

C H A P T E R 1

Leaders, Ethics, and Schools

A Search for Clarity

THE INHERENTLY MORAL NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

As Thomas Sergiovanni (1990, 1996) and Robert Starratt (2004) observed, educational leadership is productively conceived in terms of service to students, staff, and society. Although there are lots of ways to get into leadership, sustaining leadership over time requires moral sensitivity and sophistication, always with an eye to service on behalf of others. **Ethical issues** such as accommodating high-stakes testing, preserving free expression while limiting hate speech and religious solicitation, and discouraging cheating and **violence** of every sort are examples of common morally laden assignments for school administrators. In addition, service-oriented moral leadership confronts a host of **ethical dilemmas** (Price, 2008). The moral dilemmas they confront include such things as equitable distribution of resources among departments, alleged but unintended harassment among employees, the equitable implementation of various employee incentive protocols, and balancing of the contentious claims of adversaries, to name but a few.

The point of doing ethics both as individuals and collegially with others is to solve problems for the well-being of all involved (Howard & Korrer, 2008). There would probably be less stress in leadership positions if leaders pay attention to developing and maintaining an appropriate moral vision for their schools and districts (Strike, 1999). Such vision, when realized, is constitutive of the moral architecture of a school or **community**.

Until recently no distinction was made between ethics and **morals**. Indeed, a cursory review of college course catalogs in any decade or century shows that regardless of course title (*morals* or *ethics*), course substance is largely the same. *Ethics* and *morals* both equally referred to prescriptive rules or principles of **action**, rules presumably designed to make things better in some important sense by guiding appropriate action. Note the use of the word *action* where one might have reasonably anticipated the word *behavior*. The moral world is not about behavior per se but rather about action.

The term *action* is distinguished from the term *behavior* in that it implies intent. Behavior that is accidental is usually morally excusable unless one is accused of being unduly negligent. Moral praise and condemnation both are usually reserved for acts intended by the actor, and hence we have the fashionable use of the term *action theory* in philosophy and social psychology today (Thompson, 2008).

Morals and *ethics* both still refer to prescribed rules or principles of action in general parlance even today (Millgram, 2005). But in the wake of logical positivism in **law** schools, courses titled “legal ethics” began limiting their focus to descriptions of sanctions for specific violations of rules. The American Law School Association Committee on Ethics recently began an attempt to reverse this trend, reasoning that rules make sense only in light of shared commitment and general moral vision (Simmonds, 2007). Starting in the 1970s with a renewed interest in medical ethics, a similar distinction between **morality** and ethics was initiated by some social scientists studying the professional world of physicians. The word *ethics* came to be used for the rules, regulations, principles, and sometimes shared moral commitments common to a distinct group of professionals. In contrast, the word *morals* was shunted aside, said to refer only to personal moral commitments and principles. The distinction is heuristically useful in some contexts and probably will continue to be made in some professional literature. Nonetheless, the distinction does not yet establish a hard line of demarcation between the two terms in most parlances (Posner, 1998).

Several observations illustrate the difficulty if not undesirability of separating ethics from morals. To begin with, how can a profession agree on ethical **obligations** if there is not a shared and personal moral commitment to the aforesaid rules? And why would a school board employ a principal who said she was not personally committed to the profession’s code of ethics but would merely act in the light of them? Moreover, it is not clear that a person could *be* truly professional if she behaved in accord with a wrongheaded institutional “ethic,” that is to say, prescriptive rule. What counts as a wrongheaded institutional ethic (prescriptive rule) is something that the reader will figure out with greater experience, theoretical **understanding**, and reflective study. For the time being, consider the following real example as a prompt to understanding this caution.

In the late 20th century, a district school superintendent in Mississippi mandated that as a matter of district policy no interracial couples would be allowed at the high school prom. The superintendent insisted that the prohibition was necessary because of rising racial tensions in the area, and the presence of one or more interracial couples may have prompted a serious disruption at the event. As an administrator you have a **duty** to follow your superior’s directives generally and formal district policy specifically. On the other hand, your moral commitment as a professional is to show equal respect to all people. Imagine you are assigned to chaperone the prom in this situation. An interracial couple appears at the door in defiance of district policy. You recognize the couple. Both are honor students and good citizens. Teachers working the front desk turn to you, wondering what should be done as the students approach. What do you think should be done?

The district policy is clear. Your personal and professional moral commitments are also clear. The two sets of commitments—one to the district policy and another to the principle of equal respect—seem diametrically opposed to one another in this case. What is your

professional obligation? Do you follow the superintendent's directive, or do you act on your personal and professional conscience?

Before reaching your decision, reflect on another true incident. During the Vietnam War, a young lieutenant, presumably on orders from his company commander, had his troops destroy a village and begin killing the inhabitants until an American helicopter placed itself between the inhabitants and the lieutenant's troops. Upon formal review the lieutenant claimed he was only doing his duty by following orders. The military tribunal court-martialed him, saying he was always responsible for his own actions. He could never have a duty to act in a criminally offensive way, even if commanded to do so by a superior. More generally, from the mid-20th century and to the present, people brought to trial as war criminals have often pleaded they were acting under orders and so were not deserving of punishment. Is that a good defense? Is it a morally upstanding defense? Are such considerations relevant to the educational scenario described earlier?

To return to the hypothetical of the administrator on duty at the prom, what should you do? As you look about, all seems calm. There is no impending danger. However, as the night wears on it is quite possible that various prohibited intoxicants will begin to take their toll on some of the students. Some of the boys may become a bit edgier and quick to challenge another. Still, these are only possibilities at the moment. On the other hand, you are the district's representative. If you don't uphold and honor school policy, why should anyone else? And yet again, if you engage in an act of overt prejudice, don't you discredit not only yourself but the school, the district, the community, and the profession as well?

It may be premature to require you to risk a solution to this hypothetical, but as an administrator you can be sure that although you may not face this particular dilemma, you will face situations equally challenging to your wits, your sense of social sympathy, your honor, and your integrity. The closest you will come to a plausible answer at the moment may be to reflect on the notion of what it means to be a professional. Such reflection may lead you to conclude there is less of a gap between professional ethics and your personal moral convictions than you may have once suspected.

