Justice and Caring: Power, Politics and Ethics in Strategic Leadership

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Abstract: The underlying motif of this paper is to highlight a prominent theoretical and methodological flaw present in many discussions dealing with strategic planning and research in strategic leadership in general; that is, the absence of attention to the ethical implications of proposed strategies, and the role power, politics and ethics have on leading strategically. The paper underscores social justice and caring perspectives necessary from which to frame strategic initiatives. In terms of methodology and approach this reflexive paper critically reviews and examines extant literature in the field of strategic leadership, including prescriptive strategies advocated in the field of practice. Reflection and analysis of strategic leadership, at large, forms the core of this conceptual paper.

Supporting previous research, this paper finds that the field of strategic leadership, characterised as incipient and diffused, would benefit from mindful attention to the study of ethics with a focus on viewing strategic initiatives in schools and communities from a social-justice and caring lens. Going beyond a review of the field, much of the paper views strategic leadership, in its various stages or manifestations, through a paradigm of social justice and an ethic of caring absent, for the most part, in writing and research in the field.

Introduction

Strategic leadership, according to Eacott (2008a) is a field in search of ‘unity’. He laments the inattention of strategic leadership by school leaders, the lack of theoretical literature, and the emphasis ‘on prescriptive writing in the field’ (2008a: 353). Eacott’s main thrust in his state-of-the-art conceptual paper is that knowledge has been stagnant ‘because the majority of research and writing in the field have approached strategy from a narrow set of epistemological foundations’ (2008a: 354). In the end, he calls for heightened attention to, and focus on, further ‘empirical research and inquiry into strategy in education by suggesting alternate ways of defining and researching strategy’ (2008a: 367). His hope is that others (i.e., scholars and practitioners) ‘will continue to question and focus on the key features of strategy and the issues that confront them’ (2008a: 368).

Eacott presents a conceptual framework for educational strategy that draws from an extensive body of literature and research on planning and change (e.g., Davies & Davies 2006), strategy in the corporate sector (e.g., Boyd, Finkelstein & Gove 2005), strategic thinking and actions (e.g., Caldwell 2006), applications of strategies in education (e.g., Bell & Chan 2005), and including his own recent work (Eacott 2008b), which analytically examines
contemporary literature on strategy in education. Nowhere in Eacott’s extensive review of extant literature of the field of strategic leadership, however, is there a citation or explicit discussion of the role ethics plays in strategically managing a school. Similarly, in the writings of other scholars and practitioners, the inattention to ethics and strategy is glaring. This paper underscores social justice and caring perspectives necessary from which to frame strategic initiatives. This reflexive paper, then, critically reviews and examines some of the extant literature in the field of strategic leadership, including examples of prescriptive strategies advocated in the field of practice with an ethical lens. Reflection and analysis of strategic leadership, at large, forms the core of this conceptual paper.

**Ethics in Educational and Strategic Leadership**

Insufficient attention and research has been given to aspects related to moral or ethical leadership among school leaders, despite the fact that since the mid-1990s several researchers and leaders in the field have demonstrated the importance of morality or ethics in the work of principals (see, e.g., Sergiovanni 1996; Fullan 2003a; Hester 2003; Strike, Haller & Soltis 2005). Peter Drucker (1998) asserts that good leaders lead not through knowledge and skills, but through responsibility and integrity. Ethical and moral leadership are viewed as critical for building effective schools and sustaining learning communities (Sergiovanni 1992b; Starratt 2003a). Without an ethical and moral stance, a leader will lead perfunctorily, without ‘soul’ (Bolman & Deal 1997).

