

## Values and Ethics in the Decision-Making of Rural Manitoba School Principals

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### Abstract

This study examined the ethical leadership experiences of four school principals in rural Manitoba using a naturalistic inquiry approach of semi-structured interviewing. The intent was to examine the extent to which the decisions principals make align with the ethical paradigms of Care, Critique, Justice, Profession and/or Community. The ethic of community figured most predominantly in the decisions made by rural school principals, followed by the ethics of profession, care and justice. Limited evidence of the Ethic of Critique was evidenced in the discourse provided by participants. The paper concludes with a reflection on the nature of values-based ethical leadership in rural contexts, and recommendations for research, theory and practice.

*educational administration, rural education, ethics, principals*

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to seek a deeper understanding of the ethical nature of the principalship in rural Manitoba schools as principals engaged in the pursuit of the good in educational leadership, and the spirit of commitment in rural communities. Hodgkinson (1991) suggests that school administration finds itself in an "arena of ethical excitement" (p. 164), requiring a persistent re-examination of how to lead education. By extension, educational administrators perpetuate particular notions of morality that reflect their individual and collective values. Therefore, the morality of

the leader is of prime importance to the construction of what is valued in education and constructs the role of the school principal as moral agent (Foster, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1991) who has a desire and obligation not only to understand the ideas (and ideals) being pursued, but also to re-think established ideals and practices.

Arguably, schooling is both big business and politics when one considers the multi-million dollar textbook/resource industries, collective agreement issues, provincial/federal funding or jurisdictional issues. Yet administrators are also people working in local spaces pro-

moting effective teaching and learning, which are contested terrains. For this, Hodgkinson (1991) claims, the educational administrator requires “extraordinary value sensitivity” (p. 164).

Recent work on rural educational initiatives in Manitoba (Wallin, 2009) has revealed the advantages of rural education and implicitly highlighting the role that particular values, such as that of community, play in educational leadership. Wallin (2009) noted that one of the primary defining features of rural education is the “attempt to address formal educational goals within the local community context” (p. 70). If we accept the notion that values and ethics are derived culturally (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007), it may be that innovation in rural environments is as much due to the value structures of the communities involved as it is to the individual qualities of the leaders who guide them. Leadership becomes even more complicated when one considers whether the value systems of any particular rural community (and the administrator of the school) align with those promoted by the centralized provincial educational system. This study, therefore, examined the ways in which rural principals’ approaches to decision-making were reflective of the ethics of care, justice, critique, profession and community.

### Conceptual Framework

If one considers educational leadership to be a moral endeavor, then it follows that leaders need to be critically aware of their own value systems (Foster, 1986, 2004) and the factors that affect their work. We are interested in how, and to what extent, particular ethical paradigms influence the actions of rural school leaders. We

believe there is often a desire on the part of administrators to use critical, ethical judgement but that this may be at odds with community norms and/or administrative constraints such as policy, regulations, political correctness, and even laws. The end result is often sacrificing, whereby administrators ameliorate their own values in order to remain supported by the system.

The values and ethical perspective of educational administration attempts to consider administration as what it ought to be rather than what it is (Begley, 2004; Foster, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1978, 1991, 2002; Starratt, 1991, 1994), which implies that good educational administration is something for which to continually strive through practice, experience, reflection and human interaction. As Greenfield (1974) noted, “[O]ur concepts of organisations must therefore rest upon the views of people in particular times and places, and any effort to understand them in terms of a single set of ideas, values and laws must be doomed to failure” (p. 2). These ideas grounded our understanding of rural Manitoba contexts and their impact on the decisions made by school principals.

