with movements back and forth through time and along a continuum of personal and social considerations. The school and community that come in and out of them, take on a dynamic interactive sense. The community is experienced as infusing the school and the school as infusing the community” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 67). They note that narrative inquirers “make themselves as aware as possible of the many, layered narratives at work in their inquiry space. They imagine narrative intersections, and they anticipate possible narrative threads emerging” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70). All stories occurred within the context of a larger school community where events move outward from the individual outward to the school community and beyond, stories nested within stories with myself as researcher-
researched in the midst. I applied scholarly notions about leadership, ethics, and school culture to inform my insights and help me consider a variety of perspectives.

Here is a way to portray the construction of vignettes through the recursive process of reading and analyzing field texts and refracting memories of those experiences. Clandinin and Connelly note, “In the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story. . . Within the inquiry field, we lived out stories, told stories of those experiences, and modified them by retelling them and reliving them” (2000, p. 71). I have created a model to envision this process of stories lived, recorded, relived, analyzed, and so recreated, in Figure 5:

![Figure 5 Linear Model of Story Re-Creation](image)

I worked to follow the above model. By reliving and retelling I learned. Explaining to others also helped, and so I discussed the events with my informed former colleagues who lived the events with me. “Explaining to others,” Clandinin and Connelly, explain, “helps us get clear” (2000, p. 73). These events occurred within a complex milieu that included interactions among various parties and stakeholders, reflecting again Clandinin and Connelly’s concept of three-dimensional narrative space.

As a principal I encountered many dilemmas and emotionally charged confrontations. These experiences involve working with students, parents, and school staff. It would be disingenuous to say that I did not glean significant lessons through
experiences with students. I certainly encountered ethical dilemmas with students, and analysis of those experiences would involve a separate treatise. While I learned much from those experiences, events with students were often filtered through other staff, including teachers and the associate principals. The events with staff were those in which I was directly involved.

Of those experiences with school staff, I have chosen four to analyze: Three teachers, a custodian, and an associate principal. I chose to recreate these specific narratives for several reasons. First, they made a significant impression on me professionally, emotionally, and ethically. Even as I reflect on them several years later, the angst they generated within me seems as real as ever. In addition, they show the many nuances of the processes of due process and documentation related to the ethics of justice and the profession. They are also representative, in that they show a range of levels of personnel with which a principal deals, from custodian to administrator. Finally, they are significant examples of the five ethical frameworks. Most important, through each I learned valuable lessons about myself and the craft of educational leadership.

I devoted several sections to each experience, arranged more or less chronologically. I created vignettes in my attempt to capture the three-dimensional qualities of the experiences, along with analytic reflections and discussions of the events framed as appropriate within the larger theoretical constructs of leadership, school culture, and the various ethical frameworks of critique, justice, care, community, and profession. As I recounted and analyzed these critical events, I recalled previous experiences and reflected on how they helped craft my responses to that dilemma. I questioned what I learned from the experience. Throughout my study I worked to understand how these
experiences shaped and directed my moral approach to the principalship as I negotiated other events occurring within the school community. After each vignette and Phase, I applied the parameters of the ethical frameworks in my quest to understand my values as a morally directed school leader and so define my sense of moral purpose.

**Narrative Structure of My Research Text**

I recreated the events based on the “five elements of plot structure (i.e., characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolution)” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 189). I then reflected on what I learned from those events, informed by the research described above. Sergiovanni notes, “Research and reflecting on personal experience can often provide us with patterns of characteristics to which many . . . are likely to respond in the same way” (2009, p. 7).

Narrative inquiry was the right approach for me because it aligned with my education and experience. I have been preparing for and writing textual analysis for much of my professional life. As an undergraduate I studied the writing style of the New Journalism, pioneered by Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and Tom Wolfe. Following my undergraduate degree I supplemented my salary as a high school English teacher by writing free-lance magazine articles, which I did for several years. I returned to college and earned a Master’s Degree in English, an ordeal that immersed me in the process of textual analysis in many forms. I am comfortable with writing and welcomed this opportunity to use writing to learn about myself (Richardson, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). At the same time, reliving and recreating these evocative experiences has been the most difficult and demanding writing I have ever attempted. I relived the emotional peaks and valleys of each event, made more intense by their compression into a smaller box of time.
My work to recreate events and accurately reflect my understandings were both exhausting and rewarding. It is an experience I recommend to all school leaders.

An explanation of the writing style I enlisted in my study is also in order. The most obvious element of style I used was my use of first person point of view throughout. That is appropriate for autoethnography and should be an a priori admission that expressed perceptions are mine. I began each Chapter with a quote from a similarly evocative and reflective work of poetry or prose. My intent has been to show broader implications of self narrative inquiry and weave the elements of reflection and autobiography throughout my narrative. Voice, signature, narrative form, and audience are all important (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 146). These should be readily apparent in a first person autoethnographic account. My goal has been to create a text that is readable, interesting, informative, and useful.

Believability and Verisimilitude

Riesman argues, “Following a methodical path, documenting claims, and practicing reflexivity strengthens the case for validity” (2008, p. 193). Clandinin and Connelly, however, point out, “Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 184). They prefer terms such as apparency and verisimilitude, thus “avoiding the illusion of causality, that apparent cause-and-effect relationship that appears to exist when narrating events in a temporal sequence (185). Janesick argues that terms such as reliability and generalizability reflect a post positivistic orientation have no place in a autoethnographic narrative inquiry (V. Janesick, personal conversation, August 15, 2012).
Ellis and colleagues note, “For autoethnographers, validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 282). Richardson proposes as metaphor the crystal, “which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach” (Richardson, 2000, p. 13). “Crystalization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of validity (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves) and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know” (Richardson, 2000, p. 14).

A significant danger of personal inquiry pointed out by several researchers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Richardson, 2000; Anderson, 2001) is solipsism, defined as “The theory that the self can be aware of nothing but its own experiences and states; the theory that nothing is real or exists but the self” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 4th ed., 2000). While Anderson agrees that autoethnographers are right in eliciting emotional and sympathetic responses from readers, he warns against “self-absorbed digression . . . Autoethnography loses its sociological promise when it devolves into self-absorption” (2006, p. 385). Denzin describes the analytical view of autoethnography as “self-reflective but not self-obsessed” (Denzin, 2006, p. 421). Sparkes cautions against self-indulgence (2000). Spry notes, “Reflecting on the subjective self in context with others is the scholarly sagaciousness
offered by autoethnography. Good autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal, it is a provocative weave of story and theory” (Spry, 2001, p. 713).

In line with this thinking, Clandinin and Connelly warn against what they call the “Hollywood plot,” the plot in which everything works out in the end. “Narrative inquirers help their readers by self-consciously discussing the selections made, the possible alternative stories, and other limitations seen from the vantage point of ‘I, the critic’” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.182). They call for “wakefulness” on the part of the researcher, being aware of potential criticisms of context, field texts from point of view of three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (2000, p. 182). “A language of wakefulness allows us to proceed forward with a constant alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, and of simplistic plots, scenarios, and unidimensional characters” (2000, p. 182). This is a kind of “ongoing reflection” (p. 184).

My goal has been to avoid glorifying my own accomplishments. That was one important check I asked of my outside readers. While I discovered insights and motivations that were not previously clear, I also revealed failures and described outcomes I wish I had avoided. As I noted when I first described this study, I did not expect to portray myself as a crusader for social justice or a master of distributed or democratic leadership, but rather as a morally directed principal learning how I constructed and applied a sense of moral purpose through negotiating both intense ethical dilemmas and broader efforts of school reform. In several events I analyzed, people either voluntarily or involuntarily terminated their jobs. That is why I labeled these events ethical dilemmas. They were “messy” and their interpretation required a pragmatic
application of the ethical dimensions of critique, justice, care community, and the profession.

**Outside Readers**

Clandinin and Connelly suggest sharing writing on a “work-in-progress basis . . . We ask others to read our work and to respond in ways that help us see other meanings that might lead to further retelling” (2000, p. 61). For this purpose I enlisted friends and former colleagues who were my associate principals during the events described. One is now a principal and doctoral student. The other remains an associate principal at a different school. Neither is still working at Orange Pines. While they could not account for insights into my lessons learned, however, their memories provided further context for my reflections. I proposed to my expert outside reviewers the following questions: Are my descriptions of the incidents accurate? Are the themes and constructs I have identified consistent with your experiences and memory? Are there some themes and constructs I missed?

I was relieved that they both agreed with my perception and depiction of those turbulent events. Interestingly, both remarked at the changes I made in details of the events, in order to mask identities. I made some changes in accounts of events, based on their memories. They both were surprised at the accuracy of my recall in other details, however, a feat that was only possible through my narrative analysis of my field texts. Both stated independently that my descriptions caused them to relive those moments and caused them to recall the anguish of the conflicts and the excitement of the successes.
Ethical Issues

The study poses no serious ethical problems for any individuals or institutions. Clandinin and Connelly remind researchers, “We need to consult our consciences about our responsibilities as narrative inquirers in a participatory relationship” (2000, p. 172). “It is our responsibility not to cause harm to our participants . . . But as researchers, we also owe our care and responsibility to a larger audience, to the conversation of scholarly discourse, and our research texts need also to speak of how we lived and told our stories within the particular field of inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 174).

This is a self-study. As the former principal of Orange Pines Middle School, I am the only identified participant. The focus of the study is on my leadership style, the practices, processes, and procedures that I used, the responses my efforts generated, and the lessons I learned as a result of my interactions. Faculty and staff are indirect participants. To protect them, I have shrouded the identities of my interactors in a variety of ways. I used a pseudonym for the school and did not identify the city, county or district to which the study refers. The events occurred as many as 11 years ago, and staff members at the centers of the events have not worked in the district for some time. Any documents used as field texts that might have been provocative were those written by me, the researcher and subject of the study. Other documents were public notes and agendas, but with no reference to any identifying details. I masked the identity of the characters by assigning pseudonyms, changing their race, gender, job assignment, and other identifying details. It would be impossible to identify any person through criteria recorded in any database. In some situations I created composites or combined events, strategies noted by my outside readers. Scholars agree that these tactics can be used to
conceal identities. Elements of stories can be fictionalized while remaining faithful to one’s experience as a whole. These superficial changes, they maintain, do not change the essence of the meanings of introspective research (Saldano, 2009; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The effects of the events and my lessons learned remained the same. The purpose was to gauge my learning and faults.

Metaphors

Researchers have chosen a variety of metaphors to describe the process of unpacking and recreating the meanings of experience through narrative inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln compare this reflective research process to making a quilt (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) think of it as more like making soup. Richardson chooses a crystal to view events from multiple sides.

In conceptualizing this process I keep coming back to the idea of a prism. A prism breaks light into its disparate parts called a spectrum (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, 2012). Prisms are used for analyzing light and for determining the identity and structure of its materials and can reverse the direction of light by internal reflection” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). The metaphor of breaking into parts for analysis and reflection helped capture this process for me. The ethical frameworks and other scholarly literature became another prism for the data, breaking the experiences into parts that I could reorganize into patterns of meaning and understanding.

I represented my discoveries as I recreated the experiences through descriptive and potentially evocative vignettes. Wolcott used the metaphor of a cruise ship to describe the journey of a school year. I have modified this metaphor in this discussion by
referring to conflicts as tempests across the turbulent sea of school reform. I used as a framework a three-dimensional model of narrative space described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in which I moved inward and outward, and forward and back, while remaining rooted in the school setting. The efficacy of any metaphor, model, or framework is its utility in helping to communicate one’s message. That has been my goal throughout this study.

**Closure and A Look Ahead**

I have attempted to look backward and forward in time in order to construct and decipher the puzzle of who I was, who I am, and who I may become. I looked inward to my personal reasons for doing this study and outward to the social significance of the work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). “Our guiding principle in an inquiry is to focus on experience and to follow where it leads” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 188). I have worked to follow to follow that advice.

In Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven I describe critical events and ethical dilemmas I faced in the seven years I served as principal of Orange Pines Middle School. I begin Chapter Four by describing the diverse communities that comprised the feeder pattern of the school. This includes physical description of the landscapes, as well as the demographic characteristics of the communities. The next three Chapters proceed chronologically as I describe my perceptions of three chronological phases in the development of my persona as a morally directed school leader. Chapter Five comprises Phase One and describes ethical dilemmas and formative events that occurred during Years One and Two. Chapter Six comprises Phase Two and describes key events during Years Three, Four, and Five. Chapter Seven comprises Phase Three and describes
significant events during Years Six and Seven. Within each Chapter I discuss school wide reform efforts conducted as I worked collaboratively with groups of teachers. Each Chapter includes several vignettes in which I attempt to capture the three-dimensional qualities of the experiences, interspersed with analytic reflection and discussion of the events within the larger constructs of comments from other scholars about the development of leadership, school culture, and the various ethical frameworks of critique, justice, care, community, and profession. As I recount and analyze these critical events, I recall previous experiences and reflect on how they helped craft my responses to that dilemma. My goal throughout is to analyze and describe how these experiences shaped and directed my moral approach to the principalship as I negotiated other events within the culture of the school community.

In Chapter Eight I review my lessons learned and summarize my reflections regarding my journey. Each vignette is my interpretation of events. As I wrote, I endeavored to remember Ellis’ guiding questions: Did I learn anything new about myself? Did I learn more about my work as a morally directed school leader? Will my story help other principals cope with or better understand their ethics and values? In sum, my goal has been to provide personal reflections and insights that may improve my profession. I hope I have made a difference.
CHAPTER 4
WELCOME TO ORANGE PINES MIDDLE SCHOOL!

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?...

T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” ll. 70-72

Descriptions and Demographics

The building I entered when I became principal of OPMS had been built just after
the end of World War II as the third generation of Orange Pines High School to exist on
that site since the latter part of the 19th century. The high school had later moved to a new
facility across town, leaving the current structure as the junior high/middle school.

OPMS draws from several areas that are very different in geography and
demographics. Orange Pines serves both in-town and rural residents in an area that
covers more than 200 square miles. The feeder district is divided into four basic areas:
Mill Town, Ranch Grove, Riviera, and Magnolia Avenue.

Ten miles north of the school, Mill Town stretches east from the federal highway
that marks its western edge. Two paved roads jut perpendicular to the highway and define
the area’s northern and southern boundaries. Both quickly drop into pockmarked dirt
roads that lurch clumsily for a couple of miles before stopping abruptly at a copper-
colored river that meanders alongside a heavily wooded state park that sprawls on the opposite shore. The rest of the area is etched with dirt roads that are perpetually washed out and littered with holes. The area draws its name from a lumber mill that once provided jobs for scores of residents, black and white. The mill closed sometime in the early 70’s, taking with it jobs and dreams. Mill Town is now a blighted mix of houses, woods, and fields. Junked cars rust in the front of wooden shacks, where middle-aged men slump listlessly on ramshackle porches. Overgrown back yards battle tangles of palmetto woods and swamp. The area is steeped in unemployment, crime, and despair. The population is split equally between blacks and whites, who share abject poverty as a common denominator.

Within a mile of the school sits Riviera, an area more urban than Mill Town but equally desolate. Its ironic name lingers from a failed subdivision started during the Depression and contrasts with the stark harshness of its condition. A mile-square border of paved roads boxes a labyrinth of dirt paths, lined with a mix of weathered shotgun-style frame and faded concrete-block houses. The sounds of gunshots echo nightly against their stoic walls. Dusty lime rock roads morph into the sand that comprises most of the yards.

Riviera is more densely populated than Mill Town, and its citizens are an eclectic blend of whites, blacks, and Mexican Hispanics. Many of the Mexicans and some of the whites are migrant workers. For most of the Mexicans, Spanish is their first language, and many speak no English. They share with Mill Town the pervasive constants of poverty and crime, which mix with road dust to form an omnipresent pall that shackles the souls of those who live there.
Moving east from Rivera, the terrain springs into a hilly run of pastures, orange groves, and pines known as Ranch Grove. Among orange trees and fields of cows and horses, large houses nestle in comfortable hammocks of well-manicured lawns, quietly hidden from the bustle of the main roads. Ranch Grove is semi-rural and much less densely populated than either Mill Town or Riviera. Most who live there are white. Some are descendants of original settlers. Many earn their living from their ranches or groves, handed down through two or more generations. Others are professionals who migrated from the city to find a peaceful, friendly community in which to raise their kids.

Magnolia Street anchors the neighborhood closest to Orange Pines Middle. Attractive, two story homes line the street, which is rimmed by sidewalks on both sides. Some houses are new, while others are registered historic sites that have stood for more than a century. It is the most expensive and prestigious address in the City of Orange Pines.

Until the 1980s, almost all the middle school students in these areas attended OPMS. Although a few sent their children to private schools in the city 30 miles south, Orange Pines was the traditional and accepted school. Many of the parents had attended there, and they sent their children after them. As growth began to encroach from the south, the district built Francis Middle. A state of the art school, it drew many students from the Ranch Grove area. A few years later, the district built Meeks, another state of the art school, clean, crisp, well scrubbed, and stocked with new furniture and modern technology. At the same time the district was building new schools, however, planners were ignoring older schools like Orange Pines. Gradually, parents of means began to move their children to the newer schools. Most of those were white, leaving Orange
Pines with a student population that was 40 percent Hispanic, 15 percent African American, 40 percent special needs, and 70 percent impoverished.

Thus was the population of Orange Pines Middle when I became principal. The exterior was red brick, officially named “State University” brick, reflecting the focus on history and tradition in Orange Pines. An indefinable but distinct odor hit visitors when they entered. It combined the scents of 50 years of sweat and mold, blended with tears of sadness and joy, hate and love, loss and victory, poverty and wealth, all packed in together. Some said the place was haunted. The plant manger swore he had seen a ghost upstairs more than once, and many believed him. I never saw any ghosts, but I could hardly walk the halls without tripping over long shadows of the past, which were ever present.

When I became principal, the building was a mess. The roofed leaked, and the plaster bubbled across the ceiling. Rusty streaks lined the walls. I thought that if I looked carefully enough, I could tell the age of the school by counting the layers of paint as it chipped from the walls, the predominant color of which was institutional green.

Inside the classrooms, ceiling ties were stained from roof leaks. The condition of the furniture reflected the state of the building. Student tables and desks were etched with obscenities and other graffiti. In one room, a hole between the floor and ceiling created a conduit through which students shoved paper, pencils, and pens.

Attached to the north end of the building was an auditorium that held more than 600 seats and a broad stage. Many of the wooden seats were chipped and broken, and most were marked with graffiti. The floor was gray concrete. A dropped ceiling loomed closely overhead. Several tiles bore water stains. An air handler perched just above the
ceiling in the rear of the auditorium. Whenever the unit jumped to life, its cacophony
drowned out all but the loudest competing sounds.

The room was illuminated by rows of fluorescent lights, marked randomly by
broken ballasts that dotted the ceiling with dull blots. The curtains that hung from atop
the stage were stained and torn, requiring them to gape perpetually open to frame the rear
of the stage. Tall windows and blinds stretched down from the ceiling along the outside
wall. During the day sunlight peeked through broken slats in the blinds and splashed lines
across the floor and broken chairs. At night, light from inside hallways seeped through
the broken gaps and grinned toothlessly across the softball field toward Magnolia Street.

The PE locker rooms were in equally bad shape. Many of the locker doors were
broken and hung open. They were littered with years of chewing gum, dried tobacco,
and wads of paper and covered with graffiti.

The front of the building had been renovated just before I arrived. The windows
had been replaced and were attractive. The back of the building, however, was another
story. The original building housed tall, broad windows, maybe 10 feet or more square.
They had been designed to open tall and wide to take advantage of any Florida breezes
that might come along during hot afternoons. Sometime in the murky past, probably
when they installed window air conditioning units in the early eighties, the district
installed smaller windows. Instead of patching the void with matching brick, the district
had surrounded the windows with concrete blocks, rendering them not only plain but
unattractive. When it rained, thick drainpipes dumped torrents of water from the flat roof
onto dirty asphalt, depositing large pools of water in the area that doubled as the student
commons area and faculty parking lot. Adjacent to the building ran a three-foot wide
trough of dirt and broken concrete that might have served at one time as an area for
shrubs, but anything planted there had died long ago, leaving a void filled with chips of
rock and debris.

When I toured the plant with the director of construction shortly after I arrived, he
provided an apt summary. “Jim, this place looks like a ball bearing factory.” I wasn’t
sure what a ball bearing factory looked like, but I knew it wasn’t a complimentary
description, and I knew it was one I had to change.

For Mill Town and Riviera parents and students, the condition of the building
reflected normalcy. They didn’t expect anything different or more. For the natives
whose parents had attended there, it was home. The newcomers and the affluent,
however, wanted something “better” for their kids. Within the community the school
carried a reputation as a haven for “gangs,” even though that was a false assumption. I
believed that affluent, recently planted whites perpetuated the premise because of the
preponderance of Mexican and black students and poor whites who attended the school,
although no one would ever admit that. With this came a reputation for more numerous
discipline problems and fights than at other middle schools in the area, another false
assumption. Enveloping everything came a belief that the school was academically
inferior to the newer schools and provided a mediocre education. Across community
groups the school carried the label of a “ghetto” school, an invective reinforced by the
condition of the physical plant.

Ironically, this negative perception was strongest among residents of Magnolia
Street, which skirts the campus’ northern edge. Shortly after I became principal, I
conducted an informal survey of the area and, specifically, Magnolia St. and its
tributaries. I communicated to district planners that of 12 middle school-aged students living on or adjacent to Traditions St., three attended OPMS. The remainder was split among private schools and Meeks.

These erroneous but pervasive community perceptions of OPMS were captured for me in an incident that occurred one evening at my church, which is located about three blocks from OPMS. During a youth event I met a teenage girl new to the neighborhood. She lived across the street from the church and, therefore, near to OPMS. I asked her what grade she was in.

“Eighth,” she replied.

Somewhat embarrassed, since I thought I should recognize her, I said, “Oh, do you go to Orange Pines?”

“No,” she sneered, “I go to Meeks.”

“Why do you go to Meeks when Orange Pines is just around the corner from your house?”

“I don’t go to Orange Pines,” she snapped smugly, “because my parents care about my education.” Her intemperance slapped me with an emotional force I may never forget; and yet, that saucy 14 year old had synthesized community perception in a few syllables.

In many ways the attitude of the staff reflected the opinion of the community. Many teachers did not believe their students could perform well academically. “We can see where they come from – we see their environment. What else can we expect?” was a common chord. Teachers did not often bother to enter their students in contests or competitions. When they did, they did not expect to win, and their students usually met
their teachers’ expectations. At the start of his presidency George W. Bush coined the phrase “the soft bigotry of low expectations” to describe an attitude prevalent among underperforming schools that accepted mediocrity as the norm (Bush, 2000). The concept was so effective that he used it as the impetus to drive NCLB legislation. While this is not an endorsement of the punitive strictures and other negative aspects attached to the NCLB approach to school reform, the attitude of low expectations was prevalent among the faculty and staff of OPMS and was reflected in the school’s reputation within the community.

Paradoxically, however, most of the teachers and support staff loved their students and the school. Each Christmas they would raise hundreds of dollars among themselves to feed and clothe needy families, and teachers often silently bought shoes, eye glasses, and other necessities for individual students. Many thought it was their Christian mission to help the kids. A majority of the staff had worked at the school for more than 20 years and often referred to themselves as a large family. Heavily unionized, they were content and wary of change.

**Climate of Accountability**

This period marked the beginning of the current post-positivistic climate of school accountability, and all schools in the district were under the same push for school improvement. The Crestview school district had been proactive in establishing a middle school infrastructure in every middle school. This included teams of teachers who taught the same students in heterogeneously grouped classes. The district had also established a curriculum based on subject area outcomes and interdisciplinary units that teachers followed each quarter. These guidelines were applied externally rather than constructed
internally by the faculty. While teachers applied the infrastructure of heterogeneously grouped teams, therefore, much of the pedagogy and curriculum at Orange Pines was traditional.

