



# Using case studies of ethical dilemmas for the development of moral literacy

Case studies  
of ethical  
dilemmas

## Towards educating for social justice

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to focus on a case study, framed as an ethical dilemma. It serves as an illustration for the teaching of moral literacy, with a special emphasis on social justice.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Initially, the paper provides a rationale for the inclusion of case studies, emphasizing moral problems in university teaching. It discusses briefly the strengths and weaknesses of using these types of case studies in the classroom. In particular, it explains how both the rational and emotional minds can be addressed, through the use of these moral dilemmas, by introducing two concepts: Multiple Ethical Paradigms and Turbulence Theory. Following an explanation of the two concepts, an illustrative case is provided. This case deals with aspects of No Child Left Behind legislation that narrows the curriculum for some students. The underlying social justice issue of this case is raised. The dilemma is followed by a discussion of how to resolve or solve it by raising questions that relate to the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and Turbulence Theory.

**Findings** – It is hoped that university teachers will find that case study analysis, through the use of the two concepts of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and Turbulence Theory, provides a meaningful and helpful way to promote moral literacy.

**Originality/value** – It is recommended that this kind of case study, framed through the use of a paradox, should be taught not only in educational ethics, but it can also be infused in many other courses in the university curriculum.

**Keywords** Ethics, Teaching, Social justice, Case studies

**Paper type** Case study

### Introduction

Social justice should always be at the forefront of the minds of the educational community (Brown, 2004; Larson and Murtadha, 2002; Marshall, 2004; Shields, 2004). Unfortunately, that is not always the case. All too often, students who have been raised in deprived environments continue to be shortchanged in their education, despite the best of intentions. In this article, a case will be discussed that focuses on the narrowing of the curriculum for students to enable a school to attain Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002) legislation in the USA. Adequate Yearly Progress means that students must meet acceptable standards in reading/language arts and mathematics, and schools need to meet certain attendance or graduation rates. This piece of legislation has led to a tightening of the curriculum for some children, particularly for those who have

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trouble passing standardized tests. Frequently, these same young people come from poor families with little social capital.

Thus, instead of providing these students with the broad-based education that they need to become productive citizens and excel as creative adults, they receive intensive skill-based learning in English and mathematics as well as constant test preparation. Moreover, these students do not receive the training they need to attain moral literacy. All too often, they are not given the necessary concepts and tools necessary for them to solve challenging and meaningful ethical dilemmas that they will face throughout their lives. This kind of preparation goes well beyond recall and repetition; it asks young people to think deeply, using diverse ethical frameworks, to discover how to make wise and intelligent decisions.

The use of a case study, framed as an ethical dilemma, can be especially effective to help students of education understand a concept, such as social justice, as well as extend their moral literacy in general. Nash (1996, p. 64), in his book on professional ethics, pointed out that: "A good case can be a provocative, almost indispensable tool for teaching the relevant moral concepts..." According to Vanderbilt's Center for Teaching (2006, p. 1), "Good cases generally have the following features: They tell a good story, are recent, include dialogue, create empathy with the main characters, are relevant to the reader, serve a teaching function, require a dilemma to be solved, and have generality." Good cases can also address different ways of knowing including reflective thinking, critical thinking, and moral thinking.

While many kinds of problem-solving can be addressed by students utilizing an ethical dilemma, a criticism of the use of case studies in classrooms, however, is that they are not able to replicate the emotions elicited through actual situations. To surmount this critique, two theoretical concepts can be used to assist the student to evaluate case studies that are framed as ethical dilemmas. One theoretical concept helps the students to work through a case study using rational problem-solving, and the other theoretical concept helps to evaluate an ethical dilemma using an emotional perspective. The rational approach is addressed through the use of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms of the ethics of justice, critique, care, and the profession (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001, 2005), and the emotional concept is dealt with through the utilization of Turbulence Theory (Gross, 1998, 2004). These combined ideas form the theoretical framework that is meant to help students solve ethical dilemmas. It brings together, what Goleman (1995) calls, the rational and the emotional minds.

