The Principle of Best Interests of Students in the Principalship

Keith Walker
University of Saskatchewan

Benjamin Kutsyuruba
Queen's University

Nicola Bishop-Yong
Westmount Community School, Saskatoon

The best-interests principle is a widely used ethical, legal, and social basis for making policy and decisions involving children. This article provides an overview of the state of the conversation about the best interests of students and a recent study of the concept as it was understood and used by school principals. The purpose of this research was to examine the best-interests principle through an investigation of theory, practice, and professional praxis and thus to identify the common use and understanding of the best-interests principle in Canadian in-school administrative practice. We discuss the moral nature of educational leadership through a multidimensional ethical framework that comprises ethics of justice, care, critique, community, and profession. Research methodology consisted of a structured survey that included both closed attitudinal and open-ended questions. The findings revealed a compelling image of the best-interests principle in educational administrative practice, emphasized the significance of the multi-ethical paradigms in decision-making, and positioned in-school administrators vis à vis best interests on the matrix at the intersection of two dichotomies: a focus of interest (individual–student or the communal—students) and a methodology of deciding—(subjective—case by case or objective—criteria-based).

The *best-interests* principle is a widely used ethical, legal, and social construct for mediating making policy and decisions involving children (Kopelman, 1997). As such, the applications of the principle abound in legal, medical, and educational contexts where determinations are made on behalf of children. The construct represents *the* guiding criterion for legal disputes about custody and access (Department of Justice Canada, 2004). In addition, this notion is a common reference point used in quasi-medical and medical contexts (Bailey, 2006; Kopelman). In educational contexts, the best-interests principle has received increased attention in the mitigation of ethical and legal decision-making (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2006; Frick, 2006; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001a; Stefkovich & Begley, 2007; Stefkovich & O'Brien, 2004; Tirri, 1999; Tirri & Husu, 2002; Walker, 1995, 1998a).

The *best interests of students* has become a common shibboleth of "enormous potential to direct and to measure goodness, rightness, and appropriateness of policy and practice" (Walker, 1995, p. 5) for educators, policymakers, and legal adjudicators. The phrase is a first source of demarcation for educators who will often evoke the phrase to show their colors. As such, it is the common proxy for saying, "All that we do and say in education ought to be in the stewardship of our compelling moral purpose to support the healthy growth and development of children and youth." Often the phrase is used as a shorthand expression of the taken-for-granted *summum bonum* (the greatest good) that must be preserved in the outworking of all or any educational policy decisions; as in "We must not transgress the best interests of the students with this new policy." Also, of course, in the reading of almost any legal case dealing with the interests of the child or the competing interests of adults where children are involved, one witnesses the use of the construct of best interests as a hinge (cardinal) principle against which the warrants of conflicting perspectives must be measured before resolving decisions may be made. Much best-interests discourse appears inside and around educational organizations (i.e., staff rooms, classrooms, schools, and school systems), in the work of education policy agents, and in societal institutions (governments and judicial bodies). However, although the concept is present in the parlance of educational communities, we argue that there is a lack of meaningful attention and exegesis in proportion to its evocative use.

Although work has been done to theorize best interests as a guiding principle in ethical leadership and decision-making in education, only a small number of empirical studies have been conducted, and qualitative research on the perceptions of this principle by educational leaders has been inconclusive (Frick, 2006; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001a, 2001b; Stefkovich, 2006; Walker, 1995). Despite attempts to provide a rigorous definition, the research reveals that *best interests* is used broadly and interpreted in multiple ways. Consequently, the "potent phrase" (Walker, 1998a), often used as justification and rationalization for administrative decisions, requires critical examination. Of course, difficult and "wicked" problems do not rely on rational, traditional, or bureaucratic policy and decision-making processes for resolution, but we would still advocate a view that the use of *in the best interests of the student(s)* by school principals requires mapping and charting. It is imperative for in-school administrators to grapple with the complexities of applying the best-interests principle, both ethical and jurisprudential. Our effort here is not to simplify the work of school leaders, but to begin to unpack and make sense of a concept that may be espoused without appreciation of either the substantive construct or the context complexities. For as Walker (1995) wrote, "the more committed and competent we are in finding the ethical courage to do what is clearly in the best interests of

children, the better we will serve the children of our schools" (p. 8). Studies on the best-interests principle represent a significant opportunity to examine various dimensions of ethical leadership. Although *the child, children, the student,* or *the students* should not be essentialized or homogenized, a critical perspective of these central constructs is beyond the scope of this article.

Here we provide an overview of the state of the conversation about the *best interests of students* and report on a recent study that focused on the concept as it was understood and used by school principals. The purpose of this research was to examine the best-interests principle through an investigation of theory, practice, and professional praxis, and thus to identify the common use and understandings of the best-interests principle in Canadian in-school administrative practice. In the following sections, we begin the discussion of the moral nature of educational leadership through a multidimensional ethical framework comprising ethics of justice, care, critique, community, and profession, together with jurisprudential and ethical decision-making perspectives. We then describe and discuss the perceptions of Canadian principals regarding the notion of *best interests of students* and ethical dilemmas in administrative decision-making. The article concludes with an interpretative matrix to describe principals' perspectives and the challenges for ongoing research related to this persistently important concept.

Ethical Frameworks and Educational Leaders' Pursuit of Students' Best Interests

Although principalship has historically been framed within the notions of *administration* or *management,* only recently has leadership overtaken them as the main descriptor for what is entailed in running and proving public service organizations (Bush, 2008; Hoyle & Wallace, 2005; Selznick, 1984). Leadership is often linked with change, vision, values, or purpose, whereas management and administration are related to maintenance, implementation, or technical issues (Bush, 1998; Cuban, 1998). However, both dimensions of organizational activity are present and important in the role of school administrators (Bush, 2011). As Hallinger (2003) argued, leadership perspective on the role of the principal does not diminish the principal's managerial role. Moreover, Starratt (2004) cautioned about presenting and interpreting issues that school leaders face primarily as technical, rationalizable problems resolvable by technical, rational solutions, and not surfacing the human, civic, and moral challenges nested in many of these problems. Similarly, Sergiovanni (1992) implies that technical expertise without a moral compass is inadequate for the task, as is a moral compass without technical expertise.

The assertion that educational leadership is a fundamentally moral endeavor has been developed over many years by numerous scholars (Begley, 1999; Furman, 2004; Greenfield, 2004; Hodgkinson, 1991; Johansson, 2004;

Langlois, 2008; Sernak, 1998; Starratt, 1994). A number of theoretical foundations for understanding ethical leadership have been developed by Noddings (1984), Duignan and Bhindi (1997), Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1988), Kimbrough (1985), Sergiovanni, and Starratt (1991, 2004). Writing on the philosophy of administration 20 years ago, Hodgkinson encapsulated the "then modern state" of educational leadership when he termed it "especially difficult, especially challenging and especially moral" and said that it was in essence, "philosophy-in-action" (pp. 63, 115) We assert that this state remains as Hodgkinson described it: administration is a moral art that points to our need for wisdom, and "leadership is always a function of value and of commitment to organizational value or purpose (p. 27). It is beyond the scope of this article to explicate and exegete the axiological, epistemological, and ontological presuppositions for this wide-ranging collection of educational scholars. This has been done elsewhere (Evers & Lakomski, 1990; Hodgkinson, 1978). Nor do we delve into specific schools or doctrines of ethics as has been done in earlier works (Donlevy & Walker, 2011; Walker, 1991; Walker & Donlevy, 2006, 2009).

Campbell (1999) observed that central to much of the ethical leadership literature is that "educational leaders must develop and articulate a much greater awareness of the ethical significance of their actions and decisions." (p. 152). As Starratt (1991) suggested, ultimately, "educational leaders have a moral responsibility to be proactive about creating an ethical environment for the conduct of education" (p. 187). In his review of comparative systems of ethics, Rebore (2001) evoked three justifications for the relevance of ethics in educational leadership: (a) ethics not only provide a framework for decision-making, but also require reflection on values; (b) ethics support disciplined ways of thinking; and (c) ethical analysis offers a unique response to the demands of leadership. Whereas typical leadership approaches, instructional or managerial, might answer the questions of *how* and *what*, a well-developed sense and competence in ethical leadership can help answer the question of *why* (Rebore).

In their examination of the daily practices of school administrators, researchers (Langlois, 2004; Langlois & Starratt, 2001) discovered that certain situations were increasingly challenging for them in terms of how they justified their decisions and in the difficulty that they experienced in understanding the ethical issues in their practice. Similarly, Beckner (2004) posited that to many administrators, philosophy and ethics seem rather far removed from the everyday challenges of educational leadership and management, and they tend to rely more on experience and personal judgment. However, the influence dimension of leadership requires the leaders to have an effect on the lives of those being led, so making a change in other people carries with it an enormous ethical burden and responsibility (Northouse, 2013). Moreover, as Stefkovich (2006) noted,

> Ethics should guide school leaders' decision making, [so] that there can be common ground even in multicultural, pluralistic society, and that, rather than impose their own values on students and teachers, school leaders should strive to reach a higher moral ground in making decisions. (p. 4)

Applied ethics help educational leadership to move from bureaucratic systems and control toward empowering teachers and participation in making decisions (Rucinski & Bauch, 2006). Ethical considerations enlarge and enrich the language and frames of deliberation for school leaders with respect to their professional and moral purpose, obligations, and agency on behalf of students and other stakeholders. In this article, we position the *best interests of students* as an important criterion for ethical deliberation and determinations. A delimitation of this study is that its context and the selection of literature cited draws primarily on English-speaking, Commonwealth, and United States contexts. Our interest is to provoke enhanced dialogical competence, particularly with respect to ethical issues and decisions in schools. Given these assertions, what part do the interests of students or the best interests of children have in the conduct of education and the ethical adjudication work of school principals?