LEADER AS MORAL ARCHITECT

Leadership is a ubiquitous and practical exercise of human understanding and skill. Leadership shows up in all aspects of communal living and association. Leaders may do good or evil. They may lead through democratic processes, or they may lead through authoritarian demands. Their personalities, paths to **authority**, and sense of **responsibility** may vary greatly. In short, there is no generic template for all aspects of leadership in actual practice and in every context. There is no one-size-fits-all template for sustaining one's role as a leader in an educational community and under shifting schooling pressures. So much depends on context, and contexts are always in flux. Nonetheless, there is much that can be identified generally as relevant to sustainable leadership in an educational community.

When one looks more generally beyond **education**, any list of leaders belies the flaw in efforts to construct a one-size-fits-all template for leadership. For example,

St. Benedict, Joseph Stalin, Che Guevara, Seligman the Great, Lee Iaccoca, Mother Teresa, Mao Tse-tung, Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Oppenheimer, Joan of Arc, Golda Meir, George Washington, and Maria Montessori were all leaders of historic proportions. Yet think how different one is from the other. Think how different the contexts and challenges were that confronted each. One could easily argue that both St. Benedict and Joseph Stalin were authoritarian, and yet one must admit that each had strikingly different moral visions and led others from within very different contexts. Che Guevara and Mother Teresa were both said to be open to democratic processes in leadership, and yet again they were quite different from one another. Each had sharply different moral visions, and each led communities filled with strikingly different social dynamics. Of course, this does not mean that every kind of leadership is morally right minded. If just any moral vision were acceptable in education, then there would be no need for you to read this book, much less for you to attempt to think and act ethically. But the fact that we are dealing with educational leadership helps focus our considerations, especially our moral concerns, and that is fortunate because the productive study of leadership must limit itself in scope and sequence to be of any serviceable value to practitioners (Fasching, 1997).

Like all leaders, educational leaders work in specific contexts that limit the range of goals and probably social dynamics. In the case of educational leaders, these limitations emanate first and foremost from their professional commitments, but other factors such as time, place, and general social dynamics all play a limiting role on what is apt and appropriate as well. The leader may be an architect of a community's or **organization's** moral ambiance, but that does not mean he has a free hand at what materials he must work with or when a change in design may be necessary. For example, the profession's shared moral vision sets boundaries to what a leader can do or properly demand of fellow professionals. Like physicians following the Hippocratic code, educational leaders are constrained from the outset to do no harm to those they serve. And just as the Hippocratic oath isn't limited to doctors from Greece in antiquity but rather extends to physicians across millennia and many geographic borders, the shared professional vision of educators spreads across the globe in time and space. In addition to doing no harm, the professional vision of educators entails bringing people together in the sincere search for and sharing of truth. This bringing together of all peoples in the sincere and skillful search for truth and understanding is what we mean throughout this text by the term *Great Conversation of Humankind*. Professional vision may both limit what the leader can do and fulfill the leader in her attempt to get things right. Changing circumstances may both limit and advance the cause of professional leadership in education (Wagner, 1992).

A REFLECTIVE BREAK

To what extent are doing ethics and being ethical dependent upon context, personality, character, cooperation, and thinking with others? Explain your thinking.

American president John F. Kennedy famously implored his compatriots, “Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.” In asking citizens to engage in such reflection, Kennedy was acknowledging that leadership cannot succeed by focusing solely on the person at the top to make everything right. Successful leadership is a collaborative and community undertaking.

Leaders exist only in the context of community. Communities may be construed in light of geographic constructs or in light of shared professional interests (and, of course, in other ways). Communities make and sustain leaders in one way or another as much as do the individual talents and moral vision of the leaders themselves.

The apparatus sustaining a community is its moral architecture. Architecture typically is a dynamic interplay between the architect and her design and the engineers materializing the design. The same is true of moral architecture in the schools. The leaders bring important designs that they articulate and, more importantly, that they role model. All other stakeholders in the school and district are analogous to the engineers who through practice and willingness to commit to their own interpretation of the designs create a dynamic that brings the moral architecture to fruition.

Except in cases of sheer anarchy or absolute despotism, leaders are brought into the somewhat limiting constraints of a community’s existing moral architecture. Over time leaders are bound to affect the moral architecture of the community, just as the architecture inevitably affects them. By respecting the most commendable aspects of existing moral architecture, stakeholders and leaders alike show respect for one another, the community, and its vision. Leaders committed to working with stakeholders further develop the moral architecture, creating and strengthening bonds between other leaders, staff, and students.

Leadership is inherently a dynamic between the **character** and **personality** of a leader and the further dynamic of the leader working in concert with followers of somewhat like mind in an action-focused context. Few understood this latter dynamic better than President Kennedy. In a recent conversation with Christopher Kennedy Lawford, one of the authors recalls Lawford telling the story, “When I was 5 the Democratic convention nominating Uncle Jack occurred in California, where I lived. My uncle came into my bedroom the night he became the party’s nominee and asked me if I would help him win the presidency. I said I would tomorrow but I was tired now” (personal communication, April 17, 2007). The point in this amusing anecdote is that Kennedy recognized just how richly textured the dynamic between leader, followers, and context is. Here Uncle Jack was securing the commitment of all possible stakeholders. Such efforts are the very heart of leadership in democratic environments. Put another way, leadership demands both an awareness of and the ability to develop a robust moral architecture involving all stakeholders as fully as possible.

Beyond organizational structure and social hierarchies, every community also has a moral architecture. The moral architecture permeates both formal structure and social hierarchy. Moral architecture also illuminates the respect, moral imperatives, traditions of decency, and **courtesies** animating communal consciousness. (See Case Study A.6 in Appendix A.) Moral architecture is distinct from and does not replace decision-making protocols, nor does it replace law, policy, or organizational hierarchy. Moral architecture reflects in dynamic fashion stakeholder response to all these communal elements but goes further to reflect social

graces and collaborative style. In summary, moral architecture is about how Munoz, Bernstein, Muhammad, and Jones treat each other collegially.

