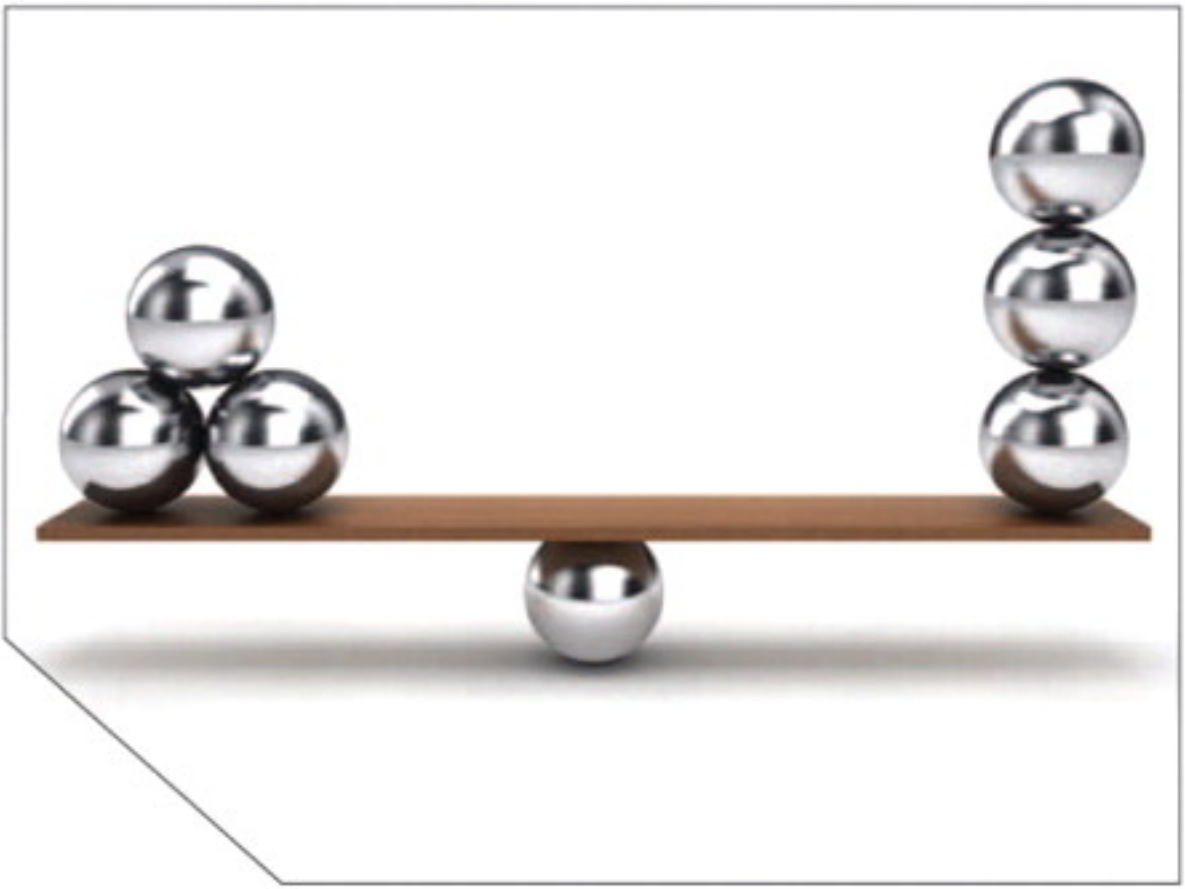
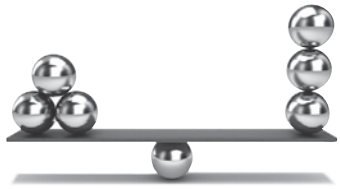
The Allyn & Bacon Educational Leadership Series

THE ETHICS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

SECOND EDITION



Ronald W. Rebore



The Ethics of Educational Leadership

Second Edition

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my wonderful grandchildren, who have enriched my life beyond comparison. In birth order they are Will Rebore, Luke Hamel, Joe Hamel, Henry Rebore, Tessa Hamel, and Max Hamel.