Best Interests of Students

The concept of *the best interests of the students* is most usefully understood in the context of our vision of what might constitute an ethical framework for those working with children and youth in the educational sector. Scholars have produced and elaborated multidimensional ethical frameworks (Begley, 2006; Furman, 2004; Katz, Noddings, & Strike, 1999; Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001b; Starratt, 1994; Stefkovich, 2006) that envisage and conceptualize the effect of diverse ethical perspectives on educational leaders. Shapiro and Hassinger call these perspectives *paradigms*.

Developed in response to the complex ethical challenges facing contemporary society, the approaches of ethic of justice, ethic of care, ethic of critique (Starratt, 1994), ethic of profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001b), and ethic of community (Furman, 2004) may be drawn together by principals to create an integrated framework for ethical practice. As Starratt noted, the interpenetration of each of these ethical and interpretative themes is necessary for the fully developed moral person, fully developed human society, and we would add, the agentic leader. We contend that the ethics described below should not be set in opposition to one another, but viewed as collectively comprising an ethics system with a web of concepts and applications.

Ethic of Justice

Fairness or equal treatment is the core value underlying an ethic of justice. It focuses on rights and law, as "society must establish rules that are fair to all and then live by those rules" (Noddings, 1999, p. 8). Starratt (1994) conceived the ethic of justice as requiring that we "govern ourselves by observing justice" and henceforth "treat each other according to some standard of justice" (p. 49), which is uniformly applied to all relationships. For Starratt, this type of ethic emanates from two schools of thought: one, represented by Thomas Hobbes and John Rawls, advocated for the individual as the primary human reality, independent of social relationships and logically prior to society who engages in a social contract with the community; and the second, represented to various degrees by Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Dewey, placed the society as the prior reality in which the individual develops. Although these philosophers came from diverse philosophical traditions and in some cases diametrically opposed perspectives, they viewed ethics as grounded in practice in the community. In this regard, the person living in society learns the lessons of morality through experience; and participation in the life of the community teaches the individual how to think of his or her own behavior in terms of the larger common good of the community. Starratt (2003) contended that an ethic of justice, especially when focused on the issues of governance in a school setting, can encompass both understandings: "justice understood as individual choice to act justly and justice understood as the community's choice to direct or govern its actions justly" (p. 144).

Denig and Quinn (2001) state that this ethic perceives ethical decision-making as rational, logical, systemic, and enhanced by universal principles. As such, Shapiro and Hassinger (2007) suggest that this ethic leads in-school administrators to questions such as: Is there a law, right, or policy that would be appropriate for resolving a particular ethical dilemma? Why is this law, right, or policy the correct one for this particular case? Does this law or policy serve our deliberations or adjudication of the best interests of the students? How should the law, right, or policy be implemented such that students' best interests are served? In summary, the ethic of justice focuses on rights, law, and policies and concepts such as fairness, equality, and individual freedom.

Ethic of Care

The ethic and concept of care are often described as a *relation* based on mutual agreement, loyalty, or alignment. Starratt (1994) denoted that an *ethic of care* requires "fidelity to persons" and absolute regard and love. It is concerned less with fairness and more with caring for individuals as unique persons. This ethic is rooted in the work of Gilligan's (1982) analysis of Kohlberg's moral development and subsequent writers like Noddings (1984,

2005) and Beck (1994). Its relational nature is reflected in Beck's contention that "the communal relationships between people mean that the welfare of each is inextricably related to the welfare of others ... such that caring for others is, in fact, caring for oneself" (p. 20). Rucinski and Bauch (2006) called for in-school administrators to be grounded in the ethic of care and in belief in the sacredness of human relationships and the good of human beings in the school organization.

Noddings (2005) and Sergiovanni (1992) have challenged the status of the ethic of justice as dominant among ethical paradigms in education and law and have called for more attention to concepts such as loyalty, trust, and empowerment. However, whereas theoretical opposition to the dominance of the ethic of justice advances theoretical understandings and provides space for the use of the ethic of care, academics routinely call for the two ethics to be balanced (Sernak, 1998; Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Stefkovich, 2006). Stefkovich identified three factors intrinsic to this concept:

1. Understanding self both as separate from and in relation to community,
2. Building a just and democratic pluralistic school community; and
3. Experiencing personal freedom in order to fully function in a community. (p. 11)

The relationship between the ethic of care and best interests is profound in the light of Rucinski and Bauch's (2006) call for educational leaders to be grounded in the ethic of care and in belief in the sacredness of human relationships and the good of human beings in the school organization. Similarly, Shapiro and Hassinger (2007) suggested that this ethic asks in-school administrators to consider the consequences of their decisions and actions by taking into account questions such as: Who will benefit from what I decide? Who will be hurt by my actions? What are the long-term effects of a decision I make today? And if I am helped by someone now, what should I do in the future about giving back to this individual or to society in general? In summary, the ethic of care is rooted in relationship-building, trust in, and compassion for others.

Ethic of Critique

The *ethic of critique* deals with questions of social justice and human dignity and the morality of social and political resistance (Starratt, 2003). It is aimed at awakening our attention to the inequities found in schools and in society and represents a challenge to the status quo in order to give a voice to the marginalized (Rucinski & Bauch, 2006; Stefkovich, 2006). This ethic recognizes that no social arrangement is neutral. Every social arrangement, no matter how it presents itself, is artificial (Starratt, 1994). Arrangements are usually structured to benefit some segments of society at the expense of others, and hence the ethical challenge is to make these social arrangements more responsive to the human and social rights of all citizens, especially

the marginalized and "the least among us." The challenge for educational leaders is to expose and confront the tough questions of social class, race, gender, and so forth. This ethic requires educators to deal with the hard questions in areas of difference including: Who makes the laws, rules, or policies? Who benefits from these laws, rules, or policies? Who has the power? Who are the silenced voices (Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007)? And who says *this* or *that* is an action, accommodation, affordance, or appropriation in the best interests of students? Applying the ethic of critique may require confronting some entrenched assumptions about the assumed legitimacy of the status quo and the risk of standing up to superiors who support, even by their own passivity, the status quo (Starratt, 2010).

The ethic of critique has been elaborated by critical theorists and activists, as well as critical pedagogy theorists who analyze social class and inequities (Apple, 1988, 2001, 2003; Foucault, 1983; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1994; Purpel, 2004; Shapiro, 2006). In this respect, the ethic of critique provides a "discourse in expanding basic human rights" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001b, p. 14) and the basis for moving from discourse to action. Such a critique and posture leads to the development of options related to important concepts such as oppression, power, culture, privilege, authority, voice, language empowerment, and in particular, social justice. In summary, the ethic of critique is typified by a critical inquiry of differences.

Ethic of Community

Furman (2004) suggested that increased attention be given in the ethics literature to collaborative work and communal processes necessary to build an ethical school and to achieve the moral purpose of schooling in the 21st century. Furthermore, Furman lamented that ethical frames often do little to pull our thinking beyond the mindset so entrenched in our Western society of the individual as leader and moral agent. Defined as "the moral responsibility to engage in communal processes" (p. 215), an *ethic of community* envisages administrators, teachers, school staff members, students, parents, and other community members engaging in communal processes as they pursue the moral purposes of schooling. Thus an ethic of community privileges the communal over the individual as moral agent. The shift of the locus of moral agency to the community as a whole is represented as preeminent in relation to the other ethical paradigms. According to Furman, the ethic of community captures the centrality of this need for communal processes as the ethics of justice, critique, and care (Starratt, 1994) and the profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001b) do not. We might ask what *we* think are the alternative courses of action that collectively provide for this cohort of students, in this community, given our values and plural interests. Viewed through the lens of the ethic of community, best interests are community-minded and pluralistic in nature.

Ethic of Profession

A number of scholars (Beck, 1994; Begley, 1999; Normore, 2004; Shapiro, 2006; Starratt, 2010; Stefkovich, 2006; Willower, 1999) have advocated that school administrators have professional preparation in ethics, and especially in ethical decision-making. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), even taken together, the ethics of justice, critique, and care do not provide an adequate picture of the factors that must be taken into consideration as leaders strive to make ethical decisions in the context of educational settings. Shapiro and Stefkovich aptly surmised, "not all those who write about the importance of the study of ethics in educational administration discuss the needs of children; however, this focus on students is clearly consistent with the backbone of our profession" (p. 23). They argued that if there were a moral imperative for educational administration, it would be to serve the best interests of the student and that this ideal would lie at the heart of a professional paradigm for in-school administrators. Starratt (2004, 2010) argues that an educational leader's professional ethical responsibility is to promote the good of the practice of the profession, namely, to promote the good of learning, the good of general education. Shapiro and Hassinger (2007) identify that the lens of the ethic of the profession to resolve an ethical dilemma raises questions such as, What is in the best interests of the student? What are the personal and professional codes of an educational leader? What professional organizations' codes of ethics should be considered in order to best serve the interests of these students? What does the local community think about this issue? And what is the appropriate way for a professional to act in this particular situation, based on the standards of practice for the profession?