Moral architectures may range from so-called flat structures in which either anarchy or “might makes right” despotism results in dominance of the many by the capriciousness of a few, to lofty architectures with high-level commitments articulating honored principles and virtues generally accepted by all. Leaders either fit or fail to fit into an existing moral architecture. The best leaders, and those most likely to sustain a leadership position, affect the existing moral architecture in important ways, making it better in the eyes of nearly all.

This book argues that the heart of leadership begins in character and moral commitment. Individual character and shared commitment, as they are spread throughout a school or district, reflect qualities of moral architecture. Reflective, **strong character** on the part of individuals and shared moral commitments give the moral architecture an elevation necessary for adjudicating between the inevitable and transient diversity of claims that are bound to occur from time to time. In contrast, unreflective, **weak character** and fear of shared commitments deflate a moral architecture, limiting access to diverse perspectives and democratic resolution of disputes.

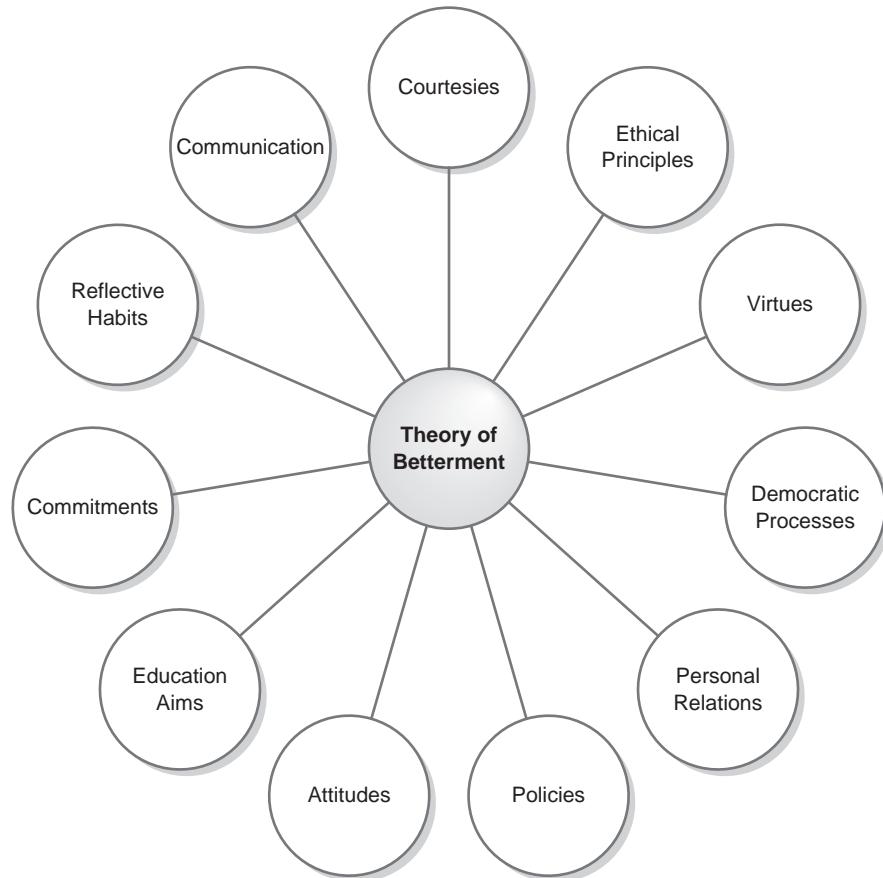
Although leaders play the most conspicuous roles in elevating and modeling participation in a moral architecture, their efforts alone cannot sustain its benefits. As the great contemporary philosopher of Chinese moral theory Antonio Cua (1979) insists, leaders must be paradigmatic of the best of ideals of a community if those ideals are to extend into the future. Nonetheless, the life of an institution’s moral architecture depends on no one person.

MORAL ARCHITECTURES STAND ALONE

Group dynamics as studied by social scientists are descriptive of how people typically engage one another. In contrast, the study of ethics and morality draws attention to how people *ought to* engage one another. Moral architecture is a collection of principles, virtues, and courtesies that people in a given organization implicitly agree ought to guide their collaborations. Collaborations are most sustainable when underlying shared moral theory supports a given architecture. The point of this book is to focus attention on the nature of morally responsive leadership most likely to guide organizational success over the long haul.

Figure 1.1 depicts many of the elements of a moral architecture, namely, principles, virtues, courtesies and related values and manifestations, communication patterns, personal relationships, school policies, collective attitudes, educational aims, moral commitments, and reflective habits. At the center of the figure, imagine a theory of human betterment. When fully developed, this theory will relate an ideal of education, with experience lived well, generally. Moral architecture is a dynamic always in flux. Some elements of architecture are more noticeable at one time or another, only to recede from the foreground later as circumstances change. For example, school courtesies, communication patterns, and democratic processes may recede to the background when school personnel sacrifice these values as they rush to meet pressing state or federal mandated deadlines. School leaders need to ensure that temporary imbalances do not become permanent features and deflate their schools’ moral architectures.

Figure 1.1 The Complexities of Moral Architecture: Ideals, Beliefs, and Behaviors That Permeate an Organization



School leaders seeking a healthy, dynamic moral architecture center on sustained service to others and on a vision of human betterment. Commitment to such service requires strength of character, and strength of character has long been recognized as a straightforward moral virtue. Even more than service to others, commitment to human *betterment* is central to the notion of morality generally. Before a leader can model or agree to these recommendations meaningfully and direct her daily practice accordingly, she must have in mind clear and precise definitions of the key moral terms necessary for such reflection. For example, the educational leader must have explicitly in mind definitions for virtue, character, morality, human betterment, and, in the terms of this text, moral architecture.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE META-ETHICAL AND PRESCRIPTIVE MORALITY

The ancient Greeks advised frequently that it was important to clarify one's terms. "Define your terms!" is often heard in history courses describing the ancient Greek search for **knowledge**. Since roughly the 1950s the effort to define terms precisely has been elevated to a technical subspecialty in philosophy known as meta-ethics (Blackburn, 1984; Darwall, 2006; Hare, 1954; Jackson, 2000; Korsgaard, 1996; Sober, 1975).