In university classrooms, the formal presentations of these ethical cases can lead to probing questions and answers by both students and faculty members. Breaking down silence by opening up university classrooms for honest and forthright discussions is a way to begin to prepare aspiring and practicing educational leaders to cross the borders of the academic classroom into their school communities to deal with hard issues and even previously taboo topics. Using practitioner-written ethical dilemmas that describe authentic situations can also be an effective approach to expose students to a number of current difficult and emotionally-charged issues prior to actually confronting them in their work or even in their private lives.

In an era of high-stakes testing and school accountability systems that are transforming the lives of k-12 students and teachers in the USA and in some other countries (Leithwood, 2001; Normore, 2004), it seems important that university classrooms

provide the safe space to discuss challenging situations that could have real consequences in actual school settings. None of us know how we will react under unusual pressure; however, through using both Turbulence Theory and the Multiple Ethical Paradigms as tools for analysis of a case study, it is anticipated that educational leaders will learn to deconstruct conflicts as they begin to understand their emotional and rational implications.

### **An overview of the multiple ethical paradigms**

An introduction to the Multiple Ethical Paradigms of the ethics of justice, critique, care and the profession is provided in a book entitled, *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education: Applying Theoretical Perspectives to Complex Dilemmas*[1]. This work, written by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001, 2005), takes into account the ethics of justice, critique, care and the profession. An earlier work by Starratt (1994a) suggested the importance of the three paradigms of justice, critique, and care in his approach to ethics and schools; however, the Multiple Ethical Paradigms provide more information and understanding of those ethics and add a fourth lens or perspective, the ethic of the profession.

#### *The ethic of justice*

Shapiro and Stefkovich's model describes the ethic of justice as a perspective that focuses on rights, law, and policies. It is part of a liberal democratic tradition which adheres to faith in the legal system and in progress (Delgado, 1995). Modern-day ethical writings in education, using the foundational principle of the ethic of justice, include, among others, works by Beauchamp and Childress (1984), Goodlad *et al.* (1990), Kohlberg (1981), Sergiovanni (1992), and Strike *et al.* (2005). This paradigm focuses on concepts that include fairness, equality, and individual freedom. This lens leads 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? How should the law, right, or policy be implemented?

#### *The ethic of critique*

The ethic of critique has been discussed by a number of writers and activists (e.g., Apple, 1988, 2001, 2003; Astuto *et al.*, 1994; Bakhtin, 1981; Bowles and Gintis, 1988; Foucault, 1983; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1994, 2000, 2003; Greene, 1988; Larson and Murtadha, 2002; Purpel, 1989, 2004; Shapiro and Purpel, 2004; Shapiro, 2006) who are not convinced by the analytic and rational approach of the justice paradigm. They ask us to redefine and reframe categories such as privilege, power, culture, language, and, in particular, social justice. This ethic requires educators to deal with the hard questions regarding class, race, gender, and other areas of difference, including: Who makes the laws, rules, or policies? Who benefits from these laws, rules, or policies? Who has the power? And who are the silenced voices?

#### *The ethic of care*

For the most part, in contemporary times, the ethic of care has been described in great detail by feminist scholars (e.g., Beck, 1994; Belenky *et al.*, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan *et al.*, 1988; Ginsberg *et al.*, 2004; Goldberger *et al.*, 1996; Grogan, 1996; Marshall, 1995; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002, 2003; Sernak, 1998; Shapiro and Smith-Rosenberg, 1989; Shapiro *et al.*, 2003), who have challenged the dominant and/or patriarchal ethic of

justice in our society. Male ethicists and educators, including Buber (1965) and Sergiovanni (1992), have also helped to develop this paradigm. These scholars have sought to make education a “human enterprise” (Starratt, 1991, p. 195). Attention to this ethic can lead to discussions of concepts such as loyalty, trust, and empowerment. This ethic asks that individuals consider the consequences of their decisions and actions. It asks them to take 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?