The ethic of profession takes into account not only the standards of the profession, but also community standards, the personal and professional codes of an educational leader, and the professional codes of a number of educational organizations (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001a). The integration of personal and professional codes may lead to a clash of codes that the school leader will need to negotiate. The best interests of the student is a moral ideal that can be relied on to calm the internal struggle between personal morality, what is determined as right and good according to the individual, and what an organization and/or the profession expects, values, and delineates as right and good practice (Frick, 2006). Factors that play in the development of professional codes may include, but not be limited to, the inclusion of considerations of community standards, including both the professional community and the community in which the leader works. Stefkovich and Shapiro (2003) advocate that dialoguing about and in the communities of work to help address the *silencing* is especially important to critical theorists. Hence, *community* is embedded in the model and is not interpreted as a stand-alone ethic as in Furman's (2004) model. However

whether community is viewed as a separate ethic or part of a larger schema, as positive or negative, its influence on ethical decision-making in schools may be profound and should not be underestimated (Stefkovich, 2006). Stefkovich summarized that the ethic of profession asks educational leaders to "to create a dynamic model that places 'the best interests of the student' as central" (p. 14) and as such is a core moral imperative for educational leaders.

Promoting a Student's Best Interests: Ethical and Jurisprudential Considerations

Of course, ethical decision-making is more easily espoused and intended than it is enacted and implemented. It is our view that an awareness or consciousness of and language for articulating ethical challenges with respect to the best interests of students may contribute to better decisions for students. As with earlier explication, numerous attempts in recent writing on ethical leadership have been made to examine the relationship between the best-interests principle and decision-making. However, as Clarke et al. (2010) argued, the *best interests of the child* test has been criticized for its indeterminacy; simply put, there is no single definition of what is or is not in the best interests of a child. In the absence of any clear definition of best interests, a guide to determine factors to be considered in making ethical decisions was developed by Stefkovich (2006) and later elaborated on by Stefkovich and Begley (2007). This guide for educational leaders in making decisions in the student's best interest consists of three broadly conceived jurisprudential constructs (by this we mean the understandings from "regime" law-making and judicial interpretations in case law): *rights*, *responsibility*, and *respect*. These concepts incorporate Walker's (1998a) claim to ground educational decisions and policies in ethics and jurisprudence. Relying on context, this conceptualization takes into account students' voices and begins with the assumption that school officials will engage in active inquiry and self-reflection in order to make decisions that are truly in the best interests of the student rather than self-serving or merely expedient (Stefkovich & Begley).

Rights are essential to determining a student's best interests and include: rights granted to all human beings as articulated by philosophers past and present; and universal rights recognized by the United Nations, and particularly those rights acknowledged under its *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The use of the best-interests construct and approach to decision-making is evident in judicial cases across the Commonwealth nations, in Europe, and in states associated with the United Nations. In addition, this approach recognizes the existence of certain fundamental rights as universal despite the fact that some countries seem not to have fully recognized them in practice (Bitensky, 1992). As a result, caution is warranted when using the word *universal* to differentiate ideals from realities and to acknowledge the difference between jurisprudential principle and alignment of intention to actual

behavior and decision-making in educational practice and experience.

Although individual rights are fundamental, they are not unfettered (Stefkovich, 2006). Accordingly, we advocate an approach that honors the philosophical tradition of accompanying rights with *responsibility*. Indeed, theorists past and present from many diverse perspectives consider rights to be incomplete if viewed without consideration of accompanying responsibilities. Although not based directly on utilitarian ethics, John Stuart Mill's words on responsibility are viewed as significant: "Everyone who receives the protection of society owes a return for the benefit, and the fact that living in society renders it indispensable that each should be bound to observe a certain line of conduct toward the rest" (1978, cited in Stefkovich, 2006, p. 23). Noteworthy is the differentiation between two major orientations of the term *responsibility* (Jonsen, 1968): the *ex post* responsibility of attribution (i.e., holding responsibility for the commission of an act), and the *ex ante* responsibility of appropriation (i.e., antecedent responsibility on the event or activity). Influenced by Locke, Rousseau, and Kant, contemporary scholars have connected ethical decision-making with the latter orientation to responsibility that one has in making moral choices. This pattern of thinking about responsibility is concerned with a more general sense of expectations that in a given role, one will perform as a morally responsible agent (Starratt, 2004). Inclusion of responsibility in the conceptualization of the best interests of students is supported by Starratt (2005), Gilligan (1982), and Noddings (2002), each of whom recognized the concepts of authentic self and empathy.

The concept of *respect* has been applied to ethics across many disciplines and arises in each of the five ethics that we delineate in this article. There is no agreement as to a central definition, and philosophers often conceptualize respect through the Golden Rule. Most often the respect-of-persons doctrine is equated with the work of Kant, who proffered respect for persons as central to moral theory. In the light of an array of definitions of respect, Stefkovich (2006) offered Kant's placement of respect in moral theory as a foundation to its inclusion in her model, and as such it means to treat others never as a means to ends, but as ends. The best-interests model conceptualizes respect as a cornerstone of ethical behavior that requires positive, mutual interactions between individuals. Stefkovich envisaged respect as including equity, equality, tolerance, self-respect, acceptance, and "a commitment to finding common ground in an increasingly multicultural, pluralistic society" (p. 26).

The ethics and jurisprudential literature impart a continued concern with the nature of the principle and the process of determining best interests, resulting in continual reflection and critique. Stefkovich's (2006) best-interests model sought to provide a jurisprudentially and ethically defensible expression of what is in a student's best interests and to assist educational leaders

in understanding that self-reflection, open-mindedness, and sensitivity are necessary qualities and that making ethically sound decisions profoundly influences others' lives (Frick, 2006). Consequently, the "myriad of considerations" that are imposed in resolutions of best interests impose a great deal of pressure on decision-makers to use their ethical discretion and dialogical competence (Walker, 1998a, p. 293). Educators are best informed as to the extent and depth of best interests through considerations of ethical and jurisprudential interpretations.

Educational leaders increasingly deal with questions about who holds the overriding authority in decisions about particular children. Walker (1998a) claimed that it may be wise to exchange the question "What is best for these children?" with the question "Who should decide what is best for these children?" Walker (1998b) articulated this modern conundrum when he wrote, "Sometimes parents, educational professionals, special interests groups, state representatives of justice, education and social services all vie for legal position and pre-eminence" (p. 321). He contended that educational leaders were well positioned to help negotiate among various stakeholders and indeed state that it is the core responsibility of educational leaders to work with their collaborators to mediate competing interests and for "collaborative processes to bring grassroots expertise to bear on decisions that make a difference for children" (p. 320). Hodgkinson (1991) rather famously argued that educational administration finds itself in a rather special-case position among administrative professions:

> Its leaders find themselves in what might be called an arena of ethical excitement—often politicized but always humane, always intimately connected to the evolution of society, sometimes invested with the Type I values of the culture. Besides, education is both an institution in the sociological sense and a vested interest in the political science sense. It embodies a heritage of value, on the one hand, and is a massive industry on the other, in which social, economic, and political forces are locked together in a complex equilibrium of power. (p. 164)

He concluded that all these factors call for extraordinary value sensitivity on the part of educational leaders.

Beyond the extant literature on the best interests of students, just how do the principals as leaders understand and make use in practice of the concept of *the best interests of students*? This was the question that we sought to explore in the study described below.

Methodology

Our purpose for the research was to examine the best-interests principle through an investigation of theory, practice, and professional praxis and

thus to identify the common use and understanding of the best-interests principle in Canadian in-school administrative practice. This study is a subset of an extensive examination of the Canadian school principals' perceptions of their moral agency, ethical problems, challenges, pressures, and influences at work and grounds for their ethical decision-making and recovering of trust in schools. This article selectively deals with the participants' perceptions of the principle of *best interests of children/students* as it applied to their principalship. Five research questions guided the study: How do in-school administrators define and use best interests? In what circumstances do in-school administrators use best interests? What factors influence their decisions of best interest? How do in-school administrators make determinations of best interests? and What is the extent of in-school administrators' conceptualization of best interests?

The target population for this study included Canadian in-school administrators. We asked a stratified sample of 780 in-school administrators to participate in the survey. The participants were identified by an analysis of multiple educational databases at the national, provincial, and divisional levels. Of the total number of surveys distributed (N=780), 17% or 132 in-school administrators chose to participate in the study. Although the sample represented all Canadian provinces and territories, we note that three of the 13 jurisdictions had a disproportionately higher response rate. The participants were all practicing in-school administrators throughout Canada.

As a primary data-collection tool for this study, we administered a survey in both mail-out and on-line forms. The *best interests* questionnaire, consisting of 14 closed- and open-ended questions, was embedded in a larger study survey on moral agency and trust that fielded five questionnaires: two online versions and three mailed versions. Embedded into the online versions and two of the three mailed versions, the survey was distributed to a stratified sample of in-school administrators across Canada. We developed items for the instrument based on recommendations from principals and questions raised in the literature. To check for content validity, we field-tested the survey with a group of principals and a panel of experts reviewed it before distribution.

In this study, the quantitative and qualitative data were not prioritized. Instead, we collected quantitative and qualitative data, weighted them equally, and analyzed them in a complementary manner. The closed-question data consisted of attitude-scaled questions that ascertained the principals' use and application of the best-interests concept. We recorded the responses to attitude questions on a five-point Likert scale, which asked participants to check their level of agreement with various statements. We sought further exploration of use and application of the best-interests principle through open-ended questions.