This was also the beginning of the implementation of two different external accountability systems. The first came from the state, which had begun applying “grades” to schools, based on students’ performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), designed to assess student performance in reading, mathematics, and writing. This was also the inauguration of federal NCLB legislation, which used the same student scores to monitor a school’s progress. At the time I became principal of Orange Pines Middle, it was categorized as a Title I school. This designation was based on the percentage of students classified as impoverished and entitled the school to additional funds used to purchase personnel and instructional materials. This was early in the implementation of NCLB mandates, and both teachers and administrators were unsure of the law’s long-term effects. More pressing was the designation of the school’s year-end “grade,” which was listed on the district and state department of education websites and published in the local newspapers. The grade was a mark of shame or pride. Regardless of how we felt about being judged by the results of one comprehensive assessment, we understood that the grade was paraded as a quantifiable symbol of the quality of the school.

Thus I set on a quest to improve the reputation of Orange Pines Middle School within the community. That would require a focus on programs, curriculum, staff, and the physical plant. Those issues would be challenging enough, without the distractions and trials of several arduous and emotionally draining ethical dilemmas that confronted
me from my first days as principal. From those trials, however, I came to understand what I valued in the school community, what I valued in others, and what drove me to succeed as I searched for a moral purpose in my leadership of a challenging school.

As Wolcott (1973), Sergiovanni (2009), and many others have noted, a principal’s day is broken into many disparate parts. I have often used the metaphor of scenes and episodes within a television drama to describe events within a school culture. Some stories play out each week and are quickly solved. Other conflicts continue over one or more seasons. Some characters remain, while others move on toward other adventures. Events cycle between high drama and comic relief. Regardless, there is always action. There is rarely silence.

It would be not only difficult but tedious to chart all turbulent events that occurred in my seven-year tenure as principal of Orange Pines. I have decided to recreate and reflect upon several experiences that were emotionally painful, professionally difficult, and ethically ambiguous for me. Each spanned several years, and each ended painfully for my interactors and for me. In order to probe other ethical aspects of my leadership style, I will paint these events against the macrocosm of events that shaped the overall climate of the school. In some cases, I applied lessons from these focused experiences to school-wide reform efforts. In others, my lessons from my interactions with larger faculty groups fueled my encounters in these specific conflicts. I have described definitions of critical events earlier in Chapter Three. As I began to recall and craft these vignettes, I remembered a description an assistant superintendent applied to such ethical dilemmas. She noted, “We remember them because they are the ones that bite us in the ass. We compare them to the ones where we were successful, although we don’t
remember the details of those, because we move on from them” (personal conversation). Schon describes these events more formally as “the changing character of the situations of practice – the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice” (1983, p. 14).

**Tragedy**

I consider some of the scenarios I will describe as tragic, a common but important descriptor that deserves discussion. In his *Poetics* Aristotle describes tragedy in part as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself … with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions.” Holman explains, “Tragedy treats man in terms of his godlike potential, of his transcendent ideals, of the part of himself that is in rebellion against not only the implacable universe but the frailty of his own flesh and will” (1971, p. 533). The people I will discuss were not highly placed tragic heroes like an Oedipus or a Lady Macbeth. They were all human beings, however, and in my value system, children of God. Thus, their fall from what they could have been is tragic. I believe these vignettes will show the contrasts between what they could have been and what their pride, their frailties, their refusal to reflect drove them to be. While my own tale is certainly not tragic, I deeply regret my inability to help them realize their potential.

As an organizing structure, I will describe events within phases and years. My goal will be to move between critical interactions and place them within the broader context of my school reform efforts. I will reflect on the tension of the five ethical frameworks as I perceive their interplay within each year and phase. These are the ethics
of care, critique, justice, community, and the profession. In this approach I borrow from Beck and Murphy (1997), who see ethical frameworks as “one way of organizing the many ways of thinking about the complex issue of ethics” (p. 32). Throughout this discussion I will question what I learned about my profession and myself by living through their periods of catharsis. Indeed, I will seek to identify my own moments of catharsis in my quest to discover, construct, and refine my professional identity as a morally directed leader.
CHAPTER 5

PHASE ONE, YEARS ONE AND TWO

"My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see. That — and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm — all you demand; and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask."

Joseph Conrad, Preface to The Nigger of Narcissus.

Year One

I have identified Years One and Two as Phase One of the development of my identity as a morally directed school leader. In Phase One I entered a deteriorating school facility and encountered turbulent critical incidents and challenging ethical dilemmas. As I interacted with these elements I began to draw on my experiences to explore and begin to define my sense of moral purpose as a school leader.

Community Connections: Ethics of Care, Critique, and Community

When I entered Orange Pines Middle School as principal, I was already well ensconced in the Orange Pines area community. My family and I attended church on Magnolia St. My daughters took dance and piano lessons around the corner from the school. My son played rec league football on the OPMS field. My wife directed plays for the community theater group that shared the OPMS auditorium. My oldest daughter
had attended the school several years earlier, and most of her teachers were still there. In addition, some of my children’s teachers from other schools had migrated there. I knew several staff through a community web of church, athletic, and civic groups. Finally, I was surprised to discover that my mother had attended Orange Pines High for one year in days before the current building was erected.

I treasured my connections to the area and to OPMS. The Orange Pines community had embraced me with a stability and sense of belonging that I had not known for much of my youth, and I was eager to bolster that relationship in my new job as principal of the local middle school. When I spoke to parent groups, I often drew for them the various ties I had to the teachers and the community. I wanted them to know that my staff and I were woven into the tapestry that was the community of Orange Pines and committed to the safety, emotional health, and academic success of their children.

Shapiro and Gross discuss the concept of turbulent events, which they describe as emotional and volatile events that may disrupt a school culture (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). They explain that in the context of such events, it is incumbent upon the school leader to provide some sense of comfort and security for the students and staff. Two turbulent events early in my principalship cemented my focus on compassion for both students and staff as I attempted to provide a sense of comfort.

The first critical event introduced me directly to the poverty of Mill Town. One of our students had been killed while racing his four-wheeler through a pasture. He had tried to drive under a barbed wire fence and was decapitated. The horrific scene was witnessed by several of his friends. Although I did not know the student, I thought it my duty to visit the family. As with many of our students, his parents were divorced, and he
lived with his grandmother and father. I sat on their front porch and listened to them grieve a precious child I did not know.

As they mourned, I remembered myself as a college freshman sitting on a similar porch with my own grandmother after her son, my uncle and my mother’s brother, had blown his brains out with a shotgun. I had no words then to help my grandmother understand why her only remaining offspring had been ripped from her so cruelly. The grief was palpable then, as it was now. The only comfort I brought was to tell them the school cared. That couldn’t bring their son back, but maybe that made a small difference.

These people were poor, uneducated and white, although they could have easily been black or Hispanic. This event represented many other experiences of tragedy and grief in which I became immersed as principal that helped forge my belief poverty is a significant barrier to student achievement. I don’t mean to dismiss racial prejudice as a factor in underachievement, and I realize those viewing the same events through a different screen of social justice might disagree; but in my experiences dealing with impoverished people of all races, the income and education level of a child’s parents was a discriminate factor in predicting the student’s academic success. My own home, tucked snugly inside a pine hammock in Ranch Grove, seemed light years away, separated from this place by formidable walls of education, income, and class.

In another disturbing event that occurred early in Year One, the grown son of one of our teachers died suddenly and unexpectedly of a brain tumor. Although I did not know him, I had known his mother for several years. She had been one of my daughter’s teachers and represented one of my personal links to the school. I remember that as I announced her son’s death at a faculty meeting, I began to cry. I’m not sure why,
although I may have remembered the deaths of my mother and uncle, compounded with the stress of working as a new principal, a job that was emotionally exhausting.

**Reflection: Critical events and ethical frameworks**

**Ethic of care**

In retrospect, these two incidents cemented for me the ethical premises that drove the remainder of my principalship. Foremost was the ethic of care, which Starratt notes is primary among the ethical frameworks as the fundamental characteristic of being human (2012). He notes, “an ethic of care tends to deal with the relationality that binds humans together, and the attendant responsibility of responding to the other’s needs as another human person (2012, p. 37). This includes those who are “sick, impoverished, unjustly persecuted or oppressed” (p. 38). I quickly learned that I did care about my students and staff, and that it was important for me to let them know that I cared. These events provided quick links to my own personal losses. I realized the turbulent events of death and grief are universal commonalities and consummate levelers that we all share. This seems to me directly tied to the ethic of care, a concept that I would carry throughout my years at Orange Pines.

**Ethic of community**

Furman suggests three processes as starting points for embracing the ethic of community in schools. These are processes for “knowing, understanding and valuing; …for full participation and inquiry; … and for working toward the common good” (2004, p. 10). She advises honoring others as “unique individuals and as members of valued cultural groups” (Furman, 2004, p. 10). This requires what she calls “deep or intentional listening … inviting others to tell their stories of who they are, what their lives are like,
and what they hope for” (p. 10). I believe I was trying to establish that link within the neighborhood and school communities through my involvement in the grieving of these tragic losses of life.

**Ethic of critique**

Linked closely with compassion is the ethic of critique, which demands that we acknowledge our differences and to work to provide all our students a quality and equitable education, despite those inequities. The poor and uneducated are most likely to be disenfranchised and least likely to challenge a system that may exclude them. The death of the boy from Mill Town painted for me a vivid portrait of the sadness and poverty of the area that previously had been only an abstraction. While these initial events were not ethical dilemmas, they were formative critical events that reminded me of my past and showed me early and quickly that I did care for my students and staff, and that I wanted them to know I cared. These themes of care and critique would become central to my morally directed approach to school reform.

**Tom and Rita: Probing the Ethics of Care, Justice, Critique, the Community, and the Profession**

My first ethical dilemma came quickly through the relationship of Tom and Rita, an ethical morass that stretched over my first two years. Clandinin and Connelly note that we begin our experiences with participants “in the midst” of their lives and ours (2000, p. 63). This was definitely the case with Tom and Rita.

I started as principal at OPMS on a Wednesday. Teachers were to return the next Monday, so I didn’t have much time to learn the campus and the staff. For help, I turned to my two associate principals, Semitra, a Caucasian female and Randy, a Caucasian
male. They were experienced administrators who had worked at the school for several years and knew the staff well. Teachers liked and respected them, and they were committed to the success of OPMS.

As noted by many narrative analysts, stories are everywhere (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cole & Knowles, 2001; Ellis, 2004; Riessman, 2008). As with all organizations, many stories combine to create the grand narrative of the school. Among the many tales Randy and Semitra briefed me on was a romantic relationship between two teachers who were married to other people. The narrative of Tom and Rita would be an ethical dilemma that would test me from the beginning of my principalship and cause me to probe the depths of my values, emotions, and beliefs. My interactions with them would challenge my principles and match the ethic of care against the ethics of critique, justice, the community, and the profession.

Semitra and Randy knew about the relationship through the reporting of our social worker, Rhonda, who was a friend of Rita’s and did not approve of her relationship with Tom. Rhonda told Semitra that earlier in the summer Tom’s wife had confronted them in public and instigated a major argument, complete with screaming and obscenities. While the story made for interesting conversation, we had many things to do to prepare for school opening, and I dismissed it as a minor distraction. We agreed that as long as they kept their issues away from school and kids, their personal relationship was not our concern. Unfortunately, that would not be the case.

Tom Byrd and Rita Hablaro formed a two-person team, teaching the school’s dropout prevention (DOP) students. She taught language arts and social studies, and he taught math and science. They also shared an instructional paraprofessional. Their
students demonstrated severe discipline problems and had lost the “right” to be mainstreamed with other students. They were isolated from the rest of the school and self-contained in the classrooms of Tom and Rita. They went out only for lunch, PE, and another elective. That was a practice I later discontinued, but at the time, it was the school and district norm.

These students were troubled at school and troubled at home. Mixed among them were children with emotional and learning disabilities. Some had been sexually abused. Most had been physically abused. Few lived with both biological parents. Many slept on a sofa or the floor or shared a bed with a sibling or two. They lived in a world where sex was casual and substance abuse was commonplace. Teaching them was challenging at best, and few could do it successfully, but Tom and Rita had struck a rapport with their students and managed their instruction as well as anyone I had seen.

The DOP suite squeezed into a space on the second floor, above the auditorium stage. It was isolated from the rest of the school and accessible only by a single staircase entered from the outside. Tom, Rita, and their assistant parked close to the doorway, making ingress and egress easy and discrete. The area that in earlier years housed the school library was divided into two classrooms, two offices, and restrooms. It was a world unto itself. Because of its isolation, it wasn’t the kind of place one could just stop by en route to another destination. One had to make a special point to drop in. That seems like it shouldn’t make a difference, but it did. Consequently, I didn’t visit as often as I should have.
My extended encounters with Tom and Rita began on Day Four of my career as middle school principal when Janice, my secretary, walked into my office and shut the door.

“Tom’s wife wants to see you. She’s been crying and says she has to talk to you right away.”

I had no idea what this was about or what would happen, but I knew I wasn’t going to talk to a crying spouse by myself.

“OK,” I said. “Ask Semitra to come join us.”

Mrs. Byrd was a small, frail woman. She wore no makeup. Her uncombed blonde hair hung listlessly across her eyes, which were red and matted. I asked her to sit at the table adjacent to my desk.

“Mr. Lane, I’m Veronica Byrd, wife of one of your teachers. I know you don’t know me, but I’ve got a big problem. My husband is having an affair with one of your teachers. You need to do something about it. And if you don’t, I will, and that won’t be pretty.”

Semitra and I looked at each other. I knew I was out of my depth, and I needed to call in reinforcements. “Get Patrick in here,” I said to Semitra. Patrick was the school resource officer (SRO). He was a member of the city’s police department and was stationed at the school fulltime. One lesson as principal I learned quickly was to involve the SRO in any matter that involved legal issues.

Patrick soon entered and sat in another chair at the table. He was a large man, probably about six feet, two inches tall and over 300 pounds, and he
breathed heavily as he dropped into the chair. He set out his note pad and pen.

“What’s going on, Mrs. Byrd?” he asked pleasantly.

“Like I said, my husband is having an affair with one of your teachers. I confronted them with it last week. I have two young children, and she’s wrecking our lives.”

I didn’t know what to say, but I knew I had to say something. I was the principal, and I was supposed to know what to do. “I know this is upsetting, Mrs. Byrd, but this doesn’t have anything to do with the school. It sounds like a private matter between you and your husband.”

“It’s not private any more. She called and left a message on my phone. She said, ‘You better watch your back, bitch.’ That’s it. I’m not going to take any more. I’m done with him. I’ve decided I’m going to divorce him. He can have her. But you better tell her to stop calling and threatening me, or she’ll be sorry. They both will.”

In his work as a police officer Patrick had encountered many domestic arguments, and he took over. “OK, first of all, you can’t go after her or him. That will just make things worse. You’ll be arrested, and that’s not what you want. You can get a restraining order against her. I suggest you get a lawyer and follow his advice.”

Then it was my turn. “I know you’re upset, Mrs. Byrd, but you cannot bring this problem onto the school campus. If you come onto campus again, come directly to the office. Do not go to your husband’s room or Ms. Hablaro’s room.”
I knew that was correct, but if she did that anyway, I wasn’t sure what we would do.

Fortunately, Patrick intervened. “That’s right. If you go to her room or his, I will have to arrest you for disturbing the peace. That’s to protect everyone – you as well as them and the students in their classes. I empathize with your situation, I really do, but my job is to prevent any disruption on our school campus.”

She cried and said she understood. She just wanted us to know of the situation. We hadn’t resolved anything, but speaking to us seemed to defuse the immediate tension of the moment. She agreed to abide by our rules and left.

The next step was to conference with Tom and Rita individually. I had only been on the job four days, and I hadn’t even met them. Rita was tall, sleek, and Hispanic – Spanish, specifically, I think. Her hair was jet black, short, cropped over her ears and styled close to her face. Her subdued makeup highlighted her dark eyes, pink cheeks, and cherry lips. Her fingernails were neatly manicured and painted with a soft pastel that matched her lipstick. She wore a colorful, patterned rose and lavender blouse with a dark lavender skirt. She wore two bracelets, a matching necklace and matching earrings. Her shoes were leather flats that matched her handbag, both light shades of pink. I remember thinking she was certainly well dressed for a planning day.

Our conversation set the pattern for many future conferences. I told each of them about my meeting with Mrs. Byrd earlier that morning. Rita appeared shocked.

“Mr. Lane, first, I want you to know I am embarrassed by everything you have told me. Tom and I do have a personal relationship, but he and his wife have
been separated since the beginning of the summer. He’s moved out of the house and told her he’s filing for divorce. What’s more, Mr. Lane, I didn’t call her. She called me and left a threatening message on my phone. I think I should file charges against her. Mr. Lane, I know you don’t know me, but I am a very professional person. I want you to respect me professionally. I take great pride in my work, and I would never do anything to damage my job or my reputation. I never mix my personal and professional life. Any relationship I have with Tom is strictly private and away from school.”

Tom took a different approach. He was dressed in jeans, a tight-fitting polo and scuffed sneakers. He was tall and intense, also Hispanic, about 6 feet tall and well built. Bright and articulate, he had a deep, clear voice that commanded the room when he argued a point, which was often.

I told him about my conversation with his wife. He pressed forward in his chair.

“Look, my wife’s crazy. I moved out and told her I’m filing for divorce. What I do on my own time is my business. She doesn’t have any business coming in here. She’s threatened to have me arrested, and now she’s trying jeopardize my job. She’s a screaming lunatic. Our marriage is over. I’m in the right here. I’m minding my own business, and she comes in here butting her nose where it doesn’t belong. She had better back off.” Tom had a way about him that was menacing. His eyes were intense. He looked directly at you when he talked. He wasn’t threatening, exactly, but he did make me uncomfortable.

“OK,” I said, “I don’t know about any of that. You know I just got here. She came to see me. I didn’t seek her out. I’m just telling you what she said, and
what I told her. But you have to keep your personal issues private and away from school and away from the kids.” During that meeting I advised each of them that a violation of the Florida educator code of ethics could cause them to lose their jobs. I read an excerpt from a pamphlet describing professional ethics and noted, “We are held to a high moral standard and are expected to achieve and sustain the highest level of ethical conduct.” They said they understood and that I would have nothing to worry about.

What a mess, I thought. I was just trying to figure out this new job and was presented with this remarkable distraction. Here was my dilemma: Who was telling the truth? What business was it of mine who did what with whom? They all seemed sincere and appropriately indignant that I would question their integrity. I didn’t personally approve of adultery, but who was I to judge them?

A follow-up conversation with Joe, the district supervisor for employee relations, put the event into perspective. “It doesn’t matter who’s right, Jim. What matters is that it ended up on your desk. Once that happened, it became your business. They need to be sure that this stuff stays away from the school and the kids.” A week later I followed up with a letter to Mrs. Byrd and conference summaries to Tom and Rita. These were my first official messages documenting an emotional and ethical event. There would be many to follow.

After school began, a pattern developed. Tom and Rita would be out the same days, and they began to miss work more often. Then one day, about a month after school started, Tom and Rita came to me. Rita began.
“Mr. Lane, as I told you at the beginning of the year, I always strive to be a professional and not to mix my personal and professional life. But something happened that has made me very upset and crossed the line.” She went on to say that one of her students had asked her if she and Mr. B. were going to get married. He also asked if she was going to have Mr. B’s baby.

“This is Rhonda’s fault,” Tom snarled. “She’s been talking to the kids about us. She’s trying to slander me. I’ll go to the union. I won’t put up with this.” I told them both to calm down. I would look into it and put a stop to the nonsense.

When I spoke to Rhonda, she had a different version of events.

“Of course I didn’t say anything to the kids. I don’t have to. Apparently, they are back and forth in each other’s rooms all day. You should talk to some of the kids and see what they have to say. They see enough of this kind of garbage at home. They don’t need to see it at school.”

And so I did speak with several students. Semitra and I interviewed them together. Rhonda was right. They didn’t need this. One asked me if Tom and Rita were getting married, because they were together all the time. Another said that on a recent weekend he had helped Tom move furniture between apartments. He said Rita was there.

In my follow-up conversation with Tom, he admitted the boy helped him move.

“He’s a big guy and was a lot of help. I paid him, and he appreciated the money. If Rita’s there, that’s my business. I’m on my own time then.”
I agreed but told him and Rita they couldn’t act that way and then become angry when students talk. I directed both of them to stay away from each other during school hours, except when professionally necessary.

**Another conflict**

Then in mid-October, something happened that escalated the conflict. The cafeteria manager called me, angry that Rita had not reported for lunch duty. Lunch duty is one of those items low on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs that becomes important in a hurry when no one is there to monitor the kids. We called her room and then Tom’s. No response. A few minutes later, the plant manager saw them pulling up in Tom’s car.

“We just went to Hardy’s to pick up lunch,” Rita said to me when I called them in. “Don’t we have a right to do that?”

“We do,” Tom echoed. “It’s in the contract.”

“True,” I agreed, “but it’s also in the contract that the principal can require specific duties of teachers. Rita missed her duty. You’re also supposed to let an administrator know if you’re leaving campus. And besides all that, I told you two to stay away from each other during school hours. I’ve tried to be fair. I’ve tried to respect your professionalism and honor your privacy. I’ve also told you three things every time we’ve met: exercise discretion, keep your personal relationship away from your students, and don’t let this relationship interfere with your professional conduct. You’ve violated every one of those.”

I issued each of them a letter of reprimand for leaving school campus without notifying an administrator. The sanction seemed minor, considering everything else they
had done, like jailing Al Capone for tax evasion. But it got the point across. Although it came just three months after I first met with them, it seemed like a lifetime ago.

**Reflection**

I was exhausted and overwhelmed and didn’t know what to do. I had never dealt with anything like this before. When I first conferenced with them, I wasn’t even sure what these teachers’ roles were professionally, and yet I was sorting through their personal issues. I think these scenarios reminded me of incidents with my stepmother. With her there was always an issue, always a complication. She was perpetually angry with someone. That was part of the legacy I brought with me and influenced my decisions. I also wanted to give Tom and Rita the benefit of the doubt. They were so steadfast in their defiance.

My stance at this point certainly stemmed from my inexperience and lack of self-confidence in such important situations. Schon notes the “gap between the (professional) schools’ prevailing conception of professional knowledge and the actual competencies required of practitioners in the field” (1987, p. 10). My ignorance certainly contributed to my lack of confidence. Bass (2008) notes that the element of self-confidence is strong in transformational leaders and notes that leaders who lack self confidence are “less willing to hold face-to-face discussions with subordinates” (p. 189). He notes, “If (leaders) don’t believe in themselves, neither will the others they seek to influence believe in them” (Bass, 2008, p. 189). He continues, “At the same time, leaders must guard against arrogance and unwillingness to hear what others have to say” (Bass, 2008, p. 189). The latter description did not characterize me, since I held many conversations
listening to their opinions. At the least, I was more than willing to listen, often ad
auseam, to their opinions.

Another issue that must be addressed is that of power. Blasé and Blasé note,
“Principals, by virtue of their position, possess enormous power that may be used in
constructive or destructive ways” (2003, p. 22). I don’t believe that in the case of Tom
and Rita or elsewhere I ever adopted an authoritarian style of leadership decried by Blasé
and Anderson (1994) and Blasé and Blasé (2003). I believe I was moving toward a style
of leadership Blasé and Anderson describe as open, transformative, and empowering.
They explain, “This approach (to leadership) is democratic in its processes of decision-
making as well as in its fundamental concern with goals of equity and justice” (1994, p.
21). While that style proved well suited for school-wide efforts, it was initially less
effective in individual conflicts, spurred by my lack of confidence and fed by my
ignorance. I was clearly in a learning mode that would continue.

Starratt (2012) notes that the ethic of critique forces us to confront situations in
which we disproportionately fail certain groups. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) agree,
noting social classes as those most often ignored. This was the case with Tom and Rita’s
DOP students. Their teachers were playing out their drama before needy students who
didn’t need to see that their teachers were as dysfunctional as their own families.

More of the same

Tom and Rita continued to miss work on the same days. By this time they had
used their allotted personal and sick days, and every day they took was unpaid. I called
Joe to brief him on events. I asked whether I could chastise them for being out at the
same time.
“Right or wrong, Jim, it doesn’t matter. What they are doing has a negative effect on the entire school. If they are out the same day, it gives the appearance of impropriety. They have to know the situation does not look good. They would be better off if they were professionally separated and worked at different schools. It’s really proving to be a strain for them to be together.”