### *The ethic of the profession*

In recent years, there has been increasing attention placed on ethics for educational leaders. A number of writers (e.g., Beck, 1994; Beck and Murphy, 1994a, 1994b; Beck and Murphy, 1997; Beckner, 2004; Begley, 1999; Begley and Johansson, 1998, 2003; Burford, 2004; Cambron-McCabe and Foster, 1994; Duke and Grogan, 1997; Greenfield, 1993, 1995; Hart, 1994a, 1994b; Mertz, 1997; Normore, 2004; O’Keefe, 1997; Starratt, 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 2003, 2004; Shapiro, 2006; Stefkovich, 2006; Willower, 1999) have advocated for prospective administrators to have some preparation in ethics, and especially in ethical decision making. The ethic of the profession even became part of the 1996 document, *Standards for School Leaders*, written by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, (ISLLC, 1996, p. 18). Of these, Standard 5 states the following: “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.” This ethic places the student at the center of the decision making process. It also takes into account not only the standards of the profession, but the ethics of the community (Furman, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Furman-Brown, 2002), the personal and professional codes of an educational leader, and the professional codes of a number of educational organizations (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2001, 2005). Using the lens of the ethic of the profession to resolve or solve an ethical dilemma raises questions such as these: 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? 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 the profession?

Figure 1 is a representation of the four ethical paradigms: justice, care, critique and the profession. This diagram depicts the ethics as interwoven circles and it also indicates that no one ethic is superior to the other.

### **An overview of turbulence theory**

In his books, *Staying Centered: Curriculum Leadership in a Turbulent Era* and *Promises Kept: Sustaining school and District Leadership in Turbulent Times*, Gross (1998, 2004) found that schools that had developed curriculum, instructional, and assessment innovations for several years, all experienced some degree of turbulence or volatile conditions during the time periods of these changes. Further, he discovered that the degree of turbulence at the ten schools and districts he had studied could be divided into four levels: Light, Moderate, Severe, and Extreme Turbulence[2].

*Light turbulence*

This kind of turbulence includes ongoing tensions that arise with the normal functioning of the school. Examples of this include dealing with a disjointed community or geographic isolation of the school. The key to light turbulence is the fact that it is part of the school's environment and that it can be handled easily in a way that will, at least, keep the issue in check.

*Moderate turbulence*

This instability is related to specific issues that are widely recognized as important and needing to be solved. The loss of an important support structure or rapid growth of the student body would be examples of this kind of instability. Moderate turbulence, therefore, is not part of normal operations; it quickly gains nearly everyone's attention and yet, it can be responded to with a focused effort.

*Severe turbulence*

This kind of intensity is found in cases where the whole enterprise seems threatened. A conflict of community values was at the heart of one instance of severe turbulence in Gross' work. In that case, members of the community were deeply divided in their reaction to specific reforms. School board elections became highly emotional, friendships were ended due to pressure to join one faction or another, and the process of reform was suspended. In severe turbulence the problems are so serious that normal administrative actions seem inadequate. A coordinated set of strategies is very likely needed while business-as-usual thinking needs to be suspended.

*Extreme turbulence*

This level would mean serious danger of the destruction of the institution. In one of his studies of school innovations, Gross (2000) revealed a case of extreme turbulence where a cascading series of pressures caused an end to the entire reform process.

Turbulence Theory, therefore, gives us an enhanced ability to calibrate the severity of the emotional tensions at hand. It further aids us in our attempt to contextualize a given problem as we construct strategies to move to less troubled waters.

Table I presents a generic turbulence gauge for assessing the emotional climate for ethical decision making.



**Figure 1.**  
The multiple ethical  
paradigms

**“No child left behind” leads to children being left behind in the arts and social studies**

*Introduction*

With some background to the concepts of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and Turbulence Theory, let us now turn to a case study that is framed as an ethical dilemma. In discussing this case, the four ethics and levels of turbulence are used to assist in the decision making process. This case depicts some of the problems that educational leaders face when they have to make hard choices between retaining a curriculum that includes the arts and social studies or emphasizing literacy and mathematics at the expense of other subjects in order for students to pass high stakes examinations. Deciding what to do is a challenging process at the best of times for educational leaders. In an era of high stakes testing and high learning expectations, with low tolerance for poor scores on examinations, the decision making process is even more demanding.