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Preface

No issue has captured the interest and imagination of the US public more than the subject of ethics, particularly in relation to leadership in the public sector. Ethical issues in education now concern more than the conduct of administrators, teachers, and staff members in relation to how they fulfill their responsibilities in schools and school districts; these issues extend now to their private lives. The public makes little distinction between the arenas in which educational leaders deal with ethical situations. People are concerned with the ethical fiber of superintendents, principals, and other administrators, regardless of the situations in which they perform an action. They are public figures, so they are expected to be role models for students, other educators, and the general public.

In treating the subject of ethics as it relates to educational leadership, the material and argumentation in this text are organized so that they support Standard Five of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders. This standard is concerned with the ethics of school leadership. The works of important philosophers provide the basis for the development of the ethical principles presented in this text. Equally important is the methodology that these philosophers used in arriving at ethical insights. Two philosophers from the classical period are presented, along with six from the modern period, and fifteen from the contemporary period. These philosophers were chosen because their ideas and concepts are relevant to the US ethos and to the practice of educational leadership.

The second edition of *The Ethics of Educational Leadership* should be of interest to three groups of people: professors of educational leadership who have the instructional responsibility of teaching courses in ethics, practicing central-office and school-building administrators who want to become more familiar with the field of ethics, and members of the general public who have an interest in how ethics relates to educational leadership.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

- Each chapter begins with a Focus Scenario, which sets the stage and explains how the forthcoming material in the chapter is relevant to the practice of educational leadership.
- The Selected Bibliography in each chapter has been updated.
- A new chapter discusses ethical-legal issues in educational leadership.

- A new chapter explains the human relations dimension of ethics.
- Three new chapters are devoted to the ethics of human communication.
- The excerpts from the various philosophers have been removed in order to focus more clearly on the application of the material to the practice of educational leadership.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The book is organized into four parts. Part One, "The Ethical Administrator," comprises Chapters 1 through 4 and is concerned with establishing the fundamental principles that are central to being an ethical person who is also an educational leader. Part Two, "The Ethical Practice of Educational Leadership," includes Chapters 4 through 7. These four chapters concentrate on the ethical practice of central-office and school-building administration. Part Two also contains a new chapter on the legal issues facing educational leaders. Part Three, "Equity in Ethical Educational Leadership," contains Chapters 8 and 9. These two chapters deal with gender equity and how other kinds of equity issues can be addressed in a pluralistic society. Part Three also discusses equity from the perspective of social justice and considers how public discourse can contribute to the development of educational administration policies. Part Four, "Human Communication and the Ethics of Educational Leadership," includes Chapters 10 through 13. Chapter 10 takes the reader through the theory and practice of human communication from an ethical perspective. Chapter 11 focuses on cultural communication, and Chapter 12 deals with nonverbal and verbal expressions. Chapter 13 ends the text with a treatment on the necessary human characteristics of empathy and genuineness.

Several pedagogical features help readers understand the nuances of the material. Each chapter enhances reader comprehension through the following sections: Discussion Questions and Problems, and Selected Bibliography. Chapters 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9 also include one or more case studies. These case studies clarify chapter content by presenting readers with real-world ethical dilemmas.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am especially grateful for the support that I received from my wife, Sandy, as well as my son, Ron, and daughter, Lisa, both of whom are teachers. I could not have completed this text without the encouragement and support of Meredith Fossel, my editor at Pearson. Her insight helped me focus the text on material that best serves the needs of the academic community and that the general public can also apply to everyday situations. Most helpful in producing the text was the developmental editor, Marla Sussman, who kindly helped me sort through the

revised and new material. The production process was facilitated by three professionals: Susan Hannahs, Munesh Kumar, and Marianne L'Abbate. Their collective and individual assistance and patience made the process *user friendly,* for which I am most grateful. Finally, my research assistant at Saint Louis University, Lina Harati, was very helpful in researching material and in assisting in the mechanics of the production process.

I also wish to thank the reviewers of the first edition for their comments and suggestions: Clay Baulch, Sul Ross State University; Clinton Collins, University of Kentucky; Edward Cox, University of South Carolina; David A Erlandson, Texas A&M University; Beverly Geltner, Eastern Michigan University; Robbe Lynn Henderson, California State University, Dominquez Hills; Larry W. Hughes, University of Houston; Marla Israel, Loyola University in Chicago; Stephen Jacobson, State University of New York at Buffalo; Spencer Maxcy, Louisiana State University; Ruthie Stevenson, Mississippi College; and Alan Vaughan, Cambridge College.