Closely aligned with research into these moral and ethical dimensions is analysis of fundamental sources of authority for the work of principals in schools. Sergiovanni (1992a) characterised administrative or supervisory policies and practices based on one or a combination of four general sources of authority: bureaucratic, personal, professional and moral. School leaders who rely primarily on hierarchy, rules and standard operational procedures for their authority to effectively run their schools emphasise the bureaucratic frame. Leaders who base their organisational decisions on a personal frame seek to utilise personality traits such as charisma, as well as techniques related to interpersonal social dynamics. Other school leaders emphasise formal professional codes of behaviour rather than bureaucratic or personal sources for their authority. According to Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007), however, school leaders are not as readily cognisant of moral authority as a basis for their work.

Despite the above aforementioned works, scholarship and research has not delved more deeply into issues of moral or ethical leadership in regard to the roles and responsibilities of principals. A review of the literature on educational leadership indicates that emphasis is placed – given the current high-stakes accountability era encompassing all aspects of schooling and education, particularly in the USA – on leadership behaviours aimed primarily on promoting gains in student achievement (see, e.g., Gordon, Kane & Staiger 2006).

Brown (2008), reviewing the literature of principal leadership and student achievement, initially focuses on research in the 1970s and early 1980s. Highlighting *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Educational Excellence 1983) and its recommendation for strong leadership as a means for school improvement, as well as the effective schools research that recognised the importance of quality leadership by consistently identifying strong instructional leadership as instrumental in creating a positive school climate and as a correlate of high-achieving schools (Edmonds 1979), Brown indicates that such efforts set the
tone for future emphases on measures of student achievement. She says: ‘Although it is difficult to demonstrate a direct link between school leadership and student achievement (the most tangible and publicly accepted measure of school success), a model of what makes a good leader is emerging’ (Brown 2008: 29). She identifies the following factors or variables as most studied: instructional leadership; school culture; management; communication, collaboration, and community building; and vision development, risk taking, and change management. No specific mention of moral or ethical leadership is made.

Efforts to connect school leadership to student learning are reflected and reported in a comprehensive study by Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom (2004). They posed the following questions, among others:

a. What effect does successful leadership have on student learning?

b. How does successful leadership exercise its influence on the learning of students?

The researchers found that ‘successful leadership can play a highly significant ... role in improving student learning’ (Leithwood et al. 2004: 3). Cautioning readers about the size and effects of such conclusions, the researchers drew the following conclusions, among several others:

a. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school.

b. Principals are being admonished to be ‘instructional leaders’ without much clarity about what that means.

Again, the absence of a mention of moral leadership is revealing in that the educational leadership literature, particularly in its research dimension, neglects study of the ethical and moral dimensions of school leaders. Similar findings, excluding mention of moral or ethical leadership, were also reported by Hallinger, Bickman & Davis (1996), Cotton (2003), Williams (2003) and Bailey, Cameron & Cortez-Ford (2004).

The few studies that do explore ethical dimensions indicate that school leaders are not aware of the moral or ethical aspect of their work. Campbell (1992) concluded that principals denied that the challenges they faced on a daily basis were ethical in nature; instead, they attributed their work as being strategic, administrative, professional, political and/or procedural. Other researchers confirm that leaders do not consider their decisions and actions from an ethical frame (see, e.g., Campbell 1997; Starratt 2004; Mahoney 2006). Ethics is viewed, at best, as a subterranean consideration, but not practically relevant as a source of authority (Sergiovanni 1992b) or as a decision-making factor (Shapiro & Stefkovich 2005).

Klinker & Hackmann (2004) conducted a study consisting of 104 secondary administrators who received State Principal of the Year awards. They completed a questionnaire with narratives reflecting scenarios likely to be encountered by principals, including student-discipline and teacher-evaluation issues. Respondents were asked to make action choices and provide justifications to resolve the dilemma. Their research questions were

a. Do principals make ethical decisions in accordance to an ethical standard?

b. What justifications do the respondents use for making ethical decisions?
Quantitative and qualitative data analyses were undertaken.