*The case*

Principal Oaks was on her way to meet with her superintendent, Dr. Bright, to discuss staffing and scheduling needs for the next school year. Principal Oaks knew that it was only a matter of time before her superintendent would require that she change the middle school schedule in order to provide students more time in math classes as well as adequate time for math and reading remediation during the school day for the school’s most needy students. A few weeks earlier she had helped to arrange a meeting of all the math teachers in the middle and high schools as well as representative elementary teachers to discuss the approach to improve the math scores of students across the district. For three consecutive years the district had attained Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), but each year the student scores in mathematics were barely above the required cut scores. This was not the case for the student scores in reading: Reading proficiency scores were consistently 15 to 20 percentage points above the required proficiency threshold scores. The district knew that as proficiency thresholds increased on the state test mandated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) legislation, the school might not be able to attain AYP if too many students were to score below the proficient level in mathematics.

The math teachers worked hard to suggest restructuring of the mathematics curriculum. Moreover, they also had a compelling argument for the need to have

| Degree of turbulence | General definition   |
|----------------------|--|
| Light                | Associated with ongoing tensions, little or no disruption in normal work environment, subtle signs of stress |
| Moderate             | Widespread awareness of the problem, specific origins  |
| Severe               | Fear for the entire enterprise, possibility of large-scale community demonstrations, a feeling of crisis     |
| Extreme              | Structural damage to the institution’s normal operation is occurring   |

**Table I.**  
Definitions of turbulence



additional math class time in the schedule. Senior middle school teacher, Mr Owen Balance, represented the middle school math teachers when he made the following suggestion:

You know it is wonderful that our students score well above the threshold proficiency scores in reading, but it is important to recognize this: In our middle school we have two language arts courses for each student. We have a separate reading and a separate English class at each grade level to help students develop their proficiency in reading. We have only one math course and one math teacher at each grade level. Yes, the science course at each grade level does help students cover math standards to a limited degree, but we also have the social studies course at each grade level that helps students attain reading standards. It is clear that if the math department is to be held to the same standard as the language arts department to have students achieve on the NCLB state tests, then the math department needs more time in the schedule to teach math.

The superintendent had been at the meeting with the math teachers and understood their concerns. He had also shared his desire that students should receive remediation in reading and math during the school schedule if during the previous year those students scored below proficiency on the state-required tests.

Now as she was meeting with Superintendent Bright in his office, Principal Oaks was about to get her directive from the superintendent to change her schedule. The directive was this:

After listening to the concerns of the math department, I want you to do what you need to do to find additional math time for all three grades in the middle school. I have arranged with the board to hire an additional math teacher to be shared equally between the middle school and the high school. Use the available four periods each morning with this new math teacher to do what you can. I know that your middle school students' schedules are full, but we will have to restructure or reallocate time to have all middle school students have at least two more periods of math- or the equivalent – in a six-day cycle. You also know that the board expects us to schedule several periods during each cycle for remediation in math and reading for those students who have scored below the proficiency cut scores on the state assessment. I also know you have been discussing scheduling with the special education supervisor and with your special education teachers. I know it will be difficult, but the special education department feels that if they are to have a chance to improve their student's scores, they must have two periods of reading and two periods of math each day to work with their students. I know that you will have some difficult choices to make. Some students may not have time for classes such as art, music, industrial arts, home economics, computer, or library if we meet their present needs to better prepare them for the state test. If students participate in chorus and band during the school day, this may have to change. Perhaps you will also have to reduce the number of periods that students take their other major subjects of English, reading, science, and social studies to arrange additional time for all students to have more math. But remember, English and reading classes help our reading scores, and next year the federal government is requiring the state to test all students in science. It looks as if the arts and social studies are going to be your target areas to reduce time because these subjects are not tested – at least, not yet! Perhaps you will have some students next year with a schedule that includes only major subjects, health, and physical education. Good luck!

Principal Oaks left the superintendent's office with both a headache and a heart-ache. She was acutely aware that students who were involved in chorus and band at her

school had completely full schedules. There was no flexibility within the present schedule to accomplish all that the superintendent had challenged her to accomplish. Wholesale changes will be coming, and there will be upset members of the school community. It will be impossible for her to please everyone.