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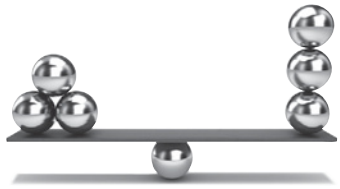

PART ONE

The Ethical Administrator

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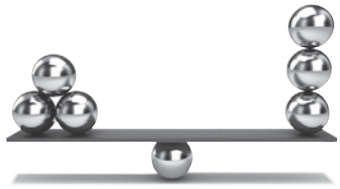

CHAPTER 1

The Purpose and Structure of the Book

FOCUS SCENARIO

You have just been hired as the senior high school principal in a school district with four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Parents and the school district's professional teacher association have complained to the superintendent of schools and the board of education that the human resources department has failed to hire the *best and the brightest* for teaching positions in the district. The community that is served by the school district is very affluent, and most of the parents are well educated, with at least a bachelor's degree; many of the parents have graduate or professional degrees.

Additional problems are present in the selection process. It has been the practice in the school district for the assistant superintendent for human resources to be the primary person making the decisions on who should be hired. He has often carried out this function without input from other administrators or teachers. Job descriptions seem to be outdated, and there have been no selection criteria except the professional opinion of the assistant superintendent.

Some administrative positions have been filled without public advertising. The application process is also flawed, and the application forms are outdated and appear to have no effect on the selection of employees.

Finally, two people had been hired for positions without adequate background checks; they were ultimately terminated because they had falsified information on their applications. One of the teachers had been terminated from another school district for drinking alcohol at school, and a bus driver had been convicted of child abuse. Members of the board of education, along with the

superintendent of schools, have asked you to chair a committee of parents and teachers that will be responsible for hiring a new associate principal. The superintendent expects you to develop an ethical, legal, and effective selection process. What are the ethical issues in this scenario and what should the principal do?

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK

The content of this book is rooted in Standard Five of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders. These standards are the product of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). They were drafted by professionals from twenty-four state education agencies and representatives from professional associations. The standards are compatible with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) curriculum guidelines for school administration. The model standards are being used by many states to assess candidates seeking licensure as school administrators.

ISLLC Standard Five states that school administrators should promote the success of all students by acting with integrity and fairness, and in an ethical manner. This standard is operationalized through three dimensions: knowledge, dispositions, and performances. The following discussion details various aspects of those dimensions.

Knowledge

The administrator should know the purpose of education and the role that leadership plays in society. He or she should know and understand various ethical perspectives, including the value of having a diverse school community. The school administrator should know the history and philosophy of education.

Dispositions

The administrator should believe in and support the ideal of the common good as particularly set forth in the Bill of Rights. He or she should believe that every student is entitled to a free and quality education. He or she should use ethical principles as guidelines in making decisions, and should accept the consequences for upholding those principles. The school administrator must demonstrate that his or her personal interests are subordinate to the welfare of the school community and should use the power of his or her office in the service of students and families. His or her leadership should support a caring school culture.

Performances

The administrator should examine his or her personal and professional values as set forth in professional codes of ethics, such as the American Association of School Administration. He or she should serve as a role model and inspire other members of the school community to higher levels of performance. The school administrator should accept full responsibility for school operations, and use his or her office to enhance school programs. He or she must treat all members of the school community in a dignified, equable, and confidential manner, and should expect the same behavior from other members. He or she should recognize the value of diversity. The administrator should allow public scrutiny of all policies and procedures. The school administrator should respect the legitimate authority of others, fulfill all legal contracts, and fairly apply all legal requirements to the school community.

THE CONTEXT OF ETHICS

Although Standard Five deals with the ethics of educational leadership, in itself it presents neither a theoretical foundation nor an implementation process. Those issues are left to interpretation in endeavors such as this book.

Ethics has a long and varied history. There is no way of knowing how humans wrestled with ethical issues before the advent of writing, but they must have confronted difficult situations that required reflection about the right way to act. The classical beginnings of ethical consideration are found in Plato's account of Socrates's trial. Socrates was accused of disturbing the social order because he went about Athens asking citizens their opinions concerning the ultimate meaning of human existence. At his trial, he accepted the death penalty and drank hemlock rather than give up his search for truth.