This study is underpinned by a framework that helped us examine the “competing value orientations [that have manifested] within particular educational communities” (Begley, 1999b, p. 52). The lenses through which we examined the practice of the rural school principals in this study was a conception of the ethics of critique, justice, and care (Starratt, 1991, 1994), profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005) and community (Furman, 2003, 2004)

### The Ethic of Critique

Starratt (1994) states that the force behind the employment of critique as an ethical frame is critical theory which encourages the school community to re-think the way things are, and imagine the school environment in a wider context (Foster, 1986). The ethic of critique measures educational norms and practices against levels of fairness where some will benefit from decisions and some will not. This way of understanding systems implies that no social environment or organisation can make a legitimate claim to neutrality. Instead, educational administrators need to see that no school environment has to be one way or the other. Instead, leaders need to try to link administrative practice to social and cultural concerns because “all theories, all constructs, all practices are open to critical reflection” (Foster, 1986, p. 13). Starratt’s (1991) ethic of critique invites a kind of “moral fulfillment” (p. 191) as moral responsibility for changing systems that perpetuate inequities falls one the shoulders of educational administrators.

### The Ethic of Justice

The ethic of justice (Starratt, 1991, 1994, 2004) proposes that certain standards are upheld in the way people treat each other as a form of governance. We govern ourselves by individual choices and community choices. According to Starratt (1991), “The ethic of justice demands that the claims of the institution serve both the common good and the rights of the individual in the school” (p. 194). In this sense the ethics of justice and critique have a shared purpose. Decisions

about making the governance of the school more equitable or fair must originate in a critical examination of the variables that made those conditions unfair in the first place and by “naming ... the problem (critique) will suggest new directions or alternatives for re-structuring the practice or process in a fairer manner” (Starratt, 1994, pp. 51-52).

### The Ethic of Care

While the ethics of justice and critique act as perspectives for governance and reflective practice, the ethic of care situates relationships among people “from the standpoint of absolute regard” (Starratt, 1991, p. 195). Dignity for people is the overriding principle in the ethic of care. Ultimately, in terms of the school climate and the relationships that exist among people, caring is a two-way street, where the one caring and cared-for exist within the same ethical principle (Noddings, 2003).

### The Ethic of Profession

What the ethic of profession seeks to address, according to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), “is a consideration of those moral aspects unique to the profession and the questions that arise as educational leaders become more aware of their own personal and professional codes of ethics” (p. 19). At the heart of Shapiro and Stefkovich’s position, as posited by Greenfield (as cited in Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005) is a moral reasoning on the part of educational administrators in which a competency can flourish in professional training. A failure “to provide the opportunity for school administrators to develop such competence consti-

tutes a failure to serve the children we are obligated to serve as public educators” (p. 20). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) frame the ethic of profession around a conception of the best interests of children. However, Stefkovich and Begley (2007) and Walker (1995) acknowledge that the phrase is a problematic conception, in that it is used widely but never really defined and can become more rhetorical than genuine in its regard for the students themselves.

### The Ethic of Community

The ethic of community “centers the communal over the individual as the primary locus of moral agency in schools” (Furman, 2004). The critical aspect about the ethic of community, in terms of educational administration, and perhaps its application to the educational realities of rural Manitoba, is its refutation of the belief that “individuals are the primary ‘moral agents’ who have an impact on schooling” (Furman, 2003, p. 3). Foster (2004) adds that “the community concept tends to be nested within a more dominating notion of individualism” (Foster, 2004, p. 188), residing within the school building only. In fact, a broader notion of community may have tremendous impact on what is considered to be innovative approaches to “quality” and/or educational leadership within a rural community school setting.

Furman (2003, 2004) defines the ethic of community as “the moral responsibility to engage in communal processes as educators pursue the moral purposes of their work and address the ongoing challenges of daily life and work in schools” (p. 215). In this view, the ethic of community ought to be a process, and work

alongside but beyond the ethics of critique, care, justice and profession (Starratt, 1991, 1994, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005). This blending of ethical conceptions has important implications for rural schools, where the rural community is highly influential in the educational environment.

Mulcahy (1996) suggests that traditional attempts to address rural educational issues are mostly attempts to contextualize them within an urban framework, and that improving rural schools meant modeling them after urban representations. Such an attitude may diminish the value of the community component, which is so important in the rural social context. Wallin (2009) states that “Rural schools have become more sophisticated and more adept at doing what they have always done best—they rely on the local expertise and the concept of community to work together ... to make sure their children receive the best education they have to offer” (p. 6). The quality of available programming rests with the “educational and social environments of [their] local communities” (p. 6).