Her thoughts kept coming as she reflected on potential consequence. How could she take away the arts classes from her most needy students? Most of these students will not have the opportunity to learn about or experience many of the arts classes if they don't have these classes during their middle school years. And for those most needy students, it is often only in the arts classes that they find real success. How will they feel about school if the classes in which they are least successful are the ones in which they must spend most time? For many students the arts classes are the classes that they feel they can enjoy, and it is because of their success and enjoyment of these arts classes that they are able to capitalize on their time in academic classes. How will the teachers keep these most needy students motivated?

And what about getting more math periods in the schedule? Students who are involved in chorus and band already have full schedules. We will have to redo our entire school schedule. How ironic that just earlier this year the arts teachers told her how much they liked the present schedule that systematically rotated students through all of the arts offerings each year. How can the school continue that now? Will it mean that class sizes will have to increase in the arts classes that are offered? Will it mean that not all classes can be offered each year, and arts teachers will have unscheduled time during the day because students will be unavailable to be scheduled into their classes? Will that mean that some arts teachers may be reduced to part-time positions or perhaps even furloughed? Should we still try to offer home economics or industrial arts, or should we use the limited arts time to preserve time in art and music classes?

But what about reducing the time in some academic subjects to gain more math time? How will the academic teacher in those subjects react to that? And will it be social studies that will lose time in the schedule just because it is not tested? Students already have limited knowledge of geography and civics. Isn't it part of our school's mission to develop well-informed students who can become engaged citizens, enabling some to become our future government leaders?

Principal Oaks kept asking herself if any of these changes were really best for her students. By making changes the school may better prepare students to score higher on the state tests and thereby save the school from negative sanctions from the federal and state governments, but do these state tests really help to make our children better students? Is it really in their best interest to be better in math but have fewer or no experiences in the arts? Is it fair for one test score each year to decide whether some students will have art and music or be able to be involved in band or chorus? Is it really right to limit the options of our most academically needy students? More often than not, these students come from homes in which their parents do not have the resources to offer them opportunities outside of school. If they aren't exposed to the arts in school, they may never again have the opportunity. What if we must limit the arts or social studies from some students and those subjects happen to be their area of special talent? Are we being negligent as a school to limit the class offerings to these students?

Principal Oaks felt even more upset as all of these thoughts ran through her mind. She asked: All of this because of a score on a test? All of this because federal and state legislators thought they were doing something good, but had no long-range insight



into the effects of their decisions? She remembered the quote from Justice Brandeis (1928, p. 14) that she often had her high school students memorize in her English classes: "Experience should teach us to be most on our guard to protect liberty when the government's purposes are beneficial. The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in the insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning, but without understanding."

### **The multiple ethical paradigms and the case**

In this section of the paper, the case, previously described, will be discussed in light of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms focusing on the ethics of justice, critique, care, and the profession. Following the case discussion, Turbulence Theory will be explained in terms of its relationship to the ethical dilemma regarding the narrowing of the curriculum.

#### *The ethic of justice*

According to the ethic of justice, as explained by Beauchamp and Childress (1984), educational leaders should be able to turn to laws and policies for guidance in a society such as the USA, in which our government is committed to the principles of tolerance, respect, and fair treatment of all persons (Beck and Murphy, 1997b, p. 7). The federal policy makers who support NCLB would argue that they did in fact establish the law in order to develop respect and fair treatment of all students in our educational institutions. However, one could also argue that the policymakers, who supported NCLB, did not see far enough into the future to understand and evaluate all the consequences of their particular act as it would unfold over time in terms of fairness for all students, especially for those in poverty. Because of this, Principal Oaks does not feel that she can look to the federal NCLB Law for guidance.

Instead, she could argue that the NCLB Law is not one that is based on the respect and fair treatment of all persons: a collateral consequence of the law's emphasis on reading and math is that many schools have had to limit arts classes, which she could argue is unfair to those students whose special talent lies in the area of the arts. In addition, leaving out social studies is a problem for all students as it is a discipline that is important for the development of engaged and critical citizens. Consequently, one could then argue that this law does not give her any ethical guidance that would lead her to build a schedule to favor more math and reading at the expense of social studies and the arts.

In fact, if Principal Oaks views her dilemma from the vantage point of the ethics of justice, she may ask, "Is it fair to limit education in the arts or social studies for students merely because they have scored below a proficiency cut score on a standardized test in reading and math?" However, she would have to consider that a score on one standardized test is not a fair or equitable reason to limit a student's study of the arts and social studies.