Four themes emerged from the study: courage, the common good, gut feelings and difficulty in defining ethics. Principals reported that making tough ethical decisions took a lot of courage. Principals made decisions, they reported, based on benefit for everyone or the common good. For instance, one principal stated that although he felt badly about having to terminate the employment of a teacher who had only four years left to retirement, he made his decision on what he felt was best for the school. Very significantly, principals explained that decision-making involved investigating the case thoroughly, remaining aware and sensitive to others’ needs, listening for different points of view, and examining all aspects of the problem. Yet, when it came down to making a decision, these top principal leaders used their ‘gut’ feelings. As one respondent put it, ‘It’s a gut feeling. An emotion, I can’t explain it’ (Klinker & Hackmann 2004: 449). Finally, principals reported that, although they made ethical choices, they had a hard time defining ‘ethics’.

Results of the study indicated that although a majority of these principals were able to select the most appropriate action response to a case situation, at least one-third ‘selected inappropriate actions for two of the three narratives’. ‘Moreover,’ they continue, ‘respondents had difficulty understanding the processes through which they made their decisions’ (Klinker & Hackmann 2004: 453).

The authors concluded that when confronted with ethical dilemmas, principals must fully examine their own beliefs and values and try to base their judgements on them in rational ways. They conclude: ‘Ethical decisions are nested within social, emotional, and psychological contexts. Understanding this complexity of contexts can be helpful to beginning administrators and assist them in making appropriate ethical decisions’ (Klinker & Hackmann 2004: 453).

Extant research, mostly qualitative in design, indicates that school leaders lack ethical literacy related to their work in school leadership (see, e.g., Cherrington & Cherrington 2000; Begley & Johanson 2003; Fullan 2003b; Bennis & Rhode 2006; Shapiro & Gross 2007; Stohr Isaacson 2007). As indicated, most studies that have been conducted to explore ethical dimensions of the work of principals have been anecdotal and qualitative, utilising primarily oral testimonies of principals (see, e.g., Campbell 1992). Few, if any, studies in education have attempted to document principals’ understanding of their ethical and moral responsibilities using quantitative measures. Parenthetically, outside the education field some quantitative studies have been undertaken to more fully understand the role ethics plays in decision-making (see, e.g., Landau & Osmo 2003).

Thus far, we see that although some researchers and others point to the importance of ethical literacy, and draw some implications and suggestions for practice, a lack of empirical research on ethics in educational leadership is evident. This inattention to the role and importance of ethics in educational decision-making by educational leaders is reflected in some studies that indicate school leaders lack ethical awareness.

Moreover, the connection between ethics and, more specifically, strategic leadership is particularly tenuous. On the one hand, research confirms that school leaders must remain ‘strategically intelligent’ in order to manage and sustain educational reform so vital to an organisation (see, e.g., Davies & Davies 2005; Davies 2006). It is believed that change is an undeniable reality for any organisation and that although not all change means a school will be better off or improve, no improvement can occur without planned change. Representative
of much of the writing in the field, Davies and Davies (2005) posit that school leaders are involved in five ‘key activities’: direction setting, translating strategy into action, aligning the people and the organisation to the strategy, determining effective intervention points, and developing strategic capabilities. According to Davies & Davies, ‘Strategic leadership is a critical component in the effective development of schools’ (2005: 10). They see strategic leadership not as a separate type of leadership (e.g., transformational leadership) but as a broader initiative that may span other leadership models (e.g., collaborative or instructional). In other words, strategic leadership skills are useful when principals aim to improve instructional programmes, collaborate with broad constituencies and transform their schools into, for instance, learning communities. The knowledge and skills of strategic leadership are critical to help accomplish these initiatives. In general, strategic leaders are committed to improving their organisations on many levels. Principals who exhibit strategic leadership believe and engage in the following activities, among others:

- coordinating all functions and practices in the school so that everything works in harmony towards a common end
- ensuring that all individuals share common goals
- assessing the ability of the organisation to respond to social, political or interpersonal crises
- adjusting the organisation’s mission to meet newly developing exigencies
- imagining varied possibilities for the future.
- Yet, on the other hand, no clear articulation of the role of ethics and strategic leadership is made