Joe had logged years as a principal before moving to the district office. I had always thought of him as gruff and temperamental. In retrospect, however, he seems to have been patient and circumspect. I did appreciate his decisiveness, and I see now that he and the district staff were leaving things up to me as principal to act and manage the school as I saw fit, and no one was telling me what to do. I met with each of them, warned them about their excessive absences, and gave them a memo summarizing our conversation.

**Email explosion**

Then an explosive debacle erupted during preparation for a school-wide Club Day. We would release students after lunch, and for the next couple of hours they would rotate among classrooms where teachers would try to recruit them to a club or group they were sponsoring. A teacher-led committee coordinated the clubs. Normally this was a routine, benign process. Teachers would propose a club, and the committee would render approval. This time, however, things quickly came to boil.

Using the school email system, Rita notified the committee chair, Melissa, that she and Tom wanted to start a Young Atheists Club. Melissa responded to Rita’s email by saying the committee felt such a group was not in the Christian spirit of OPMS and did not reflect the cultural background of the community. Melissa represented the
Christian conscience of OPMS. She included a small group of teachers on a “Scripture of the Day” email list, and she traditionally opened planning day potluck lunches with a prayer.

From that point, events escalated exponentially. Tom responded in a tirade that he copied to everyone on the school email system. He was tired of having someone else’s religion shoved down his throat. Melissa and the committee, he said, had no right to veto his request. They were small-minded bigots, and the school had a responsibility to instill an awareness of religious diversity with our students. He called the committee members “absurd” and “worthless, autocratic and condescending.”

The assault launched a barrage of comments from all angles. Some sided with Tom and some with the committee. I didn’t know this was happening until my secretary called me. “You’d better look at what’s going on over the email. It’s getting pretty bad.” The messages were ricocheting at a rapid pace, one feeding the other, and all posted for everyone to see. Once again, I didn’t know what to do, but I knew I had better do something. I called the technology specialist. “I don’t care what you have to do,” I said, “shut down that email system now!”

Fortunately she was able to do that quickly. Once again, the remainder of my day, as well as many days ahead, would be devoted to the collective angst created by Tom and Rita. I quickly called district. Supervisors referred me to the Electronic Use Guidelines, which every teacher signed every year. It charged teachers not to use the Internet or email system for any personal or nefarious purpose, especially in making rude or disparaging remarks about another individual.
Later that day I issued a memo to the entire staff, along with a copy of the guidelines. I quoted from the guidelines and warned them,

“The above criteria make it clear that sending comments that are chastising, critical, or offensive are an inappropriate use of the school network. These comments are especially inappropriate when listed for the entire staff to read. Be assured that I will not hesitate to take appropriate disciplinary action regarding any misuses of the school email system.”

Following that, I wrote Tom another formal letter of reprimand for initiating the explosive exchange. His actions were especially egregious, I noted, because he had included the entire school in his remarks. I said that his response was another in a series of inappropriate actions related to another staff member.

As I expected, he fired back with his own letter. He noted that he was not the only one hurling comments across the system. He also said his relationship with Rita had nothing to do with this event, and I had no basis for that claim. He said he would file a grievance with the superintendent regarding my continued harassment of him. I was concerned about that threat, but my conversation with Joe, the employee relations director, put me at ease.

Joe: So what if he files a grievance? He started it. He’s wrong, and we can transfer him to another school.”

Jim: But he’s right that other people said things over the email. And he’s also right that technically, I can’t tie Rita to this event. I might lose the grievance.”
Joe: We won’t lose; but even if we do, it doesn’t matter. He has to know you are running the school. He has to know you’ll be on his case for everything he does.

Tom did file a grievance, and after several weeks of legal bantering, the assistant superintendent heard the appeal. He agreed with some of Tom’s points, but not the bulk. As a result, I revised my formal letter to him referencing “another staff member.” I was also told to direct Melissa and others not to use the school email for religious or other personal messages. Nonetheless, Tom was rebuked for his actions that disrupted the school.

Reflection

In his grievance letter, Tom had been logical and erudite. This was most dangerous and deceptive for me. I began to see that rationality was another of the values or traits that I brought to my job. I found it hard to understand why someone clearly intelligent, articulate, and seemingly rational could be so dysfunctional. This was a key error in my reasoning. I think I set up a subconscious syllogism: Rational people are not dysfunctional. Tom is rational. Therefore, Tom is not dysfunctional. There are two errors in that logic: He might not be rational. Or, he might be rational in one area but not in another. I had seen this on a personal level with my father, an intelligent, educated person who slid inexorably toward his own demise. I think that’s why I remained concerned and continued to care, despite these events.

At the same time, I felt tarnished. I knew my professional judgment had been questioned. For the first time, these problems would reach the superintendent, and I didn’t like that. I wondered if the grievance reflected on my ability to effectively manage
the school. I think I also felt somewhat betrayed. I felt I had worked to help them both, and I was being repaid with a legal challenge.

In this case I had to formally retract statements I made that were conjecture. I think that directed correction reinforced my commitment to try to be absolutely accurate in recording what all parties said and did. I also learned that in very serious and heated matters such as these, it is vital to try to be as accurate and dispassionate as possible. The experience taught me to document carefully, a skill I would apply many times in the years ahead.

**Year-end**

Spring moved toward early summer. Then on a planning day near the end of the school year, Rita called my secretary, crying, and said she was leaving for the day. The next day, she filed a worker’s comp claim. She wrote that she had fallen into a cabinet while moving furniture in her room and had injured her shoulder. Meanwhile, Rhonda came to me and said Rita had bruises on her arm, which she thought were caused by Tom. When I talked with Rita the next day, she denied that Tom had injured her. “I was moving furniture and I hurt my arm. That’s all, Mr. Lane.”

**Reflection: Ethical dilemmas and frameworks**

This dilemma matched personal rights and care against legal codes and duties to the profession. My thinking at the time was something like this. Was she being abused? If so, what evidence did I have? Rhonda’s claim was hearsay. If he was abusing her but away from the school setting, did we have a right to intervene? Starratt (2012) notes the complex tension between the ethics of care and justice in the human condition. I explore the application of the ethical frameworks below.
**Ethic of justice**

Starratt sees justice emerging from “communal understandings” through which individuals act ethically within society (1994, p. 50). Shapiro and Stefkovich note that the ethic of justice relates “to the rule of law and the more abstract concepts of fairness, equity, and justice” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 12). They explain that in applying the ethic of justice to a problem, one must consider the “the rights of the individual versus the greater good of the community” (2011, p. 12). This last concept is key to the unraveling of this and other dilemmas. Many aspects of this event were covered under the ethic of justice. Tom’s wife sought justice from the law for his infidelity and for Rita’s alleged harassment. In addition, she wanted me to intervene. While I may have personally disapproved of their relationship, under the ethic of justice I had no legal right to do so. Had his wife confronted him at school, she would have been arrested. Tom and Rita sought justice for their actions through the guidelines of the teachers’ contract. Using the same contract, however, I sanctioned them for violations that caused them to shirk their routine school duties. Thus, both parties used the established system of justice to arbitrate the issues.

I brought with me to the job a concern to be absolutely logical and cite evidence for my actions. That trait may have caused me to shirk a greater obligation to students. A need for certainty on my part may have kept me from acting when I suspected she was being abused. In retrospect, perhaps I should have pursued that line of investigation as a legal issue. If he was abusing her at school, that was affecting the school environment. The ethic of justice did allow me to censure them for specific events, and I felt better after those decisive statements. My failure to be more decisive sooner may have
ultimately hurt the students and the school. I may have been so careful to follow specific professional guidelines, to show absolute proof, that I neglected a larger ethic of justice for her, a duty to the students, and duty to the school community.

**Ethic of the profession**

I realized as these events developed that I knew little about how to react professionally in these emotionally charged conflicts. I was prepared to work with curriculum, textbooks, schedules, and student discipline, but I had no sense of how to respond when teachers’ personal issues interfered with their professional duties. I was fortunate to be able to call on experts from the district for advice, even though they left the decisions to me. Shapiro and Stefkovich point out, “personal and professional codes frequently collide (2011, p. 64). They argue, however, that the application of the ethic of the profession requires a moral consideration that I did not see with them. This was the dilemma set before me with Tom and Rita.

It was ironic that one of Rita’s first comments to me was that she valued her professional reputation, and yet her actions were remarkably unprofessional. The ethic of the profession calls for teachers to adhere to specific codes of conduct (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). The email interchange was clearly a violation of one of those codes. Their relationship also violated personal codes that I and others have regarding adultery. Throughout the year we moved through a dance between the ethics of justice and the profession, balancing adults’ rights of privacy and due process against the rights of the students and the profession. This established an irony that haunted me. The professional guidelines were designed to ensure justice and due process for the teachers, often at the expense of the students, who, according to the thinking of Shapiro and Stefkovich (2013),
should lie at the heart of the ethic of the profession. Those researchers point out the multiple demands of this ethic: “What would the profession expect me to do? What does the community expect me to do? And what should I do based on the best interests of the students, who may be diverse in their composition and their needs? (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2013, p. 27).

**Ethic of care**

Starratt notes that the ethic of care “places human persons in relationships of absolute value; each enjoys an intrinsic dignity and absolute worth” (2012, p. 36). My compassion in Year One was first directed at Tom’s wife. As events progressed, however, I discovered I also had concern for Tom and Rita. I certainly cared for their students, but my focus on providing justice for the adults hampered my actions. In retrospect I did sanction Tom and Rita, but I continue to wonder if my concern for establishing a relationship with them and honoring their dignity kept me from acting more quickly. At any rate, the ethic of care became more prevalent in my encounters with Tom and Rita during Year Two.

**Ethic of critique**

Because of the unique student population that Tom and Rita served, they came under less scrutiny than if they had been teaching regular, mainstreamed students. That was not a conscious administrative choice, but a de facto default. The harsh truth is that students who are at risk of failure in school are often in that situation because their parents fail to advocate for them. The DOP structure of sequestration was in itself a violation of the ethic of critique. Starratt notes that the ethic of critique confronts “structures and procedures and policies that affect whole groups of people unfairly on a
regular basis” (2012, p. 49). If Tom and Rita had been teaching students in an advanced elective or gifted program, it is unlikely those parents would have been silent as the teachers argued and missed work. Under different circumstances, I as an administrator might also have been more vigilant. Thus, as the ethic of critique charges, the students were the ultimate victims. They were the ones the system was supposed to serve, and ironically, they were the ones the system through codes and procedures failed to protect. I have learned it is incumbent upon school leaders to speak for these unrepresented groups, a charge to which I think I did not at first effectively respond.

**Ethic of community**

Furman explains that one aspect of the ethic of community is “aimed at working toward the common good of the (school) community” (2004, p. 12). The email debacle was the antithesis of the common good and so became a turbulent, disruptive event within the school culture. The school community certainly suffered as a result of their actions, most obviously through the Internet incident, but also through Tom and Rita’s other miscues. Teachers are often more aware of the actions of their colleagues than are principals. Blase and Blase (2003) observe that while actions taken by the principal may send a chilling effect through the school community, teachers who do have professional pride are grateful when the principal takes charge. These same teachers become frustrated when they feel the principal is not taking appropriate action. Ethics of justice and the profession ensure the anonymity of administrative action. A leader may be acting, as I was, without knowledge of the school community and thus present the false appearance of inaction. In those situations the resolution of the dilemma is especially important in order to preserve harmony within the school community.
Jon Strictor: Probing the Ethics of Care, Critique, and the Profession

Deaths within the school community and conflicts with Tom and Rita were not the only critical incidents and ethical challenges I encountered during my first year as principal. The ethical dilemmas I faced with shop teacher Jon Strictor would span the entire length of my tenure at OPMS.

First encounter

My first experience with Jon had actually come several years before, when I was assistant principal at Francis Middle. My daughter called me, sobbing. My stomach quickly jumped through my throat.

“What’s wrong, Becky?”

Her words were broken by her sobs. “I (sob) got (sob) an (sob) F (sob) on (sob) my (sob) progress (sob) report (sob) in (sob) wood shop (sobsobsob).”

Well, not the end of the world, I thought. And, although my wife and I always expected good grades from our kids, I did get an F in Algebra once in the ninth grade. Still, an F was way below par. “How could you get an F in wood shop? Just show up and do the work. How hard can that be?”

“I did (sob). I turned in the projects, but he said they weren’t done right (sob). And if I get to class late, he locks the door and won’t let me in. And now I have an F.” She started wailing again.

“If you turned in your work, there’s no way you could get an F. I’ll call him and get it straightened out.”

I did call him. By this time I’d digested the situation. My 13 year-old daughter didn’t need to be crying over shop class. I knew she’d done the projects, because I had
helped her with them. Still, maybe she hadn’t turned them in or done something foolish. I would find out. I called the teacher.

The tone of my conversation with Mr. Strictor was very different from the tone of the conversation with my daughter. “Why, of course her projects will count, Mr. Lane. Becky is a fine girl. I’ll work with her and make sure everything is all right.” Becky ended up with an A in Shop. As I thought, how hard could that be? I would learn just how hard in a few years.

**Several years later**

Jon Strictor was a squat, round man of indeterminate middle age. He was not just clinically obese. He was fat. He stood about 5 feet, nine inches tall and carried thick tubes of flesh around his broad girth. He hobbled rather than walked, and he was always out of breath. His pale blue eyes bulged from his round, scarlet face and threatened to burst from their sockets at any moment. He perspired profusely and often, and the back of his shirt was often soaked in sweat. He was also severely diabetic, a condition that caused him multiple and severe health problems. During the previous year he had fainted in class, was hospitalized, and missed several weeks of work.

He taught wood shop to sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Most took the class as an unwelcomed spoke to a vocational “wheel” in sixth and seventh grade. Eighth graders had the option of taking the class as an elective, but few ever chose that, opting instead for Agriculture, Technology, even Home Economics – anything but Mr. Strictor’s class. Some students who truly loved the subject and were already experienced carpenters chose the class freely, but most landed there because they had the bad luck to turn their registration form in later than their peers.
When I arrived at OPMS, Jon had already built a pedigree of reprimands from the two previous principals. In addition, he had that brief history with me. Nonetheless, I was determined to give him the benefit of the doubt. Jon’s issues differed from those of Tom and Rita, in that they dealt almost exclusively with parent complaints. As principal, I was committed to showing teachers that because I had been a teacher, I was always willing to listen to their side. This included Jon. Despite that, I soon began receiving parent complaints about his teaching and demeanor with students. In early October I started talking with him about these complaints, and by the end of December I met with him formally and gave him the first of many conference summaries.

I usually met with teachers at a table in my office. I thought sitting at the table, rather than behind my desk, was more egalitarian. It showed we were equal, I reasoned, and that I was willing to listen to their side. I thought of it as similar to the round table used in the Vietnam War Paris Peace Talks or Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table. That was probably a little dramatic, but that was my thinking.

Jon was a teacher who got the maximum benefit from his union dues. Whenever we met, which would be often, he had at least one union representative present. During our early meetings he used as advocates school-based “building reps,” teachers who were willing to act as witnesses and help negotiate minor disputes. He soon graduated to using salaried union workers, including the union president. As with Tom and Rita, the first conversation I had with Jon created a template for all other conversations I would have with him over the next seven years.

Jim: “Jon, I have several concerns that parents and students have shared with me over the past several weeks. First, kids say yell at them all the
time. They say you do that not only to them individually, but the entire class.”

Jon: “I don’t yell at anyone,” he responded quickly. “It’s loud in the shop, and I have to raise my voice to be heard. Besides that, I’m hard of hearing, so it’s hard for me to judge my volume.”

Jim: “OK. I can understand that. But many students say they are afraid of you. Some parents have told me, in fact, that their kids are ‘terrified’ of you and are afraid to attend your class. Some of your students cry when they talk about you. They also say you’ve called kids ‘jerks’ and ‘morons.’ They say one day when you couldn’t find the key to the restroom, you started screaming and called the class ‘a bunch of thieves.’ They said you later found the key in a pile of papers on your desk. Finally, they say they don’t get to work on their shop projects because they can’t pass the safety tests. Then they get F’s for not doing their projects, even though they never got to work on them, because they couldn’t pass the parts test. What’s going on with that?”

As we faced other, Jon began to perspire. Beads of sweat dotted his forehead. As he talked, spittle formed and dried at the corners of his moth. My attention periodically drifted to those details, rather than the topic under discussion.

Jon: “I would never call students names like that,” he responded. “I might have been short tempered. I’ve had some health issues. My blood sugar is way up, and my doctor is worried about it. You know that last year I passed out in class, and I don’t want that to happen again.”
Jim: “I understand that, Jon. We all deal with health issues. I agree that teaching is a stressful job. But that doesn’t give you the right to berate the kids.”

Jon: “I’m not berating anyone. Besides, this is Shop. I have to have control. There’s a lot of dangerous equipment and tools in there, and I can’t just have students working on the equipment if they don’t understand it. We’re working with drills and saws.”

Jim: “I appreciate that, Jon. That’s true, safety is important. When I look at your tests, however, you’re asking them to identify a complicated list of parts. Do they really need to identify all the parts of the band saw in order to use it?”

Jon: “They absolutely do. If something goes wrong, they need to know how to diagnose the problem and fix it. I don’t think I’m doing anything unreasonable.”

Jim: “Finally, Jon, one parent told me that people in his neighborhood have talked about you a lot. They say you have a reputation for being unreasonable and mistreating students in front of their peers.”

Now it was time for Barb, the union rep, to respond.

Barb: “You know you can’t generalize, just on the comments of one or two parents. When people get mad at a teacher, they’ll say anything. This is a small town, and people like to stir things up.”

Jim: “You’re right, Barb. This is a small town. People do talk, and that’s the problem. Jon, you’ve built a reputation over the years as a teacher who is
hard to work with. Here’s the bottom line. You know I’m not the first principal to talk to you about these issues. You’ve set a pattern that’s unacceptable. I expect you to provide a positive learning environment and conduct your self in a professional manner.”

Reflection

This initial meeting with Jon Strictor established the ethical dilemmas I would face with him for the next several years. Parents complained regularly about him mistreating their children. I agreed with the parents, yet I wanted to support the teacher. I knew he had health problems, which probably contributed to his negative demeanor. I remembered that my father had been diabetic, and I knew problems with blood sugar could create wide swings in a diabetic’s personality. While I had a duty to protect the students, I also had a professional obligation to provide a due process procedure in which the teacher heard accusations against him and had a chance to respond and improve. I was a new principal, and I didn’t want to give the impression that I was generalizing from the past or from a few complaints. I wanted to give him a chance to improve. I didn’t want to appear unfair.

Spring

Despite my admonitions, the parent complaints about Mr. Strictor continued through the year. A conversation I had with a parent near the end of Year One was representative of many complaints I received about Jon in this and subsequent years. As with teachers, I met with parents at my office table. I took notes, which I read back to them to be sure I captured what they wanted me to hear.
“Mr. Lane,” this mother began, “I don’t usually complain about teachers, but I have to talk to you about a situation with Mr. Strictor that is getting out of hand.”

I always tried not to show any emotion in these meetings, although I sighed inwardly. I braced myself. “What’s the problem?”

“My son, Eric, took wood shop as part of his vocational wheel. It was a very unpleasant experience for him, to say the least. He was looking forward to it, since he works in my husband’s workshop at home all the time. They are always tinkering and making things.”

“That sounds like a natural fit. Why didn’t he like it?” I asked dutifully, although I already knew the answer.

“Mr. Strictor seems to be a very unhappy person and in need of some type of counseling. He’s downright mean to the students. If he doesn’t like children, maybe he should reconsider his profession.”

I agreed with her, but I couldn’t say so. “That seems a little harsh. What exactly happened?”

“First, Eric got a detention for chewing gum. I guess he was breaking the rules, but a warning might have been nice. That was the first formal discipline he has ever gotten in school. After that, he felt he could never do anything right. It seemed like Mr. Strictor was correcting him about every little thing. The last straw came this week when he turned and sneezed into his shoulder. Mr. Strictor gave him a detention for intentionally disturbing the class – for sneezing! Don’t you think that’s a bit much?”
“Hmm, OK, I do understand your concern. I'll look into it and call you back.”

As with so many episodes, I investigated. I spoke with Eric and other kids in the class, and I got the same report. I decided what I already believed in my heart to be true: In sneezing Eric had not violated any school rules. I called Mr. Strictor and overruled the detention.

**Reflection**

Once again, I felt the tension of several conflicting values. As an educator, I was bound to support the teacher and was reluctant to undermine his authority. At the same time, I believed the teacher was unjust. I had the authority to overturn the punishment, and I did. This critical incident forced me to be conflict with someone, either the parent or the teacher. There could be impending complications either way. The teacher could complain to his peers, thus, as noted by Blasé and Blasé (2003), Blasé and Anderson (1994) and others, creating a belief in the school community that I would not support teachers. Although that potentially would be unhealthy for the school climate, Mr. Strictor had little credibility in the school community. If I were to rule against the parent, she could complain to the superintendent, forcing me to defend my decision to my bosses. I never had a problem doing that, if I believed I was correct. In this case and with many others involving Mr. Strictor, I didn’t believe supporting the teacher was the right thing to do.

**Year-end meeting**

I issued Jon Strictor five conference summaries that first year regarding complaints parents had filed against him. During the last week of school, I met with him
and the union president. I followed that meeting with a letter describing my concerns about him as a teacher. I noted that he regularly raised his voice, made embarrassing remarks to students, and seemed unreasonable and arbitrary in his treatment of students. He and the union president agreed that he would take a series of classroom management workshops that summer and report back to me at the beginning of the year.

I believed I was on firm ground and had done what I could do. This was a poor teacher abusing students. Although nothing he did rose to the standard of immediate dismissal, each was another splinter in a plank of mediocrity. Mr. Strictor also held the strongest contract, which made it difficult to fire him, short of a traumatic event. Thus I continued to chip away, hopeful that the summer would make a difference in Mr. Strictor’s treatment of students.

**Reflection: Ethical dilemmas and frameworks**

The events involving Jon Strictor matched the ethics of care and justice against the ethics of critiques, the profession and community. These would be tensions that would be consistent throughout my experiences with this teacher.

**Ethic of justice**

As with Tom and Rita, many of the interactions I had with Jon Strictor over this and the following years focused on the ethic of justice. Our interactions were always controlled by the exigencies of the contract, monitored by the ever-present union representative. Starratt says of such interactions,

> The school is an organization that requires procedures, policies, and structures that will provide to the work of teaching and learning a necessary order and predictability, a sense of purpose and accountability toward the work. A
school has to have some way of governing its internal life. … We govern ourselves by observing justice. That is to say, we treat each other according to some standard of justice that is uniformly applied to all our relationships” (Starratt, 2012, pp. 39-40).

I followed the same procedures as I worked with Tom, Rita, Jon Strictor, and others in the pursuit of justice. I think I was more direct with Jon Strictor early on than I was with Tom and Rita. One reason for that directness was that I had more outside testimony from parents. The issues with Mr. Strictor were also better defined. I wasn’t dealing with the murky ethics of sexual morality. It seemed easier to be clear and direct and ensure that I was being fair.

**Ethic of the profession**

Many of the complaints about Jon Strictor regarded his pedagogy and treatment of students, both of which fall under the ethic of the profession. The issues were never his curriculum specifically, but more his approach to instruction. Questions often concerned his assessment of the quality of a student’s work, permission for a student to advance to a more complex project, or adherence to rules of classroom safety. When taken individually, most of the issues seemed minor and easily corrected. Taken together, they formed a fabric of harassment that enveloped his students and made them miserable. These all speak directly to the ethic of the profession. Shapiro and Gross explain this ethic requires us to ask, “What would the profession ask me to do? What do various communities expect me to accomplish? What should I take into account to consider the best interests of the students?” (2013, p. 36). My dilemma was to ensure his rights of
justice and due process while linking each individual act to a collective pattern of professional dysfunction.