The study of ethics is an extremely complex enterprise because the subject matter is human conduct. In humans, conduct does not merely occur but emanates from the totality of the person. Children, adolescents, and some adults tend to react to situations rather than act according to certain principles. Everyone is prone at times to this reactive type of behavior. However, mature adults are expected to put thought and reflection behind their actions. Only in this way can human beings maintain a stable and equitable society.

Integral to reflection on the most desirable course of action are three fundamental questions that all philosophizing attempts to tackle in some way:

- **What does it mean to be a human being?**
- **How should human beings treat one another?**
- **How should the institutions of society be organized?**

It is true that these questions are not explicitly set forth in every deliberation, and they are often separately debated. However, what it means to be a human being is fundamental to human conduct. Implicit within a racial segregation policy is a distortion of what it means to be human. Some examples are found in US society, such as racial segregation; the poor treatment of women, people with disabilities, and older adults in general; and discrimination against older adults in the workplace.

This first question begs setting forth the most basic and important operational principle in ethics:

All human beings are innately free and have the right of self-determination simply because of their humanity. This principle can be mitigated only if a person's conduct impinges on the freedom and self-determination of others.

How human beings should treat one another is thus predicated on certain notions about humanity. Those notions are significantly influenced by the culture and traditions of each society. History has verified that societies are always changing, for either better or worse. Governmental and legal structures, economics, and scientific advances have also influenced notions about humanity. The issue formulized into the second question establishes the perspective that ethics is always about conduct toward other people. If a person is a hermit and avoids all contact with other human beings, he or she will never be unethical.

Concepts about humanity and human conduct affect the way people organize and deliver education, healthcare, and government and social services. When certain people are not valued in society, individual responsibility is lessened and institutional care is abrogated. Ethics as a discipline is much more complex than merely making decisions about the right or wrong way to act in a given situation.

As a philosophical enterprise, ethics is about rational inquiry for the purpose of acquiring knowledge that can be used in making decisions about present and future actions. As such, the study of ethics is a search for truth. The ultimate goal of ethics is normative: the establishment of standards of conduct.

Ethics is concerned with human conduct, as distinguished from mere human behavior. *Conduct* implies that there is a choice; people can choose one course of action or an alternative course of action. *Behavior* is a descriptive term referring to all human activities. People can behave in a rational or irrational manner. The underlying assumption is that conduct is rational because it is intentional.[1]

There are two traditional approaches to the study of ethics: the deontological approach and the teleological approach. The former approach is concerned with the rightness or wrongness of a given action. It is usually understood within the context of duty. What is the right thing to do? That is the million-dollar question, of course, and there is no scarcity of opinions in almost every situation about what that right thing is. That there are many interpretations of what is the right thing to do will be clear from the philosophical treatments included in this book. Some opinions are rooted in utilitarianism, which holds that the consequences of an action should be the standard for what makes something right. Others indicate that a person's motivation or the aspects of the situation itself are the determinants that make an action right or wrong.

The teleological approach considers the goals of action in terms of goodness and badness. The major concern of this approach is what is meant by *goodness*. The seeking of pleasure is set forth by some philosophers as the ultimate goodness, whereas others value intrinsic qualities. A number of interpretations to this fundamental question are presented in the philosophical works referred to in this book.

As suggested by the three fundamental questions posed earlier, this book takes an approach that is both deontological and teleological. It is difficult in practice to utilize just one approach and neglect the other. Rather, both considerations are presented in this book and thus a nexus is created in which both approaches are intermingled.