I believe courageous, passionate, and visionary leaders … need to recognise that their effectiveness as change-leaders is the result of the skillful interplay of power, politics, and ethics. (Duffy 2003: 15)

The expression ‘it’s all politics’ may not be entirely accurate but, at the same time, it isn’t far off. Politics involving vested interests of various individuals and groups of people within organisations plays a key role in shaping behaviour and what gets or doesn’t get accomplished in a school building (Blasé & Anderson 1995). Various individuals and groups are vested with formal or even informal sources of power and authority (Jackson 1990). Principals, for instance, are vested by the nature of their status or position with a degree of authority over tenure decisions of faculty. Power is a term that refers to the extent to which authority is vested in individuals within a school or district. Principals, for instance, have the authority to dock pay of an individual who commits some indiscretion, but it doesn’t mean they have to exercise their power to do so. Quite often principals do not invoke their authority to do such things. Although formal authority may exist in different individuals within a school (e.g., financial school secretary, custodian, first-grade lead teacher or assistant principal), informal authority or the authority to act powerfully might rest with charismatic leaders, for instance.

The study of politics is at once complicated and necessary in order to understand and navigate the educational landscape in a school. While this is not necessarily the place to delve
into the intricacies of such a discussion, its mention is significant given our discussion of principal strategic leadership. Planning and making decisions, important parts of strategic leadership, do not occur in isolation of the political realities or exigencies that exist in schools. Attending to issues of vested interests, authority and power within schools is necessary to carry out strategic initiatives

Duffy (2003) posits that power and politics are expected processes that occur naturally in school settings. As such, Duffy, continues, they are ‘neutral’. He explains, ‘there is nothing inherently wrong or evil with power and politics … the exercise of power and politics must … [however,] be done in an ethical manner’ (2003: 15). The relationship among power, politics and ethical behaviour is stressed by Duffy (1991) as depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Relationship among power, politics and ethical behaviour (from Duffy 1991: 4)**

Each of the four quadrants represents a different sort of leader behaviour. Quadrant 1 (Q1) represents a leader who displays powerful, political behaviour in an unethical manner. Quadrant 2 (Q2) reflects a powerful, political and ethical leader. Quadrant 3 (Q3) represents an unethical leader who is powerless and apolitical. Quadrant 4 (Q4) indicates that the leader may display ethical behaviour but is powerless or apolitical. Principal behaviour can be characterised in each quadrant as follows:

- Q1: Powerful, political but unethical behaviours
- Q2: Powerful, political and ethical behaviours
- Q3: Powerless, apolitical but unethical behaviours
- Q4: Powerless, apolitical and ethical behaviours
Duffy (2003) explains that it is Quadrant 2 behaviour that represents best practice. Leaders who inspire through vision building, who have the ability to ‘work the system’ to get things accomplished, to create structures and systems that allow for wide participation and collaboration, to obtain and utilise resources legitimately, to motivate followers to good and meaningful action, and to do the right, moral things, fit nicely into Q2. Duffy, advocating Q2 leadership, explains why some leaders cannot lead in this way and then raises a critical question that may go beyond our analysis here, but is nevertheless still important:

In my heart I know most people who move into leadership positions want to be Q2 leaders. But something happens to them when they actually make the move to the administrator’s office. Somehow some of them lose their sense of moral direction, their notions of right and wrong, their definitions of truth and justice, and they frequently seek expedient solutions to problems without regard to underlying ethical principles. Then, before long, they change into Q1s, Q3s, or Q4s. This presents a management development problem for school districts: how do they recruit leaders who are capable of and willing to be Q2 leaders, and how do they restructure their district’s reward system to help leaders stay within the Q2 arena? The solution to this puzzle is, I believe, important to the future of leadership for systematic school improvement. (Duffy 2003: 18–19)