**Ethic of care**

Issues of care arose with Jon Strictor from the start. A central complaint from parents was that he seemed uncaring and ignorant about their individual challenges. Conversely, I had compassion for him, because of his health issues. Starratt notes that the ethic of care “honors the dignity and integrity of each person and desires to see that person enjoy a fully human life” (2012, p. 36). I wanted to extend that dignity to him. I knew poor health could cloud his judgment and affect his behavior. This created an ironic tension throughout my relationship with Jon Strictor, in that I believe he received more compassion from me than he ever afforded his students.

**Ethic of critique**

The students in vocational classes were those not taking Spanish and band, the two multi-year courses that substituted for the vocational electives. This placed the less academic students more at risk from the abuses of Mr. Strictor. This grouping was not as egregious an affront of the ethic of critique as was the DOP grouping, and their parents were more willing to complain than those of the DOP students; at the same time, they were also likely to forgive Mr. Strictor, or at least forgo further criticism, if he corrected the specific issue under review. Parents also considered wood shop less important than academic course, so they were less likely to complain than had the course been language arts, science, or math. Finally, students also were in his class for a quarter or semester. Before most events could reach a crescendo, the student had moved on to another course, Mr. Strictor escaped unscathed, and the cycle began anew. Starratt uses the term
“structural injustice” to describe groupings that place some students at a disadvantage (2012, p. 46). This grouping may have inadvertently contributed to the longevity of Mr. Strictor’s career.

**Ethic of community**

Furman explains that the ethic of community requires that parties engage in dialog aimed at working toward the common good (2004). The actions of Jon Strictor did affect the school and neighborhood communities, in that they worked against the common good. He refused to acknowledge that or engage in dialog to solve those problems. I learned that teachers believed him to be harsh and uncaring, and he had no friends among the faculty. While many had empathy for his physical condition, their concern for their profession made them intolerant of his actions. He also was known within the community as a poor teacher and contributed to the negative reputation of OPMS that I was trying to reverse.

**Year-end Events**

As I noted earlier, when I arrived at OPMS, the building’s physical plant had many needs. I felt those were the most deserving of my attention. It would not matter how good the teachers and programs were, I reasoned, if the roof leaked and the plaster peeled. Therefore I began to create a plan to improve the facility. I followed my inspection tour with the director of facilities with a steady lobby of the assistant superintendents. My efforts paid off, and by the end of the year we had secured from the district a new roof, new ceiling tiles throughout the main building, freshly painted hallways, and a budget commitment to replace the boys’ PE lockers.
I met monthly with the school leadership team. I established a communications committee, to which teachers and staff brought complaints and concerns. The previous year the school had moved from a grade of “C” to “B,” and so had a significant amount of school improvement money that required the faculty to vote on its use. In what I thought was a demonstration of school unity and commitment to quality, the staff voted to use $30,000 of school improvement money to stock a new computer lab.

Early that summer I attended a leadership conference. In my notes I wrote, “Talk about our committee structure and my open door policy – bring me problems – we make solutions.” In another section I wrote in all caps, “SCHOOL IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS!” I think that was an epiphany for me and captured my approach to leadership in that first year. I think it revealed a nascent commitment to the concepts of distributed leadership, an idea I did not formally encounter until several years later. I think that my concern for relationships was an extension of the reason I moved my family to the small community of Orange Pines, and why I valued my various connections to the community. That emphasizes to me the ethics of care and community. Strike argues that an effective learning community demonstrates “trust, cooperation, belonging, and mutual identification” (in Begley & Johansson, 2003, p. 69). Furman argues the ethic of community requires the commitment “to know, understand, and value others” (Furman, 2004, p. 11). I think that’s why my encounters with Tom, Rita, and Jon were so upsetting to me. My care for them did not create the relationship I desired. I vowed to work harder to promote collegiality in Year Two in my constant efforts to improve OPMS.
**Reflection**

In their book *The Presidents Club*, Gibbs and Duffy succinctly describe the first months of Bill Clinton’s presidency: “Sheer inexperience, bad luck, and almost nonstop internal second-guessing lent Clinton’s first six months in office a chaotic, amateurish quality” (2012, p. 422). I hope this does not completely characterize my first few months as principal. I do, however, think that my ignorance and inexperience allowed problems to linger and grow more so than had I been more experienced. For the first time, I was matching my compassion against my determination to be fair and just, while balancing those concerns against the larger macrocosm of community and the profession. I also had to learn the choreography of negotiating legal strictures within ethical concerns of the profession. All that created a steep ethical, emotional, and professional learning curve that would continue in Year Two. I had entered the job valuing compassion, justice, and community. I would continue to explore and refine those raw values in Year Two.

**Year Two**

**School-Wide Events: Probing Care, Community, and the Profession**

I welcomed the teachers back in Year Two with a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the successes of the previous year. I focused on the physical improvements and the various extracurricular activities the school offered. Finally, I listed the students’ test scores, which were up from the previous year. It was a presentation I used throughout the year to promote the school to parent and civic groups. Each year thereafter, I greeted the faculty with a presentation featuring the triumphs of the previous year, the challenges ahead, and our plan for meeting our goals.
That fall my wife and I visited a 1920s vintage movie theater whose patrons had organized a fundraising campaign to replace the theater’s seats. I decided we could do the same thing for our auditorium. I called a committee together, and we launched the Seat Yourself! Campaign. The plan was that patrons could donate money to “buy” a seat for the auditorium and have their name placed on the seat in their honor. We appealed to graduates of the high school from as far back as we could reach. I promoted the idea constantly among groups and with the assistant superintendents and superintendent. I saw this as a way to regenerate pride in the school, as well as to raise money to replace the broken seats.

We raised about $20,000. While that was a princely sum, it was not nearly enough to buy new seats. The move caught the attention of the district, however, which had just secured a penny sales tax for school renovation. The timing was right, and by the end of the year we had plans and budget in place to completely renovate the auditorium: chairs, ceiling, walls, and floors. OPMS would no longer be known as a “ghetto school!”

A sense of change began to swell among the school community, as well. Semitra, Randy, and I organized a faculty study of the book Closing the Achievement Gap: No Excuses (Davenport & Anderson, 2002). The book described the efforts of a school in Texas to improve student achievement. The study emerged from a decision by our leadership team to look for ways to improve the school’s culture and student test scores. We started as a voluntary group meeting for one hour after school to discuss sections of the book that appealed to us. The plan was that we would share ideas from the book at faculty meetings. We began with eleven school leaders, including Semitra, Randy, and
me. Teachers began to talk about the ideas generated during the book study, and more wanted to participate. Semitra quickly ordered thirty more books.

We formed a group of 40 volunteers, which comprised more than half the faculty. We met for an hour or more after school once a week. This was remarkable, considering that when I arrived, many would walk out the door, and even out of a faculty meeting, the minute their contracted day was over. I encouraged an open forum where we could talk about issues from the book and how they related to our work at OPMS. We took notes and disseminated them to the faculty. We quickly realized that the book study was a forum for ideas about how our school could improve. Semitra summarized the results in a report to the superintendent’s staff:

People became energized about what they were doing. A positive feeling spread across campus. Teachers and teams began to talk and share more. The culture became one that we can accomplish anything, that all of our students can be successful, that together we can overcome any obstacle to student success! We realized that by working together we truly could be successful!

The faculty established goals for discipline, academic improvement, parent involvement and campus improvement and beautification that set in motion improvements that would continue.

Reflection: Focusing on care, community, and the profession

I think the ethics of the profession and community worked symbiotically during Year Two and beyond to fuel school improvement and student success. Our efforts to improve the school’s physical plant were commitments to the ethic of community. The moves generated attention at the district office and a sense of pride and attention in the
community. As I noted earlier, the focus of my discussion here is not what specific changes of curriculum or infrastructure contributed to the school’s improvement. The point is that we came together collaboratively and constructively to discuss and attack problems.

**Community, constructivism, and collaboration**

This was the beginning of an energizing period of school reform at OPMS, showcasing the ethics of community and the profession. I believe our efforts were successful in a very challenging school facility, student population, and faculty because we approached our task through a framework of care for students, school, and community. Professionally we were able through constructivist collaboration to channel that compassion into an energy that began to transform the school. Strike defines an effectively functioning school community as “a group of people linked by a shared consciousness and a shared identity and not just by bonds of mutual regard or attachment” (in Begley & Johansson, 2003, p. 75). Furman notes the importance of “dialogue and deliberation” (2004, p. 12). Lambert says of constructivism,

> When actively engaged in reflective dialogue, adults become more complex in their thinking about the world, more tolerant of diverse perspectives, more flexible and open toward new experiences. Personal and professional learning require an interactive professional culture, if adults are to engage with one another in the processes of growth and development (2002, p. 35).

Our goal was always to establish that culture. I believe my focus on care and community led me in that direction. We had energetic and knowledgeable teachers whom the faculty respected and who were excited to contribute. I was also fortunate to
have two associate principals forged in the same mold. I was to learn later how valuable a commodity that was. I was willing as principal to allow teachers to read, think, plan, and initiate their plans, which is the essence of collaborative and transformative leadership. One can read about theory, but a principal must have the disposition to be willing to let go and allow others to lead and create. That was my personality. They were experts, and I was willing to let them go forth and prosper.

**Tom and Rita: Matching Ethics of Care, Justice, and the Profession**

I don’t recall that Tom, Rita, or Jon Strictor attended any of our book study or school improvement meetings. They were operating on a plane separate from the majority of the school. My interactions with them contrasted starkly with the reform efforts going on across the school.

After Tom’s grievance was reconciled, I told him that despite our conflicts, I wanted to help him and would do whatever I could to do so. One afternoon he called me on my cell phone.

“Jim, I’m taking you at your word. You said you wanted to help, so let’s see if you meant what you said.” Thus we entered another phase of our relationship, one that poignantly combined the ethics of care, justice, and the profession. As Tom talked, he began to cry. He told me that Rita was a “hopeless alcoholic.” He said she “holds it together at work; but when she gets home, all hell breaks loose. She starts drinking as soon as she walks in the door, and she keeps going until she passes out. I’m really worried about her,” he sobbed. “I love her, and I’m afraid she’s going to end up killing herself.”
Tom said they had recently quarreled over her drinking. He was trying to take the booze away from her, and she threw him out of the apartment they were sharing. He also said he was suffering through his own addiction to prescription narcotics. A veteran of Desert Storm, he said the Veteran’s Administration psychiatrists had freely prescribed anti-depressants and painkillers after he returned home. Now he was addicted, still prone to bouts of depression, and had difficulty controlling his temper when off his medication. I was stunned at the frankness of his admissions. I felt a flood of conflicting emotions, including vindication, anger, and relief. I was also flattered that he had called me. Maybe, I thought, my efforts to care had paid off.

The next day I called Chris, the coordinator of the district’s Employee Care Program (ECP). This was a new program designed to give employees free and confidential counseling for personal crises. He was eager to get the program off the ground, and these were the personnel traumas for which the plan was designed. He suggested that I meet with Tom and Rita individually and encourage them to call him and enroll in the program.

When I met with Rita, she was less willing to talk than Tom had been. She first accused Tom of trying to ruin her life because she had broken up with him. She finally agreed, however, to call Chris about the counseling program.

I think each of them did meet with Chris several times over the next few months. This became a sort of cat and mouse game in which Tom and Rita never did commit to a rehabilitation program. At one point Chris told me, “Jim, I’d really like to work for you.” I asked him if he was mocking me. “No,” he replied, “but I do think you are very generous. If you have erred, it’s in being too sympathetic and indulgent.”
Reflection

I think his comment was a key insight and showed how I had allowed my compassion to override my professional responsibilities to the students and the greater school community. Shapiro and Gross discuss the utilization of both reason and emotion to work through ethical challenges. They note that Begley queries whether the ethic of care is an “emotional or rational model” (2011, p. 18). To me, it was both.

I can remember both teachers sobbing in my office. I had not experienced that on a professional basis before. That took me back to my father. I remembered him crying at my mother’s death and over the various challenges he faced. I believe he was also addicted to prescription drugs, since, as a pharmacist, he had ready access to them. Perhaps that is why I empathized with Tom and Rita. Maybe I could still help them, I mused.

Another problem

Then one day Randy called me after he had a conversation with Tom and Rita’s teaching assistant. “She says she says she smells alcohol on Rita every day. She says Tom keeps her out of his room. He goes in, shuts the door, and doesn’t do anything. And here’s the worst: She thinks you’re not doing anything about it.”

This situation was frustrating in many ways. I felt I had been working hard to reconcile this problem, although none of the teachers knew what I’d been doing behind the scenes. I worked to maintain confidentiality and didn’t share everything with any of the staff, other than my assistants. I realized then that I needed to do more. I called Joe in employee relations.
Look, Jim. Meet with Rita. Tell her you’ve tried to be empathetic, but you can’t allow this to continue. Tell her you smell alcohol. Tell them both they’ve got to get some kind of counseling. Tell them they’re not being productive, and they’re hurting the kids. Remember, Jim, you can’t allow your empathy to become enabling! Regardless of the reason, if they’re not performing, it’s not OK. They’ve got to manage themselves!

His advice was another wakeup call to me and spoke directly to the issue of my valuing compassion for the adults at the expense of their students, which is our greater professional purpose.

When I talked with Tom, he agreed to recommit to counseling and rehabilitation. He was no longer the combative Tom who had filed a grievance the previous year. He admitted personal problems and agreed to do better. I think I was still swayed by my empathy. I saw my father in his place, and so my past continued to dominate my present. I think that again, naively, I was hoping things would reconcile.

**Closure on Tom and Rita**

In late March Rita failed to appear for a manifestation hearing that was to determine a student’s educational placement. She did not call in sick until later in the day. Manifestation hearings are legal events that require much scheduling of administrators, teachers, and parents. Missing one is significant. For that I issued her a formal letter of reprimand. Further breaches, I noted, could result in her dismissal.

Soon after, Tom committed a similar legal breach. He left his class while proctoring the Comprehensive Achievement Inventory (CAI), the high stakes test that was tied to school and student rewards and advancement. He told the assistant that he
was leaving, but he never alerted the school’s test coordinator, an administrator or even my secretary. For that I issued him a formal reprimand.

Those were the last formal communications I had with either of them. Both transferred to different schools at the end of the year. As I recall, despite all the conversations I had with district staff, they did not orchestrate the moves. Tom and Rita both applied for open positions, and the principals hired them. Both principals were good friends of mine. Neither called to ask for a reference, and both had hired Tom and Rita before I knew they were leaving. Naturally, this set up other dilemmas for me. Should I have called my friends and warned them of the problems they were taking on? Perhaps, but I did not. My reasoning then was that they were both potentially good teachers. If they were separated, they might likely return to their professional best. I did believe that, and I hoped that would happen. After that year they no longer worked in the county, and I lost track of both of them.

**Reflection: Ethical dilemmas and frameworks**

I think I’ve always felt that accuracy begets fairness, which seems to me squarely mounted within the ethic of justice. I also think I had an underlying belief in some sort of universal truth. If we could all agree on the facts, we could agree on the solution. I was beginning to learn, however, that ethical dilemmas cloud that certainty. My job was not to judge their morality. The ethic of the profession, however, required me to ensure the smooth operation of school and protect their students.

There was certainly justice to be had for the teachers who were subject to their abuses. There should also have been justice for the students who witnessed those ethical breaches and whose education was compromised because their teachers’ focus was
always elsewhere. As I moved to more formal documentation, our meetings included salaried union representation. I’m sure Tom and Rita felt they were invoking justice against what they perceived as my abuses. To prepare for those meetings and then debrief following them, I leaned on advice from experienced supervisors at the district office. These sessions may be comparable to what Schon identifies as a sort of “reflective practicum – aimed at helping students acquire the kinds of artistry essential to competence in the indeterminate zones of practice” (1987, p. 18). They served as my mentors as I learned more transactional aspects of the job of principal in my first two years.

My experiences with Tom and Rita caused me to confront many issues within myself. I believe I favored too much the ethic of care and too little the ethics of justice, critique, the profession, and the community. I wanted to establish community and individual relationships, but I may have damaged relationships with others by my indulgence in their excesses. I believe that had Tom and Rita been mainstream teachers, the students’ parents would not have allowed the events to continue. Those parents would advocate for their children aggressively in ways parents of at-risk students almost never do. Their final letters of reprimand spoke specifically to their violations of the ethics of the profession. Each abandoned their posts, and their students, at a crucial time. In truth, they had abandoned them long before.

**Jon Strictor: Tensions Among the Ethics of Care, Justice, and the Profession**

Unfortunately, Year Two with Jon Strictor began like Year One. Like Tom and Rita, he seemed oblivious to the culture of camaraderie and reform evolving within the school community. By the end of September I had received 11 parent complaints against
Mr. Strictor. Complaints came so quickly and in such volume that I charted them on a spreadsheet listing the student, parent, concern, teacher response, and outcome. Issues were varied but followed a pattern of lack of care and professional awareness. In one case, he did not allow a student out of class for speech therapy, an action guaranteed by his Individual Education Plan, a legal document. Another parent complained of unfair grading practices. Several students said he yelled at them constantly.

When I spoke to Mr. Strictor, he always had a response. The students were late turning in their work. They ganged up with their friends to get him in trouble. “I’m one of the few strict teachers in this school,” he retorted to one complaint. “That’s why they rebel against me. More teachers should make them toe the line like I do.”

One mother called me in tears. She said her husband had just died, and her son was having trouble coping. “I admit that he may have turned in his work late, but Mr. Strictor is just mean to him.” Jon responded to me that he didn’t know the boy was having personal problems. Of course he could make up his work. In virtually every case, he retreated and allowed students to turn in their work late or rework their project. I tried constantly to clarify the issue for myself, as well as for him. Students may have technically been in the wrong, but his harshness and lack of empathy was making their experiences in his class a living nightmare. When he did back down, which was often, I always hoped that he did so because he had some glimmer of empathy and saw the errors of his ways. I don’t think that ever happened.

At the end of Year Two another incident brought Mr. Strictor and Barb, the union rep, to my office. The conversation went something like this.
Jim:  “Jon, earlier this year we had a conference where we discussed 11 different complaints against you. By now that complaint has risen to 14, more than maybe all other teachers combined.”

Barb:  “Those are irrelevant. They don’t have anything to do with this particular incident.”

Jim:  “Well, I think they are relevant, because they show a pattern.”

Jon:  “So, what’s the problem now?”

Jim:  “You know I had a complaint about an inappropriate remark you made about a girl. You said to her, ‘You look like a whore and a slut.’”

Jon:  “I told you I never said any such thing. I said she had restyled her hair, and she looked cute, like a fashion model. Did you ask the other kids in the class?”

Jim:  “I did, Jon. I talked to several kids. They all said they heard both comments. They said you made the comment about her looking cute several days later.”

Barb:  “I have a concern that these kids are all friends. They could all be working together to get him in trouble because they don’t like Shop.”

Jim:  “I checked on that. First, I spoke to each of them separately. They all said the same thing. I also checked to see if they were friends. They denied that. To follow that up, I checked with their teachers. They don’t hang out together, and they don’t share classes other
than this one. I don’t think there’s any evidence they are friends.

Because of this, I’m going to monitor your performance and give you your annual evaluation by the end of the school year.”

Mr. Strictor filed a grievance with the superintendent, alleging several injustices. First, he said I was unfairly grouping unrelated incidents together. Next, he said the administration didn’t support his discipline referrals, which was why the students were unruly in his class. Students thought they could act with impunity. Finally, he said I was unsupportive and unfair.

The superintendent upheld my letter of reprimand. I agreed to tell the associate principals to follow up more aggressively on his discipline referrals. This was frustrating to all of us, since we were more willing to believe the kids than the teacher. I also agreed to refer every parent complaint back to him, rather than to intervene immediately, which I was more than glad to do. Thus the second grievance of my career was upheld with minor revisions. The remainder of the school year passed without incident, and Mr. Strictor received another “Satisfactory” evaluation.

**Reflection: Ethical dilemmas and frameworks**

I think in the case of Jon Strictor the ethic of justice for the teacher again worked against the best interests of his students. Due process and contractual procedures clearly functioned in his favor. It was almost impossible to fire him. Working through the issues with Jon Strictor forced me to wrestle with the concept of what it means to be a good teacher. Teachers must combine caring and empathy with subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. They must be just, but each student may require his or her own application of justice.
Through these struggles I began to draw a clearer portrait of my definition of an effective school leader. I came to understand that adults may also require individual applications of justice. Thus, I continued to balance the requirements of justice and care for the individual teacher against the wellbeing of his students. Shapiro and Stefkovich note the “tension between the ethic of justice, rights, and laws” and the concepts of true fairness and critique (2011, p. 13). This process characterizes Schon’s description of “reflection-in-action which is central to the ‘art’ by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict” (1987, p. 50). This process of grappling with these complex issues would remain constant as I entered Phase Two of my quest to clarify my professional identity as a morally directed school leader.
CHAPTER 6
PHASE TWO, YEARS THREE AND FOUR

“The hardest thing to see is what is in front of your eyes.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Year Three

In Years Three and Four I entered a new phase in the development of my identity as a morally directed leader. In Years One and Two I had experienced some incidents that were traumatic, and others that were ethically challenging and ambiguous. I had also begun to explore my direction toward a distributed and constructivist leadership style based on the twin precepts of collaboration and care. I had not clearly defined these concepts, however, and my actions were probably as instinctual as they were purposeful. This may be an example of Schon’s description of what he calls “knowing in action – the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life . . . Every competent practitioner can recognize phenomena . . . for which he cannot give a reasonably accurate or complete description” (1987, p. 49). I continued to base my actions on my care for the school and local community and my desire for reciprocation of that care. My learning continued in Year Three.
School-Wide: Developing Ethics of the Profession and Community

During Year Three we followed up on initiatives begun during the book study the previous year. Teachers developed a Daily Instructional Focus, in which all teachers concentrated on a specific skill each day, showing how it applied in that subject area. Some teacher leaders manipulated the schedule to allow an extended planning period every week for all teachers. Semitra drafted a discipline plan based on our book study that significantly reduced our in-school suspension rate. Meanwhile, I worked with the School Advisory Council to sponsor a variety of entertainers and motivational speakers as role models for our students.

I hired outside trainers to conduct data analysis training for our teacher leadership team. We created a new acronym for teacher planning, TWIST (Teachers Working in Study Teams), and used a weekly planning period each week to coordinate book studies, staff development, and data analysis. We adopted a new motto for the following year: “What does the data say?”

Meanwhile, I hired outstanding teachers for technology, agriculture, business, and band whose efforts would begin to break the stigma that OPMS students could not win competitions. That year and after, OPMS students began to enter and win district and regional contests. The significant breakthrough there wasn’t in winning, although winning is always fun, but in breaking the aura of failure that had been so pervasive. Dominant here were the ethics of the profession and community. We hired teachers who were proud of their profession and willing to work with students to help them achieve. We had begun to break the oppressive cycle of negativity and low expectations.
Jon Strictor: Struggling With the Ethic of Care

Mr. Strictor was out of work on health leave for much of Year Three. He underwent gastro-bypass surgery to confront his obesity and returned in March. I applauded his move to take control of his health. I did empathize with him as a human being. He lived alone and, as far as we could tell, had no close relatives. He apparently had a couple of friends who looked in on him, although at school he had no friends I believed he was a lonely person, and I wanted to help him. I began to wonder whether an administrator could actually help an employee who refused to look inside to help himself. I felt that I was questioning my own beliefs about my profession as I attempted to decipher the problems he presented me. I was constantly weighing his personal issues against the welfare of his students, the atmosphere of the school community, and the reputation of the school within the community. I knew that teachers and parents watched to see how I resolved his issues. I was working to build the reputation of the school within the community, and he was an obstacle to that quest. This continued my own process of reflection-in-action (Schon, 1984), and it angered me that he was not able to look beyond himself and give to his students the same empathy that I was giving to him. Because he was out on medical leave for much of Year Three, however, the year passed without significant incident from Jon Strictor.