We subjected the quantitative data from the 11 closed attitudinal ques-

tions to descriptive statistical analysis to identify central categories. We provide simple percentages of responses with means and standard deviations, but note the uneven cell sizes and response rate due to variance in completed mail-out and on-line versions of the survey. We subjected the qualitative data from the open-ended questions to thematic analysis. We grouped the results of the analyses of qualitative data and presented them according to emergent themes. Responses to open-ended questions were coded according to the dominant recurring themes in the responses (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Codes were then combined into categories, and categories into patterns or concepts (Lichtman, 2010). Analysis of open-ended responses provided rich descriptive data for the study.

The demographic data for the study included six categories: age, gender, province, years of professional experience, years of experience as a princi-

Table 1
Demographics of Respondents (*n*=132)

Age Range	%	*Province*	%
31-40 years	12	Alberta	20
41-50 years	41	Saskatchewan	28
51-60 years	40	Ontario	18
61 years or more	6	Others	33
No Response	1	No Response	1
Gender	%	*Years as Educator*	%
Male	55	10 years or less	2
Female	44	11 to 20 years	28
No Response	2	21 to 30 years	52
		31 years or more	16
		No Response	2
Years as Administration	%	*Formal Ethics Training*	%
5 years or less	27	Yes	53
6-10 years	39	No	25
11-15 years	13	Unsure	22
16 years or more	19		
No response	2		

pal, and formal ethical training (See Table 1).

The participating principals fitted into four age-range categories; most (81%) belonged to the 41-60 age group. Gender representation showed a slight prevalence of male principals. Two thirds of the respondents had 21 or more years as a professional educator, and most had held administrative positions for up to 10 years.

More than three quarters of the participants held master's and a few had doctoral degrees. More than half reported some formal training in ethics, which consisted of university-level courses in ethics or ethical leadership as well as board or school professional development activities (or a combination of both).

Research Findings: Principals' Perceptions of the Best-Interests Principle

The findings were grouped into the following categories: definitions and significance of the best-interests principle; familiarity, use, and efficacy of the best-interests principle; preference for resolving best interests individually or communally; and ethical paradigm preferences in resolving best-interests dilemmas.

Definition and Description of the Best-Interests Concept

Given the view in the literature that educational leaders frequently justify their actions as in the best interests of children, we were interested in their definitions and perceptions of the significance of the best-interests principle. In this section we discuss data from the following open-ended questions: How do you prefer to define "in the best interests of the student(s)"? How would you explain "in the best interests of the student(s)" to a new staff member? We were not expecting different responses to these questions, but rather chose to ask the descriptive and definitional question in two ways.

Analyses of the data revealed that the notion of *the best interests of the student(s)* was broadly conceptualized and defined in three major categories of thought: *best interests as core good, best interests as good pedagogy,* and *best interests as comprehensive good.* Most respondents identified with a definition of best interests as a *core good.* The best interests of students were regularly described as the *core* or *center* of decision-making and the *heart* of educators' work. One respondent noted, "I would ask staff members to always remember *why* we teach—to educate students. They are our priority." It was evident that the respondents mitigated decisions of best interests by placing the students at the *heart* of decision-making, or as one respondent articulated, "We need to see to their needs ahead of our own." Prevalently, respondents defined best interests as the *why* of their work and *why they entered teaching.* Respondents identified an ethical duty and responsibility

toward providing students with the best possible care and attention including decisions on their behalf. This sense of service responsibility prevailed that: "Students are our client and we have a responsibility to our students" and that an agreed central purpose of education, best interests, should be "to serve students." Finally, respondents defined best interests as the *best outcome* or as a positive *benefit*. Decision-making in this manner was depicted as those decisions that led to students' development, advancement, and growth. One comment encapsulates this point: "What the phrase [best interest] means to me is that decisions are made from the perspective of providing the best possible outcome for that child."

When describing best interests as *good pedagogy*, principals used concepts and phrases like *learning, achievement, learning environment*, and *pedagogy*. The best-interests principle was described as a means to an end. In the view of some respondents, the central purpose or paramount reason for education was students' learning as indicated in the following responses: "Our central purpose is student learning. I prefer to define 'best interests' in the context of good pedagogy," and "I would explain it by saying that the paramount reason we are in business is to advance student learning. If the decision advances student learning, then it is in the best interest of the student." Decisions of best interests were identified by the respondents as those that "support[ed] student learning [and] achievement in a safe and caring learning environment" or enabled students to "flourish in an environment that is safe and productive to learning." In addition, the respondents defined decisions of best interests as "interests that [led] to growth through learning opportunities" and higher achievement."

Finally, respondents defined best interests as *a comprehensive good, wherein* decision processes acknowledge the complexity of educating students and recognize their multi-faceted lives. Respondents indicated that the "best interests of the students has to embrace academic, social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual criteria [and as such] the entire student has to be safeguarded." This way of thinking extended interests beyond narrow interpretations. Whereas others might have depicted student learning or good pedagogy as the center, these respondents envisaged a larger holistic context for the definition of best interests such that decisions were best considered when "all the needs, dimensions and variables of student life" are accounted for.

As might have been expected, in defining best interests, the respondents identified three types of influences that regulated, affected, and in some cases mitigated decisions in the best interests of student(s): *stakeholders' influence, contextual considerations*, and *relational aspects*. Respondents' definitions of best interests were mitigated by a sense that all of those involved in a decision, the stakeholders, should be considered. Furthermore, decisions of best interest needed to consider the multiple stakeholders' needs, present and future. At the same time, it was indicated that sometimes it

might be necessary to override the influence of some stakeholders in order not to jeopardize the best interests of the student(s). Respondents identified a range of *contextual considerations* based on the availability and breadth of information about the situation. For example, one participant noted that the information one has regarding a student's situation must come into play for each decision made: "*In the best interest of the student* is a phrase used by people who believe that their decisions and actions can affect the lives of the student(s) in their care ... Decisions are based on information: the better the information the better the decision and how it will affect people." Finally, respondents indicated that decisions of best interest needed to consider *relational aspects* together with the importance and significance of attending to relationships among students and staff. One respondent wrote that best-interests decisions were best made in the context of getting to know student(s) on a "personal level" and to "understand who they are as people." The implication was that determinations of best interests are predicated on fostering honest, respectful, and open relationships. Respondents also noted that open and positive communication and dialogue were considered essential to the actualization of best interests. This raises the question of individual and collective perspectives on the best interests of the students, which we address below.

Familiarity, General Use, and Perceived Efficacy

Participants were asked to describe the familiarity, general use, and perceived efficacy of the *in the best interests of the student(s)* principle. Their responses are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2
Familiarity, Use, and Efficacy of the Best-Interests Principle

Items	*% Indicating "Agree" and "Strongly Agree"/ % Indicating "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree"*	*Mean*	*SD*
I am familiar with the principle *in the best interests of the students.*	99/1	4.73	0.479
I routinely use the criteria of *the best interests of the student(s)* in my administrative decision-making.	99/1	4.64	0.515
The principle of *in the best interests of the student(s)* is an effective means of resolving ethical challenges in administrative decision-making.	86/1	4.31	0.753

Most of the respondents indicated either strong agreement or agreement with the familiarity of the best-interests principle and claimed to use the concept routinely in their administrative decision-making. Eighty-six percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the best-interests principle was an efficacious means of resolving ethical challenges in administrative decision-making. The efficacy of the best-interests principle registered a higher percentage of neutral responses (13%) than that of familiarity and use.

The use of the best-interests principle, further explored in the open-ended questions, revealed five broad circumstances where in-school administrators used best interests as a means of decision-making: *discipline matters, pedagogical considerations, human resources, special education,* and *safety.* Most frequently, respondents identified *discipline* as a time when the notion of best interests was used to justify a decision. The discipline cases provided by the respondents ranged from alternate options to suspension and expulsion, safety, and the general enforcement of school rules and expectations. Examples of the cases discussed and elaborated on included giving a student coaching and extra chances based on his or her background and recent behavior, shortening suspensions given individual circumstances even if in conflict with policy, contravening the practice of contacting parents if family dynamics did not support contact, providing in-school suspensions when home life was unsafe or when overriding the wishes of teachers. However, even more compelling than the particulars of the discipline cases was the emergence of three themes discussed above: the need to recognize the individual student, the influence of stakeholders, and the need to attend to matters such as relationship-building and dialogue.

Pedagogical instances like learning, programming, or scheduling were also frequently mentioned as deliberative times when the concept of best interests was used to justify a decision. Some of the pedagogical cases discussed and elaborated on included learning adaptations for individual needs' student placement, retention, and advancement; and programming suited to learning and students. Instances of using the best interests to justify a decision in areas of *human resources and staffing* showed that the principle had become the mitigating factor in resolving matters such as possible staffing reassignments, hiring or termination of teaching and support staff, and staff disciplinary or supervisory matters. As one respondent wrote, "I had to decide whether I could sacrifice 2.5 teacher associate positions so I could keep a full-time teacher. My decision was made upon the best interests of the students." In terms of *special education,* respondents identified the philosophy and nature of inclusion and the practical means of integration as most common incidences when a best-interests justification was used. Least frequent was the mention of the best-interests principle in potential *unsafe* or supervisory practices where the resolution of the matter was mired in conflict between or among staff, parents, students, or community expectations of safety.

Table 3
Best-Interests Principle: Collective or Individual Preference

Items	*% Indicating "Agree" and "Strongly Agree"/ % Indicating "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree"*	*Mean*	*SD*
The optimal test of a difficult situation is: Does it support *the best interests of all students?*	83/8	4.11	0.887
The optimal test of a difficult situation is: Does it support *the best interests of the individual student?*	64/19	3.75	1.11

Preference to Resolving Best-Interests Dilemmas: Individual or Collective

In-school administrators were asked to indicate a preference for resolving matters of best interests as either upholding the individual (*student*) or the communal (*students*) interests. Their responses are outlined in Table 3.