Bolman & Deal (1997) have written much in the area of political leadership. They summarise ‘five propositions’ using their perspective as follows:

1. Organisations are coalitions of various individuals and interest groups.
2. There are enduring differences among coalition members in virtues, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve the allocation of scarce resources – who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences give conflict a central role in organisational dynamics and make power the most important resource.
5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among different stakeholders. (Bolman & Deal 1997: 163)

Each of their propositions finds relevance in our discussion of strategic leadership. Putting forth and maintaining a strategic vision requires the participation of others, as we mentioned earlier. Building and nurturing coalitions of support are critical to success as a strategic leader. Discovering who has a vested interest in one’s vision of the future and capitalising on ways to involve them is essential. Although principals, for instance, strive to build coalitions, they realise fully that these coalitions comprise diverse community members with different perspectives and capabilities. Strategic leaders welcome such diversity because they realise that the strategic plan will be made even stronger through diversity of ideas and points of view. Such leaders are pragmatists as well. They know that resources are scarce and so that prioritisation is necessary. Keeping channels of communication open by sharing views and priorities is a way to build and maintain support for school initiatives. Conflicts are inevitable when distribution of scarce resources is at play. School leaders are expected to bargain, negotiate and jockey for position without infringing on others’ rights and perspectives. They aim to achieve consensus, if possible, in most matters.

The role of power and politics related to strategic leadership, as discussed above, was
obviously not culled from extant research but from an analysis proffered by observers in the field of educational leadership. In practitioner literature, the role of ethics receives minimal attention. Fundamental ethical questions need to be addressed, such as:

- Has the strategic vision or plan been screened by an ethical lens?
- What are the implications of power and politics for providing the highest-quality education for students?
- What is the role power, politics and ethics have on leading strategically?

Given the complex educational landscape in which school leaders work and the ethical dimension of strategic leadership, almost always forgotten or taken for granted, leaders need a frame from which to scrutinise their plans. Development of an ethical framework to guide strategy in education is missing in the literature of the field. In the next several sub-sections, one example of such a frame is presented. Then, a discussion of ethics and its deep relationship to strategic leadership ensues.

**Steps to Developing an Ethical Framework for Strategic Leadership in Order to Effectively Navigate the Complex Political Environment in Education**

In an effort to demonstrate the manner in which a conceptual framework may guide strategic development in education to help navigate the complex political environment leaders confront daily, the following three sub-sections of the paper provide a rationale for ethical discourse. Admittedly, the framework is tentative and needs further explanation. Other frameworks are certainly recommended. Studies, too, are needed to examine the impact of such frameworks for the work of strategic leaders. In the meantime, the sample that follows may serve useful as a lens through which to view proposed strategic visions, programmes and actions. More than simply a vision and mission statement that often appears in the introduction of many strategic plans, this framework is more detailed and is meant to analyse strategic goals and objectives, data sources, parent involvement initiatives, professional development opportunities, budget considerations, and other components of a given strategic plan. These components are continuously examined through the ethical frame in order to ensure goal adherence, programme consistency, and overall ethical actions throughout the initiatives.