Non-instructional Personnel and the Ethics of the Profession and Community

While the success of the school’s instructional program depends on the teachers, the non-instructional staff is there to hold the infrastructure together. Their performance is a key factor ensuring harmony or disharmony within the school community. Non-
instructional staff includes all non-degreed personnel and generally falls into four categories: secretarial, instructional paraprofessional, food service, and custodial. Custodial and food service are domains that often operate unnoticed as a part of the essential but quasi-clandestine framework of the school. When these workers do their jobs correctly, things run smoothly, the campus looks good, and they operate in relative anonymity. When they malfunction, the school community alerts to their presence quickly. I learned I was on shakier ground in supervising those employees because I knew little about the details of their work. I leaned heavily on the cafeteria manager and plant manager to take the lead and supervise their workers. They knew the jobs and were professional in their approach. While these managers advised administration of their decisions, they usually hired and supervised their own staff. They worked diligently to resolve problems and only brought issues to me when events required the threat of an employee losing his or her job.

**Frieda Johns: Matching the Ethics of Justice, the Profession, and Community**

The narrative of Frieda Johns presented me with several critical events during Years Three and Four that helped me clarify my understanding of the profession of educational leadership. Frieda was one of the custodians who worked the night shift. The night crew arrived at 2:00 PM, near the end of the teachers’ day, and worked until 10:00 PM. Each custodian was responsible for cleaning certain areas of the school during the evening. This included emptying trash, vacuuming and mopping the floors, dusting as necessary, and generally making the rooms satisfactory for the next days’ use. Frieda was tall for a man, much less a woman. She stood about 6 feet, two inches tall; she was not fat, but broad and muscular. She was missing her two front teeth, through
which she would often spit when she was outside. Stories differed on the cause of her injury. Some said she lost her teeth playing roller derby somewhere up north. Others said they were punched out in a bar fight. The reason didn’t matter. She wasn’t someone you wanted to make angry or meet alone at night in darkened hallway.

Frieda could work her way around ten men if she wanted to, which was the problem. She usually didn’t want to, and she spent most of her time at OPMS getting out of work or doing anything else but her specific job assignment. Frieda had been working at OPMS a few weeks when Smitty, the plant manager, told me we needed to meet with her and briefed me on the issues.

I met with Frieda, a union rep, and Smitty and listed our concerns: The storage closet wasn’t stocked with toilet paper. The rooms weren’t vacuumed. The floors were dirty. The desks were left in disarray. Frieda was unimpressed.

“First of all, no one told me I had to stock the storage room. I know I didn’t get to one of my rooms, but that was because we had a basketball game. I had to help set up and then clean up. That took all my time.”

Reflection

OK, I reasoned. Maybe she has a point. The games do require additional personnel. At the same time, we have a lot of evening games, so we have to be able to compensate for that. And maybe no one told her about stocking the closet. She hasn’t been on the job all that long. She needs time to adjust. I told her we’d give her a chance to improve and sent her on her way.
Another change

Smitty continued to have concerns and a few weeks later, he was back in my office with Frieda and a union rep. I listed the problems. The quality of her work was inconsistent. While some toilets in her area were clean, others were filthy. Some rooms were swept, while others were littered with paper. In one, dead insects spread across one corner of the room. Again, Frieda had a response.

“I’ve been working to get the toilets clean. We have minerals in the water. It stains the toilets. I’ve been spending my time deep cleaning them. I’m working my way through. And the dead ants and roaches were there because we have a major bug problem. I vacuum them up, but they just come back.”

Once again, I thought, we did have a lot of iron in the water. I’d seen it stain the sidewalks and fixtures. And I knew we’d had ants, and the insecticides they let us use were so people-friendly that they didn’t stop the insects before they could come in to die. Still, things needed to be clean.

I said all this to Frieda. Encouraged, she continued. She was tired of people being on her case about her work. She was getting paranoid about everything she did. She shouldn’t feel like she had to be looking over her shoulder all the time.

Understood, I said, but Smitty’s job was to make sure things are done correctly. The school needed to be clean. Just do the job, I thought.

Frieda continued the pattern that would be consistent throughout her tenure at OPMS. She would spend excessive time on one activity while neglecting fundamental tasks. She continued to say that no one told her exactly what to do. That seemed unlikely to me since Smitty was quite thorough, but I was willing to cover every base to
be sure all the custodians understood the requirements of their job. Accordingly, I met with all of them one afternoon with Smitty and Leroy, the assistant plant manager. I laid things out: Toilets, trash, floors, desks, dirt, dust, graffiti. I said teachers were beginning to complain, which they were. Everyone heard the same thing, so I felt that I was being fair.

Reflection

Custodians often took pride in their work and understood the effect their efforts had on the well being of the school. Frieda did not make that connection. Frieda believed she was being treated unjustly, and so she invoked procedures established in the district contract to follow procedures of due process. Her defiance forced Smitty to scrutinize her performance and required me to formalize that documentation. Although Frieda and Jon Strictor were different in many ways, the key elements of the dilemmas they presented were the same. I cited both of them for lapses in job performance. Both refused to reflect and acknowledge their problems. I applied the same procedures of justice as I had with Tom, Rita, and Jon. With warnings to improve her performance, we moved on to Year Four.

Year Four

School-Wide: Collaboration and Community Come Together

In Year Four my efforts to hire star teachers continued to reap benefits. The band won superior rankings in regional competitions. The Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) sent students to state competition for the first time in recent history. The Agriculture teacher won two grants for new equipment, and his students began to gather awards. The technology specialist worked with a large group of students to
produce a DVD about the school’s reading program that won a district contest. Parents formed a PTA and raised over $5,000 to use on school improvement projects. We implemented a strategy we called “What’s Great About OPMS?” Faculty, staff, and students sent me topics, which I shared on the in-school TV program, in newsletters, and in parent meetings. I also brought my presentation to the Orange Pines Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce, singing the praises of Orange Pines Middle School.

Meanwhile teachers continued to work to modify the bell schedule to carve out extended periods of planning and staff development time each week. Each month teachers met in committees focusing on student achievement, student/staff recognition, and discipline/safety. I gave teachers broad authority to research and discuss ways to improve the school. Notes a teacher recorded from a December meeting included the following statements:

Positive interactions in TWIST meetings. We are sharing strategies and discussing results.

Great ideas are being shared at the meetings.

We share strategies, implement, and debrief when we come back to the next meeting.

We talked about the stages of group formation and moving from “grumbling” to “willingness.”

At the end of the year, I distributed an anonymous faculty survey to get their responses to our reform efforts. One question was an open response, asking teachers to list the administration’s strengths. Descriptors and the number of times they were listed included the following:
I believe these responses reflected the positive impact that my ethical foci of care, collaboration, and community were having upon the staff. It was especially significant that my associate principals shared this approach, and our collective efforts were bearing fruit within the school community.

This attitude was reflected in the notes of my end-of-year meeting with the assistant superintendent, where I wrote the following question and response: “What do I offer as principal of OPMS? Perspective, empathy, experience, and love of community.”

I believed that my experience as a teacher made me a better principal. I think this attitude was rooted in ethics of care, the profession, and the community, which pushed me always to work with the faculty to achieve the greatest good for the school. Sergiovanni notes that concern for the school should extend beyond the school walls to families (1992). Strike describes successful communities united by a “vision of education …agreed upon by the members of the community…This vision is rooted in a common vision of human flourishing, and it involves aims that require cooperation in order to secure” (in Begley & Johansson, 2003, p. 74). I believe we were successful because we continued to work toward those goals.

At the same time, the district continued to respond to my pleas to upgrade the facility. They replaced poor lighting in the hallways and gym and completed the renovation of the auditorium. Student test scores improved, and the value of OPMS seemed to be rising in the community. Meanwhile, I continued to be frustrated that the
same compassion, collaboration and sense of shared community that seemed to be spreading through the macrocosm of the school culture were not always successful in my ongoing trials with Jon Strictor and Frieda Johns.

**Jon Strictor: Struggling with Ethics of Care, Justice, and the Profession**

Mr. Strictor returned to school in Year Four with renewed vigor but the same demeanor and the same results. By the end of the first semester I had logged thirty complaints from parents against him. The issues were the same: He raised his voice often. Students said they were accused unfairly. They felt his responses to infractions were more severe than necessary. He was constantly accusing students of misbehavior who did not have problems with other teachers. His directions were confusing and inconsistent. At the end of Year Four I wrote him another formal letter of reprimand documenting the same concerns. I described his lack of patience and inability to manage typical middle school behaviors. Because of my continued pressure on him, at the end of Year Four I was able to negotiate agreement with the union to set up a Teacher Assistance Team for him in Year Five. This would list specific behaviors for him to improve. It would also provide him with a teacher mentor from another school who would work with him. This was another step in the system of due process defined in the teacher contract to work with problem teachers.

**Reflection**

My concerns about Jon’s lack of empathy for his students continued to amplify. I had compassion for him, and I could not understand why he appeared to have so little concern for his students. I intervened more in his discipline referrals, often talking to the students myself and returning them to class. When they could not stand him any more, I
would transfer students to another class. That put strain on the system, however, and was not an effective widespread option.

I think I saw once again my father in him. He was destroying his professional life incrementally. No matter how carefully I charted his demise and supported my reprimands with specific examples, he would not change. Once again, I was frustrated that the procedures established to ensure justice for teachers did not place students at its core.

Frieda Johns: Refining Ethics of Justice, the Profession, and Community

A significant incident

In the Crestview school district, custodians use electric golf carts to navigate school campuses. They are quiet, quick for short distances, and can squeeze into tight spaces. They can also carry light freight like people, equipment and cleaning supplies.

So it was that in the middle of Year Four, Frieda was driving a cart through the school parking lot at the end of the school day. Parents were lined up in their cars, waiting for school to dismiss. As Frieda was driving past, she scraped the side of one of the cars. I learned this when the mother marched into my office after school and demanded that I look at her car. Dutifully, I went out and inspected the damage. With me I took the plant manager and the SRO. Clearly there were scratches on the car. The mother described Frieda, who would be hard to miss, and said Frieda had driven past and scraped the side of her car. I told her I would investigate and call her back.

I talked with Frieda. She admitted she had “tapped” the car’s mirror with the mirror of the cart as she drove by. The driver claimed Frieda not only hit her mirror, but scraped her bumper and side of her car. Frieda said she stopped to inspect and, thinking
there was no damage, moved on. The driver said she didn’t stop. Once again, I had another conflict of opinion between Frieda and someone else. This time, the action had spread into the community through her negative interactions with a parent. As always, Frieda disputed the facts of the case. The parent, however, provided the name of a witness, another parent waiting in line. Her testimony corroborated the first parent’s account. The school district was liable for damages to the car. Besides inflicting damage to someone’s car, this was damage against the school’s reputation, something I was working hard to improve.

I issued Frieda a reprimand. Hitting a car and then deferring responsibility was a more serious infraction than not cleaning toilets. Her nonchalance and reckless attitude had not only damaged someone else’s property, but she could have injured someone. The bigger issue becoming typical of Frieda was that she didn’t take responsibility for her actions.

One night two months later, the assistant plant manager found Frieda and another custodian behind a custodial storage working on a project unrelated to school. Leroy, the assistant, said later they were building a dog house. Frieda said, no, they were breaking up an old wooden palette that had been left for scrap to put in her truck. “I was doing the school a favor. I was going to use the wood, and this way, the school didn’t have to pay to haul it away.”

The next day, Frieda filed a worker’s compensation claim with my secretary. She claimed she had gotten a splinter in her hand while pushing a broom and had to visit a doctor that morning to have the splinter removed. Meanwhile, Frieda remained negligent in her cleaning duties.
When I met with her to follow up on the incident regarding the alleged doghouse and splinter, I heard the same refrain. “You guys pick one or two things that I do wrong, but I don’t get any credit for extra stuff I do. I do lots of things for teachers around here that nobody says anything about.” She said she had helped one teacher change a tire and another jump-start his car. She said she had helped the band teacher set up chairs for the band concert and helped troubleshoot the sound system when it wasn’t working.

**Reflection**

All true, I thought, she does all those things. Maybe she wasn’t building a doghouse. I knew Leroy didn’t like her. Did he embellish the event? I didn’t see the incident. Did Frieda lie about the source of the splinter? The brooms do have wooden handles. She could have gotten a serious splinter that way. Did she get it handling the palette for her own gain, which was not school-related, or pushing a broom, which was a job-connected injury? I remember thinking, “Why am I spending my time trying to sort through this trivia? Why can’t she just do her job?”

Once again, I told Frieda to focus on her specific duties: “Clean what you’re supposed to clean. Report any accidents promptly and accurately.” This was frustrating because focusing on singletons of minutia seemed counter to what I wanted to do to promote a positive school environment. Changing a tire was good for the school culture, I thought. Spending time building a dog house was not good for the culture. It irritated me that she did not see the larger issues of the impact of her actions on the school culture.

**More problems**

Teachers started to send me emails about Frieda not cleaning their rooms. Two teachers believed she was trying to intimidate them because they had complained about
the quality of her work. They said she was playing the radio overly loud when cleaning after school. They said she stared at them. One teacher overheard her complaining to a co-worker. She said she was “tired of this shit,” presumably about my constant reprimands. Then she referred to one of the teachers as a “bitch.”

I called her in. “They’re lying,” she said.

“Why would they lie, Frieda?

“I don’t know. They don’t like me. They are trying to get me in trouble.” It angered me that she would call these teachers liars. I knew them to be good, honest people. They just wanted to teach, do their job, and be true to the mission of the profession and serve their students and school. I was certain they wouldn’t put make false claims. Why couldn’t Frieda just do her job? I gave her a letter of reprimand for her remark about the teacher and promised that I would continue to monitor her performance.

**More trouble**

Despite my warnings, conflicts involving Frieda continued. One spring evening after a parent meeting, the president of the PTA was walking to her car. It happened that she was the wife of a prominent local physician who also served as mayor of the City of Orange Pines. She was one of those who lived on Magnolia Street and could have sent her kids to a private school. Instead, she had chosen OPMS so that her children could experience a diverse culture. I valued her support at school and in the community. She had done a lot of work to help clean up the school campus. She had spearheaded an effort to hire an outside vendor to pressure wash all the sidewalks, with the intent that our
custodians would maintain them, so she had a vested interest in the care and appearance of the facility.

Walking to her car that evening, she observed that the sidewalk was dirty and littered with trash. Seeing Frieda nearby, she commented to her about the debris on the sidewalk. From that point, stories differed. Frieda said the mother offered to get a pressure washer to clean the sidewalk. The parent said Frieda remarked sarcastically, “I’ll get you a pressure washer, if you want.” Meanwhile, teachers had continued to complain about her shoddy work. I called her in to discuss the parent encounter and teacher complaints.

With Frieda, it was always the same fugue. She didn’t say those things. She was misquoted. She didn’t know why the parent would lie. I found myself again quibbling over semantics. I could give Frieda the benefit of the doubt once, twice, three times, seemingly ad infinitum. Here, however, her insolence was spilling into the school and now the neighborhood community. About the cleaning, she said, we had been short custodians. Several had been out sick, and she had to pick up extra rooms. She couldn’t do it all.

As always, a union representative had joined Frieda for our conference. The rep said that I continued to single Frieda out unfairly. Frieda produced photographs of areas maintained by other custodians that were dirty. The union rep argued, “See, this isn’t fair. You guys should document every custodian the way you are documenting her. You need to be consistent. You put her on with a short crew, and then you criticize her for not getting her work done.”
Was there truth to that? We had been short handed. On the other hand, everyone had to help pick up the slack. I admitted to myself that I was tired of dealing with Frieda. Smitty agreed to start a more methodical schedule to inspect all work. As always, we were trying to be fair and just.

After a series of inspections and photographs, we held another meeting with Frieda, Smitty, and the union representative. I explained that Frieda had not been performing satisfactorily for the past two years, and that I had secured clearance from the director of employee relations to recommend her dismissal to the superintendent. “That’s fine. I’m sick of this damn place, anyway,” she snorted and stomped out of my office.

Two days later I received a letter of resignation from Frieda, delivered through the union. Her resignation ensured that she wasn’t fired. I learned a few days later that she had been hired by a private school. What was wrong with those people, I wondered. Didn’t they check references? I certainly felt relieved that she had gone and I would never have to deal with Frieda professionally again.

**Reflection: Ethical dilemmas and frameworks**

I knew that in my treatment of Frieda I was right morally and professionally; yet I also knew that Frieda had a child at home. She needed the money and benefits her job provided. I hoped her new job would provide the same benefits. As with Tom, Rita, and Jon, I could not understand how Frieda could march inexorably toward her own demise. I had applied an ethic of care toward her and sincerely hoped that her work would improve. The dilemma with Frieda was not that she did not care, exactly. As she herself pointed out, she would go out of her way to help a teacher move or fix something. She longed to be complimented for something extra she had done, while to do that she had
neglected her basic duties and left some portion of the school untended. She resorted to a convoluted ethic of justice to protect herself from what she perceived to be unfair attacks by Smitty and me.

**Justice and community**

Working through Frieda’s issues reminded me of the significant contributions that non-instructional workers made to the school. It was important to the school community that Frieda either improve or leave. She created disharmony among her colleagues on the custodial crew, the teachers, and the community. She had invoked the system of due process and justice to protect herself from what she perceived as my unfair treatment. Once again, in order to be thorough and fair, I had applied the same process of justice to protect the school community and to pressure her to leave.

**School-Wide Events: Developing Constructivism and Distributed Leadership**

From the beginning of my principalship I had hired several outstanding teachers who brought excellence to their academic areas and thereby showcased the school. Of course, the goal of every principal is to hire strong teachers. In retrospect, however, I worked to hire teachers who were not only experts in their fields, but who were innovative and independent thinkers. I then gave them free reign to develop their programs and help their students succeed. This reflected my personal attitude when I was a high school English teacher, department head, and district supervisor. In those roles I always assumed I knew more than the principal about my subject area. Thus, my willingness to delegate power to expert teachers and allow a model of collaborative leadership to develop evolved from my own experiences as a teacher leader. I was not the “heroic” leader decried by Furman (2004), Spillane and colleagues (2004), and other
proponents of distributed leadership. I think some principals are unwilling to relinquish their authority and trust their teachers. I was fortunate to inherit some excellent teachers, two outstanding associate principals, and to find and hire other bright and innovative teachers.

**Star teachers**

During Year Four I attended a workshop entitled “Star Teachers of Children of Poverty,” based on the work of Martin Haberman. Haberman (1995) cites many characteristics of teachers who are successful working with children of poverty. They include being lifelong learners themselves, being committed to finding things they can share with their students, being nonjudgmental, and willing to share authority with their students. Star teachers, according to Haberman, are dedicated to the “continuous generation and maintenance of student interest and involvement” (1995, p. 22), and their ultimate goal is for their students to learn. These teachers, according to Haberman, are more likely to engage in projects that challenge the status quo. Learning about Haberman’s work reinforced for me what I was already doing. I believed the type of teacher confident in his or her knowledge and ability could help me facilitate a distributed, constructivist leadership model. This constructivist approach helped create an ethic of community that benefitted students and enhanced the school’s reputation in the community. These teachers were overwhelmingly dedicated to the ethics of care, critique, and the profession. While community was probably not their primary focus, their good work did enhance the school community. They also served as a contrast to the ethical conflicts I faced with teachers and staff who were less committed to their students and the
school, or who were so overwhelmed with their own personal issues that they were unable to apply their best efforts to their students.

**Reflection**

During Years Three and Four I experienced more critical events and continued to refine my perception of morally directed school leadership, although I would not have defined it in that way then. I see now that I was involved in sorting out the tensions among the frameworks. Driven by an ethic of care, perhaps to be cared about, but certainly caring nonetheless, I was torn by the tensions in specific ethical dilemmas when those problems did not respond to my ethics of care and justice. In a collaborative leadership framework it doesn’t matter if the leader doesn’t know the best way to do something. The only requirement is to be wise enough to recognize when someone else does know the best way, and be willing to follow that.

In dealing with the personnel problems described above, my style of leadership was fundamentally transactional. We followed a prescribed hierarchy and procession of events. These events served as a contrast to the more transformational work that was happening within school wide efforts.

Ethical dilemmas are more difficult and challenging, because the principal is expected to know best and to act accordingly. As I noted earlier, Schon has critiqued this gap between professional knowledge and practice (1984, 1987). While I did have guidance through district office professionals who were skilled in the legal and contractual codes, the challenge remained with me to balance the ethic of care and compassion against issues of justice and care for the students. I’m not sure that at first, I met that challenge adequately, surrounded by ghosts of my past. I do believe I learned
and improved, however, and came to more of a balance among care, justice, and the profession. I believe the work we did moved toward elements of transformative leadership. Bass notes,

Burns (1978) defined a transforming leader as one who: raises the followers’ level of consciousness; gets the followers to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of the team; and raises the followers’ level of need …from lower level concerns of safety and security to higher level needs for achievement and self-actualization (Bass, 2008, p. 618).

The success was rooted less in me as some sort of heroic leader than for me to be willing to allow an ethic of community and distributed leadership to take hold (Furman, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011).

Another critical event shocks the school

A turbulent event occurred in the spring of Year Four that would have a significant effect on the culture of OPMS over the next three years. In May the school community experienced the first death since those in my first year and the first of a faculty member. Our reading coach died quickly and unexpectedly of cancer. She was one of the stars I had hired. She had most recently been an assistant principal who had begun her career as a teacher at OPMS. Along the way she had married and relocated. When she and her husband moved back to the area, she sought a teaching position there. She had been a teacher leader and key player in moving the school forward. We held her funeral in our newly renovated auditorium. I spoke about her life and the many lives of students she had touched along the way. This was not an ethical dilemma, but was a poignant and disturbing event in the school culture. Just as gaining a star teacher can
increase the synergy in a school culture, losing a star can inhibit growth. At the family’s request we held the funeral in the auditorium. This seems to me to show application of the ethic of the community, highlighting the school and the facility to honor someone who had contributed so much to both. She had been a friend and partner in our collaborative reform efforts. She was bright, energetic, and proactive. We would miss her.

**Transitions**

In another key event that was less traumatic but also disrupted the flow of the school, during the summer of Year Four Semitra was promoted to principal at another school. She had been instrumental in organizing our book talks and several school wide reforms. The faculty liked and respected her. We were happy for her success but sorry to see her go.

As I prepared to hire another associate principal at the start of Year Five, I entered emotionally and professionally another phase in the evolution of my moral leadership persona. While I knew Semitra would be difficult to replace, I assumed that I would be able to hire another excellent associate principal. I had been successful in hiring outstanding teachers, and I thought I would likewise hire an outstanding associate principal. What ensued, however, was to become the most morally challenging narrative of my career.
CHAPTER 7

PHASE THREE, YEARS FIVE, SIX, AND SEVEN

The romance and the beauty were all gone from the river. All the value any feature of it had for me now was the amount of usefulness it could furnish toward compassing the safe piloting of a steamboat. Since those days, I have pitied doctors from my heart. What does the lovely flush in a beauty's cheek mean to a doctor but a 'break' that ripples above some deadly disease? Are not all her visible charms sown thick with what are to him the signs and symbols of hidden decay? Does he ever see her beauty at all, or doesn't he simply view her professionally, and comment upon her unwholesome condition all to himself? And doesn't he sometimes wonder whether he has gained most or lost most by learning his trade?

Mark Twain, from Life on the Mississippi

I have defined Years Five, Six, Seven as Phase Three in the development of my moral purpose as an educational leader. In Phases One and Two I matched compassion with frustration as I mixed the application of justice with needs of the profession. I also developed my instincts in the use of distributed leadership to develop school leaders and inspire constructive synergy within the school. During Phase Three that culture of synergy continued. At the same time, Phase Three presented me with more critical events and challenging dilemmas as I worked to refine and understand my moral purpose.
Year Five

Replacing Semitra

Phase Three of my development as a morally directed leader began in the end of Year Four, when I initiated the process to replace Semitra, who had been promoted to the position of principal at another school. This process began the most challenging and emotionally taxing experience of my career as over the next three years I worked through the ethical dilemmas presented by the associate principal I hired to replace Semitra.

Randy and I interviewed each of the applicants who were technically qualified for the job. We also asked them to respond in writing to a series of prompts regarding our goals for Orange Pines Middle. From those applicants we chose three finalists. I then assembled a committee of teacher leaders who interviewed the final candidates. The committee came to a quick consensus that Janessa Alvarez was the best choice to become our next associate principal, and Randy and I agreed. We thought she would be an excellent role model for many of our students. She was Hispanic, had been a migrant worker, spoke fluent Spanish, and had achieved academic and professional success against strong odds. Ms. Alvarez was excited, and so were we. Her job would officially begin the week before the teachers returned, and we eagerly anticipated her arrival.