There is much work to be done in clarifying specific moral terms. Consequently, it should be no surprise to anyone that there are specialists at work on the project, and their work can be usefully explored by the practicing educational administrator (Price, 2008). This text will not explore meta-ethical issues in any depth other than to note the usefulness of such investigations from time to time. The glossary defines a number of relevant moral terms in light of the accumulated work product of meta-ethicists, and this should suffice for the practical investigations prompted in this text. In addition, we define at length two technical terms devised specifically for the approach of this text, namely *moral architecture* and a term yet to be defined more fully, *the Great Conversation of Humankind* (hereinafter also called the Great Conversation or simply the Conversation).

Clarity in moral language makes possible more exacting execution of considered and well-planned moral action (Adams, 2002; Crisp, 2006; Jackson, 2000; Millgram, 2005). For example, it doesn't do much good to tell either teachers or students that cheating is wrong if the teachers or students aren't exactly sure what counts as cheating or what it means to say that something is morally wrong in a specific context. Understanding what counts as cheating and what amounts to wrong, either morally or at least in some institutional context, makes violations and potential violations more evident to all. Such shared understanding should minimize the extent of unnecessary disagreement and conflict (Stevenson, 1944).

A GROUP DISCUSSION

If your district engaged in a discussion of democratically responsive leadership, how would you help clarify such a grand concept? Is there any reason to conclude that democratic leadership should have universal application in educational contexts or in the context of public schooling? When unpacking the term *democratic leadership*, what related concepts must be understood? Do you think you have identified all the *concepts* that must be grasped in order to understand the concept of democratic leadership? List the concepts you think must be understood in order to understand democratic leadership. Finally, what exactly are you saying when you modify the term *democratic leadership* with the further modifier *responsive*?

IT'S NOT JUST TALK: POINTING OUT THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF COMMUNAL MORAL LIFE

When people think about ethics and morality, they have in mind something specialists call prescriptive moral theory. In prescriptive moral theory the theorist is genuinely trying to

distinguish not the meaning of terms themselves but rather right from wrong action and character. The point of prescriptive morality is to construct rules, identify principles, or recommend virtues for living a morally upright and ethical life. At the level of practice, the principal or superintendent who is trying to decide whether a particular act is right or wrong (e.g., whether an alleged case of bullying or sexual harassment exists) is thinking prescriptively about possible moral choices. Moreover, he or she is living through and role modeling the virtues of a deliberative moral agent (Hursthouse, 1999). Such modeling is indispensable for adding elevation to institutional moral architecture.

Just as educational leaders must clarify the *meaning* of certain morally relevant terms, they must have warrant for anticipating the right-mindedness of action and policies in the contexts for which they are designed. In an educational context this right-mindedness is generally guided by an eye to human betterment (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Thus, conscientious educational leaders must not only take time to clarify the moral terms they use, they must also think through how people will be affected by given acts, the implementation of specific rules or policies, and the modeling of transparent virtues. The consequences that result from implementation will extend beyond any immediate challenge. Those consequences will further temper the evolving institutional moral architecture.

In short, the educational leader's lived moral experience affects more than just his or her situation in an organization or community. The leader's lived moral experience reverberates throughout the moral architecture, shifting architectural shape regardless of original and intentional design. As Cua (1979) notes, the more prominent a person's role in an organization, the more her ethics influence others. This role-modeling effect of Cua's "paradigmatic individual" can perhaps be more exactly described (at least in mathematical terms) as an attractor effect (Skyrms, 2004). The attractor effect is the predictable effect that powerful figures have on the lives of others, depending in part on the *strength* of the exhibited virtue, **v**ice, or disposition and the *proximity* of others to the role model. Suffice it to say that educational administrators play the major role in the dynamic that brings about an organization's sense of right-mindedness in matters large and small or, as we describe it, the organization's moral architecture.

TAKING PRESCRIPTIVE MORALITY SERIOUSLY

Whether in the case of individuals, professions, or communities of any kind, moral thinking aims at sentences that prescribe or prohibit virtues and vices, actions, and attitudes. Despite the recent flurry of opinion that there is no truth or point to "getting it right" in moral thinking, empirical evidence and studies from all over the world suggest much to the contrary (Adams, 2002; Audi, 2005). Three of the most prominent examples of mounting empirical evidence can be found in the American Psychological Association's endorsement of Peterson and Seligman's (2004) study of universal virtues and character strengths, Gert's (1996; 2004) studies of universal moral rules, and Sober and Wilson's (1998) extensive meta-analysis of the biological foundations for moral universals. Simply put, we have far more information about human morality generally than some relativists allow.

For readers who desire a better understanding of recent research in this realm, a wealth of multidisciplinary research is available (Axelrod, 1984; Blackburn, 2001, 2003; Coles, 2000;

Englehardt, 1986; Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Fletcher, 1993; Frank, 1988; Gaylin, 1979; Gazzaniga, 2006; Gibbard, 1990, 2003, 2008; Glimcher, 2004; Rapaport, 1991; Valliant, 1998; D. S. Wilson, 2002; J. Q. Wilson, 1997). Because every leader in an organization is a seminal architect of the organization's moral architecture, this literature is invaluable to responsible and reflective leaders. There is good reason to believe that human betterment can be achieved (Dugatkin, 1999). If there is any doubt that human betterment is achievable (Wright, 1955), consider the history of slavery. It took several thousand years for the last nation on Earth (an island nation off the west coast of Africa) to formally outlaw slavery in 1983. Now, when slavery does occur, it is at least formally condemned as contrary to both local and international law (Sowell, 1995). So there is evidence that people tend to agree cross-culturally on some moral prescriptions (Gordon, 2008; Koble & Garcia-Carpintero, 2008). Nonetheless, when researchers study ethics, they still need to consider grounds for moral agreement as well as moral diversity (Gibbard, 2008). For example, there is evidence of surface-level disagreement, or cultural endorsements of specific diverse ethics, however, there is compelling evidence that some universal moral structures run beneath local sources of agreement and disagreement (Scriven, 1976).