Most participating school administrators (83%) strongly agreed that the optimal test of a difficult ethical situation was whether the decision supported the best interests of all students. On the other hand, a more moderate percentage of principals (64%) agreed that the optimal test of a difficult situation was whether the decision supported the best interests of the individual student.

Participants' verbatim responses added more clarity on the collective or individual use of the best-interests principle as an optimal test. Despite the widespread articulation that most students' interests should take precedence, many respondents acknowledged the recognition of individual students' needs. Of course, this course of inquiry was highly dependent on situations imagined or experienced by the respondents. However, most of the respondents identified the need for a balanced approach in weighing the interests of the collective student body and each individual student: "We always need to do what is in the best interest of individual students; however, we must be aware of the message decisions send for the collective learning community we serve." With this comes the difficulty of being multifocused or "keeping in mind the student's welfare (physical, intellectual, emotional), including the balancing of individual and common needs when making decisions." Instrumental in this test was the relation of the best-interests-of-students principle with the notions of fairness and equality, or as one principal phrased it, "Fair is not equal; fair is giving everyone what they need, but yet what is best for each child."

Table 4
Ethical Paradigm Preferences

Items	*% Indicating "Agree" and "Strongly Agree"/ % Indicating "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree"*	*Mean*	*SD*
Dilemmas concerning the best interests of the student(s) should be resolved using policy and the law (Ethic of Justice).	52/30	3.19	0.981
Dilemmas concerning the best interests of the student(s) should be resolved by considering the care and well being of all involved (Ethic of Care).	96/4	4.41	0.629
Dilemmas concerning the best interests of student(s) should be resolved by avoiding the marginalization of those directly or indirectly involved (Ethic of Critique).	78/6	4.03	0.897
Dilemmas concerning the best interests of student(s) should be resolved by considering the expectations and responsibilities of the teaching profession (Ethic of Profession).	72/15	3.65	0.824
Dilemmas concerning the best interests of student(s) should be resolved by considering the interests of the community (Ethic of Community).	44/22	3.24	1.01

Ethical Paradigm Preference in Resolving Best-Interests Dilemmas

In order to assess how educational leaders make determinations in the best interest of the student(s) and what factors influenced those decisions, respondents were asked to identify their attitude to five ethical paradigms influencing their decisions: *justice, care, critique, profession,* and *community.* Participating principals' responses to survey questions and the corresponding ethical paradigms are shown in Table 4.

Analysis of attitudinal questions revealed that respondents rated the ethic of care highly among the ethical paradigms. The ethic of critique and

professional code of ethics received a similar rating behind the ethic of care, and the ethics of justice and community received lower rankings among the ethical paradigms. Respondents were not given extended definitions of these ethical paradigms, but rather responded to nominal, descriptive statements. As such, we offer these findings only as possible signals of respondents' dispositions toward each ethical paradigm.

The qualitative data provided somewhat different results, whereas frequency of mention and significance assigned by respondents to each ethic confirmed a ranked preference ranging from the ethic of care, ethic of critique, ethic of profession, ethic of community, and ethic of justice. Analysis of these data revealed that the respondents had not envisaged best interests in discrete terms, but rather in a complex manner consisting of multiple or mixed ethical paradigms. The high incidences of the ethic of care among the qualitative data were comparable to the quantitative data results. Respondents repeatedly articulated an emphasis on relationships, dialogue, and integrity of the student or stakeholder involved. In the words of one principal, "I need students to trust that I will put them first. I need the teachers to trust I will support them. I need parents to know I will do everything possible to provide the best for their children."

Similarly, ways of thinking consistent with the ethic of justice and critique also prevailed in the open-ended responses. Verbatim statements elicited from the participants revealed that they made considerations of equity and fairness, as well as giving attention to voice and social justice, in their deliberations and perceptions of best interest. Minimal references were made to specific codes and responsibilities of in-school administrators within specific provincial and district regions that guided best interests. Rather, analysis suggested a widespread recognition or universal acceptance of general, philosophical standards of the profession and of educators in general, that is, the purpose and heart of best interests were the student and students.

Whereas analysis of the quantitative data indicated that respondents ranked considerations of the ethic of community low among other ethical considerations, analysis of the qualitative data revealed a higher and more significant role for this ethic. A prevalent theme among respondents' data was attention to communal manners of thinking and behaving consistent with ethic of community, communication, collaboration, dialogue, and stakeholders' involvement. In regard to the ethic of community, we found that "best interest of the school community" and "accountability to the school community" were common descriptors. Community served as a catalyst for one principal's decisions: "In my community, there is always talk about decisions being made. Often the blame is placed upon me. I however feel confident knowing I have made a decision in the best interest of the students."

Further to the above, principals were asked to tell about specific examples of the practical application of the notion of best interests of students. Several of the participating administrators described working with certain initiatives in the best interests of students.

- We started a program for autistic students and decided to embrace an inclusive school model in delivering that program. This was in the best interest of all students and so we moved to support and promote that model. It was hard because we were asking staff to teach and organize in a way that was different from the norm.
- I have kept students from going to the adjacent lot owned and equipped by the Community's recreation association during school time as there is not adequate supervision for these students while they are over there. Our school board does not provide supervision off property—it's not a risk I am willing to take.
- During staffing I have assigned teaching duties to a teacher because he was the best qualified rather than assign the course to a teacher who did not have the qualifications but wanted the course.
- Students were out at recess and one student got upset with another and punched the student, then removed himself from the situation on his own accord. I decided not to follow through on a suspension for the student as he had made a conscious decision to stop and get out of the situation. Teacher wanted me to suspend, but I felt that the student would learn more by working the situation through and working with the student he had trouble with.
- Students were assigned to work as a small group on a cooperative activity; one student really wanted to work alone and had shown us that it was the best way for him to stay on task and produce his best work. He was allowed to work alone and the other two students worked as a pair.

Through analysis of these findings, we have glimpsed into and worked to grasp the array of situations entailed in the work of principals who indirectly and directly wonder what might be in the best interests of the students under their care. How might we understand the interpretations and use that principals seem to make of the notion of the best interests of students?

Discussion: Best-Interests Model and the Educational Leader

As observed in the findings, the participating Canadian in-school administrators conceived the principle *in best interests of the student(s)* in ways somewhat consistent with the professional ethic and best interests models in the literature. Yet their conception of best interests moved beyond the current models and literature to include best interests as moral imperative. They reaffirmed the multidimensional ethical framework (ethics of justice, care, critique, and profession) and placed emphasis on an emerging role of the ethic of community.

Moral Imperative: Best Interests of Student(s)

This study affirmed the importance of moral and ethical considerations in educational administration. The findings support Foster's (1986) observation that each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of human life and, therefore, administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas. Furthermore, as Stefkovich (2006) contends, "it is incumbent on school leaders to make ethical decisions that truly reflect the needs of the students and not their own self-interests ... it requires a great deal of self-reflection, open-mindedness, and an understanding that making ethically sound decisions profoundly influences others' lives" (p. 21). These authors, with Hodgkinson (1991), suggest that there is a moral art to educational leadership that differentiates or even distinguishes the role from more mechanical, rational-technical, and managerial roles. The stewardship of vulnerable children and the entrustment of parents, state, and community obligate educational leaders to high standards of care and moral deliberation.

Participants affirmed the "contested nature of educational problem-solving" (Begley & Zaretsky, 2004, p. 653) and revealed a dichotomy of conceiving best interests. Whereas defining best interests as the ethical foundation for educational decision-making was evident, the data also suggest that interests were simultaneously narrowly and broadly defined such as in pedagogical and comprehensive-good definitions.

Respondents conveyed the effect of the clash of interests on educational decision-making by identifying the possible limitations. They concurred that although identifying best interests was a complicated and difficult task, adherence to the principle was still just and right despite those challenges. As Vojak (2003) notes, even if one acknowledges that best interests are not always discernible, it should not keep one from striving toward best interests as an ideal. In this respect the data indicate that the best-interests principle plays a significant role in directing the reasoning, judgment, and deliberation of in-school administrators.

This conception of the best-interests principle echoes the prevalent argument in the literature that the principle of best interests is an *ideal*. The respondents in this study consistently identified in their definitions that the principle of best interests was the guiding purpose of educational administration and as such the core good of sound decision-making. In addition, social and moral duties that underpin the jurisprudential construct of responsibility were also evident in the data. As Kopelman (1997) noted, "best interests standard makes little sense unless it is understood not as an absolute duty, but as a *prima facie* duty or an ideal that should guide choices" (p. 277). As an ideal construct, the best interests of students may be seen as a lighthouse giving us perspective and helping us steer or navigate our best course on behalf of students. Research on how principals respond when confronted with ethical dilemmas suggests that the best interests of

students figure prominently as a meta-organizer and ultimate influence on their decision-making (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007).

Multidimensional Ethical Framework

The current literature continues to emphasize the significance of the ethics of justice, care, critique, and profession for real-life ethical dilemmas in leadership practices of in-school administrators (Langlois & Lapointe, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). The first three ethics have been frequently discussed in the field of educational leadership. Starratt (2003) argued that each ethic needs the strong connections embedded in the other; the ethic of justice needs profound commitment to the dignity of the individual person and the profound social analysis of the ethic of critique; the ethic of care needs the larger attention to social order and fairness; and the ethic of critique requires an ethic of care if it is to avoid the cynical and depressing ruminations of the habitual malcontent.

