
Preface

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT AND WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

What is ethics about? What relevance does it have for school leaders? A common answer to the first question is that ethics is about *morality*: what is right and what is wrong. And certainly ethics is, in part, about what is right and what is wrong. This view of ethics, however, is too narrow, and, if you hold it, it will diminish the importance of understanding ethics for the practice of leadership.

Why is this view too narrow? Ethics, as I shall understand it here, concerns a larger question: How shall we live well together? Putting the central question of ethics this way focuses ethics on the nature of good communities. Schools should be good educational communities, and, for school leaders, the study of ethics should emphasize what makes a school a good educational community. Community is the essential relevance of ethics to leadership.

This larger question involves two main subquestions: What are the fundamental aims of good communities? and What is the nature of a fair basis of cooperation in good communities? When we ask these questions about schools, we want to know, first, what are their central aims, and, second, how these aims may be justly pursued. These questions, as we shall see, take us into a wide range of inquiries. We shall need to consider among other things the nature of the basic purposes of education in liberal democratic societies, the nature of intellectual and religious liberty, equality of educational opportunity, democracy and legitimate authority, and fair decision making.

To focus a book on the ethics of leadership *merely* on morality, on the question of what is right and what is wrong, tends to overemphasize personal conduct and disconnects ethics from the art of good leadership. If we are merely concerned with what is right and wrong, we may decide that leaders should be truthful, not steal from their schools, not be racist or sexist, avoid conflicts of interest, and make fair decisions. And certainly leaders should do

these things. But when we had observed these things, we would not know very much about schools or good leadership. These norms are rules of conduct in any institution or community, but they are also disconnected from educational purposes and the nature of good education. The larger view I shall take of ethics is intended to reconnect ethics with the nature of good education, good educational communities, and good leadership.

This book also concerns accountability. While it is not entirely about accountability, it turns to a discussion of accountability frequently, and this helps to tie the various inquiries in the book together. And there is a persistent theme about accountability argued in this book: To be responsibly accountable, educators need to have a coherent vision of the education they wish to provide and how they ought to provide it.

Leaders should use such data about their school's performance that various accountability schemes may provide to make judgments about whether they are providing a good education, but they should not allow the various performance measures employed in these schemes to define a good education. Test scores should be one measure of educational effectiveness but not its meaning. When we allow our measures of a good education to become its meaning, we run the risk of various vices of accountability, such as gaming and goals displacement. We can avoid these vices by creating schools that are strong, ethical communities with a coherent vision of their mission.

THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

In Chapter 1, I develop the idea that ethics is concerned with good communities and lay out some of the other themes of this book. Following this introductory chapter, in Chapters 2 and 3, I discuss some of the basic goals of education and the idea of intellectual community. The themes here are simple: The central goals of education all involve cognitive development. This, in turn, requires that schools be intellectual communities where ideas and their debate and discussion are valued.

In the central part of the book, Chapters 4 and 5 (but including Chapter 3 as well), I discuss what I call *constitutional essentials*: intellectual liberty, freedom of religion, equality, and democracy. Here the focus is on the central norms of liberal democracies. How shall we understand these norms of fair social cooperation in an educationally relevant way?

Chapter 5, which considers legitimate authority in relation to accountability, also provides a transition into the final section of the book, where we discuss ethical decision making in Chapter 6 and accountability in Chapter 7. An account of the ethics of accountability is central in these chapters.

At the end of the introductory chapter, I have provided the reader with a more detailed sketch of each chapter and its contents.

THEMES AND THREADS

Are there threads that tie these chapters together? There are several. Let me mention three. First, the fact that we live in and aspire to be a liberal democratic society is central to this work. Among the norms that should shape our schools are those of liberty, equality, and democratic community. I refer to these as *constitutional essentials*. They are among the central principles of fair cooperation in our society.

The second unifying theme is the *ethics of accountability*. For good or ill, accountability is a reality of the lives of school leaders. I do not address accountability as a policy matter. While I have many views on this, I try to keep them out of this book. School leaders (especially those being newly minted) are not asked to make policy. They are asked to comply with it. Yet educational policy interacts with the culture and the norms of schools. Often whether policy succeeds or fails depends on that interaction. My purpose in this book is not to praise or condemn accountability, it is to discuss with you how to respond to it responsibly.

The final unifying theme is that *community counts*. The fundamental task of the school leader is to create communities that are competent, caring, collegial, and, of course, educative. That is not an easy task because there are many factors that tend to pull communities apart. It is, however, essential to good education, ethical schools, and responsible accountability.

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

Why should you care about ethics? One answer to this question is that, if you are to address the complex issues that you will face, you need answers to the kinds of questions I address. You need a view of what counts as a good education and of the importance and role of constitutional ideals such as liberty and equality. You need a coherent view of your own role and your own authority and of how to deal with conflicting demands made on you. You need a view of the norms of ethical decision making. Finally, you need a view of the ethics of accountability. In short, you need a moral compass to guide you through a jungle of complex and conflicting demands.

A second answer is that you need a view of what constitutes a healthy and effective educational community. As you are not yet education tsar (and I trust you do not aspire to this), the relevance of the answers you achieve to the questions I pose is not so much that you can proceed to act unilaterally on them as it is that you can create an educational community in which answers to these questions are sought and reflected upon. Creating healthy and effective deliberative communities is the very center of your job.

What should you expect to obtain from this book? I will occasionally offer some concrete advice. But I am less interested in generating specific guidelines than I am in helping you to think through some of the ethical

xviii Ethical Leadership in Schools

complexities that are likely to occur in your professional practice and to generate a reflective stance on the issues involved. Perspective and reflection may require developing some complex concepts or even creating a language for discussing them. Concrete advice often additionally requires detailed knowledge of a context, and contexts vary. Hence, detailed advice and precise recommendations may not travel well. Thus, this book aims to provide perspective, shape aspirations, and enable understanding more than it aims at concrete recommendations and recipes. I hope to put you in a place to provide your own ethical advice.

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