**The Concept of Social Justice Informing Strategic Leadership**

The concept of social justice has received wide attention in the literature (see, e.g., Connell 1993; Bogotch 2000; Bowers 2001; Rapp 2002; Brown 2008; Furman & Shields 2005). The subject of promoting social justice in schools is vast, so attention to it in this section will remain introductory. Calls for social justice abound because many critics over the years have pointed to significant social, political, economic and educational inequities in schools (see, e.g., Ogbu 1978; Apple 1986; Giroux 1991; Spring 1994). Schooling, for these critics, perpetuates and reinforces social, racial and gender stratifications. Inequities in allocations of school finances (Kozol 1991), socially stratified arrangements through which subject matter is delivered (known as tracking practices) in schools (Oakes 1985), biased content of the curriculum (Anyon 1981), patriarchal relations through authority patterns and staffing (Strober & Tyack 1980), differential distribution of knowledge by gender within classrooms (Sadker & Sadker 1994), and the influence of teacher expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson 1968) are examples of inequities decried by these critics.
Educational exclusionary attitudes and practices have significant pedagogical, curricular, leadership and moral implications for the work of progressive and idealistic educators as well as concerned community members. Inclusion remains an ill-conceived idea for many educators and parents. Unaware or unwilling to accept its benefits for both special and general education students, detractors adhere to traditional conceptions of teaching and learning. Paradigm paralysis (see, e.g., McBeath 1994) is all too common in education. Assumptions are fixed with a reliance on a single paradigm or lens in which to perceive the school work and world. Whether it is the conception of organising schools, formulating curricula, teaching, and supervising instruction, or views of how students learn best, paradigm paralysis has thwarted alternate ways of conceiving education and schooling. This paradigm effect, as it is called, is natural but becomes problematic when educators rigidly follow the prescribed path even when it is no longer functional or when we are confronted by other more efficacious possibilities. Exclusionism has become a paradigm effect. Some educators are paralysed by the idea of inclusion; it just doesn’t fit with their conventional ways of structuring work in classrooms.

Strategic planning is not a simple technique or strategy that a principal employs to accomplish a particular objective. It emerges from a deep commitment to improve schooling and the experiences students have in them. ‘Those of us in positions of power and privilege have, at the least, a responsibility to ensure that passionate, creative people who possess oppositional imaginations and commitments to social justice, … are heard, supported, and respected…’ (Rapp 2002: 222).

The Strategy of Building an Ethic of Caring

Dewey stressed that social morality was based on a fundamental premise of caring. He discussed the ‘Attitude of willingness to reexamine and if necessary revise current convictions, and even if that course entails the effort to change by concerted effort existing institutions, and to direct existing tendencies to new ends’ (Dewey & Tufts 1909: 777). In another essay he wrote ‘The democratic faith in human equality is belief that every human being, independent of the quantity or range of his personal endowment, has the right to equal opportunity with every other person for development of whatever gifts he has’ (Dewey 1981: 227–228). The work of Nel Noddings (1984, 1986, 1992), characteristic of and influenced by Dewey’s work, centres on the ethic of caring. An ‘ethic of caring’ affirms a belief that educators and children alike are to be caring, moral and productive members of society (Jordan Irvine 2001). As Noddings, extending Dewey’s views, posits, ‘The traditional organisation of schooling is intellectually and morally inadequate for contemporary society’ (1992: 173). Although appropriate at some point in educational history, the traditional model of bureaucratic school organisation in which organisational needs supersede individual interests is no longer appropriate. Dewey knew this well when he wrote that the problem of education was the ‘harmonising of individual traits with social ends and values’ (quoted in Mayhew & Edwards 1965: 465). Nurturing an ‘ethic of caring’, principals, as do teachers, realise their ultimate motive is to inspire a sense of caring, sensitivity, appreciation and respect for the human dignity of all people despite the travails that pervade our society and world. Organisations are not autonomous, independent entities but rather are made to conform to and meet the needs of people. Noddings makes the point related to the purpose of education, ‘We should educate all our children not only for competence but also for caring. Our aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people’ (1992: xiv).
Feminist organisational theory (Regan 1990; Blackmore 1993) informs this ‘ethic of caring’ by avoiding traditional conceptions of teaching and leading. Feminist theory questions the legitimacy of the hierarchical, patriarchal, bureaucratic school organisation. Challenging traditional leadership models, feminist theory encourages community-building, interpersonal relationships, nurturing and collaboration as of primary interest (Ferguson 1984).