Hetherington (2007) writes that for rural school administrators the major consideration for successful leadership is understanding community. In fact, the general variable in the success of rural leaders, despite perpetual challenges, is the role of community support (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Allen, 2006; Ewington, Mulford, Kendall, & Edmunds, 2008; Hetherington, 2007; Starr & White, 2008; Wallin, 2009). It was, therefore, our assumption that the ethic of community would influence signifi-

cantly the decision-making of the rural school principals in this study.

### Methodology

The study was framed methodologically utilizing naturalistic inquiry (Agostinho, 2005; Creswell, 2005) with semi-structured interviewing methods (Creswell, 2005) to focus on “the close interrelationship of values and inquiry in moral choice in administration” (Willower, 1996, p. 349). These methods allowed for the interview session to evolve, based on the participants’ responses, into a discussion beyond the questions themselves. This way the interviewer facilitated a sense of meaning the participants attached to the issues raised in the discussions (Creswell, 2005). Four rural school principals in two rural school divisions, who had actively practiced in a rural Manitoba school for at least three years, and whose experiences as a group represented a variety of school levels—K-4 and K-6 (Early Years), 5-8 (Middle Years), and 7-12 (Secondary and Senior Years)—participated in the study. Although the recruitment invitations were sent to all principals in the divisions, the participants who consented to be interviewed were male. The absence of female perspectives is regrettable, and may compromise the validity of the findings of this study. However, no female principals in the two school divisions volunteered to take part in the study. The authors acknowledge this as a limitation and have highlighted it as an issue to recognize in future studies. Participants were asked to describe and reflect on their values in order to identify the ethical principles that underpinned their administrative practice.

Data were analysed using the ‘bottom-up’ approach described by Creswell (2005): A general sense of the data was developed followed by a coding design related to emergent themes and a central trend. The transcripts were reviewed several times to determine the extent to which the ethical paradigms of care, critique, justice, profession and community were represented in the text. For the purposes of this paper, all participants have been provided with pseudonyms to respect the confidentiality of their responses.

### Findings

#### Participants’ Values Systems

The question of the origin of principals’ values invariably turned into a discussion of what each actually valued in life based upon prior experiences. The principals in this study believed that understanding the ethical principles which impacted on their practice was a prerequisite for leading a school. There existed broad reflections on values such as respect, faith, and responsibility as a world citizen as well as more specific reflections on values such as hard work, responsibility, dignity, setting positive examples, and providing quality experiences for students. For example, Alex spoke of the importance of making the “right” decisions because “ultimately it’s for the kids ... It’s to make things better for the kids.” For Garry, the measure of one’s worth as a school leader came down to who one was, as a person, not one’s formal position: “If you’re sure about who you are and who you want to be, the job comes a whole lot easier.” Neil suggested, “the way I do things as a principal ... has always been as much as pos-

sible, just simply the way that I value the way I live.” Keith was influenced deeply by the church and his family’s commitment to faith. In his view, the “whole idea of deference and favouring other people ... a willingness to sacrifice for the benefit of other people” shaped his leadership practice in that “to have those values come out in my everyday [working] life is very natural, because it’s who I am ... it just flows out of you, like breathing oxygen.”

Within the discourse existed an understanding that the nature of the rural Manitoba principalship was a reflection of the commonality of the personal values held by these individuals. These were related to prior learning experiences during which they had “learned lessons,” either through the role modeling of others or through personal conflicts from which they had emerged. Gary grew up “in a mining town [that was] a pretty rough area” where he “acquired [his faith] through a rough road.” He indicated that his values had “sharpened over time” because of a major experience that “shakes your foundation of your values.” Neil indicated that extensive travelling to developing countries had influenced his leadership capacity. Along his travels he came to realize that “the purpose was to understand, at least to some extent, people from a different perspective, and to sort of widen our scope of experience, but also our value base.” The experience instilled not only a sense of “my place in the world” but also “my responsibility to my community, to the kids in my school ... in a larger way to the world around me.” Keith cited the way he was raised as the primary source of his values structure: “My father was a hard-working per-

son ... He understood the idea of loyalty, and trust, and dignity.”