School-Wide: Balancing Ethics of Care, Justice, and the Profession

Early crisis

Year Five began on a turbulent note. The fall stunned us with a deep tragedy that ripped the heart of the school and local community. We discovered that our band teacher had been having sex with one of his female students. The news was horrific and
devastating. He was arrested, pled guilty, and remains in jail today. That is not an ethical dilemma, since the choices, though tragic, are prescribed, direct, and expeditious. An event like that calls into function the ethics of justice and the profession in their most expedient forms. Regardless of the compassion we had for him as an individual, he had seared an indelible blight on the lives of our students and the image of the school. He had been, for all appearances, an excellent teacher. Under his leadership the band had earned numerous awards. Indeed, I had counted him among my star teachers and a key in rebuilding the reputation of the school. My son had performed in the band just two years before, and he loved the man.

The most difficult parent meeting I have ever faced was a gathering of over 300 parents in our auditorium, whom I had assembled in order to discuss the event and respond to their concerns. Of many questions thrust at me, the one I remember came from a parent whom I consider a friend. He asked, “Jim, what systemic steps have you taken to be sure nothing like this ever happens again?”

What could I say? I don’t know how a principal can prevent such a crime. The ethic of the profession has clear codes warning against this type of abuse. I don’t think that reading and signing a Code of Ethics sheet in a faculty meeting does anything to prevent this egregious ethical breach. If one does not have an internal moral brake to prevent such an act, no outside force can prevent it. While I sensed all this, I had not clarified the issue for myself. Could I as the school’s leader declare that we could do nothing to prevent such a horror? This was reflection-in-action (Schon 1984) in its most stressful form. Parents were rightly angry and frustrated, as was I. I responded honestly that I was as shocked as they were and had no answer.
I have since learned to watch for warning signs. These include a teacher who arrives early and works late and spends time alone with students. Also suspect are those who prefer to spend “free” or planning time at school with students, rather than with other teachers. Ironically, those are also traits that in most circumstances signal dedication. Therein lies another dilemma in the mystery of educational leadership: angels and villains sometimes wear the same robes. The challenge lies in sorting out the truth beneath the façade.

In addition to meeting with parents as a group, I spoke to the students over our internal TV news program and sent home a letter for all parents. While there was nothing redeeming in the experience, a response I received from a parent does reflect my ethic of care for the school community. I did not understand that then, but I do now. The mother wrote,

Dear Mr. Lane,

I want to commend your strength in leadership, which you displayed today. I know that discussing the current sexual misconduct issue with the student body must have been very difficult for you, but also very necessary. I believe that your public acknowledgment and guidance has opened the door of communication between the school and the children and has also begun to build the bridge of trust and respect again. Today, my daughter expressed a sense of relief that you, her principal, have addressed the issue publicly and that she now feels more comfortable and confident about her school. I respect your decision to address the students and to communicate with the parents because it was the right thing to do,
and you did. On behalf of my family and other concerned parents, I thank you (personal correspondence).

I don’t include this piece as a solipsistic tribute to my leadership. In fact, I still question how I could have prevented the event. Probably I should have been more diligent and asked more questions. The OPMS campus was laid out so that the band building was across campus and separated from the rest of the school. Its isolation made it easy for us to stay away. Maybe my commitment to hiring good people and letting them work went too far. Maybe I was so consumed with the many distractions of the job that I didn’t do as much as I could or should have to protect my students. This mother spoke to the heart of the ethic of the profession when she said, “it was the right thing to do.” Obviously, that was always my goal. Critical ethical events are dilemmas because the “right” or best choice is not always clear.

**Professional and Community Successes**

Despite that tragic start, Year Five also brought successes. The PTA and School Advisory Council combined finances to purchase a state-of-the-art presentation system for the auditorium that featured a large projection screen that was illuminated from the rear. We also used our Seat Yourself! donations to buy blackout curtains for the auditorium windows. The auditorium was finally a class act, and in the spring, I hosted and moderated a contentious debate about a landfill planned for the area. While not a school event, the function allowed us to showcase the facility to the community and participate as a partner in community events. Then in a stunning move, the district proposed plans to erect a new classroom building on our campus and renovate the current building.
Chinese partnership

In a stunning piece of synergy, our technology specialist launched a move that partnered us with a school in China. His daughter had been traveling to China through her business. Through her job she made a connection with a large middle school in Nanjing that was interested in linking with an American middle school to help their students learn English. Her father traveled there independently and arranged the connection between them and OPMS. The Chinese were eager to work with an American school and, more important, they were well financed. After he returned, things moved quickly. We staged several events in which our students communicated with the Chinese students through sophisticated telecommunications equipment loaned to us by a local university. It was electric. It was magic. It was fun. That summer we sent ten teachers to China for a week to teach Chinese students. The relationship between our schools would last for the remaining three years I was principal.

I have obviously given a simplistic explanation of the process we followed to establish a partnership with a school in China. The point is that this was a time during which things were starting to move synergistically at OPMS. During the summer the PTA and School Advisory Council paid for a group of our teacher leaders to meet, and they again used our test data to fine-tune plans to improve our instruction. Meanwhile, against this backdrop of anguish and excellence, I continued to struggle with issues presented by Jon Strictor and Janessa Alvarez.

Janessa Alvarez: Exploring Paradoxes in Ethics of the Profession and Critique

Janessa was a Hispanic woman in her early 30s. She was attractive but not intimidatingly so, not the beauty queen/fashion model type but more like Mary Anne on
Gilligan’s Island, the classic girl next door. She dressed well and was seemingly articulate. She had bronze skin, black hair, and brilliant white teeth. She was friendly, quick to smile, and charismatic. She quickly put people at ease and seemed eager to work and learn.

She was the oldest of several children raised by parents who had been Mexican migrant workers. She was the first of her family to finish high school and had worked her way through college, earning Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees. She had been a teacher in the Crestview district for several years and had held several teacher-leader positions. We all thought she would be an excellent school administrator.

**Early problems**

Warning signs surfaced quickly, however. After Janessa was appointed associate principal but before she officially began, she left her current school well before school dismissal in order to appear in an OPMS pep rally, where I proudly introduced her to much fanfare from the students and staff. I later learned that to attend the pep rally she had left her school without notifying her principal and without ensuring that some of her supervisory duties were covered.

Soon after, and also before beginning her official duties, she attended an OPMS spring football game and mingled among the students and crowd. She had been a cheerleader in high school, she said, and talked with our cheerleaders and gave them advice on form and technique. I thought that was great. She was showing excellent enthusiasm for the job. And then she left and went home.

Her early departure surprised me, because staying at the football game would have made a strong positive impression with the students, staff, and me. She would also
have learned more about all of us. However, I reasoned, she was not officially an
associate principal yet, so she wasn’t professionally obligated to be there; I did not know
that she was beginning a pattern that would be consistent throughout her job with me and
would plague Ms. Alvarez’s contentious career as a school administrator.

A new school year

As I noted above, Ms. Alvarez officially assumed her role as associate principal
near the end of the summer, a few days before teachers reported for the new year. From
the time she started in her position I became concerned about both Janessa’s work ethic
and her ability to perform common duties of an associate principal. During planning
week I asked her to attend a district-sponsored breakfast for teachers new to the district.
Several of our newly hired teachers would be attending. Janessa came and left, but did
not sit with or greet our new teachers. I didn’t specifically tell her to meet and greet them,
but I assumed that was understood. In another act that irritated me, the last day before
teachers returned to school from summer break, she was absent. As with teachers, the
administrators’ contract provided sick and personal days, but the last day before teachers
report is usually busy as we clarify last-minute plans and preparations. It’s an important
day for administrators to be at work, yet Janessa missed the day, saying she needed to
spend time with her daughter.

As the year progressed, she regularly arrived late to or left early from important
meetings. She failed to complete some routine reports to the district and state. She
distributed the faculty handbook, her responsibility, rife with errors. She did not
complete several important tasks. She performed poorly on other assignments. She
showed an inattention to detail and either an unwillingness or inability to complete tasks at an acceptable level of competency that would continue throughout her tenure with me.

One of Janessa’s acts of omission especially troubled me, even though it was not something I had required her to do. I scheduled a variety of motivational speakers throughout the year. Sometimes the speakers would return in the evening to speak to parents and community members. These events were always interesting, and so I always volunteered to supervise the events and gave my assistants the night off. One of those speakers was a woman who was a professional basketball player. Like Janessa she was from a family of Mexican migrant farm workers, and as a young teenager she had attended OPMS each spring when her family came to the area to pick tomatoes. Even though I had not asked Janessa to attend, I was certain she would be there. After all, I reasoned, she and this speaker shared a common heritage. However, Janessa did not attend. While I realized I had not required her presence, I thought her initiative to excel and represent her ethnic group would compel her to attend. Soon after she missed another important event. I hosted a meeting attended by two assistant superintendents, a school board member, and other district officials to discuss the school’s proposed renovation. Janessa did not come to the meeting, even though it was held immediately after school.

Reflection

As I considered these events, I grew progressively more conflicted. I questioned myself regularly. I had not specifically told her to come to the planning meeting with the assistant superintendents. Randy, however, was there, along with several parents and teacher leaders. It seemed to me that if she cared about the school, and especially if she
wanted to advance her career, she would attend any meeting she could with the district officials. Once again, her lack of initiative and perceptiveness puzzled me.

I questioned my own failure of leadership and direction. I searched my experiences as assistant principal. My personal relationships with my principals had varied. They were always cordial, but sometimes I felt I was criticized inappropriately. Sometimes I felt I did not get credit for my good. I felt I had been passed over for rewards or even promotions. I also knew I had gaps in my knowledge of scheduling and other organizational functions of administration. I knew that I was continuing to learn the very difficult job of school administration, and I was willing to overlook mistakes.

Because my relationships with some of my principals had been strained, I had worked to build a rapport with Randy and Semitra. I had regarded us as partners, working together successfully in a very stressful environment. We sometimes felt matched variously against confrontational parents, resistant teachers, or problem students. The job was too stressful, I reasoned, too intense, to allow chinks in the armor. Finally, despite ignorance in some aspects of school administration, I had always worked from the precept that assistant principals were knowledgeable and competent. I knew there was a learning curve to decipher policies, procedures, and other details of the job, but I never thought an associate principal would be lacking in basic skills. In this regard I returned to the feelings of self-doubt I had experienced in first working with Tom and Rita five years before. I had experienced enough situations to build my confidence and transactional knowledge. In the case of Janessa, however, I was unsure of my efficacy in this situation, which Bass defines as “a belief in one’s ability to cope with specific situations” (2008, p. 189). I continued to assume, therefore, that Janessa would improve.
When Janessa’s job performance began to lapse, I assumed I had miscommunicated. This was a pattern for much of our professional relationship. When she did wrong, I assumed at first it was my fault. While I thought I had been clear, I couldn’t understand how events could otherwise have gone wrong. In addition, although by this time I had experienced numerous confrontations with personnel, I continued to despise conflict. It always reminded me of screaming matches between my father and stepmother, and I would avoid that strife as long as I could. Confrontation is an unfortunate certainty of school administration, even when one operates from an ethic of care (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). I think now that my efforts to be fair combined with my avoidance of conflict to allow me to tolerate Janessa’s problems longer than others would have.

**Ethical Dilemma: Striving to define the profession**

My dilemma in working with Janessa in the first year came in trying to resolve her attractive appearance and strong background with her poor performance. The tensions created by the widening gaps between those poles caused me to question my abilities as an effective leader. Working with Janessa in this first year caused me to examine more carefully the meaning of educational leadership and what characteristics a good leader must possess.

Intangibles are more difficult to identify because they are not concrete. We know them when we see them, however. When they are not apparent, we struggle for words to describe the void their absence creates. This was the case with Janessa. Effective leaders demonstrate pride, initiative, and creativity (Burns, 2003; Blasé & Blasé, 2001). Sometimes they come early and stay late, compensating for that time later. Nevertheless,
one can depend on the leader to do what needs to be done. This was almost never the case with Janessa.

**Jon Strictor: Working to Balance the Ethics of Care, Justice, and the Profession**

The union president and I had planned to begin Year Five by setting up a teacher Assistance Team to help Mr. Strictor improve. Before we could schedule a meeting, however, Mr. Strictor began to generate complaints. This time the victim was the child of one of our teachers, Veronica Virtue. Veronica was a single mother who had adopted Gina from an orphanage in China when she was an infant. The conditions in the orphanage were clean but sparse, and Veronica suspected that Gina had suffered abuse either at the orphanage or before she got there. At any rate, Gina had some mild learning disabilities, which Veronica attributed to her rough start. Otherwise, Gina was a completely normal American twelve year-old girl. She was quiet, shy, and worked hard to please. I think most of the staff knew her story and appreciated her background. Apparently Mr. Strictor did not.

One morning Veronica tapped on my office door. She had Gina with her. Gina’s eyes were red and her face was streaked with tears.

“Could I talk to you a minute, Jim?”

“Sure, Veronica. Come on in. What’s wrong?”

“It’s Mr. Strictor,” Veronica responded. “He threw her cutting board in the trash. He said it was garbage. She didn’t line up the sections just right before she glued them, so they weren’t even. He said she had been goofing around instead of paying attention. Then he said he was going to give her a referral for wasting school supplies.
“This is wrong for a lot of reasons. First, Gina is dyslexic, so she has a hard time lining things up. Next, this is wood shop, not calculus (Veronica was a math teacher). He should give her some credit for trying. And I guess it shouldn’t matter, but he knows I’m raising Gina by myself. I don’t know anything about woodworking, and I don’t have a man around to teach her these things. Isn’t that why she’s in his class – to learn? I’ve heard stories about him from different kids, but I figured they were exaggerating. Now I’ve seen it for myself. I hate to ask this, but I really need you to get her out of his class. She just doesn’t need to put up with this, and neither do I.”

“OK, Veronica, I know. I agree. Gina shouldn’t have to deal with this. I’ll get her out of the class. And I’ll talk to him.”

I would usually honor a teacher’s request regarding her child, even before I would respond to an outside parent’s request. Some principals aren’t like that and are as strict with their teachers’ requests as they are with other parents. While I understood the point of being consistent, I always believed taking care of teachers’ personal interests and requests showed my empathy and compassion. On a more pragmatic level, happy teachers are productive and loyal. Of course, in the case of Mr. Strictor, I already agreed with her. I wouldn’t leave my child in that situation, and I thought I should treat her child as I would my own.

That poignant meeting with Veronica and Gina added impetus to Jon Strictor’s Teacher Assistance Team. The group included the union president, the director of employee relations, a competent shop teacher selected by the union, Mr. Strictor, and myself. After working through my list of 20 specific concerns, the team agreed to narrow
our focus of improvement to four categories in which Mr. Strictor was to improve. These were giving clear directions, pacing assignments appropriately, providing clear but developmentally appropriate expectations, and providing reasonable and professional responses to student behavior. This procedure was theoretically established to help the teacher improve his performance; however, if he did not, it was another necessary step toward securing his dismissal.

Mr. Strictor did not improve, however; in fact, his behavior and treatment of his students grew worse. I met with him and union representatives regularly throughout Year Five, and near the end of the year I presented him with another spreadsheet, this time describing a stunning 70 separate parent complaints against him, collected over the previous two years. Eighteen of those had come after the inception of the assistance plan. I held his review again until the end of the year. At that time he received another “Satisfactory” evaluation with the provision to continue the teacher assistance team and monitor her progress, but with the admonition that I would not allow his poor performance to continue.

**Reflection: Ethical dilemmas and frameworks**

Issues with Mr. Strictor continued to fall on a continuum between the ethics of justice and the profession. I followed guidelines as outlined in the contract to help him improve his pedagogy. The system of justice allowed him to continue to navigate through my reprimands with relative impunity. He did nothing egregious enough to force his dismissal, and yet he did nothing to improve. Justice may have been served for him, but not for his students and the school. Schon (1984, 1987) notes that reflective
practitioners question their performance and strive to improve. That was never the case with Jon Strictor.

**Year-end Highs**

The year ended with some high ethical points. Randy was pictured in the local newspaper leading a prayer group on the national Day of Prayer, which in the Orange Pines Community was a positive event. Our athletic program won a state award for sportsmanship, and our student global partners team won a district award for producing a DVD about their China project.

In my end-year assessment with the assistant superintendent, I discussed my continued commitment to improve the school’s reputation in the community and my concern about “self-fulfilling prophesies.” I explained that affluent parents would not send their children to OPMS because they did not like the student mix and level of student achievement. Ironically, they created that environment by not sending their children to the school. I was committed to convincing them that they should send their students to OPMS. I showed her that only a few more high-achieving students would have sent us into the A ranking in the state system, something all principals hoped for and high-profile parents expected. Thus we ended one year and entered a new year ready to improve!

Immediately after school was out, the local university received a Professional Development School grant that allowed 15 of our teacher leaders to participate in a retreat with several university professors and teachers from another school. More than ever before, teachers discussed ways to continue to improve our school culture. We planned staff development and action research topics for the year and procedures for
sharing insights during faculty meetings. We planned more ways to analyze student performance data and use that information to improve instruction. Of course, we discussed better ways to approach student discipline, as well as more ways to reward students for positive behavior. We planned intramural events and club activities for our students.

For the first time, we discussed ways teachers could socialize outside of school. As I review the notes from those meetings now, key focus points stand out. We listed as assets “OPMS ‘family’ image” and the school acting as a “beacon in the community.” We noted three negative influences: Inconsistency, separatism and the “victim mentality and the spirit of poverty,” a phrase that in long retrospect seems to echo President Bush’s admonition against the “soft bigotry of low expectations” (Bush, 2004). Those topics spoke to the concerns I had about OPMS when I arrived – that the students could not be successful. The teachers were recognizing that malaise and were starting to prove it wrong.

Later that summer, ten teachers traveled to our sister school in Nanjing to teach Chinese students for a week. One morning I met the superintendent’s staff in her office to Skype the teachers about their experiences. It was exciting to see that of all possible schools, Orange Pines Middle had ten teachers in China! It was like injecting a shot of adrenaline to the school and community.

**Ethical Frameworks: Community and the profession**

My constructivist approach to school leadership continued to bear fruit during Year Five as our partnership with the school in Nanjing blossomed. The credit for that project went to the technology specialist, the teachers who worked with the students, and
to Randy, who helped guide and participated in every discussion. My growing leadership style was to hire good teachers who were ethically committed to care and the profession and then let them work and prosper. Because the process was successful in other areas, I was frustrated that I was not able to achieve that synergy and rapport with Janessa or Jon. I was frustrated that I was unable to foster the change in them individually that I saw occurring collectively in the school culture.

Year Six

School-Wide Events: Synergy and Success

In the spring of Year Five I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Thus, I began Year Six with a late summer surgery. While not life threatening, my recovery lasted much of the year and was more physically draining than I had anticipated.

Fortunately, our teacher leaders were prepared and carried through on their plans and the synergy continued. That year was a Presidential campaign year, and CNN was sponsoring a debate of Republican candidates in a nearby city. One of the teachers I had hired had been a legislator in another state and was very interested in politics. He was able to work through the office of one of our state’s senators to obtain tickets for 25 students and chaperones to attend the debate. Another of our teachers had a friend who was working on one of the campaigns. The friend asked our teacher if she wanted to bring a group of students to a pre-debate picnic sponsored by the candidates. We accepted, of course. While we were sitting at the picnic tables eating pulled pork, a producer of the Nickelodeon cable network program Nick News saw our students and began talking to them. She was surprised that middle school students would have an interest in politics.
A few days later, the producer called me to ask whether we would allow the students to be featured on the Nick News program. I agreed, of course. That led to several of our students being interviewed about their preferences for President, and we were featured twice on the national news program. That event was also featured in the local newspaper, as was the story of our teachers traveling to China.

Our students telecommunicated with their peers in Nanjing several times during Year Six, and community leaders honored them at a meeting of the Orange Pines City Council. In another successful program, our guidance counselors had been working with the local domestic abuse shelter to promote harmony among diverse groups. That club received an award from the local PBS television affiliate and was also honored with a proclamation by the city council.

Meanwhile, plans for the school renovation also progressed. We held meetings with teachers about what they thought the renovated building should include and attended numerous meetings with architects and builders. One evening we held a meeting of parents in our auditorium to gather parent and teacher input. I saw this as a chance to showcase the many great things we were doing at OPMS. Our students set up off site at our partner university and broadcast a presentation showcasing the achievements of our students and proclaiming OPMS as a wonderful school. For me, the thrill of the presentation was that the students broadcast the presentation over the Internet through our telecommunications equipment and projected through our state-of-the-art projection system. One of the assistant superintendents later complained that I had taken time away from the topic of the meeting, but I did not care. My mission was to promote the value of OPMS in the community, and this was the perfect venue.
Each of these events could be highlighted in much greater detail. My point is that teachers were working independently, collaboratively, and constructively to help their students succeed and bring honor to the school community. Events were evolving in a form of synergy and serendipity that OPMS had never seen. In reflection, I believe this a good example of transformative leadership. It also seems to me to an example of urman’s sense of combining instrumental and moral purposes (2004). We dealt with pragmatic, transactional concerns of improving student achievement while advancing the reputation of the school. No principal could have created these events alone. This was the work of all of us. What benefitted OPMS, I reasoned, benefitted our students. And once again, this work served as a contrasting backdrop to ongoing individual dilemmas with Jon Strictor and Janessa Alvarez, which continued in Year Six.

**Jon Strictor: A Continuing Conflict Between the Ethics of Justice and the Profession**

I am confident that Jon Strictor was oblivious to the events occurring in the school culture. The after-school book studies and summer retreats were optional, and he never participated or expressed any interest. Year Six continued with Jon in much the same way as in previous years. The Teacher Assistance Team outlined specific strategies on which for him to focus. The associate principals and I sat in his classes. I met with his mentor. I pleaded with the union president for help in negotiating his retirement. Nothing helped. The parent complaints continued. At the end of the year, I warned him that any further infractions would allow me to recommend his termination to the superintendent.
Janessa Alvarez: The Continuing Conflict Between Appearance and Performance

During Year Six, my interventions with Janessa became more frequent and intense. I had informally expressed my concerns to her through meetings and email messages. After my surgery for prostate cancer I was out of work for three weeks. When I returned at the end of August, I held a formal meeting with Janessa and gave her an itemized list of my concerns. I told her my frustrations. I said she was clearly a people person, and the students loved her; however, I had grave concerns about her ability to function effectively as an associate principal. I told her that her performance was affecting her credibility with the staff and questioned her commitment to the job. I told her that her performance was unsatisfactory, and that she would need to improve in order to keep her job. We discussed specific weaknesses and strategized a plan for her to improve. I followed this meeting with a written conference summary, as I had done with teachers I had sanctioned.

During the meeting she cried. Her mascara flowed in dark streaks down her face. She brushed her hair from her eyes, which were matted with tears. She talked about how she loved the job. “Jim, my husband and I are doing better than we ever have before. I love this job and I want to do well. I promise you I will take care of these things, and we will never have this talk again.”

Reflection

By this time I had weathered poignant meetings with Tom, Rita, and Jon Strictor, and argumentative confrontations with Tom and Frieda. While at the start of Year Six I was more seasoned than I had been before those earlier experiences, I was not prepared
for the duress of this meeting with my associate principal, which was my first reprimand of a fellow administrator.

I remember that I was nearly nauseous as I read my complaints. I felt awkward. I had not wanted to confront these issues, but I had no choice. I wanted to be her friend. I wanted to like her, and I wanted her to like me. I wanted the camaraderie, and I hated professional censure. I remembered my father. The same questions nagged me. Were these problems my fault? Had I failed to give her proper guidance? Had I, in some inattention to detail, failed to clearly outline her job responsibilities?

Before and after the meeting, my awareness of my own faults rushed over me. Because I was painfully aware of these failings in myself, I was reluctant to critique a colleague. At the same time, self-reflection involves not only acknowledging weaknesses, but in searching for ways to adapt or improve. I did not see that she had made a professional commitment to take either route. That made me angry and sad, both at her and for her.