Surface-level variance in ethical rules and commitments increasingly appears analogous to what linguists have observed about human language (Hauser, 2006; Warneke, 2008). Just as languages differ on the surface (so Mandarin looks and sounds very different from Spanish, for example), there is compelling evidence that the species possesses a deep structure that makes human linguistic practice in general a possibility (Chomsky, 1988). Analogously, it might be noted that the cross-cultural transition away from opposing ethics involving issues such as slavery illustrates Dewey's (1938) notion that moral knowledge, like medical and other kinds of knowledge, converges as issues and principles are progressively studied and clarified (Alexander, 2007).

When students and staff from diverse backgrounds are brought together for the first time, they may sense little shared agreement on surface-level rules prescribing and prohibiting social behavior. At first glance institutional moral architecture may not be readily apparent. In addition, each person may bring along a mix of conflicting messages from both television and home about how to deal with "we-they challenges," "self-interest versus **altruism**," and other apparent dichotomies of human social engagement. For example, compelling kinship affiliations (Hamilton, 1964) may draw them in one direction while principled instruction may draw them in another. Finding underlying moral structures alluring to all or otherwise creating grounds for convergence and creating a common sense of right-mindedness can be an Olympian task for educational administrators, their faculties, and their staffs. Yet regardless of how great the challenge, students and staff must learn that there is a source of respect in the human spirit (Strike, 1991) that makes bigotry, **racism**, and **sexism**, among other things, as universally unacceptable as slavery (Kohn, 2008).

FROM THE GREAT CONVERSATION TO TRUTH AND MORAL COMMITMENT

Albert Einstein once said that there would be no point to doing science if there were no reality about which scientific statements might be right or wrong (Isaacson, 2007). Analogously, moral theorists in education (Strike & Soltis, 2004) claim there is truth in morality, although it may look different from truth in other areas. In sympathy with both of these insights, we

suggest that there is no point to morality or ethical theory if there is no such thing as getting it right or getting it wrong. As we alluded earlier, the history of slavery is in part at least a history of people and their leaders slowly moving away from error and coming to get things right.

Educational leaders must meet moral matters head on simply in order to do their respective jobs of principal, superintendent, educational policy maker, and so on. Educational leaders inherently make decisions about what *ought* to be done and (presumably) for what *good* ends. There is no way of pretending they can avoid moralistic decisions and commitments. However, in the best circumstances, highly principled moral architectures supporting virtues and eschewing vices advance the causes of productive planning and execution of collective purpose. They do this in part by developing communal attitudes and courtesies, accommodating a genuine concern for the well-being of others.

Fortunately, the educational leader is not left to construct a sense of organizational good out of whole cloth. Education has been around for millennia. More pointedly, the profession of teaching is one of the four oldest, along with doctoring, lawyering, and preaching. The professional traditions of education have accrued much in the way of hard-won and time-tested truths in the quest for morally respected practice. There have been high points and low for educational practice, from the Golden Age of Greece and the Age of Confucius to Nazi and Stalinist attempts to use education to propagandize. The former sought criticism in the pursuit of truth; the latter suppressed criticism in order to enforce oppressive socialization.

The term *Great Conversation* has been around seemingly forever. Although our use of the term is not fully identical with previous uses of the term (such as when the *Encyclopedia Britannica* used it to introduce their Great Book series back in the 1950s, a series disproportionately laden with Western male thinking), we share with previous definitions the idea that the Great Conversation is a process for seeking generalizable truth and understanding. Importantly, we extend the definition of the Conversation to make explicit the entailment of **multiculturalist** commitments to respect the voice of others, share understanding, and promote human well-being through the search for truth. In our more explicit definition, the commitment to pursue truth requires that participation in the Conversation be kept open to every source of potential truth and that everyone be heard and every idea exposed to earnest criticism aimed at moving all participants further away from error (Johnson, 2008). Presumably, as one moves further from error the only direction open is toward truth (Koble & Garcia-Carpintero, 2008). Moreover, the direction away from error also leads beyond matters of mere personal taste and idiosyncratic expression. As people move away from error they move toward others sincerely committed to truth, even when those others are not people we would often find ourselves agreeing with on other matters.

Truth claims should be held tentatively by those genuinely concerned with getting things right. Truth is difficult to ascertain, but that doesn't mean we cannot recognize personal and collective moves toward it. Our definition of the Great Conversation separates the concept of truth from definitions open to wildly disparate accounts associating truth with the simple expression of power, willfulness, or simple sympathy with the opinion of others. Perhaps most importantly, our definition of the Conversation entails commitment to the independent voice of every participant, with the goal of sharing as fully as possible all that is learned. In short, truth and the Great Conversation go together in matters of morality just as the two fit together in every other subject matter or cognitive discipline.

The Conversation seeks the possibility of generalizable insights of high utility for every aspect of human endeavor. Consequently, the Great Conversation depends on critical inquiry and fostering appropriate attitudes and virtues (Zagzebski, 2004). These derivative attitudes and virtues include respect for truth and for other truth seekers, open-mindedness to different ideas and evidence, humility in the quest for truth, tolerance for differentiation between levels of justification, and much more (Hare, 1992). In addition, the authentic search for truth is an inclusive practice as well as a practice with inclusion as its goal. Specifically this means that the Conversation must be an “every person” sort of affair, inherently global and multicultural in interest and actual engagement of others. To grasp the moralistic core of the Great Conversation, the reader must learn much more about moral theory itself. The goal of Chapter 2 is to familiarize you with most of the major branches of moral theory. Educational administrators are responsible for more than hosting this Conversation in their facilities.

LEADING THE GREAT CONVERSATION

Educational administrators are responsible for a number of training programs, socialization, and schooling practices. Each of these responsibilities must be accommodated in the organization’s moral architecture in addition to the context necessary for fostering the Conversation. Because these further obligations are often imposed by civil authorities and other stakeholders outside the educational profession, cases of potential conflict of purpose may arise. Administrators must anticipate these conflicts and in some cases accommodate

A REALITY CHECK

Assume that you know condoms have been shown effective in protecting against pregnancy but that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) acknowledge that they do little to protect people from many sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or the depression that often accompanies becoming infected with one (Meeker, 2002). Some parents object to students being exposed to this information for a variety of reasons. Consider this: Do you consider the sharing of such knowledge an educational goal, or do you consider it a socialization goal mandated by society? Explain your thinking. Is it a good thing to share such knowledge with students? Explain. What considerations should determine whether it is good practice to share such knowledge with students? Before you answer, consider the possibility of conflicting parental concerns, the strength of the CDC’s supporting research, society’s interests, your professional commitment to truth, the students’ and your own religious commitments, and other claims that may be a source of distress in arriving at a decision about sharing information about STIs with students. In sharing such knowledge, are educators at any legal risk? Are educators obligated to present such information while showing no moral concern? Explain your thinking.

conflicting interests under a single robust moral architecture with explicit commitment to the Great Conversation at every level.