### Primary Values Underlying Administrative Practice

Principals were asked to discuss the values that underlie how they made decisions in their administrative practice. This question generated many similar responses, which suggested that values were commonly shared among the participants. Keith pointed to the expectations of the community as being very influential. That the community expected the principal to share the values of the community is a strong statement about the close relationship between school and community, as well as community members’ wish for the school to be a site of cultural value transmission. For Alex, having an active parent council was of dubious comfort, because it “can be quite political and not the easiest to deal with.” He indicated that this group’s expectations caused him to make decisions on occasion “that won’t cause a whole great amount of backlash.” A similar point was made by Garry who spoke of a situation where he knew the community (as well as Garry himself) would be completely opposed to an issue that had “come across his desk.” In this case, he decided to engage in conflict with the superintendent rather than face what he knew would be recriminations from the community. He contacted the superintendent to say that “it’s stopping at my desk, and if you need to have a discussion about it with me, that is fair”. The superintendent had to be informed of the potential for community resistance “so that there were no surprises.”

### Decision-Making Protocols and Processes

When principals were asked to reflect upon the processes and protocols they followed in decision-making, policy was cited often, along with concepts such as democracy, order, relationships and common sense. This question was the first to elicit responses related to the ethic of justice, in that principals believed that the school must serve the rights of students and the greater common good (Starratt, 1994). Keith's first and foremost consideration was his own core values, "which I think is a pretty good thermometer of the community." While he suggested that he was given the responsibility "to exercise my own judgment on how to fit that policy in the local context", his values were very much aligned with those of the local community. Alex focused on the impact that relationships have on the decision-making process. In his view, if decisions do not satisfy the requirements of legislation (in this example, Appropriate Education), the protocol needs to be reviewed, because school leaders "do a lot of work with trying to match the right people to the right programs ... [because] ... the best indicator of a child's success is how well they had a relationship with their teachers."

Garry cited the need for "common sense" in both school division policy and practice, maintaining the position that "where policy is seen to ... work against ... where we believe we should be going, we need to re-evaluate that policy." Protocols ought to consider the mission statement of the school which was, in Garry's elaboration of the idea, more about concepts that were reflective of community values (citizenship and social justice).

Neil admitted that policies and laws are "there for a reason and ... to whatever end I can follow at the very least the intent of those, I do that." As much as he thinks in terms of the "big picture," Neil believed there should be a sense of order to arbitrate between "a completely open and democratic process and ... an autocracy." He added that decisions need to be made and that people need to respect that "that's part of my responsibility, to make those decisions on behalf of other people." Integral to Neil's responses was his underlying allusion to stewardship "on behalf of people."

### Alignment of School Practices and Personal Values

Principals were asked to discuss the ways in which their school practices aligned with their personal values. Alex believed the opportunity for reflection on vision and mission led to a genuine collaboration and collation of ideas among school and school division leaders, and promoted a commonality in thinking. He noted, "When I look at our administrative group, we have a lot of people that have kind of the same philosophy." Alex's drive toward a well-rounded school also related to developing common ways of thinking among teaching staff, justified by him because of the influence teachers have on the students and their programming. For Alex, the problem becomes one of dealing with teachers who "don't want to follow through with what you're looking for... What do you do with those teachers?" His solution spoke of hiring based on his own value beliefs, whereby he tried to "put the right person into each program." Although his comments are strongly suggestive of his need to take responsibility for his decisions and

to provide stewardship to the children in his care, they also possibly allude to difficulties that can arise when working with alternate views, using hiring practices as a means of ensuring that predominant values are maintained.