Despite our collective and individual angst, her work performance did not improve. She regularly arrived late and left early. She continued to produce written work rife with errors in detail and grammar. She did not complete important projects assigned to her. She skipped important meetings, including the evening community presentation when the students broadcast the virtues of the school across the Internet. I’m not sure she could have explained anything about our China project. This was in direct contrast to Randy, who had been active in the project from the start. My experiences with Tom, Rita, Frieda, and Jon had taught me that I needed to document more carefully, and so I took careful notes of her mistakes and our conversations. I think
that seemed cruel to her, but I had learned by then that careful was an uncomfortable but
necessary aspect of the profession of school leadership.

More illness and strife

A few weeks after our formal meeting, Janessa’s husband suffered a mild stroke. A teacher at another school, he had enough sick days to cover his time out. While he recovered relatively quickly and was back to work in a few weeks, I think he never completely regained his health. I know those events, combined with the pressures of work, placed her under a great deal of stress.

I tried to be sensitive to Janessa’s personal situation. I met with her regularly and offered specific feedback. I understood that English was not her native language. I realized that as an English teacher I tended to be more critical about grammatical errors than most. But her errors were ample, often, and sometimes egregious. She committed gaffs, not only in emails to staff, which affected the school community, but in letters, emails, and notes to parents, which affected our standing in the community.

In one poignant meeting she confessed to me that she had a learning disability. She admitted that writing grammatically correct English was a challenge to her. She said she had found ways to compensate for these deficiencies as she worked through school and through her teaching positions. She said she was finding it harder to compensate now at this more public level. I told her I appreciated her honesty. I felt an obligation to help, to accommodate, to understand. More than ever, I wanted her to succeed.

Meanwhile, several staff members, including Randy, her administrative peer, worked with her to show her how to perform various organizational tasks. This included designing duty rosters for teachers and lunch schedules for students. These mentoring
efforts were unsuccessful. Janessa seemed unable to perform basic administrative tasks. She continued to be friendly and charismatic, and some staff loved her. Others, however, began to become frustrated with her lapses. In March of Year Six I met with Janessa and the assistant superintendent. Once again I itemized areas of concern and established a plan for her to improve by the end of the school year. I summarized that meeting in another conference summary.

Sadly, her performance did not improve. I held another formal meeting with her in May Year Six and gave her a written conference summary. In June I issued her a written reprimand for leaving a district meeting and failing to return. Also in June, Randy alerted me to a list of breaches regarding the organization of the summer school program, which Janessa supervised. Summer was upon us, and students had not been invited and buses had not been scheduled. I gave her another conference summary describing my concerns.

**Ethical dilemmas and tensions between the ethics of care and the profession**

My frustration with Janessa’s failure to perform at expectations increased during Year Six. At the same time, her husband had suffered a stroke. She had never operated at the level I had expected, and now the issues with her husband’s health distracted her even more. The dilemma came in the tension between my having compassion for her plight and my need for her to perform her job effectively. We all had families. Randy’s wife had earlier undergone surgery to remove a fast-growing thyroid tumor. I spent the year recovering from prostate surgery. I struggled, as I know Randy did, to balance our compassion for her situation with the professional duty we all felt toward the school.
Janessa never seemed to feel that duty, and that apparent apathy helped fuel my frustration and continued to weave the enigma that Janessa had become.

**Year Seven**

**School-Wide: Synergy Unbound!**

The summer preceding Year Seven we sent five teachers to China to instruct in an English summer camp. In August, we hosted two Chinese teachers from the Nanjing school who taught a summer Chinese Culture Camp to students from across the county. I appointed a young, energetic teacher to coordinate the project. The teachers lived in the home of the PTA president and every night rotated to different teachers’ homes for dinner. It was another unifying event for the school and community.

As school began, I had another health setback. I suffered a lung infection and nearly died. The result was that I was out of work for a month, something unprecedented for me. School wide, however, exciting things continued to happen. In the fall the PTA hosted a mystery dinner theater featuring teachers as the actors. We sold tickets to the community, held raffles, and raised $12,000 for the school, a princely sum for OPMS. Building on the input from our teacher retreat, I wrote in the school mission statement, “Orange Pines Middle stands as a beacon of excellence within the Orange Pines community, providing exceptional educational experiences in a safe and nurturing environment.” Our teachers continued to work in study teams. Over the summer, Randy and a few of our teacher leaders visited another school in the district that had been successful in building staff rapport. They returned with ideas that we put into action right away.
Based on school visits, book studies, and collaborative sessions, teachers proposed several strategies we implemented to improve the school climate. Due to our high poverty rate, all our students were entitled to a free breakfast. To increase instructional time, teachers agreed to a longer homeroom, during which students ate breakfast in class. The reading coach put together a packet of reading exercises that every teacher discussed during the homeroom period. During their team planning sessions, teachers rotated among classroom visitations, book studies, and data analysis.

In addition to our Chinese partnership, we began communicating with schools in Russia and Sweden. The Russian connection came from one of our substitute teachers who was Russian and whose sister was a teacher there. The Swedish connection came through a district office supervisor who singled us out as the model for the district in international school partnerships.

In a very exciting move, we broke ground on a new two-story classroom building and continued to refine plans to renovate the main building. A local TV station interviewed me about the physical changes at OPMS. Events continued to move synergistically in many areas at the school level. My professional challenges with Jon Strictor and Janessa Alvarez, however, continued.

**Jon Strictor: The Profession, Compassion, Justice, and Closure**

Year Seven began quietly, with no complaints about Mr. Strictor. I continued to be emotionally torn. I empathized with him. I did have compassion. He was in poor health, had no friends among the faculty, and his students disliked him. At the same time, these were distinctions he had earned. He had failed his students under the protection of a system that favored an incompetent teacher over the needs of the children,
a tension in direct opposition to the ethic of the profession. Still, if he could improve, maybe all would end well. And then, the final event occurred. He created his own denouement.

As noted, Mr. Strictor was always one to be sure students were following the rules, and he was quick to enforce them. I always thought that ironic, since he was often breaking rules of professional practice himself. Recently I had cautioned teachers to be aware of strangers on campus, and he was a stickler for school safety. And so it happened that one September morning Mr. Strictor had been in the office during his planning checking his mailbox. When he turned to walk down the hall, he saw someone walk into the boys’ restroom. He said later the person “looked suspicious.” Dutifully, according to his later account, he followed the person into the restroom. When he entered, he noted that only one person was in the restroom, and he was in a stall, sitting on the toilet. Believing he had cornered a terrorist, or at least a student out of class without a pass, Mr. Strictor pressed his face against the crack in the stall door. “I know you’re in there. Come out right now. You’re not going to hide from me.”

Unfortunately for Mr. Strictor, the person in the stall was not a student, but one of our fathers who had just dropped his son off at school. Even worse, the man’s mother was a wealthy community member and good friends with several school board members. “The first thing I saw was this big blue eye looking at me through the crack,” the father said to me later. “What is this guy, some kind of pervert?”

This lapse in judgment earned for Mr. Strictor another formal letter of reprimand, which I presented to him that afternoon. This time, I told the union president, he had
gone too far. I began talks with the assistant superintendent about ordering his termination.

The next day Mr. Strictor called in sick. Later that morning, I received a call from the union president. Mr. Strictor had collapsed at home the previous evening. He was able to call 911 and was transported to the hospital. The prognosis was physical exhaustion. He would be out for an extended period of time.

Mr. Strictor returned to school in January. In typical fashion, he began again harassing students. Parents continued to complain. Then one afternoon, he berated the son of another staff member in the office. I was forced to call secretaries as witnesses. His poor judgment had continued to seep into the school’s professional community and poison the culture. That was it, I told the employee relations director. Surely, he had to go.

I talked with the director a few days later. “Jim, about Mr. Strictor. I have good news and bad news.”

“OK, go ahead with the bad,” I sighed. Here, I thought, would be another year with nothing done.

“You know with his contract how hard it is to fire him.”

“Are you kidding? After what he did with that parent in the restroom.”

“‘I know, but that was a parent, not a student.”

“Come on, Joe, you’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Just calm down a minute. I told you there’s good news. I’ve been able to negotiate his retirement at the end of the year.”

“OK,” I said. “What does that mean?”
“It means we agree not to take him to the board and fire him. He agrees to go peacefully at the end of the year.”

“What if he doesn’t retire?

“He’s already working with the union to file the paperwork. And if he doesn’t, we nail him.”

Suddenly, it was over. The last two months of the school year passed with no more complaints about Mr. Strictor. It was as if he had come to peace with himself and his students. How tragic, I thought. The greater tragedy was that because he had not planned his retirement, he had not benefitted from the state’s generous retirement plan. The plan allowed educators to formally “retire,” meaning that the district no longer paid their retirement contribution to the state. They officially began to collect a retirement check, which was diverted into a guaranteed tax-sheltered annuity. The employee emerged at the end of five years finally retired, but with five years of retirement stipend earnings, plus interest, stored in a tax-sheltered account. It was an excellent benefit, and one that I took advantage of. Mr. Strictor’s sudden retirement denied him that option.

That was again poignant, since I believe Mr. Strictor didn’t have many financial resources. Most career educators in our state retired with at least that fund. He did not. I always thought the union should have pressured him to retire sooner. They could see the inevitable result. I believed that if they had negotiated his retirement sooner, he would have collected at least some retirement savings. In that case I think that in a misguided and self-preserving pursuit of justice they neglected their duty to care for their member. At the same time, maybe they made that suggestion, and he balked. I don’t know what they discussed. As far as I could see, he was never reflective and never believed that he
had done anything wrong. If he did, his problems were so deeply embedded that he could not overcome them.

Blasé and Blasé have written extensively about the negative effects of power (Blasé & Blasé, 2003). As I noted in Chapter Two, the stress of the possibility of losing one’s job can result in severe health problems (Bass, 2008). While I cannot be sure, I suspect that the pressures applied through my continued transactional documentation of his shortcomings accounted for some of his health issues. My compassion for Mr. Strictor remained, but my professional concern for the health of the school and benefit of the students was more important. I was relieved that his students and I would no longer have to endure him.

**Dilemmas within the ethics of care, justice, and the profession**

My experiences with Jon Strictor constantly matched the Ethics of Justice and the Profession. I believe the pressures I brought on him induced some of his medical problems that kept him from school for long periods. I know that I pressed him into an early retirement that denied him financial benefits that other career educators, including me, had come to expect. In the case of Jon Strictor, I had to balance my care for him as an individual child of God against my concern for his students. I gave him many opportunities to improve. He apparently mistook the system of due process that protected him for an iron shield. Fortunately for the school and his students, justice did finally prevail. Perhaps he thought he would teach indefinitely. I am grateful that was not the case.
My extended absence due to illness at the start of Year Seven left the school leadership in the hands of my associate principals, Randy and Janessa. While the faculty and staff as a whole were operating at a new level of synergy, Janessa seemed never to be in sync with the momentum of the rest of the school. She established plans to work with groups of migrant students and Hispanic and African American girls, but nothing ever came to fruition. I seemed more interested in the success of those projects than she was. After two years on the job, she continued to have problems navigating the basic duties of an associate principal. When I returned, I met with Janessa to discuss her Comprehensive Assessment for Year Six. I worried for days about the meeting. I was heartsick and couldn’t sleep. I saw her falling apart and her career careening out of control. This was so hard, I thought, so painful for both of us.

I met again with her and the assistant superintendent. I told her I was rating her overall performance as “Unsatisfactory,” a rare though not unprecedented rating for a school administrator. During our meeting Janessa said that her husband’s declining health had taken her attention from her work. She was forced to shoulder more responsibilities of raising her daughter. She said that she remained committed to her job and pledged to improve. The assistant superintendent agreed to hold her “Unsatisfactory” evaluation, meaning that it would not go into her official personnel file. I told her that I would meet with her regularly and provide her specific feedback about her job performance. I said that I would reissue her annual evaluation after giving her a chance to improve.
I continued to be angry and sad that I was forced to follow the same impersonal, transactional procedure with her that I had used for teachers and custodians. Now I was using that process to reprimand a peer. As I listed her shortfalls, I felt I was in an outer body experience. I suppose I needed to remove my senses from the event, as if I had to observe the situation at a distance. I had wanted us to be more than colleagues. I had wanted us to be friends. That seemed no longer plausible.

After that meeting I know we did not meet as often as I had hoped. School administration is a busy business. At the same time, I had other interests, including Jon Strictor, plans to renovate the school, improving the school culture, and raising student achievement.

During the first few months after our meeting in late September, numerous problematic incidents occurred regarding Ms. Alvarez. In one, she failed to intervene in a heated argument between staff members. In another, I discovered she had included erroneous information in an official school report she submitted to the superintendent. She had also made an expensive error in an order of classroom equipment. In another series of incidents, she was asking secretaries to send email messages for her. When I asked why, she said that her email was not working. The technology specialist informed me that there was no problem with her email. She confused teacher duty assignments and failed to complete several other tasks. I met with her throughout the winter, each time citing specific errors. Each time we agreed to return on a specified date to review her progress. I followed each meeting with a conference summary. During each meeting she tearfully promised improvement. To my great disappointment, however, she did not improve.
In February Year Seven, the assistant superintendent and I met with Janessa again. As we prepared for the meeting, I talked about my distress. I told her I planned to list things Janessa could do to improve. She stopped me quickly.

“We’re not in a coaching mode any more,” she said sharply. “She needs to know that if she keeps this up and doesn’t improve, she’s going to lose her job.”

And that’s what she told Janessa in our meeting. During the conference, Janessa spoke to the assistant superintendent, rather than me.

“I know I could have done some things better.” She spoke softly, but with little emotion. “But I really don’t believe I have gotten the mentoring I should have received.” I stared at her, but she did not look at me. She was angry now, tears swelling in her dark eyes that glared straight ahead, past me.

“I know you say that, Janessa, but I don’t see it. At this point I’m telling you that if you don’t improve, I will not recommend that you be reappointed as associate principal. Do you understand?”

Tears tumbled down her cheeks. She said she did understand. She loved the job. She would do better. After she left, I felt exhausted. Besides my mother’s death and various histrionics by my second stepmother, this was the most emotionally charged and energy-draining experience of my life. I asked myself again: Had I failed to give her the correct advice? Had I failed to give her proper direction? Had I failed her?

That weekend Janessa’s husband had another stroke that seriously affected his mobility and speech. Janessa was out of work for several days. When she returned, she removed from her office all personal memorabilia. After that, the atmosphere in the office was surreal. She was polite but aloof. This was a dramatic change from the
gregarious, charismatic person who had charmed us two years before. Meanwhile, teachers began to come to me asking about reports that Ms. Alvarez was leaving. Several staff members said that she told them she had been fired, and that Randy and I had “thrown (her) under the bus.”

Even with all the pressure on her, or perhaps because of it, her infractions continued. One of my school improvement initiatives had been to recruit active, articulate parents for the School Advisory Council. One result was a parent who believed strongly that we should implement a school uniform policy the next year. The parent was a friend of several school board members. I would have addressed the issue anyway, but his connections made the concern more imperative.

Thus, I convened an after-school meeting to discuss the implementing mandatory school uniforms for the next year. The meeting included interested parents, teacher leaders, two assistant superintendents, and a school board member. As chairman of the school Discipline Committee, I assumed Janessa would be there, but she was not. This was more evidence of her professional indifference that I could not understand.

In April I met again with her and the assistant superintendent. At that meeting I issued Janessa another overall “Unsatisfactory” evaluation. The assistant superintendent told her that she would not be placing Janessa’s name on the list of administrative reappointments that would be going to the school board. She suggested that Janessa consider returning to a teaching position soon, so that she could choose a position, rather than risk being randomly reassigned. She did stress, however, that Janessa could still improve her performance and save her associate principal position. Janessa cried, reaffirmed that she would like to remain in her job, and vowed to improve.
Soon after our meeting the superintendent received a letter from a local migrant advocacy group, asking her to investigate unfair and inaccurate accusations I had made against Ms. Alvarez. Janessa denied any knowledge of the letter or who may have sent it. Shortly after that incident, Janessa’s husband had a third stroke, which she attributed to the severe stress that the pressures from her work environment had caused her family. I later learned she and her husband were also having serious financial problems.

The remainder of the year proceeded without incident. Ms. Alvarez committed no more faux pas and seemed to improve. While the assistant superintendent did not recommend her for reappointment in March as she did with other school-based administrators, she reserved judgment and decided to give Ms. Alvarez another chance to improve.

Thus in May, I assigned her the task of coordinating the Summer School Program, the third year she had been assigned this project. Once again, she made numerous errors in her administration of the program. In short, many students who should have been assigned to the summer program were not, and many others were assigned in error. In addition, the procedures she used to assign teachers violated the teacher contract, such that some teachers threatened to file a labor grievance. I met with her to help correct the errors and once again provided her with a written summary of my concerns.

A few days before the end of the school year she walked into my office and handed me her letter of resignation. “This should make your day,” she said coldly. Then she turned quickly and walked out. That evening she removed any remaining personal artifacts from her office. The next morning there was no physical trace of Janessa.
Alvarez, although I bore the scars of the heart-wrenching dilemmas that caused us both lasting emotional and spiritual pain.

**Reflection: Ethical dilemmas and frameworks**

This was clearly the most stressful and time-consuming ethical dilemma in my professional experience. The issues were muddied by several factors, including serious health concerns with both her husband and me. Another uncomfortable presence was the ugly suggestion of racial prejudice by an outside party. In addition, because the district has a significant investment in grooming school administrators, there is a reluctance to terminate them. Finally, we all sincerely liked Ms. Alvarez and empathized with her personal problems. By the end of Year Seven, however, the friendly, gregarious, attractive, likeable woman who had charmed my leadership team and me three years before was gone. In her place was a more somber person who was my colleague and fellow administrator, but not my friend. I notified Janessa many times of her deficiencies and gave her many opportunities to improve. She received feedback, not only from me, but from teachers, other staff members, her peer assistant principal, and even the assistant superintendent. While eventually successful, the resolution of this extended critical dilemma was a pyrrhic victory painful to all.

**Ethic of critique**

I had chosen Janessa for the assistant principal job over several white men who had applied for the position. All were competent, two were already assistant principals, and I think all would have worked well in the position. I had been determined, however, to find a role model for our minority students. I don’t think I was wrong in that motive. My intent in looking through the ethic of critique to choose a person of color may have
paradoxically clouded my judgment. Orange Pines had a poverty level of nearly 70 percent, an African American population of 12 percent, a Hispanic population of 33 percent, 15 percent of whom were migrants, and a exceptional student population of 40 percent. I wanted someone to represent those groups in ways that I thought as a white male I could not. Did I discriminate against competent white men who had applied for the position? Perhaps, but Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) note that one must sometimes make individualized decisions for the greater good. At the same time, the ethic of the profession demands competence from the school leaders. Did I discriminate against her because of her language or her race? I don’t think so, although the charge that I did still burns when I remember.

Ethic of care

My ethic of care demanded my concern and compassion for her family situation. During her time with me, her husband had several strokes and was eventually unable to work. Because of that, they were having financial problems. She said that the stress of the possibility of losing her job contributed to the poor health of her husband and generated his third and most debilitating stroke. My thoughts again return to the comments of Blass and Blasé (2003) and Bass (2008), who describe many situations in which the harsh dictates of stress resulted in physical traumas. I thought then and now that some of her problems were a result of her learning disability. I did empathize, but I could not allow things to continue. I wondered at the time if my concern showed weakness. I don’t think so now.

In these situations my ethic of care came into direct conflict with my ethic of the profession as I followed established procedures. The ethic of the profession demanded
that Janessa perform her job correctly, resign or face termination. From my perspective her leaving the position would have benefitted the students, although I’m sure she would not believe that. I always noted that teachers and other staff had the benefit of professional union representation. Administrators, at least in our district, do not have that option. She was awash within the emotional abyss alone. I don’t know to whom other than her husband she turned to for advice. I’m sure she was lonely in her professional agony.

**Ethic of justice**

The ethic of justice seemed clear to me, although perhaps not as clear for her. It was tragic to me that I had resorted to the same type of transactional documentation with her that I had with so many other employees I had reprimanded over the previous seven years. I believed I had provided ample guidance. She maintained that I had not, and I have questioned whether she was right. She ultimately resigned, and I was responsible for that. Did the pressure I applied to her make me responsible for her husband’s strokes? Should I have chosen a middle-aged white man over her? Did I discriminate against those applicants because they were white? I don’t think any of those was true, but these were the difficult questions I asked myself every day.

**Ethic of the profession**

Working with a dysfunctional associate principal made me search more deeply for my concept of a good school leader. An effective leader should personify the essence of positive, proactive, morally directed school leadership. I think the job does require a complete dedication. I once said to one of the assistant superintendents, “This job is too hard not to care. If we don’t care, we don’t belong here.” One can’t use school
administration solely as a stepping-stone to more prestigious positions. Effective school leadership combines friendship and caring and ideas and synergy and collaboration. One person can’t do it all. Some have a personality more prone to letting others contribute and lead. I think I had that, although I also think I could have been more proactive and definitive in other situations that could have reduced strife in the macrocosm for the school community. I loved the percolation of ideas, and I valued people who joined me in that creative synergy. That speaks to the power of collaboration, distributed leadership, and community described by Strike (in Begley & Johansson, 2003; Furman, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2012).

I never experienced that kind of synergy with Janessa. I often wondered if it was my job to create that. I now believe that synergy and constructivism and transformative events occurred spontaneously with many formal and informal leaders (Lambert, 2002; Blasé & Anderson, 1995; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). I value justice, although I don’t necessarily take joy in administering it. Starratt admonishes, “Leaders have to find a way to confront and accept the limitations of their leadership,” (2004, p. 145), advice that applies to each of these conflicts. Foster described the dilemma with Janessa and the others succinctly: “Leadership, in the final analysis, is the ability of humans to relate deeply to each other in the search for a more perfect union” (Foster, 1986, p. 61). Clearly through this lens, my leadership failed her. Although I did not terminate her, I did encourage her resignation. Why did she self-destruct? What more should I have done to help? I don’t know.
End of Year Seven and Goodbye

Year Seven had indeed been a turbulent year. On the negative side, I had nearly died. Jon Strictor and Janessa Alvarez resigned. On the positive, we had sent five more teachers to China and hosted two Chinese teachers in a Chinese Culture Camp. We began working with schools in Russia and Sweden. The PTA raised a lot of money. Teachers who once would never speak to each other began socializing after school. Teachers met in study teams, conducted mini-book studies, and reported what they’d learned during faculty meetings. We broke ground on a new classroom building and were ready to embark on the remodeling of the main building. Students took their state tests, as always. And then, when we got the test results in late May, the best thing for the reputation of OPMS occurred: We earned an “A” rating from the state. It was magical. It was electric. I felt that, despite all the negatives, our pursuit of compassion and excellence had paid off.

Then in early June, after the teachers had left for the summer, the assistant superintendent stopped by my office for an unscheduled visit.

“Jim,” she said, “I think you might be ready for a change.”

“What do you mean? We just got an ‘A.’ Things are great.”

“I know. But Wendell over at Meeks is retiring, and I thought you might want to go back over there. After all, you helped open the school. It’s an academic school, and you’re an academic person. Think about it and let me know.”

I was stunned. I had assumed I would live out my professional life at Orange Pines. I was torn. I loved the school and the sense of community we had built. At the same time, working as a principal at another school would broaden my career experiences.
I was completing my doctorate, and I thought the experience at another school might make me a more credible professor of educational leadership, if the opportunity ever arose.

And so, a final dilemma arose. I decided to accept the offer to return to Meeks Middle as principal. I think many people from OPMS were disappointed. Some cried. Some called me a traitor. Was I placing my own well being above the school that I had come to love? Probably. But we all must move on, and I would retire anyway, whether from OPMS or Meeks. I did move, with sadness, but also with pride that teachers and I had worked collaboratively to enhance the reputation of the school and improve opportunities and achievement for all students, which are always the primary goals of the ethic of our profession.
CHAPTER 8

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND CLOSURE

“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter – Tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning ---
So we beat on, boat against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald, from The Great Gatsby

I began this study by describing the post-positivistic incentives and sanctions under which public schools operate today. I noted that reforms must generate internally from within individual teachers, administrators, and schools, rather than from externally designed pressures. I explained that these changes must come from individuals who base their actions on their own values. I noted this to be especially true of principals, who guide the parameters of reform within the school. After completing this study, I believe those precepts even more.