The educational administrator is a moral agent who works with others to rearrange the present in order to do good, that is, to bring about human betterment. Doing good or bringing about human betterment through the Great Conversation is not something an educational administrator can do alone. Faculty, staff, and parents must share largely in the same vision of the good. A moral architecture must emerge that includes the shared sense of vision of all these stakeholders, ultimately including students as well. As Aristotle (1958) famously remarked in *The Politics*, “It makes no small difference what habits we develop, rather, it makes all the difference.” The idea of human betterment can be realized in an educational organization only if all stakeholders’ eyes are set firmly on the range of responsibilities assigned to the school or district, with special attention focused on the centrality of the Conversation.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

If the Great Conversation is the heart of education, then the moral architecture supporting the Conversation must be of a very special type. It must focus on inclusion as much as respect for the individual, passion for truth as well as tolerance for emerging opinion, and critical thinking as much as acquisition of facts, theories, and learning strategies and tactics. Clearly there is no way to get everyone to agree on every detail underpinning large concepts, policies, rules, protocols, and conventional courtesies of a school or district’s moral architecture. Nonetheless, diversity of conscience or understanding need not eliminate the possibility of generally shared moral commitments within a community (Darling-Hammond, La Fors, & Snyder, 2001).

If a democratic, deliberatively derived moral architecture is not developed, an accidental, flat one will often evolve by default. And flat architectures, suffering as they do from an absence of lofty ideals and shared vision, are unsuitable to fostering the Great Conversation. Formal codes of professional ethics help articulate the lofty ideals and shared vision that sustain a moral architecture that fosters the Great Conversation.

Indeed, codes of ethics emerge as a result of efforts to bring into view a shared moral vision to which all members of a profession might aspire (Rich, 1984). A code of ethics should not be seen as a negatively motivated demand for **accountability** from wayward souls. Rather, the spirit of a code of ethics should be positive and proactive. Codes of ethics are meant to be both enduring in spirit and responsive to practical matters throughout changing times. Therefore, codes cannot be too specific in articulation. Human understanding of immediate circumstances is always tenuous at best. Moreover, social milieus are always in flux. Consequently, prescriptive details such as previously decided cases can only reveal trends upholding the lofty principles descriptive of the Great Conversation in circumstances that are not always wholly applicable in the immediate present.

The first written code of ethics for any profession was written by Hippocrates for physicians. Central to Hippocrates’ original code is the imperative, “Do no harm!” The practice of medicine has changed greatly in the more than two millennia since Hippocrates wrote. Yet the general principle for physicians to “do no harm” remains as professionally prescriptive

QUESTIONING
THE AUTHORS

Do people really make progress in their moral thinking, as the authors suggest? If yes, how do they know when they are making progress in their moral thinking?

Do educators understand their professional moral commitments now more fully than they did, say, 50 years ago or 100 years ago? Explain your thinking.

In what sense do you think the Great Conversation might be central to the heart of education in cultures around the globe?

today as when the principle was first adopted by the local Greek profession of physicians. What counts as doing harm has changed many times and in many ways over the centuries and in different cultures, but the universal principle for physicians (even among many who never heard of Hippocrates) continues to be honored, namely, “First, do no harm.” This bit of professionally prescriptive morality represents a generalized, shared moral vision of physicians past and present. Specifically, it directs practitioner attention to their shared obligation to seek the well-being of all they serve.

Codes of ethics prescribe in the most general terms a shared sense of moral vision for members of a profession. Codes of ethics may also be used to initiate the accumulation of a track record of decisions made on behalf of the profession to reprimand or sanction members who seem to be acting at odds with the evolving sense of right or wrong of the profession. A code of ethics itself provides only a general direction for shared specialist concern; specific decisions to reprimand or sanction a fellow practitioner add a bit more specificity to the profession’s prescriptions to itself. But even the precedents establishing more precisely articulated prescriptions for members of the profession can never capture the full range of excellence in right-minded, professional action. Even a well-established record of precedent sometimes ignores or oversimplifies significant ethical considerations. Consequently, there is never enough direction in any formally articulated code or case-based derivative precedent to prescribe what the professional ought to do in every case. The proper moral considerations of professionals are bound to extend beyond such matters (Gaziel, 1997, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1996).

Being a professional is an understanding. In a profound sense it becomes for the practicing professional a state of mind that cannot be captured in a single written document. The range of unanticipated novelty is ever present and vast. Nonetheless, those on the inside of a profession, with code in hand, have a sense and familiarity with the moral vision they share with professional colleagues across geographic borders and over historic epochs. However much the details change, there is something about the moral vision of the four oldest professions (doctors, lawyers, preachers, and teachers) that makes it possible for fellow practitioners to recognize one another over the centuries and across cultural and geographic borders. In the case of educators, that something is perhaps best summed up in the concept of the Great Conversation. If this is so, and we believe it is, then the concept of the Great Conversation can serve educators well as the moral compass of a school or district. In short, the Great Conversation focuses professional vision on the necessities of an appropriate moral architecture for classroom, school, and district.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN PRACTICE: AN EXAMPLE

As noted earlier, the shared commitment of professional educators may serve as a base from which an administrator can navigate between the competing claims of stakeholders with regard to a potentially tumultuous topic such as the balance between self-expression and constraints of religious tolerance in the schools.

Under the rubric of religious tolerance and First Amendment **rights** to self-expression, the courts are addressing criteria for student dress codes, how and when students might assemble for religious purposes, and public expressions of personal religious testimony. What is ahead in law in each of these areas is far from clear. And the enthusiasms and irritations of many groups of stakeholders in the schools seem bound to conflict. Consider now how an organizational moral architecture committed to the Great Conversation might help the administrator manage such a source of stakeholder conflict.