Garry's practice centered on a core value of respect for human life and the need for "common sense" and transparency. He maintained that he attempted to "search for certainty" and "what is the same in all, amongst all people ... in terms of beliefs and values" which is a highly foundational view of values and is arguably related to his faith background. Garry was adamant in his contention that people should know where principals stand, in that "I'm hoping my decisions show my values, and show the values of us collectively as a school and a school division, what's happening everyday." Garry once again spoke to the importance of community values when he suggested that school practices must align with a commitment to the greater good for the community. When conflicts over a child's needs occur, Garry addressed the conflict by asking the parents "What is your dream for you child?", alluding to commonalities of the values between the school and parents underpinning the dream. He believed that because the values of the dream are most often aligned, it became easier for him to manage the details of conflicts .

Neil had a unique experience where values and practice converge: he had the opportunity to staff an entire school. The hiring was designed to "work with their [the teachers'] wisdom ... not imprint my values on them, but to share my values with them." He believed that "the purpose of education is to, and this is a val-

ues thing, to develop not only democratic citizens but young men and women who have a strong sense of a strong value base", which included values such as democracy and citizenship. In practice, Neil adopted a homeroom model that equipped teachers with much influence over students' understanding of "their place" and "responsibility in the world."

Keith suggested, "I'm the principal but I am not a demagogue, and I can try to get some things across but ultimately there are a lot of independent people in the building and they might not necessarily agree with me all the time." When asked how he dealt with conflict, Keith replied, "Very carefully." He suggested that any "good" administrator has to have "political savvy, must know the local community context, the divisional context ... And be able to stick handle through all of that." However, Keith also stated that most teachers trust the principal to do her/his job: "They really just want to know that the principal is able to get the job done, and do it well and in such a way that ... things are going to be successful with him. Then they'll trust me." This comment supports the idea that common values shape the assumptions of principals and teachers who work in rural communities, and as long as the principal generally makes decisions aligned with those values, they gain the trust of staff and community.

### Dealing with Diverse Values

The question that asked participants to describe the ways in which they dealt with diversity or differences in values rendered the shortest responses. However, the principals alluded to the ethic of critique more in this question than



in any other. Perhaps this was due to interpretations of 'diversity', which often presents as a conflict, and what principals do about it. Alex made much out of the fact that he was usually the one in the division who took on unpopular, and controversial initiatives. However, he accepted and encouraged challenges to his ideas, saying, "If you can change my mind, that's great." Garry believed that differences and diversity had to be framed around a common vision. It was imperative, in his view, that when decisions are being considered and differences are emerging, that common beliefs be at the forefront of the discussion. He talked about the value of being part of a professional collective and that within their collective decision-making obligations as teachers "in that process also comes an alignment of values."

Neil also leaned toward a shared decision-making process, "and I think I've made it clear over the course of time ... that if there is a different perspective on doing something, it's not like I have the only answer." Neil suggested that differences and diversity are normal, day-to-day occurrences. The duty of the principal in these situations is to invite participation and to genuinely value what people say and do.

Keith admitted to not looking for diversity in values. He prepared for diversity by telling people who were having trouble carrying out a certain plan or idea that may not be mandatory, but consistent with the values of the community, "you are your own person; if you don't want to do it, you don't have to." Keith expected clashes among values, but neither discouraged nor encouraged them: "I just say if there is, if people have a dif-

ference of opinion just come and see me and we'll talk about it." He believed that his most important duty in this situation was to model his beliefs.

## Discussion

Jenkins (2007) argues that in rural schools and school divisions, the community is too prevalent to ignore. Begley (2004) goes a step further, suggesting that principals consider the community as a greater source of influence. What we discovered was that principals' values-based approaches to leadership are integrally connected to the values of the communities in which they work. In fact, the ethic of community supercedes and/or informs rural principals' understandings of the remaining ethics of care, profession, justice and critique.

### The Ethic of Community

We contend that Furman's (2004) view that principals have a moral duty to "engage in communal processes" (p. 2) in their school, though appropriate, is limiting in its conception of what should constitute communal processes for rural schools, because it leaves these processes within the school itself. The data of this study suggest that the ethic of community must be defined to include the community in which rural schools reside, as its values help shape the work of principals in rural contexts. We argue that educational goals in rural Manitoba are guided by "the local community context" (Wallin, 2009, p. 70), that rural Manitoba schools are teeming with life, creativity, and are using the best resource they have at their disposal to succeed: "The concept of community" (p. 6).