Consequently, the lens of the ethic of justice might more likely lead Principal Oaks to determine that for her to treat her students with fairness, she should not change her schedule to limit art and social studies education, but instead she should allow her students to have a schedule that gives fair and equitable treatment to all of the subjects of mathematics, reading, science, social studies, and the arts.

*The ethic of critique*

Authors of the NCLB Legislation often defend the law by claiming that this law was designed to provide ethnic minorities, the disabled, and other sub groups the same opportunities for success in school as are available for white, middle, and upper class students. From this perspective, the NCLB Law was developed from an ethical position that honored the ethic of critique.

However, using the ethic of critique, Principal Oaks could also argue the opposing position that the NCLB Law is wrong, and consequentially, she has an ethical obligation to fight it. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005, p. 13) pose the following question in their discussion of the ethic of justice: "What is to be done when a law is wrong, such as earlier Jim Crow laws supporting racial segregation?" If Principal Oaks believes that the NCLB Law is wrong, her understanding of the ethic of justice may lead her not only to disobey her superintendent, by refusing to change the schedule, but it may lead to her to begin fighting the NCLB law by lobbying her legislators and by starting a campaign of dissent.

As Principal Oaks looks to narrow the curriculum in her school to help those minority children to have the same opportunity as other children to learn and perform well in reading and math, she may inadvertently be creating merely another type of inequity for those minority children. Shapiro and Stefkovich share that "the work of critical theorists can be found in their arguments, occurring over many decades that schools reproduce inequities similar to those in society" (Bourdieu, 1977, 2001; Horvat and O'Connor, 2006; Lareau, 1987, 2003). If Principal Oaks narrows the curriculum for those most needy minority students, is not she merely trading one set of inequities for another? Her students may have more equal opportunities to learn reading and math, but with the narrowed curriculum, her most needy and marginalized students will now have unequal access to the arts and social studies.

Consequently, if critical theorists are concerned about rectifying wrongs and making known the voices of those who are silenced (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2005, p. 15), then Principal Oaks will have only more questions and concerns as she views her dilemma through the lens of the ethic of critique. By following her superintendent's directive to narrow the curriculum, she will be limiting access to the arts for those most academically needy students, many of whom come from homes that have little or no access to art or music beyond what is evidenced in our popular culture. However, by not narrowing the curriculum, it could be argued (as legislators who support NCLB would argue) that she is then limiting equal access to higher levels of reading and math achievement for her most needy students. Principal Oaks has gained more insight into her dilemma by considering the ethic of critique, but this ethical lens has not given her clear choice for action.

*The ethic of care*

Principal Oaks asked herself –Am I showing care for my students by narrowing the curriculum to provide them more time for reading and math? As Roland Martin (1993, p. 144) indicates, "our culture embraces a hierarchy of value that places the productive processes of society and their associated traits above society's reproductive processes and the associated trait of care and nurturance". In other words, one could say that the legislators who drafted NCLB Law were concerned with developing the "productive

processes” of students to perform better in reading and math in order that students will be more productive members of the USA economy, thereby allowing the United States to better compete with the economies of other developed countries. This concept is at odds with the concept of the ethic of care as expressed by Noddings (1992, p. xiv) who claims “the first job of schools is to care for our children.” She further explains that “students are at the center of the educational process and need to be nurtured and encouraged, a concept that likely goes against the grain of those attempting to make ‘achievement’ the top priority.”

So as Principal Oaks considers the ethic of care, she is again reminded that narrowing the curriculum to advance her students’ performance in reading and math may not be in the best overall interests of her students. Her students may gain more knowledge and be able to perform better in reading and math on tests, but gaining higher levels of achievement may not be what is best for her students. Perhaps the best way to show care and concern for her students is again to ignore the directions of the superintendent and be sure that her students have a well-rounded educational experience.