This study reinforced the interconnectedness of the three ethics in the ethical decision-making of in-school administrators. Incidences of thinking consistent with the three ethics were prevalent in the data. In many cases, the responses of the in-school administrators exhibited the complexity and layering of ethical interconnectedness. In-school administrators tended to balance the students' right to learning (ethic of justice), the comprehensive needs of the student (ethic of care), students' self-interests (ethic of justice/care), and the effect on current/future student relationships (ethic of critique). This finding may be attributed to the years of experience, as most of the respondents in this study had been in administrative positions for six or more years, and almost a quarter had 11 or more years of experience. The interconnectedness of ethics allows for fuller expression of ethical leadership and is linked to the number of years of experience gained as a principal; experience is a key factor in the development of a professional ethic that is reflexive rather than procedural (Langlois & Lapointe, 2007).

Recently, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) reinforced the existence of the fourth ethic, that of profession, in a stand-alone form. Their concept of professional ethics as an ethical paradigm includes ethical principles and codes of ethics embodied in the ethic of justice, as well as professional judgment and decision-making. They recognize professional ethics as a dynamic process requiring administrators to develop their own personal and professional codes. Shapiro and Stefkovich believe that educational leaders should be given the opportunity to take the time to develop their own *personal* codes of ethic based on life stories and critical incidents, and create their *professional* codes based on the experiences and expectations of their working lives as well as a consideration of their personal codes. This sense of self as an administrator and its connection to best interests was evident in our study. As one respondent wrote, best interests are best defined and achieved

by "putting one's own biases, prejudices and preconceptions aside and dealing with the student(s) as an individual—a student-centered approach where the dignity of the individual must remain intact—where the adult must act in a reasonable way and with common sense." However, minimal references were made to specific professional codes and responsibilities in various provincial and district jurisdictions that guided best interests; instead, it was the universal standards of the profession—that students are the purpose and heart of best interests—that guided principals' work.

This study emphasized the significance of the ethic of community in a conception of best interests. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001b, 2011) and Stefkovich (2006) place the ethic of community in the larger context of the multidimensional ethical framework and their proposed professional ethic, whereas Furman (2004) advocates for a wholly distinct and separate conception. Furman's approach differs from those of scholars who view community as an entity and/or see it in relation to the individual and thus join it with another paradigm (Beck, 1994; Purpel, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). In Furman's depiction of the ethic of community, emphasis is placed on the communal and methodological modes of thinking including those of communication, collaboration, dialogue, and stakeholders' involvement.

The significance of stakeholders' involvement was denoted by the respondents as one of the three major influences on decisions of best interests, whereas the importance of communication, dialogue, and relationship-building was evident among all three broad categories of thought defining best interests. In addition, the notion of a community of educators with a common vision pointed to the collective nature of best interests. The data echo the African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child and thus views the child not as a product of individual effort, but of collective interaction and intervention. However, Noddings (2002) issued a warning that communities can act like bloated individuals. To offset this possibility of bloatedness or groupthink, Noddings suggested that individuals acquire the ability to accept the ideas and commitments of the community while resisting community pressures for conformity or orthodoxy. To accomplish this vision, one must have self-knowledge, but also a knowledge of others that is gained through ongoing communication (Stefkovich, 2006).

However, despite the occurrence of communication, collaboration, dialogue, and stakeholders' involvement in the data, incidences of expressions of the ethic of community occurred in relation to other ethical positions and not in isolation. That is, the ethic of community was not conceived discretely, but in unison with other ethical paradigms of justice, care, critique, and profession. The inclusion of the ethic of community among the other ethics in the data extends the interconnectedness and complexity of ethical decision-making (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 2003; Stefkovich, 2006).

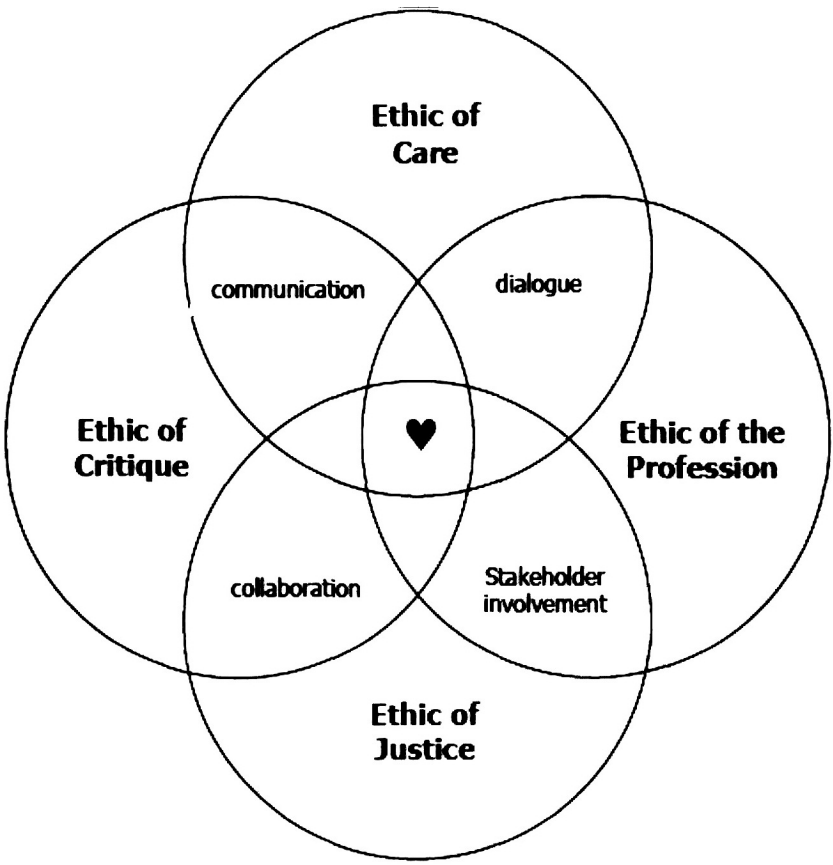

Figure 1. Best-interest model.

As shown in Figure 1, the best-interests principle was viewed by the principals as the center or heart of their work (Bishop-Yong, 2010). The interconnectedness of the four ethics of care, justice, critique, and profession included communal practices of communication, dialogue, collaboration, and stakeholders' involvement to bear on decisions of best interests. However, this model must be interpreted in conjunction with the discussion of individual versus collective and subjective versus objective interpretations of best interests.

Best-Interests Dichotomies

Conceptualizing the ethical interpretations of the best-interests principle is premised on the relational nature of interests. As such, two central dichotomies emerge in interpretations of the best-interests principle in the ethical literature, and it forms a matrix of best interests: *individual* versus *collective*

and *subjective* versus *objective* (see Figure 2). Other ways of expressing this dichotomy would be *"ad hoc* versus *criteria-based"* decisions or *"act* versus *rule"* decisions. Walker (1998b) suggested that "where the subjective and objective elaborations, sensitivities, interpretations, and applications meet" (p. 323), we will see the best interest of children and child. Data analysis revealed a central position of in-school administrators vis à vis best interests on the matrix, where in the light of legislation, public policy, and ethics, they have to choose an interest to uphold—the individual (*student*) or the communal (*students*) and a methodology of deciding—subjective (*case by case*) or objective (*criteria based*).

The matrix represents the arguments of several theorists on best interests such as Smith (1998), Capron (1982), Walker (1998a) and Shapiro and Stefkovich (2002b) along the intersecting dichotomies. Smith, like the judiciary, was concerned with the *child* in his critique of best interests per the educational leader. According to Smith, there may be "no singular right, good, or virtuous pattern for all children," yet there may be a singularly right response for the single child and what fundamentally determines the measure of help given the child is the moral agency of "people [who] are in better positions relative to particular children than others" (p. 309). Similarly, Shapiro and Stefkovich and Stefkovich (2006) centered their research on assisting those in "better positions"—in-school administrators—to make ethical decisions in the best interests of the *student*. The underlying assumption is that if the individual is treated with fairness, justice, and caring, then

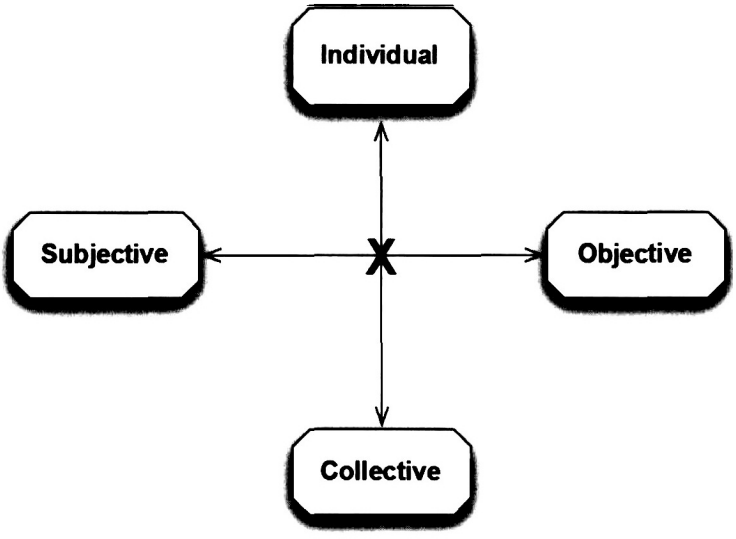

Figure 2. Matrix of best interests of students.

a strong message is sent to all students that they will be afforded justice and caring and that they should treat others similarly (Stefkovich). However, unlike Smith's assessment, Shapiro and Stefkovich appeared to hold the position of whose interests, individual or collective, in a balance. Dworkin (1982) identified that the struggle for balancing the interests of the individual and the communal lies in terms of not only value conflicts, but also time conflicts. Writing about political representatives, he suggests that they are asked to balance the interests and desires of some against those of others and may have to consider the interests of current generations against the needs or interests of future generations. Once again, the nature of interests is relational.