Each of the principals in the study were clearly oriented towards a sense of stewardship to the community. It was the alignment of values between the individual principals and the local rural community that fostered their sense of “rightness” or “goodness” in the decisions they made. It also fostered a tendency towards supporting group norms over individual challenges to those norms, which has both positive and negative implications for the inclusion of voice, the openness towards multiplicity of perspectives and views towards those who don’t fit community norms. The findings align with current conceptions of leadership practice that advocate for the creation of shared norms and the design of processes that encourage community involvement within education (Begley, 2004; Jenkins, 2007; Wallin, 2009). Although the negative aspects of creating shared norms to the exclusion of advocating for diversity have the potential to surface, rural communities are more apt to share values that have an expectation of community involvement because, schools represent the “heart” of the community.

The findings also have political implications. These principals understood that they had to weigh the consequences of their decisions against community values. Perhaps their focus on relationship-building with the community granted them some latitude in the few instances where they transgressed community norms. In all cases, the principals’ foundational beliefs about doing what was good or right for students were highly dependent on what was good or right in the views of the community. This suggests that a move beyond current conceptions of leadership that tends to keep no-

tions of schooling and leadership practice within the confines of the school building must occur. As well, rural Manitoba principals must be more cognizant of the key role that rural communities play in shaping their values and practices.

### The Best Interests of Students and the Ethical Paradigm

What does it mean to serve the best interests of students? Walker (1995), Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005), and Stefkovich and Begley (2007) examine the concept but suggest that there is no reliable definition of the best interests of students. Discussions with the principals in this study indicated the concept is not only genuinely believed but is commonly understood in rural Manitoba. These principals know their students intimately: their histories, their families, their skills and limitations. It is not unusual, for example, for a rural Manitoba principal to have watched the same students enter the school in Kindergarten and graduate from Grade 12. Each principal felt one of his primary motivations to be the welfare and care of the students in the school. The ethic of care was demonstrated in the numerous comments principals made that alluded to caring for students, staff and the greater community. Care was conceived broadly to include the community, and these principals conceived of themselves as stewards whose leadership work ultimately should ensure that the people in their care were treated with respect and integrity.

The ethic of profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005) is a major consideration, but it was articulated through an ethic of care that was intuitively understood. The principals in this study viewed their

own learning and development as having broad benefits for the students in their care, often related to their understandings of the larger community (local and global) in which these students led their lives. This aligns with Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) who suggest that the ethic of profession is framed around a conception of students' best interests that is believed to be most effectively served by a commitment to developing professional competency. The principals had a strong desire to model their values for students and supported in their comments the key role that rural schools play as a means of values transmission.

The ethic of justice and the ethic of critique were least often cited by principals. When they were articulated, the ethic of critique was reflected in how principals understood or dealt with conflict. In these cases, principals were more apt to deflate or minimize conflict or critique rather than spur its development within the system. Notions of the ethic of justice tended to prioritize group rights or norms over those of individual rights, and were very much informed by principals' understandings of the role they played as stewards of the community.

The principals in this study spoke most comfortably about foundational values that had been transferred to them over time. They could also articulate that these values were helpful in deflating conflict and moving their own initiatives forward because they were values that the communities in which they worked also supported. Because principals work in systems where they manage the differing points of view of various individuals daily, their ability to appeal to foundational sets of values is one way of help-

ing people to understand the rationale and reasons for various decisions. The challenge for rural Manitoba principals lay in the need to reflect on how their strongly-held value of stewardship to the community (which is applauded within rural communities because of the sense of care and commitment it engenders) might have negative repercussions for those individuals whose values do not align with community norms. It questions the extent to which principals can truly allow for multiplicity of perspectives to surface, or if predominant community values ultimately constrain principals' abilities to do leadership or make decisions contrary to a normative community understanding of what is right in particular circumstances. Rather than supporting the positive connotation that the word "stewardship" holds, when taken to its extreme, thinking of this nature could become paternalistic and exclusionary.