But then again, Principal Oaks thought about how her students who have done poorly in reading and math have often held themselves in low esteem. She also knows how students’ opinions of themselves and their self-worth have improved as they have more knowledge and achieve better on exams in math and reading. So here again her dilemma continues. She can see that she would be demonstrating care for many of her students who scored below the proficiency cut scores on the state tests by providing them with a narrowed curriculum to better help them develop their reading and math proficiency, but she can also see that she may not ultimately be showing them care and concern if they lose opportunities to learn more social studies or participate in the arts. Viewing her dilemma through the lens of the ethic of care has helped Principal Oaks to clarify her options, but she still has no clear instruction as to which choice will show the most care for her students.

### *The ethic of the profession*

As she turns to the ethic of the profession, Principal Oaks thinks about her own code of ethics. She remembers that central to her professional beliefs are her commitment to truth, kindness, humility, and responsibility. She is quite clear that her personal ethical code converges well with her professional code that guides her to act in the best interests of students.

However, viewing the situation through the ethic of profession has also caused Principal Oaks to consider the directives of her superintendent: provide more math class time, offer math and reading remediation during the school day, and dedicate even more math and reading class time for the most-needy students. Her ethic of profession does obligate her to follow the legal and ethical directives of her superiors, but she is not certain that the superintendent’s directives are truly moral. Also, the ethic of profession does obligate her to follow the state and federal laws of which NCLB is definitely one. As she thinks through this paradigm, she believes that she has an obligation to her students and to her teachers, parents, and to the local community to do all that she can to help her students improve their scores on the NCLB-required state tests in order for her school to make Adequate Yearly Progress and thus avoid (or postpone as long as

possible) the negative sanctions that may be placed upon her school. However, while grappling with the various aspects of the ethic of the profession, Principal Oaks knows she must ask herself one overarching question: What is in the best interests of the student?

### **Levels of turbulence and the case**

The level of turbulence could be kept at a light level if Principal Oaks were to decide to do very little school restructuring. If the scheduling were carefully done, even the students in need of math remediation do not need to miss a full year of the arts or of social studies. However, the level of turbulence could escalate dramatically if there would be major school restructuring with the furloughing of art and social studies teachers. Total restructuring could even be worse. If restructuring were to affect all students, then parents, teachers, unions, students, and community members might react by taking action to reject NCLB.

What follows is Table II that explains the various levels of turbulence depending upon the decision that Principal Oaks makes.

### **Some questions related to the case**

To think deeply about this case and promote moral literacy, grounded in a concern for social justice, a number of questions are raised. It is hoped that students answering some or all of these questions would begin to understand the complexity of decision making as it relates to this ethical dilemma. They would also be dealing with both rational as well as emotional ways of knowing in approaching the solution to this case.

#### *Levels of turbulence*

- If Principal Oaks makes moderate schedule changes, including reduced social studies class time for some students, what could she do to reduce the level of turbulence being experienced by the social studies teachers who fear that one of their ranks may be furloughed because of the reduced social studies teaching load?
- If the schedule is not changed to provide more class time for math, what would be the turbulence level for the math teachers?
- Suppose the only way to increase math time was to furlough arts teachers and reduce arts classes. How would this change the level of turbulence within the school for students and staff? How might the community experience turbulence?

#### *Ethic of justice*

- Many educators and professors of tests and measurement would argue that it is unethical to use just one test or one form of assessment to evaluate a child's progress for an entire year or to use one test to evaluate the effectiveness of a school. Based on this assumption, is it fair to limit a child's exposure to art, music, or social studies just because that student has scored below proficient on one government-required standardized test? Explain.
- If Principal Oaks must remove some students from arts classes to provide time for remediation in reading and math, will those students feel that they are being