In regard to individualistic notions of the best interest of a child or student, Smith (1998) advocated a singularly subjective standard. Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2001b, 2005) models conversely advance a blended approach by proposing a subjective, case-by-case analysis and an objective assessment of multidimensional ethical paradigms and jurisprudential concepts. Capron (1982) identified the subjective and objective tension inherent in instances of child-custody disputes and identified that the judiciary and related doctrine "seems to rest on an 'objective' standard of what a reasonable person would find appropriate for the ordinary child" (p. 126). In application, Capron noted that this standard may amount to a highly subjective decision, but only subjective in the sense that it reflects the values and beliefs of the judiciary, not those of its individual wards. This values tension of the individual is reflected in Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2001b) and Frick's (2006) work on the conflicts of personal and professional codes of ethics and their effect on mediating decisions for the best interest of the student. Walker (1998b) echoes the tension between subjective and objective determinations of best interest in his writings on best interests. Although he acknowledges the limited influence of subjective perspectives on decisions of best interests, he insists on reserving the capacity for "community, parents and professional magistrates to adjudicate these perspectives by independent and external criteria when conflicts arise." Walker not only surmises the complexity and relational nature of objectivity and collectivism, but also hints at the process that influences position on the matrix.

The views of the participating principals were premised on a balanced resolution of best interests using both a subjective and an objective consideration. Among the *best interests* conceptualizations—the definitions, use, influence factors, and how best-interests decisions were made—both objective and subjective considerations were evident in respondents' thinking. Despite the occurrence of objective criteria such as pedagogical and comprehensive considerations (academic, social, behavioral, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual) in defining best interests, subjective considerations such as stakeholders' influence, contextual considerations, and relational aspects influenced the position of this study on the matrix.

Despite a stronger preference in the quantitative data to consider the needs of all students rather than the individual student, analysis of the qualitative data revealed a slight preference for considering the needs of the individual. Respondents identified a range of contextual considerations including situational factors, weighing the interests of the greater good and the individual student, as well as recognizing a balance therein. In matters of discipline and special education, analysis revealed respondents' strong preference for recognizing individual needs. In matters of human resources, analysis revealed a strong preference for considering the needs of all students or communal needs. In pedagogical and safety matters, analysis revealed an equitable consideration of individual and communal needs. In addition, the respondents' emphasis on respect, relationships, voice, and dialogue in resolving matters of best interest articulated a tension between exclusively defining best interests in either individual or collective terms. Balancing the notion of the ethical person (Starratt, 1994) with conceptions of community (Furman, 2004) means balancing self-interests with the interests of students and other stakeholders and implies reconciling the purposes of personal and professional codes and of education itself. The principals' responses reported here exemplify this balancing effort.

The results of the study support Gathercoal's (1991) metaphor that "having your cake and eating it too requires the ingredients of law, education, and ethics, mixed and stirred judiciously with firsthand experience and baked at a public school setting until it rises to the occasion" (p. 122). The complexity of the context in which outcomes and decisions of best interests of children are determined by the principals and leaders was articulated as the need to balance the two intersecting dichotomies on the matrix. These findings lend hope to the creation of more effective educative communities among in-school administrators (Walker, 1995).

Concluding Remarks

In the changing and challenging operational environment in which schools now operate, "it is not surprising that educational leaders are often faced with ethical dilemmas in the course of their daily work as they endeavor to make complex decisions in the best interests of both staff and students" (Cranston et al., 2006, p. 106). The best interests models such as *ethic of profession* (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001) and a *model for promoting a student's best interests* (Stefkovich, 2006) responded to their desire to make sense of a much used, yet amorphous concept. Stefkovich (2006) identified the pressing need for a codified approach to best interests as follows.

> Understanding that adults possess a great deal of power in determining students' best interests and realizing how easy it is to ignore the voices of those who literally have the most to lose, it is incumbent

> upon school leaders to make ethical decisions that truly reflect the needs of students and not their own adult self-interest. (p. 21)

School principals as formal school leaders are positioned to function as mediators and animators of many competing and complementary values and interests on behalf of various educational constituents (Walker, 1998a). In their work, the best-interests principle becomes a widely used ethical, legal, and social basis for making policy and decisions involving children (Kopelman, 1997; Walker, 1995). In this article, we aspire to provoke educators to engage in further conversations about the best interests of students and provide an overview of a recent study of the concept as it is understood and used by Canadian school principals. We discuss the moral nature of educational leadership through a multidimensional ethical framework that comprises ethics of justice, care, critique, community, and profession. The research reported is intended to examine the best-interests principle as commonly used and understood in Canadian in-school administrative practice. This approach results in the presentation of a pluralistic and quasi-consensual articulation of the best interests of students. We suggest that each of the ethical paradigms presented here will yield unique and valuable perspectives beyond those offered by our respondents.

Foremost in this study is the affirmation of the constructs of the professional ethic and best-interests models such as the significance of the multi-ethical paradigms and jurisprudential constructs of responsibility, respect, and rights in educational administrative decision-making. The findings suggest that the respondents have not envisaged best interests in discrete terms, but rather in a complex manner consisting of multiple or mixed ethical paradigms. Based on their perspectives, a model of professional ethics and best interests depicts a balanced use of the ethical paradigms of care, critique, and justice with the intertwined aspects of the ethic of community, namely, communication, dialogue, collaboration, and stakeholders' involvement. The results of this study place in-school administrators vis à vis best interests in the center of the matrix on the intersection between the dichotomies of *individual* and *communal* and *subjective* and *objective*.

In conclusion, we posit that continued research into the best practices in ethical decision-making pedagogy and the thoughtful and thorough examination of ideations that help administrators mediate difficult choices in the best interests of students would serve to augment the findings of this study. Instrumental in such attempts would be an extensive examination to understand the societal factors and the educational context in which Canadian in-school administrators make decisions in the best interests of children, which could be then compared with contexts in other countries. As education is a provincial responsibility in Canada and systems of education in provinces and territories differ and are unique in some regard, we suggest that further inquiry to uncover the effect of educational policies and

cultural aspects of schooling in various jurisdictions is necessary. Furthermore, we emphasize the need for continued research in the area of multiple ethical paradigms, ethical leadership, and ethical decision-making" among in-school administrators and encourage school leaders to apply the principle of the best interests of the child by bringing into consideration the commonly taken-for-granted jurisprudential and ethical meanings and interpretations that are perhaps over-embedded and underconsidered in the cliché-oriented notion of *the best interests of the child.*

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

References

Apple, M.W. (1988). *Teachers and texts: A political economy of class and gender relations in education.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Apple, M.W. (2001). *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality.* New York: Routledge Falmer.

Apple, M.W. (2003). *The State and the Politics of Knowledge.* New York: Routledge Falmer.

Bailey, S. (2006). Decision making in acute care: A practical framework supporting the 'best interests' principle. *Nursing Ethics, 13,* 284-291.

Beck, L.G. (1994). *Reclaiming educational administration as a caring profession.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Beckner, W. (2004). *Ethics for educational leaders.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Begley, P.T. (2006). Self-knowledge, capacity and sensitivity: Prerequisites to authentic leadership by school principals. *Journal of Educational Administration, 44,* 570-589.

Begley, P.T. (Ed.). (1999). *Values and educational leadership.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Begley, P.T., & Zaretsky, L. (2004). Democratic school leadership in Canada's public school systems: Professional value and social ethic. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42,* 640-655.

Bishop-Yong, N. (2010). *The best interests principle in administrative practice: Canadian in-school administrators' perceptions, definitions and use of the best interests principle.* Unpublished master's thesis. University of Saskatchewan.

Bitensky, S. (1992). Theoretical foundations for a fight to education under the U.S. Constitution: A beginning to the end of the national education crisis. *Northwestern University Law Review 86,* 550-642.

Bush, T. (1998). The National Professional Qualification for Headship: The key to effective school leadership? *School Leadership and Management, 18,* 321-334.

Bush, T. (2008). From management to leadership: Semantic or meaningful change? *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership, 36,* 271-288.

Bush, T. (2011). *Theories of educational leadership and management* (4th ed.). London: Sage.

Campbell, E. (1999). Ethical school leadership: Problems of an elusive role. In P. Begley (Ed.), *Values and educational leadership* (pp. 151-163). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Capron, A.M. (1982). The competence of children as self-deciders in biomedical interventions. In W. Gaylin & R. Macklin (Eds.), *Who speaks for the child: The problems of proxy consent* (pp. 57-114). New York: Plenum Press.

Clarke, P.T., Heavin, H., & Walker, K.D. (2010). Racist parenting and the best interests of the child: A legal and ethical analysis. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 109,* 1-47.

Cranston, N., Ehrich, L. C., & Kimber, M. (2006). Ethical dilemmas: The "bread and butter" of educational leaders' lives. *Journal of Educational Administration, 44*, 106-121.