### Separating Personal Values from Professional Practice

The findings suggest that there were no notable distinctions between the values that guide rural school principals' work and the values that guide their lives. Foster (1986, 2004) argues that school leaders need to be aware of the contingent factors involved in their work, which includes their personal value systems, despite a professional leadership culture which encourages principals to leave personal issues—including values—at the school door.

Heinlein (2006) suggests that there exists little personal discretion in the decision-making abilities of school principals. We argue that there exists much

room for personal discretion of rural school principals, but that this discretion is often under-applied because their values for the most part align with the community values already in existence. The findings of this study suggest that principals ignore their personal value systems in their work in rural communities at their peril because of the strength of the ethic of community that exists in these contexts.

### Conclusions

Given our backgrounds in rural communities, we were not surprised by the findings of the study. Though we would have preferred to find more evidence of the ethics of justice and critique within the responses of individuals, we recognize the notions of stewardship to and care for the community as consistent drivers of the leadership practices and decisions made by these principals. Rural Manitoba principals rely on their local communities to provide a values context for their practice, and their personal values and ethical principles co-mingle with those of the community to help them thrive in their work.

The first of the recommendations we make is for greater attention to rural Manitoba educational research, especially the interplay of school and community dynamics. Community influences are evident in the study, but what is needed are more stories about the experiences that help to characterize what it means to lead in rural contexts. As Wallin (2009) and Mulchay (1996) make evident, there is a body of knowledge that acknowledges the needs, aspirations, and views of rural people in the critical and moral questions related to rural education.

However, there exists a need to include more diversity of the rural voices that exist in Canada, whether that includes geographically based communities, such as northern or remote communities, or culturally-based communities, such as Aboriginal or Hutterian communities. These voices need an academic forum to validate the contribution they can make to educational research. Pertinent questions remain: In whose interests is rural education being formed, shaped, and advanced? What makes the community concept such a necessary feature in the success of rural students, teachers and principals? What is the role of the principal in developing community-minded innovative programming in rural environments?

We are also interested in research that compares the values-based contexts of rural and urban school principals. For example, might there be stronger or lesser evidence of the ethics of critique and justice in the decision-making of urban principals? We expect the experiences of rural and urban principals to differ, given their respective social contexts, but in what ways do they speak to similar moral and ethical concerns?

The final recommendation is for administrative training to expose principal incumbents to the presence and power of values and ethics in their role. In an ethnically diverse world, conventional notions of the principalship are waning (Begley, 1999a). The social landscape is changing in rural Manitoba schools. For this reason, principals could benefit from graduate programs that include coursework in the area of values and ethics in practice (Davis, 2007; Hodgkinson, 1975), and the importance of self-anal-

ysis amid ethical situations. Principals might develop: (a) A clearer and perhaps more tolerant perspective of unfamiliar values structures; (b) A more grounded and perhaps more confident understanding of one's own values framework, and, (c) A sense of ethical frameworks in leadership practice (including, for example, more discussion on how the ethics of justice and critique could be exhibited in practice, an examination of why the ethics of care and community and so firmly rooted in rural leadership practice, and a focus on how the ethic of profession can be more clearly articulated around notions of "the best interests of children").

Ultimately, this study sheds light on how rural Manitoba school principals foster community values. Wallin (2009) notes that rural Manitoba schools continue to pursue what they always have—an innovative and community-supported approach to providing the best education for their children that they can. Bossetti and Brown (1999) argue that educational goals must help prepare children for a meaningful engagement in their future. We believe that re-structuring practice ought to encourage a system where principals can conceptualize their professional practice so that students are treated fairly, given opportunities to examine and articulate their surroundings, and see themselves and others with a mutual regard for human welfare as members of local, national and global communities. That said, we are confident that rural school principals do consider their work to be a moral enterprise, and they remain committed to the relationships, the values, and the dedication to rural ways of life that live in the hearts of those who live in these communities.

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