| Degree of turbulence | Turbulence gauge  |   |
|----------------------|---|---|
|                      | General definition  | Turbulence applied to this situation  |
| Light                | Associated with on-going tensions, little or no disruptions, Subtle signs of stress | Minimal school restructuring<br>All Arts classes remain the same<br>Additional Math and reading classes are scheduled for a portion of the year so needier below proficient miss industrial arts and home economics<br>Math remediation occurs during study halls with remedial students in chorus and band being pulled from these classes<br>Social studies time is equal to other classes except for math<br>Math classes get additional time in a rotating schedule for grade levels            |
| Moderate             | Widespread awareness of the problem(s), specific origins                            | Moderate school restructuring<br>Arts remain the same for majority of students<br>Neediest students have limited arts because of additional time in reading and math<br>Social Studies class time is reduced in all grades to allow increased math and science<br>Social Studies teachers are assigned to assist with math remediation<br>Math remediation occurs during chorus and band with a rotating schedule<br>Students needing remediation participate in chorus and band on a limited basis |
| Severe               | Fear for the entire enterprise. A feeling of crisis                                 | Total school restructuring<br>Most arts classes are eliminated and arts teachers furloughed<br>Math class time is increased to equal Language Arts<br>Social Studies (SS) time drastically cut<br>Students needing remediation unable to take chorus or band<br>One SS teacher furloughed<br>Faculty, parents, students, and community are upset but take no resistive action   |
| Extreme              | Structural damage to the school's efforts.<br>Collapse of the reform is likely      | Total school restructuring as above<br>Parents, teachers, unions, students, community members take resistive action to save arts and social studies and to reject the Federal and State requirements of NCLB  |

**Table II.**  
Turbulence levels related to the ethical dilemma

treated fairly or justly when their friends may go to arts classes, but they may not?

*Ethic of critique*

- One of the functions of a public school should be to right the wrongs of unequal access to opportunities that may exist among various populations in our society. Principal Oaks knows that many of her most academically needy students do not have equal access outside of school to experiences in classical music, theatre, painting, or other arts that some of her more academically successful students do. If Principal Oaks follows her superintendent's directive to narrow the curriculum in the area of the arts to favor more math and reading, is she limiting equal access to the arts for the children who most need this access? Is it ethical to recommend a remedy for one predicament when we are aware that the remedy will create another problem?
- If schools do not provide equal access to all students to develop their reading and math skills to the best of their ability, are these schools then limiting access for students to have opportunities for higher levels of education or higher paying jobs?

*Ethic of care*

- If a school provides students more time during the school day to help them to understand math, and this extra time allows them to feel success in their math ability, is this school honoring the ethic of care?
- Would it change your opinion if the child is removed from an arts class that they really enjoy and in which they have real talent?

*Ethic of the profession*

- Suppose Principal Oaks does not change the schedule to provide more time for students to be successful in math and reading because she felt it was her professional obligation to keep students' class time in social studies and the arts, and suppose her school then fails to make Adequate Yearly Progress, which then leads to sanctions against her school. Is there any argument that she could give that she had still acted in her school's and her students' best interest?
- If Principal Oaks believes strongly that it is not in the best interests of her students to narrow the curriculum, is she more compelled by her professional ethics to disobey the directives of her superintendent or to obey them?

**Conclusion**

Universities and colleges are expected to help their students grow into the leaders who will work to solve the problems of our world. Unfortunately, as our world is becoming increasingly complex, it is more and more difficult for our leaders to develop solutions that do not have embedded within them yet other sets of problems. Many educators agree that we need to provide specific instruction to guide our students to develop moral literacy; however, it is essential to use appropriate instructional tools necessary to guide such learning.



By helping students work with the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and Turbulence Theory, university instructors will be providing their students with tools to be better rational problem-solvers and to understand the emotional turbulence that can be experienced by individuals and by organizations when tensions and problems arise. If we hope to remedy the past injustices of our societies, we must especially help our students to grow into leaders who will have the courage and insight to practice ethical decision making as they work to rectify those social justice issues that have plagued our country and our world – those issues of intolerance and unresponsiveness that have led to the inequities related to social class, race, ethnicity, gender, and other areas of difference. As we instruct our students in the use of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and Turbulence Theory, we will be offering them not only a practical and in-depth experience in problem solving, but we will also be providing them with an ethical framework to develop their moral literacy.

The framework, consisting of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and Turbulence Theory, can be used in a myriad of classrooms, extending well beyond ethics courses. It can also be employed in other professional programs, beyond educational leadership. In sum, the utilization of this framework, combined with authentic cases from diverse fields, across the curriculum of higher education, can hopefully help to develop fair, caring, critical, and professional leaders of tomorrow.

#### Notes

1. This section is adapted, in part, from Chapters 1 and 3 in Shapiro and Gross (2007)
2. This section is adapted, in part, from Chapters 1 and 2 in Shapiro and Gross (2007).

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**Further reading**

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