Another distinction usually made in the study of ethics is the distinction between normative ethics and meta-ethics. Normative ethics is the study of human conduct, whereas meta-ethics is the study of conditions that affect normative ethics. Such controversies as the relationship between free will and determinism, between authority and intuition, between deductive and inductive reasoning, and between skepticism and cognitivism are the subject matter of meta-ethics. This text treats both normative and meta-ethical issues.[2]

Ethics is part of a much larger tradition. It is an academic discipline taught in colleges and universities along with other philosophical disciplines. It is difficult to categorize an academic discipline, but it will be helpful to situate the study of ethics in relation to the common understanding of many people. Figure 1.1 should be of

Philosophical Disciplines

Aesthetics: Study of the meaning of beauty and aesthetic judgments

Cosmology: Study of nature, the universe, and issues such as time and motion

Epistemology: Study of the meaning of truth and knowledge

Ethics: Study of human conduct

History of philosophy: Study of the context in which the various trends in philosophical thought have developed

Human nature: Study of the human phenomenon

Logic: Study of the processes of human understanding

Metaphysics: Study of reality in its ultimate principles

Theodicy: Study of what can be known about a supreme being from reason

Philosophy of Academic Subjects

Mathematics: Study of how and why reality is quantified

Science: Study of the nature of scientific theory and the scientific method

Social science: Study of the principles involved in human engagement and in the creation of human institutions

FIGURE 1.1
Traditional Categories of Philosophical Disciplines

some help in understanding the differences between ethics and other philosophical disciplines, although it is not the definitive explanation of how ethics fits into the philosophical enterprise. Keep in mind that the distinctions made in this figure are approximations and that different elements in the various disciplines overlap. The titles and designations for the various disciplines are not universal.

THE RELEVANCE OF ETHICS TO EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

It is important for educational leaders to incorporate ethical analysis as an ongoing way of thinking, for three reasons. First, the issues that ethics explores are important not only because they provide a framework for decision making, but also because they require reflection on values that are at the core of a given human enterprise. It is possible to be a thoughtful and reflective administrator without an understanding of, for example, genetics, but it is not possible to be a thoughtful and reflective administrator without an understanding of ethics. The use of student assessment as an indication of how effectively a school is meeting its instructional objectives raises significant questions about the purpose of education itself and the validity of using student assessment to evaluate a program. Equally important is the issue that is raised in relation to teacher performance if student test scores fall below a given standard.

Second, an ethical approach addresses issues through a disciplined way of thinking. The success factor that seems to be so important in contemporary public education, exemplified by mandates in many states for the publication of student test scores, also raises significant questions about students who are not achieving. For example, many nonachieving students are nonconformists in their behavior, which can lead to bullying by their classmates. Making the connection between one set of circumstances and others is a common thread that runs through all ethical analysis.

Finally, ethical analysis offers educational administrators a unique kind of response to leadership issues that is different from the response that might be expected from one who takes a management or even an instructional point of view. This statement does not mean that it is unimportant to analyze issues from a management or instructional perspective; rather, an ethical analysis can enhance the strategies developed through these other approaches. These other approaches might answer the questions of *how* and *what*, but the ethical approach answers the question of *why*. One example of such a question is, Why are certain students disenfranchised?

The Framework and Methodology

Because educational leaders practice within the larger community, the perspectives from the writings of philosophers who have exerted a significant influence

on the larger community are discussed in this book. What these philosophers have developed as philosophical principles are applied to the practice of educational leadership. More important, however, is the method they employed to arrive at their ethical insights. Each philosopher's method of analysis provides long-term benefits to the student of educational leadership ethics. The nuance of situations will change, but the analytical argumentation endures. The methodology employed by the various philosophers can be difficult to discern because they usually have not set forth their methodology in pedagogical terminology. Uncovering this methodology, then, is part of the task at hand.

The ethical positions set forth in this book come from two philosophers of the classical period, six of the modern period, and fifteen of the contemporary period, as follows:

Classical Period
- Marcus Aurelius Antoninus
- Aristotle

Modern Period
- Jeremy Bentham
- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
- Thomas Hobbes
- Immanuel Kant
- John Stuart Mill
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Contemporary Period
- Susan Bordo
- Simone de Beauvoir
- Teilhard de Chardin
- John Dewey
- Erik Erikson
- Michel Foucault
- Viktor Frankl
- Jürgen Habermas
- Sandra Harding
- Carl Jung
- Lawrence Kohlberg
- Jean-François Lyotard
- John Rawls
- Jean-Paul Sartre
- Edith Stein

Human thought draws on the contributions of past generations and is conditioned by the problems, issues, and trends of the milieu within which it is developed. Philosophers from past generations have provided current philosophers with maps, which contemporary philosophers use to develop their own analysis about the times in which they live. The insights of philosophers from past and