Cuban, L. (1998). *The managerial imperative and the practice of leadership in schools.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Denig, S.J., & Quinn, T. (2001). Ethical dilemmas for school administrators. *The High School Journal, 84*(4), 43-50.

Department of Justice Canada. (2004). *Fact sheet Section 43 of the Criminal Code Corporal Punishment: The Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. The Attorney General of Canada.* Available: http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/fs/2004/doc_31114.html

Donlevy, K., & Walker, K. (2011). *Working through ethics in education and leadership.* Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publications.

Duignan, P., & Bhindi, N. (1997). Authenticity in leadership: an emerging perspective. *Journal of Educational Administration, 35*, 195-209.

Dworkin, G. (1982). Consent, representation and proxy consent. In W. Gaylin & R. Macklin (Eds.), *Who speaks for the child: The problems of proxy consent* (pp. 191-208). New York: Plenum Press.

Evers, C., & Lakomski, G. (1990). *Knowing educational administration: Contemporary methodological controversies in educational administration research.* Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.

Foster, W. (1986). *Paradigms and promises: New approaches to educational administration.* Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Foucault, M. (1983). On the genealogy of ethics: an overview of work in progress. In H. L. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (2nd ed., pp. 229-252). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M.B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum.

Frick, W. (2006). *An empirical investigation of secondary principals' perspectives on "the best interests of the students" as a viable professional ethic for educational leadership.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University.

Furman, G.C. (2004). The ethic of community. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42*, 215-235.

Gathercoal, F. (1991). *Judicious discipline* (2nd ed.). Davis, CA: Caddo Gap Press.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Giroux, H.A. (1994). Educational leadership and school administrators: Rethinking the meaning of democratic public culture. In T. Mulkeen, N.H. Cambron-McCabe & B. Anderson (Eds.), *Democratic leadership: The changing context of administrative preparation* (pp. 31-47). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Greenfield, W. (2004). Moral leadership in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42*, 174-196.

Hallinger, P. (2003). *Reshaping the landscape of school leadership: A global perspective.* Lisse, Netherlands: Swets and Zeitlinger.

Hodgkinson, C. (1978). *Towards a philosophy of administration.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hodgkinson, C. (1991). *Educational Leadership: the moral art.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Hoyle, E., & Wallace, M. (2005). *Educational leadership: Ambiguity, professionals, and managerialism.* London: Sage.

Johansson, O. (2004). A democratic, learning and communicative leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42*, 697-707.

Jonsen, A. (1968). *Responsibility in modern religious ethics.* Washington, DC: Corpus Books.

Katz, M.S., Noddings, N., & Strike, K. (Eds.). (1999). *Justice and caring: The search for common ground in education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Kimbrough, R.B. (1985). *Current study for educational leader.* Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Kopelman, L.M. (1997). The best-interests standard as a threshold, ideal, and standard of reasonableness. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy, 22*, 271-289.

Langlois, L. (2004). Responding ethically: Complex decision-making by school district

superintendents. *International Studies in Educational Administration and Management, 32*(2), 78-93.

Langlois, L. (2008). *Anatomie d'un leadership éthique*. Quebec, QC: Université Laval.

Langlois, L., & Lapointe, C. (2007). Ethical leadership in Canadian school organizations: Tensions and possibilities. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 35*, 247-260. doi: DOI: 10.1177/1741143207075391

Langlois, L., & Starratt, R. J. (2001). *Identification of superintendent and school commissioners' ethical perspective: A case study and overlapping ethical framework: data talking to the model.* Paper presented at the Conference on Ethics and Leadership, Charlotteville, VA.

Lichtman, M. (2010). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

MacMillan, J.H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (1999). Care, justice, and equity. In M.S. Katz, N. Noddings, & K.A. Strike (Eds.), *Justice and caring: The search for common ground in education* (pp. 7-20). New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2002). *Educating moral people: A caring alternative to character education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (Ed.). (2005). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Normore, A.H. (2004). Ethics and values in leadership preparation programs: Finding the north star in the dust storm. *Values and Ethics in Educational Administration, 2*(2), 1-8.

Northouse, P.G. (2013). *Leadership* (6th ed.). London: Sage.

Purpel, D.E. (2004). *Reflections on the moral and spiritual crisis in education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Rebore, R.W. (2001). *The ethics of educational leadership*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Rucinski, A.D., & Bauch, P.A. (2006). Reflective, ethical, and moral constructs in educational leadership preparation: Effects on graduates' practices. *Journal of Educational Administration, 44*, 487-508.

Selznick, P. (1984). *Leadership in administration: A sociological approach*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Row.

Sergiovanni, T.J. (1992). *Moral leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Sernak, K. (1998). *School leadership: Balancing power with caring*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Shapiro, J. P. (2006). Ethical decision making in turbulent time: bridging theory with practice to prepare authentic educational leaders. *Values and Ethics in Educational Administration, 4*(2), 1-8.

Shapiro, J.P., & Gross, S. (2008). *Ethical leadership in turbulent times: (Re)Solving moral dilemmas*. New York: Erlbaum.

Shapiro, J.P., & Hassinger, R.E. (2007). Using case studies of ethical dilemmas for the development of moral literacy: Towards educating for social justice. *Journal of Educational Administration, 45*, 451-470.

Shapiro, J.P., & Stefkovich, J.A. (2001a). *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Shapiro, J.P., & Stefkovich, J.A. (2001b). Response of the review of ethical leadership and decision making in education. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 71*, 364.

Shapiro, J.P., & Stefkovich, J.A. (2005). *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Shapiro, J.P., & Stefkovich, J.A. (Eds.). (2011). *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Smith, S. (1998). A child's best interests: A commentary on "jurisprudential and ethical perspectives on the best interests of children" by Keith Walker. *Interchange, 29*(3), 309-316.

Starratt, R.J. (1991). Building an ethical school: A theory for practice in educational leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 27*, 185-202.

Starratt, R.J. (1994). *Building an ethical school: A practical response to the moral crisis in schools.* London: Falmer Press.

Starratt, R.J. (2003). *Centering educational administration: Cultivating meaning, community, responsibility.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Starratt, R.J. (2004). *Ethical leadership.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Starratt, R.J. (2005). Responsible leadership. *Educational Forum, 69*(2), 124-133.

Starratt, R.J. (2010). Developing successful leadership. In B. Davies & M. Brundrett (Eds.), *Studies in educational leadership* (vol. 11, pp. 27-37). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.

Stefkovich, J.A. (2006). *Best interests of the student: Applying ethical constructs to legal cases in education.* Mahwah, NJ: Earlbaum.

Stefkovich, J.A., & Begley, P. (2007). Ethical school leadership: Defining the best interests of students. *Educational Management, Administration, & Leadership, 35*, 205-224.

Stefkovich, J.A., & O'Brien, M. (2004). Best interests of the student: An ethical model. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42*, 197-214.

Stefkovich, J.A., & Shapiro, J.P. (2003). Deconstructing communities: Educational leaders and their ethical decision-making processes. In P. Begley & O. Johansson (Eds.), *The ethical dimensions of school leadership* (pp. 89-106). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

Strike, K., Haller, E., & Soltis, J. (1988). *The ethics of school administration.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Tirri, K. (1999). Teachers' perceptions of moral dilemmas at school. *Journal of Moral Education, 28*(1), 31-47.

Tirri, K., & Husu, J. (2002). Care and responsibility in 'the best interest of the child': Relational voices of ethical dilemmas in teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and practice, 8*(1), 65-80.

Vojak, C. (2003). Mozert v. Hawkins: A look at self-knowledge and the best interests of the child. *Educational Theory, 53*, 401-418.

Walker, K. (1991). Theory to practice: Ethics in policy research and development. In R. Reilly & C. Lautar (Eds.), *Policy research and development in Canadian education* (pp. 73-99). Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press.

Walker, K. (1995). A principled look at 'the best interests of the children'. *Canadian School Executive, 15*(5), 3-8.

Walker, K. (1998a). Jurisprudential and ethical perspectives on "the best interests of children." *Interchange, 29*(3), 287-308. doi: 10.1023/a:1007561315049

Walker, K. (1998b). Response to Dr. Stephen Smith. *Interchange, 29*(3), 317-326.

Walker, K., & Donlevy, K. (2006). Reconsidering ethical relativism. *Journal of School Leadership, 16*, 216-239.

Walker, K., & Donlevy, K. (2009). The four ethical commitments in educational administration. *Journal of Educational Thought, 43*, 109-131.

Willower, D.J. (1999). *Work on values in educational administration: some observations.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration Center for the Study of Ethics and Leadership, Charlottesville, VA.

Contributors

Terah T. Venzant Chambers, Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University, (Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development)

Keith Walker, Professor, University of Saskatchewan, (Department of Educational Administration & Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy), keith.walker@usask.ca

Benjamin Kutsyuruba, Assistant Professor, Queen's University, (Faculty of Education), ben.kutsyuruba@queensu.ca

Nicola Bishop-Yong, Principal, Westmount Community School, (Saskatoon Public School Division), bishopn@spsd.sk.ca

J. K. Donlevy, Associate Professor, University of Calgary, (Office of Graduate Programs in Education), donlevy@ucalgary.ca

D. Gereluk, Associate Professor, University of Calgary, Office of Graduate Programs in Education, dtgerelu@ucalgary.ca

J. Brandon, Associate Professor, University of Calgary, Office of Graduate Programs in Education, jbrandon@ucalgary.ca

P. Patterson, Professor, University of Calgary, Office of Graduate Programs in Education, mpatters@ucalgary.ca