As a consequence of their commitment to the Great Conversation (and as specified in a variety of codes of ethics for educators in specific states), educators must promote sincere inquiry but never by making others feel intimidated or in any way silenced by the ongoing inquiry of others. The Conversation is committed to inclusion, not exclusion. The directive here seems clear enough, at least on the surface. But in practical situations the underlying spirit of surface-level prescriptions must be relied on to elucidate what is needed to sustain a moral architecture supportive of the Conversation. Moreover, the educational leader will find that there is much that is never anticipated by the straightforward language of law, policy, ethical codes, or other surface-level directives. Is a Tibetan child who spins a prayer wheel in school during free time expressing his cultural identity, or is he creating an environment hostile to learning by imposing his religion into the world of all others? Is a Native American student (Nighardt, 1961) who refuses to cut up an animal in biology just to learn techniques of dissection and see the internal operations of an animal excluding himself from the Great Conversation on religious or cultural grounds? Should devout Christian teachers be allowed to wear a small cross around their neck (and what about gang members for whom the cross may be an article of gang membership, a cultural artifact, or just an item of idiosyncratic self-expression)? Theories of creationism may not be permitted in biology courses, but what about in a course on the history of science or, more particularly, the history of biology? Does it make any difference which department might teach such a course? How can the educational administrator exhibit tolerance in such a way that all stakeholders are likely to understand the administrator's position as both tolerant and respectful of each stakeholder? Because much of this is not yet fully resolved by the courts or by anything written in local policy or codes of ethics (or even the derivative literature), what should the morally conscientious administrator do?

Earlier we mentioned the principle doctors fall back on when no other guidance seems evident: "Do no harm." We advised at the time that this principle might serve well the interests of educational administrators, and here is an apt example. Several of the questions in this section seem to suggest zero-sum games as options. In other words, what is done to favor the quest for truth, sharing of an alleged truth, or self-expression by one person seems to be at an equal cost to another's search for truth, sharing of that truth, or self-expression. So what is an administrator to do, and how does he or she create a moral architecture that does no harm in all these cases and yet fosters the best ideals of the Conversation?

There are no easy answers to any of these questions nor any specific directives that can be looked up somewhere in a text. On the contrary, day in and day out the administrator will be called on to get things right when addressing such dilemmas. Without specific guidance from the law, district policy, or professional codes of ethics, the administrator is largely on her own, yet she cannot just throw her hands in the air and act on **intuition** or personal conscience. The moral theories developed over the centuries and surveyed in the next chapter provide grounds for resolving such dilemmas. For example, in the absence of any other guidelines the utilitarian will try to figure out what course of action will bring about the greatest net pleasure (Hare, 1992). An advocate of an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1988) will focus on maintaining bonds of shared commitment between stakeholders even if it doesn't promote the greatest net pleasure. So in the case of wearing a cross, a utilitarian administrator in the absence of any other guidance may allow the widest possible interpretation of self-expression in order to produce the most overall pleasure. In contrast, the advocate of caring may bring stakeholders together and attempt to persuade others that they need to come to a collective solution without intimidating anyone into acquiescence (Hekman, 1995). The point here is that even in the absence of formal guidance, familiarity with moral theory gives the practicing administrator more to go on than her own subjective suspicions. By reaching beyond the impulse of her subjective conscience alone, she shows that she is truly committed to a moral architecture fostering respect for all stakeholders and the inclusiveness of the Conversation. This proactive respect for all trumps any individual's idiosyncratic preferences of the moment (Phillips & Freeman, 2003) and shows that she senses her **professionalism** demands respect for a vision beyond mere personal conscience.

Obviously, we have not given the reader specific prescriptions for what to do in each imaginable case of religious tolerance. But that was never the intent. No one can get the right answers every time to all such cases in advance and in the abstract. However, there are principles, virtues, and other understandings generally that may help the practitioner avoid moral error a bit more often than not by knowing more about the directionality of moral focus appropriate to the task of educational administration. The primary task of the rest of this book is to show how conflicts between personal moral conscience and professional duty can be avoided through deep moral reflection. Part of this will involve recommended heuristics aimed at doing the generally right thing in context-specific situations. For example, consider Table 1.1. This template is a heuristic tool for beginning responsible moral analysis in cases of applied situational complexity.

Keep in mind that the table is a heuristic tool, not an algorithm for calculating moral truth. The table is designed to prompt more exacting thought about applicable practice and its effects on the organization's developing moral architecture. There are many dimensions to moral architecture, too many to get a fix on without extended and deliberative attention before each immediate challenge is encountered. For example, schools and districts are becoming increasingly diverse, and as a consequence they are expected to accommodate often incompatible surface-level moral prescriptions or differing notions of educational or schooling purpose. For this reason, the model illustrates that especially at the surface level there may be several ethically plausible solutions to a controversial issue among a community of stakeholders. Because it is so important to secure the integrity of the community under the broad umbrella of one moral architecture, when differential support for alternative surface-level ethics appears evident, grounds for ultimately favoring one over another must become transparent and open to critique to all stakeholders (Zakhem, 2007).

Table 1.1 A Model for Analyzing and Addressing Ethical Issues Supportive of a Resilient Moral Architecture: A Multitheoretical and Multicultural Approach