My purpose was to undertake an autoethnographic narrative inquiry in which I would describe and explain how I discovered, constructed, and refined my sense of moral purpose during the seven years I served as principal of Orange Pines Middle School. I pursued that task by reliving and re-creating through evocative vignettes several significant critical events over those years that I believed helped shape my moral persona. To frame my reflections I used ethical frameworks of care, justice, critique, community,
and the profession. Throughout my discussion I have attempted to address the following research questions:

1. How did I discover, construct, and refine my professional identity as a morally directed leader during my seven-year tenure as principal of Orange Pines Middle School?
   a. How did my previous experiences and values guide the construction of my sense of moral purpose at Orange Pines Middle?
   b. How did I use interactions in critical ethical dilemmas to construct self-knowledge and understanding and define my values as a morally directed school leader?
   c. How did I use that knowledge to guide my broader approach to school reform as a morally directed leader?

I will use the remainder of this treatise to bring reflective closure to my discussion. First I will respond specifically to the research questions. Next I will consider the efficacy of the frameworks as lenses for my analysis. Then I will reflect on my use of autoethnography and narrative inquiry as appropriate tools of self-discovery. Finally, I will consider potential uses for my research and implications for other principals and researchers of educational leadership.

Discussion of Research Questions

Question 1a: How did my previous experiences and values guide the construction of my sense of moral purpose at Orange Pines Middle?

As I noted at the start, I am usually reluctant to share my personal history, especially events within my formative youth. Not only does autoethnography require
such personal sharing (Ellis, 2009), but the purpose of my study demands it. This study has helped me clarify values that guided my early actions and anchored my later leadership decisions. In the preceding discussion I have noted motivations of compassion that I brought to the principalship. I think these tendencies were based on my turbulent emotional experience in the death of my mother when I was barely eight years old. My father’s two succeeding marriages, both of which were tempestuous, created in me a need to be accepted. At the same time I believe I brought an innate sense of compassion to my role, shaped and strengthened by those formative experiences. I think that compassion was also shaped by my experiences in nurturing my own family, which became especially significant as I worked with my wife to create a secure and loving home for our children. Finally, I think a sense of care was rooted in my religious beliefs. While I continue to define and refine those, I do take with me to relationships the belief that within each person is a perfect child of God, hidden but waiting discovery.

Because of professional sanctions against my father, I extended my compassion to those who were under the press of professional censure. I think as a child I compensated for the emotional turmoil of my home life by honing a love for rationality and logic. I think that trait was also innate but was refined in the fires of domestic duress during my formative years. This rationality translated into a strong value of justice and naïve belief in objective, universal truth. As a child I longed for justice against those whom I perceived had wronged me, and I vowed that should I find myself in a position of power, I would strive to be a fair and righteous judge. I remembered the Biblical story of Joseph, a man who rose to power despite adversity, forgave his brothers who sold him into slavery, and then ironically provided their salvation. Another Biblical account that
shaped my thoughts of compassion and justice was the story of Jesus intervening for an adulteress whom the Pharisees were preparing to stone. His simple admonition, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone” (John 8:7, NIV), quickly dispersed the crowd. His directive to the woman, “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11, NIV), balanced justice with mercy. In the mind of myself as a 12-year-old boy who perceived himself as emotionally oppressed, these stories may be considered hyperbolic, maudlin, or overly sentimental accounts, but they were formative for me.

This base sense of compassion that I brought to the principalship morphed into several forms. First, I wanted to show that I had been through strife as a teacher and understood. I knew about weekends spent grading papers, low salaries that never increased proportional to those of my friends outside of education, of the remarkable odds we faced everyday with unmotivated students and critical parents. I had been an associate principal and knew what it meant to work with unreasonable supervisors, or principals who didn’t give you praise for your work or didn’t give you the support you needed or who presented you with unreasonable demands. I knew the anxiety of balancing the demands of work and home, and I wanted to show that empathy to those under my charge. I also wanted parents to know that I understood their issues. As a father of three, I knew how hard it was to raise children. I knew the pressures of homework and science projects, and conflicts between band practice and soccer games and weekend athletic leagues.

This study clarified for me the understanding that I brought to the principalship strong but raw doses of compassion, insecurity, rationality, and justice. These combined
with a loathing of conflict, also forged in childhood. Mixed together, these traits created strong elements of tension as I fought to balance the ethics of care, justice, and community as I worked to reconcile professionally challenging events. Thus, I think I came to the principalship with an unbridled reservoir of empathy and a resolve to apply that empathy objectively to every situation. This thought suggests again Begley’s question, as cited by Shapiro and Stefkovich: Is the ethic of care an emotional or rational model? It is both! (2011, p. 18). While empathy and compassion are admirable traits, I think many times, at least initially, I allowed them to take precedent over justice for students, a concept I developed in several of the vignettes above.

**Question 1b: How did I use interactions in critical ethical dilemmas to construct self-knowledge and understanding and define my values as a morally directed school leader?**

My goal in recreating these emotionally charged events through vignettes was to track the discovery, construction, and refinement of my self-knowledge and moral purpose. Part of that process occurred through interactions with outside “others.” These often were experts from the district, and I describe several of those interactions above. The construction also occurred through discussions with my associate principals, Randy and Semitra, as well as through intense personal reflections as I grappled with these challenging narratives. As I have described, I struggled to balance my empathy and compassion with a better understanding of justice and my duty to the community. I think this is where Shapiro and Stefkovich’s ethic of the profession helps most, as it encompasses the other ethical frames. I learned that such empathy cannot surge unchecked. Ultimately, breaches of professional codes require sanctions, and the
principal must enact those sanctions for the better good of the school community and in the protection of children we serve.

I came to see that I had a strong appreciation of and longing for community connections, probably also stemming in part from my dissonant youth. I think that urgency drove me to improve the image of the school in the community. I believe I learned to channel my empathy into a greater concern for the students of OPMS, and I believe that concern helped me concentrate the synergy of the many teacher-leaders who worked together to energize the school. I realized quickly that I lacked important professional knowledge in the process of dealing with problem employees. I did learn the process, however, and was able to apply the strategies effectively in many situations that did not evolve into extended and convoluted dilemmas. I believe this exemplifies the process of reflection-in-action that Schon (1983) describes.

I was forced to grapple with these ethical dilemmas if I was to survive as a principal. I learned fundamental knowledge and skills. As I reviewed my field texts for this study, I saw that in my early encounters with Tom, Rita, and Jon, I did not document as carefully as I should have. While I did improve, I saw that I did not document as carefully as necessary in the case of Janessa. I struggled with the dilemma of matching my concern for the employees with my concern for my students. I continue to believe that the time a leader spends in helping individual staff members is time well invested. The dilemma always is when to shift the focus and how to balance the tensions between care, justice, community, and the profession. I learned that moral ambiguity clarifies itself quickly in cases of extreme turbulence, such as with the case of our band director. In less dramatic cases, events percolated until my sense of moral purpose to seek the best
for my students and school community demanded a resolution. Significant ethical
dilemmas recycle until they reach a conclusion or, per Shapiro and Gross, (re)solution
(2013). These events engage a synergy of their own.

I think school leadership is like playing poker. One rarely has a perfect hand. Sometimes you have to play what you have with some strong cards, knowing the other party may have something stronger. A principal sometimes has to act on hunches or beliefs without having all the information. I was reluctant to do that, which may have hurt me in the eyes of the school community. I learned that avoidance or waiting for more information is not only non-productive; it is impossible.

Earlier in this discussion I described the events portrayed in these events as human tragedies, and I return to that thought now. The essence of dramatic tragedy is that the audience hopes the protagonist will not succumb to his or her weaknesses, will not follow the path toward inevitable destruction. We hope that Macbeth will not kill Duncan. We pray that Juliet wakes up in time. We cry when Oedipus realizes that, despite his greatest efforts, he has killed his father and married his mother. The incidents I described are tragic because as with these personal tragedies, I felt as an outside observer I could see their inexorable path more clearly than they. That was part of my ethical struggle: How could I make them see for themselves what I saw? Some were more prone to reflection than others. None seemed to be able to change their behavior and alter their course.

I continue to believe school leaders must begin our work with compassion, realizing such compassion will create ethical dilemmas. While we should never lose our empathy and compassion for everyone, our focus on our students must move ultimately
toward predominant compassion and justice for them. Therein lies the conflict, the judgment call, and the pain.

**Question 1c: How did I use that knowledge to guide my broader approach to school reform as a morally directed leader?**

I have used the terms distributed, democratic, transformative, and constructivist leadership interchangeably to describe my leadership style, although I did not formally discover the concepts until after I left Orange Pines. These elements, however, form the basis of Furman’s ethic of community (Furman, 2004; Shapiro & Gross, 2013), and my affinity for community predisposed me to a philosophy of shared leadership. My years as an area specialist taught me to value the opinions of those teachers whom I considered experts in their subject and pedagogy. At the same time, I never perceived of myself as a charismatic or heroic leader as described by Gronn (2000), Spillane, et al. (2004), Leithwood, et al. (2007), and others. I do agree with Gronn (2009), Bass (2008), and other supporters of distributed leadership who acknowledge the need for a leader to set the parameters for success. I also believe that I worked with my associate principals to create a climate in which teachers could collaborate and create the synergy that raised OPMS to new levels of individual and group success.

These teacher leaders became my colleagues and my friends. They were people with whom I could discuss ideas. Bonded by trust, those relationships created dynamic, creative energy. I have come to believe that exercising collaborative, constructivist, transformational leadership is not a passive submission to doing whatever teachers want to do. Rather, this leadership style fosters a dynamic synergy in which the results emerge much greater than their individual parts.
I also think that an effective leader constructs a pattern of leadership over time. One must create a culture of collaboration and trust. Students change. Some staff always turn over. There are always turbulent events. Schools change slowly, and changing things after the boat has left the dock in the fall is especially hard. Thus, one may see some flux between years. The point is to create the larger pattern of progressive change over time.

George W. Bush allegedly said, “I tend to be a quick judge of people. I don’t know how accurate I am, but all that matters is what I think” (Gibbs & Duffy, 2012, p. 478). Unlike President Bush, I never believed that my judgment was the only judgment. I do believe, however, that I applied the criteria defined by the ethics of care, community, and the profession to choose outstanding teachers who complemented my leadership style and added to our collective goals. I applied my empathy successfully in collaborative group efforts. Here my sense of compassion, justice, and community were able to thrive and generate collective success.

What is the quantifiable value of synergy? Does it matter if a few students talk with China or are on national TV? Why do we care if the mayor’s children go to our school? These questions speak to the value and ethic of community and critique and are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. First, high-achieving students introduce role models. They also increase the diversity of the population. This is especially important in a school engaged in heterogeneous grouping. These events also draw financial and human resources into the school that can benefit all children. OPMS was a challenging school with needy students, and winning a few contests was not going to raise the academic level of every student. What these awards did achieve, however, was to show
students that overall success and excellence were possible. It began to raise the expectations from defeatism to possibility. Those are intangibles within the ethics of community that are easier to recognize than define. If the community and district believe the school is viable, it is more willing to invest in it. I do believe there is value in school pride. Students and their parents are less willing to succumb to the attitude of the inevitability of failure in an environment of success.

To be clear, sometimes things were sloppy, and sometimes teachers didn’t get along. Some of those who went on the China trip never spoke to each other again. I learned that as a morally driven leader to choose creative people and then to let them create. Sometimes you choose the wrong people, but often you choose the right ones. And that’s when the magic starts.

**Moral Leadership and Purpose**

The unasked question is why I chose to study moral leadership or seek my moral purpose. My concise response is that once I began to recall and critique my experiences, it seemed clear to me that I and many of my colleagues at OPMS were driven to seek the best for our needy students. While all educators might say the same, like many schools with high poverty, OPMS was challenging. The work was too difficult for one not to care passionately. Such passion can only be fueled by a strong moral base that seeks the best for all.

Thus, I believe that my moral purpose has been to approach the position of school leadership with a combination of compassion and justice, in order to establish a collaborative and synergistic school community that works for the greater good of students. I believe that is the key learning of my study.
Ethical Frameworks

I believe the ethics of care, justice, critique, community, and the profession provided a useful framework for my professional reflections. I believe I was able to describe and capture the tensions within the dilemmas through the specific language utilized by Starratt, Furman, and Shapiro and Stefkovich to analyze and understand the issues packed within each dilemma. I believe that each of us carries within us a proclivity for one or more of the frameworks. A portal to self-knowledge is to first understand that preference. Then one can understand how that inclination creates tension between that and the other ethical frames. Finally, we must understand how that tendency drives us toward a particular resolution of the dilemma.

The language of Starratt is helpful here. He views the frameworks as a tapestry and explains,

“An ethical consciousness that is not interpenetrated by each theme can be captured either by sentimentality, by rationalistic simplification, or by social naivete. The blending of each theme encourages a rich human response to the many uncertain ethical situations the school community faces every day, both in the learning tasks as well as in its attempt to govern itself” (p. 57) Shapiro and Stefkovich note that through these conflicts, these struggles over right and wrong, school leaders

“have gained a sense of who they are and what they believe personally and professionally. It means coming to grips with clashes that may arise among ethical codes and making ethical decisions in light of their best professional
judgment, a judgment that places the best interests of the student at the center of all ethical decision making” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011, p. 23).

An unscientific personal observation about inexperienced principals is that some want to show their commitment by demonstrating their rigidity. Under the guise of serving students and the profession, they neglect the rights of teachers. What’s more, I have seen some principals abuse and demoralize excellent teachers for no cause other than proving their unbending resolve. This pursuit of a convoluted ethic of the profession or justice subverts the ethic of care. I have seen principals boast about the number of labor grievances they had had filed against them or the number of staff they have moved to termination. Such abuses have been well documented by Blasé and Blasé (2003). I must admit that sometimes I too have displayed such events as my own red badges of courage. Concomitantly, I hope always to remember the significant human costs always in the balance. Knowledge of the ethical frameworks makes possible such an analytic self-conversation first and then with your key leadership staff.

While Blasé and Blasé (2003) herald the value of due process in protecting beleaguered employees from unfair and overbearing administrators, I found the system to protect failing teachers to the detriment of their students. This is an irony I discovered by viewing events through the lenses of the ethics of justice and the profession. I believe this irony has been one of the sparks that has spurred the current push for teacher accountability in Florida and other states.

The vocabulary of the ethical frameworks helped me better understand the dilemmas I faced with Tom and Rita, Jon Strictor, Frieda Johns, and Janessa Alvarez. I believe that if I had been armed with that internal knowledge and understanding of the
ethical frameworks, I could have more easily maneuvered through each crisis and perhaps reach a solution that would have been beneficial to all and not compromised student learning.

**Autoethnography**

The use of autoethnography was the best method for me to analyze, construct, and understand my moral purpose as a school leader. Ellis notes that as we explore the “issues and emotions” that such personal research raises, we allow our audiences to “experience firsthand the ethical issues” that arose in these situations (Ellis, 2009, p. 78). She notes that viewing “research as relational, rather than a project to be accomplished,” helps one becomes a more authentic researcher (2009, p. 79.) Chang notes that autoethnographers “attempt to achieve cultural understanding through analysis and interpretation” (2008, p. 48). Furthermore, “At the end of a thorough self-examination in its cultural context, autoethnographers hope to gain a cultural understanding of self and others directly and indirectly connected to self” (Chang, 2008, p. 49). My goal has been to use first person, evocative narratives to show individual, representative dilemmas within the broader context of school reform. These were subjective, emotional issues, and first person narrative through autoethnography was the most fluent way to tell these stories.

**Qualitative Philosophical Frames**

Here I think it appropriate to reflect on Cresswell’s philosophical frames to describe my own autoethnography within the broader context of qualitative research. Ontologically, I have presented my story through my eyes, although I freely admit that others might view the same events differently than as I have portrayed them.
Epistemologically, my evidence is subjective, with no distance between me and my research. I relied almost exclusively on my own writings, observations, and reflections. Axiologically, I have explored my own values throughout this discussion. Methodologically, I have used a literary style of writing to describe in detail specific representative events. Thus, I hope my use of autoethnography has worked symbiotically with the approach of narrative inquiry to create a better understanding of these turbulent events that shaped the discovery and construction of my moral purpose.

Narrative Inquiry

As I worked through my field texts to relive and re-create these stories, I came to understand that I would “learn most about narrative inquiry by doing narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 47). They note, “As inquirers we meet ourselves in the past, the present, and the future” (2000, p. 60) as we go “beyond the black box,” or beyond the notion that the events are irreducible experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). As I worked with those texts set apart by time and distance, I lived them again. I experienced the same anxieties I did in the moments of the lived event. I began to have trouble sleeping. I dreamed about the events. I understood firsthand the caution that “as narrative inquirers we are not alone in this space. (It) enfolds us. Narrative inquiry is a relational inquiry as we …move from field to field text, and from field text to research text” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). The use of narrative inquiry was a perfect fit with the application of ethical frameworks to define my moral purpose and underscored this fundamental precept: “This confronting of ourselves in our narrative past makes us vulnerable as inquirers because it makes secret stories public. In narrative inquiry it is impossible (or deliberately deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or to present
a kind of perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 62). My goal has been to be honest and revelatory in my quest to discover my ethical approach to moral leadership.

In my use of Clandinin and Connelly’s model of three-dimensional space, I have attempted to draw vignettes that move “inward and outward, backward and forward” (2000, p. 50), while remaining in the same situation or place. I have attempted to explain the external events while revealing my inner thoughts and feelings. The events occurred in the past and were analyzed in the present. In my learning they have implications for how I will apply the leadership principles I learned in future incidents. I found the model an effective tool to explain this narrative technique. My readers judge whether I was effective. Ellis notes, “We tell stories to fashion our identities . . . and to find meaning in and understand our individual and collective experience” (2009, p. 165). That has been my goal.

Central Metaphors

During this discussion I have touched on several metaphors that can be useful in the descriptions of school events. I noted that Wolcott (1973) perceived the school year as a cruise ship, difficult to change course after leaving port. That is an effective view and can be applied in many scenarios. I described a school year as a series of episodes in a television drama. I noted Richardson’s (2000) view of a crystal to describe various views of truth. I then proposed the idea of a prism through which to filter my reflections through the ethical frames. I believe that is an effective way to describe the use of the ethical frames to reflect on one’s ethical leadership style. I also found appealing Sergiovanni’s overarching metaphor of the “heart, head, and hand of school leadership”
(2009) to describe the various requirements of school leadership. That metaphor comes closest to depicting Shapiro and Stefkovich’s sense of the ethic of the profession encompassing each of the other frames in its comprehensive description of the demands of educational leadership. Ethical frameworks are abstract concepts, and each of these is an effective tool in helping describe their practical application.

Implications and Need for Further Study

As I consider the extended implications of my personal moral quest, I sense the need for many new beginnings. While these experiences and reflections were mine, they are the stuff of which school leaders are made and through which they either wither or thrive. Every day we must make “difficult decisions in chaotic times” (Shapiro & Gross, 2013, p. 19). We must “challenge the status quo . . . formulate the hard questions . . . (and) 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 & Stefko 2011, p. 13). Our cultural placement makes the ethical dilemmas that educational leaders face unique among professionals. To make the best decisions, educational leaders must discover our own personal and professional codes of ethics (Shapiro & Gross, 2012). We must “rethink . . . redefine and reframe . . . concepts such as privilege, power, culture, language, and even justice” (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2011, p. 13). These are hard issues that often delve into the fields of gender and race.

In these challenging times, educators and educational leaders are more than ever being held accountable for their actions. In the press to find easily quantified solutions to complex problems, individual voices are lost. Now more than ever must individual voices speak and be heard. Leaders must do the hard work of looking inward and asking
the difficult questions. This is the intense, reflective work of critique that must be done again and again and again. Leaders must confront ourselves with our own truths and understand our motives, or perhaps even realize that we do not fully understand ourselves. That may be the beginning of true wisdom. Starratt argues, “For persons of integrity, living ethically involves struggle and conflict. . . . One learns to become ethical perhaps more often by learning from failures than by celebrating successes” (Starratt, 2012, p. 158).

The schoolyard is not ethically neutral. Rather, it is packed daily with scores of decisions that impact people’s lives. We must, as Begley charges us, “take personal responsibility for cultivating an ethical school” (in Starratt, 2012, end notes). Ellis calls for researchers to write personal narratives in order to “understand a self or some aspect of a life lived in a cultural context” (2004, p. 45). Each story will be told by its author’s unique voice. Pulled together, those disparate tales can weave a tapestry to show a clearer picture of the ethical challenges of school leadership. It is my hope that other leaders will read my stories and recall their own similar experiences. Even more, I hope many will be inclined to reflect on their own values to better understand why they have made decisions they have made. I hope others can learn from my mistakes and experiences and be challenged to probe their own values and decisions. Our times are too challenging for school leadership to be simply a transactional enterprise.

Schon calls for an “action science, which seeks to make what some of us do on rare occasions into a dominant pattern of practice” (1983, p. 354). Starratt seeks proactive leaders who move beyond “notions of technical efficiency to leadership as a moral activity that engages the full humanity of the school community” (2004, p. 9). “We learn
to be human in the struggle for integrity. Virtue is not something we achieve and then continue to possess” (2012, p. 159). Like Fitzgerald in the preamble to this Chapter, we must continue to “stretch out our arms farther . . . boat against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

Starrat charges, “Moral leadership invites others to transform each day into something special, something wonderful, something unforgettable, something that enables their human spirit to soar and, giddy with the joy of the moment, know who they are” (2004, p. 145). Thus is the exultant opportunity presented to all who are blessed with the good fortune to lead a school. School leadership is a treasure box that holds both challenge and opportunity. Reflection is the key that opens the window to the soul within. I challenge all school leaders to open their internal windows and let their own journeys begin.

**Closure**

Riesman notes that narrative inquiry is “grounded in the study of the particular” (2008, p. 11). Jon Strictor, Frieda Johns, Janessa Alvarez, Tom and Rita represent people and dilemmas at every school. With them I recall Foster’s haunting admonition: “Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life: that is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas” (1986, p. 33). As Sergiovanni observed, “Reflecting on personal experience can often provide us with patterns of characteristics to which many are likely to respond in the same way” (2009, p. 7). I challenge other principals to take embrace these ethical frameworks and consider their particular application of Sergiovanni’s “heart, head, and hand of school leadership.” I believe his metaphor ties together the ethics of care, justice, critique, community, and
the profession that an effective leader must apply in what are often unequal measures. I call for others to reflect on the internal and external dialectics that occurred during their grappling with similar intense turbulent events. Through that constructive reflection they may come to understand how these experiences combined with their prior experiences and values to shape their own approach to ethical school leadership and discover their own moral purpose.
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### Appendix A

**Field Texts for Tom and Rita Vignettes**

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<td>Notes</td>
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<td>8/8/AA</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
<td>Conversation with district supervisor</td>
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<td>8/8/AA</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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<td>8/8/AA</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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<td>8/14/AA</td>
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<td>Letter</td>
<td>Letter to wife re-visits to school setting</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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## Appendix B

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## Appendix C

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**Field Texts for School-Wide Vignettes**

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### Appendix E

**Field Texts for Janessa Alvarez Vignettes**

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<td>Summary of concerns and history to new principal</td>
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December 10, 2012

Jim Lane, Jr.
Educational Leadership
34535 Mission Bell Lane
Dade City, FL 33525

Dear Mr. Lane:

I have reviewed the application for the project titled The Man Behind the Mask: A Principal’s Search For a Moral Leadership Purpose and determined that the study activities described do not meet the federal and USF HRPP definition of research as it is not a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge, IRB approval is not required. If in the future you change the study activities such that they become human subjects research activities, IRB approval is required. If you wish to obtain a determination about whether the activity, with the proposed changes, will be human research activities, please contact the IRB Office for further guidance.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board