<i>Reflections</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>Interests</i>	<i>Considerations</i>
Problem Identification	Talking with relevant parties about their views and concerns	Ensuring that you and others understand the precise problems and issues of the parties involved	Listening carefully to the parties involved so that their personal and cultural perspectives are understood
Problem Clarification	Interacting again with relevant parties when there are ambiguities and uncertainties	Ensuring that key concepts and preliminary questions are clearly and fully answered	Raising questions to make sure that all nuances, haziness, and conceptual confusions are understood or clarified
Moral Commitments	Determining which moral principles or virtues (e.g., fairness, equity, freedom, caring) are linked to the situation	Ensuring that different people express their exact ethical concerns, (e.g., harassment, dishonesty, offensiveness)	Discussing details to encourage involved parties to explicitly state the causes of their anger, hurt, or moral indignation
Data Collection	Gathering cultural and empirical information, facts, and data that have a bearing on the issue	Ensuring that the facts and interpretations of them are as stated and have a relationship to the problem	Pursuing all relevant facts and information from as many sources as needed
Theoretical Scan	Scanning ethical theories and their subtypes for the insight they offer	Ensuring that relevant ethical considerations are used in reflection and practice	Thinking broadly about the problem from diverse legal, policy, and theoretical perspectives
Solution Construction	Working with others to construct the best possible hypothetical solutions in the multicultural context	Ensuring that the best solutions are discussed with relevant people	Seeing whether the collective wisdom leads to more than one practical solution to the challenge
Consequences Considered	Imagining with others what the probable consequences of proposed solutions may be	Ensuring that the consequences of possible solutions on all parties are considered	Examining both the potential positive and negative outcomes of perceived solutions

(Continued)

Table 1.1 (Continued)

<i>Reflections</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>	<i>Interests</i>	<i>Considerations</i>
Solution Reconsideration	Reconsidering previously proposed solutions in the light of probable outcomes and new information	Ensuring that the forthcoming plan of action is based on all relevant ethical considerations	Rethinking plans in view of different perspectives, diverse peoples, and probable outcomes
Action Plan	Deciding on a plan of action that will be guided by the ethical decision	Ensuring that a decision is acted on in an ethical and holistic manner with clear communication of the decision to all parties	Making certain that the plan is understood as part of a broader moral architecture or school culture
Evaluation Plan	Determining what went well in the process and outcome and what was learned for future similar situations	Ensuring that ethical decision making is seen as a community learning process that informs better decision making in the future	Contributing to the ongoing thinking of staff about building a classroom, school, or district environment that is ethically informed and growing

Users of the model should avoid several temptations. We have already noted the temptation to use the model as a lockstep process. The model is intended only as a checklist of all that should be considered before arriving at some decision. Another temptation to be avoided is to use the model as a substitute for psychological or sociological theories of personal or group dynamics, stressful interactions, or group information processing. This temptation would lead to an inexcusable omission of much relevant theory and empirical data needed to construct a comprehensive picture of relevant context. The model is about the moral context in which all other adult social dynamics take place. Although that sounds quite grand (and it is), it is deliberately limited to the morally relevant elements needing deliberative attention. With these considerations in mind, the model in Table 1.1 should prove useful to readers throughout this book.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between a good person and a good school? In what sense, if any, does the word *good* successfully modify nouns such as *person* and *school*? What might be the grounds for counting Shannon Wright, Marva Collins, and Jamie Escalante as paradigmatically good teachers?

2. What makes a person virtuous? Does it matter to you that staff and students see you as exhibiting certain virtues and avoiding certain vices? Explain why such perceptions should or should not matter.
3. What do you think about when you reflect on the sentence, “Educational leadership is moral architecture”? What images come to mind? What questions do you have?

CASE STUDY

Case Study 1.1. A Case of Good Intentions?

Imagine the following scenario. Finances for education have become a problem at the state or provincial level and, more oppressing, in your district. You are the district superintendent. The school board has great confidence in you and is likely to endorse your recommendations for how to cut costs in order to give the school professional staff a raise and increase the number of teachers in order to reduce class size. Specifically, the board has asked you for a plan to downsize entitlements to pay for these additional costs.

Because you value the opinions of your colleagues and think their voices should be heard, you create a committee of long-term school personnel who understand the district and represent all district human resource categories. At the end of deliberations and several surveys, you and your committee present a plan to the school board. Your plan (which saves the district money) goes as follows: Employees will no longer be served by a single comprehensive health plan. Instead, employees will be offered a choice between a costly preferred provider organization (PPO) and several inexpensive health maintenance organizations (HMOs). The PPO has high deductibles and an across-the-board 60/40 split for out-of-network medical services. The HMOs are much less expensive, but access to medical care is limited. In addition, the wait time to see specialists is long. The board adopts your plan. Unexpectedly, organized protests emerge from groups throughout the system. Those with the lowest incomes are the most implacable, accusing you and your “gang of eight” of being self-serving and unfair. What should you do? Explain where and how you will start analyzing the matter and then address it.

Some questions may help you tease out issues in this situation: Are there some key words you need to consider? Will agreement on key words help focus attention on the right-mindedness of your proposal? Moreover, in the face of so much agitation by the lowest-paid employees, just how right-minded is the social justice of your proposal? Was it right to create a committee of only long-term employees (even though every occupational category was represented)? What are your moral obligations at this point? Did potentially dissatisfied school employees have a duty to voice their concerns about the “gang of eight” early in the very open and public process before controversy developed? Did you have a duty to ask for widespread input about the *process* of developing the proposal before the plan was developed? Some employees accuse you of self-interest. Is the nature of intentions ever relevant to figuring out the nature of another’s actions?

ACTIVITY

Activity 1.1

List five moral terms or phrases frequently used in educational discourse that often seem to lead to inflammatory disagreements. Go to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, the *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy*, *Black's Law Dictionary*, and a textbook in education that specifically defines each of the five terms.

Look also in the glossary of this book to see whether it contains the word or phrase. Write down the definitions you find in each of these authoritative sources. (Do not rely on ordinary dictionaries for this activity.) For each of the five sets of definitions, note whether the definitions agree closely with one another. Construe a detailed and explicit definition for each of the terms and describe the extent to which this carefully honed definition reflecting expert usage is captured in the inflammatory disagreements that you first had in mind. How pragmatically useful do you believe it is to insist that whenever possible stakeholders should define or clarify critical moral terms before launching into what could lead to contentious debate?

FURTHER READING

- Gordon, L. (2008). *An introduction to African philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hare, R. M. (1954). *The language of morals*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, B. (2008). *Radical hope: Ethics in the face of cultural devastation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Koble, M., & Garcia-Carpintero, M. (2008). *Relative truth*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Peterson, P., & Seligman, M. (2003). *Character strengths and virtues*. New York: Oxford.
- Rest, J. R. (1979). *Development in judging moral issues*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (2003). *Wisdom, intelligence, and creativity synthesized*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thorndike, E. L. (1940). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Macmillan.