Noddings (1992) has led a feminist critique challenging traditional conceptions of education by advocating an ethic of caring ‘to enable schools to become caring communities that nurture all children, regardless of their race, class, or gender’ (Marshall, Patterson, Rogers & Steele 1996: 276). Unlike traditional humanistic models of administration, ‘caring’ is inclusionary, non-manipulative and empowering. Whereas the main objective of bureaucracy is standardisation, caring inspires individual responsibility. Caring ‘is a situation- and person-specific way of performing in the world that requires being fully and sensitively attuned to the needs of the cared for by the person caring. Caring cannot be transformed into policies mandated from above, but caring can give form and coherence to our schools’ (Marshall et al. 1996: 278–279).

Although defining ‘caring’ has been difficult (Beck 1994), scholars who have explored this topic in depth note that caring always involves, to some degree, three activities. They are:

a. receiving the other’s perspective;

b. responding appropriately to the awareness that comes from this reception; and

c. remaining committed to others and to the relationship.

What do caring educators do? According to Marshall et al., they ‘frequently develop relationships that are the grounds for motivating, cajoling, and inspiring others to excellence. Generally thoughtful and sensitive, they see nuances in people’s efforts at good performance and acknowledge them; they recognize the diverse and individual qualities in people and devise individual standards of expectation, incentives, and rewards’ (1996: 282). With students, teachers would remain sensitive to their social, emotional and academic needs. Caring educators would make certain that students respect each other, and that the values and traditions of each individual, regardless of religious affiliation or cultural background, are affirmed. Caring educators would remain sensitive to the needs and feelings of all students.

The relationship between an ethic of justice and an ethic of caring is instructive (see Katz, Noddings & Strike 1999). An educational commitment to seeking justice in terms of promoting equality, equity and respect in the classroom for all students is fundamentally premised on an ethic of caring. Caring about the worth and needs of the individual student, not necessarily the needs of the school as an organisation, is of utmost concern to educators who work from an ethic of caring and justice. Parenthetically, one difference between the two ethics should be pointed out as well. Justice generally strives for a sense of impartiality; that is, right is right, wrong is wrong. An ethic of care, in contrast, avoids impartiality. Moral reasoning is passionate and involved. Gilligan (1993) and Noddings (2003), in Deweyan tradition, argue that moral detachment is not feasible. Caring rests philosophical laurels on compassion in which equity is placed at the core, not equality.

Towards a Framework or Conceptual Model of Justice and Caring in Strategic Leadership

This strategic initiative is echoed in its strong commitment to pedagogical practice that is inclusive. The strategic mission is to ensure opportunities for all children to learn at their
own pace with respect, dignity and success. We strive to differentiate instruction so that all students can learn at their own pace. We personify an ethic of caring and uphold the ideals of justice, equity and opportunity for all people. In order to establish a framework to guide accomplishment of these lofty aims, Figure 2 illustrates the role of the principal attempting to facilitate and influence the critical elements of strategic leadership (i.e., planning strategically, encouraging data-driven decision-making, and mediating the political environment) in order to ensure successful implementation of the school’s inclusion model. The figure reflects the complexity of the task at hand, acknowledging the multifaceted school environment educators must traverse as they consider the interplay among power, politics and ethics or moral leadership. When these aspects of strategic leadership work at their best, a culture of student achievement for all students is established and maintained.

**Figure 2:** A strategic leadership model that promotes student achievement for all students in a just and caring inclusive environment

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**Planning strategically**

**Transforming schools**
- understanding change
- planning for change
- implementing change
- evaluating change
- leading for social justice
- building relationships
- displaying self-efficacy
- building leadership capacity
- fostering moral leadership
- becoming a transformational leader

**Data-driven decision-making**

**High achievement for all students**

**Mediating the political environment**

Principal as initiator
Everyone as sustainer
The circle encompassing the figure represents the unstated, albeit ever-present ethical lens through which all activities (plans and actions) are filtered. At every turn strategic partners ask themselves, ‘Will this action further our commitment to the shared moral vision of this project or programme?’ These considerations mean that strategic leaders are:

- cognisant of their ethical and moral responsibilities
- committed to scrutinise each action through the conceptual framework (e.g., ‘the justice and caring’ paradigm articulated earlier)
- cognisant of political and other pressures that may come to bear on the school organisation
- willing to respond promptly and with long-term planning initiatives
- considerate of organisational resources
- aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individuals
- ready to prioritise many requests for programmes and resources
- aware that strategic planning is not a linear, neat process but involves constant revision
- interested in setting goals and articulating concrete plans to achieve them
- disciplined and organised
- never satisfied with success
- committed to ongoing whole school improvement that is morally grounded and ethically just.

Moreover, strategic leaders are involved in strategic thinking. Strategic thinking ‘is predicated on [the] involvement’ of key participants. ‘To think strategically, [principals] must be active, involved, connected, committed, alert, stimulated.’ It is ‘the calculated chaos’ of the work that drives the leaders’ ‘thinking, enabling [them] to build reflection on action as an interactive process … Such thinking must not only be informed by the moving details of action, but be driven by the very presence of that action’ (Mintzberg 1994: 291).

Strategic principals look to the future and base their vision on fundamental beliefs about various aspects of the school (e.g., curricular, instructional or interpersonal). These beliefs are shared and discussed widely with internal and external constituencies. This vision or ‘moral purpose’, as Davies and Davies (2005: 12) refer to it, translate into strategy development to actualise the vision. They say, ‘The function of strategy is to translate the moral purpose and vision into reality’ (2005: 12). Having a sense where a school is and where it needs to go is critical in the strategic process.

The second phase is translating this strategy into action. Davies & Davies (2005, citing Davies 2002) highlight a ‘four-stage ABCD approach of translating strategy into action’:

**Stage 1: Articulation**

This phase refers to communication about the strategies. Principals may initiate conversations but, even more importantly, encourage wide participation among key parties. Communication can occur also in more formal ways; that is, writing down strategic goals and methods used to accomplish them. Finally, establishing the structure to facilitate articulation is critical. Structural support mechanisms may include scheduling common prep periods among faculty for planning, allowing for released time during school day or a day away from the school to attend a conference, or other similar activities.
Stage 2: Building
This phase doesn’t necessarily follow the previous one but is really meant to rally faculty and staff around the strategy to gain their input and support. Principals build support through use of logos, t-shirts, informal and formal meetings, and so on. Building refers to extending the vision and support for it.

Stage 3: Creating
This phase emphasises utilising creative ways of initiating a dialogue with others to motivate them to share a ‘conceptual or mental map of the future’. They explain, ‘What strategic leaders are able to do is step back and articulate the main features of the current organisation, which might be called the strategic architecture of the school’ (Davies & Davies 2005: 14).

Stage 4: Defining
This phase involves identifying ‘desired outcomes’ and designing specific strategies to achieve them. In all efforts involving strategic leadership, aligning people’s interests and abilities with ways of promoting strategic initiatives is critical to the entire process, and represents a third phase or key activity of a strategic leader. Once key people and the roles they can and are willing to play are identified, the strategic leader must keep them motivated and on target.

Davies and Davies (2005) discuss several concepts for doing so, including:

- Strategic conversations – involving ongoing, frequent formal and informal dialogues with individuals and groups inside and outside the school
- Strategic participation – encouraging meaningful, not superficial, involvement every step of the way
- Strategic motivation – creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence in the leadership and more importantly in the larger strategic effort
- Strategic capability – bringing together diverse individuals who are willing to agree to disagree in an atmosphere of mutual respect

A fourth phase involves determining effective intervention points. Davies and Davies (2005) discuss ‘strategic timing’ as crucial for overall success. When people are not ready, for instance, or institutional mechanisms that support strategic planning are not firmly in place, it is not an opportune time to initiate or move forward on goals of the strategic initiative. They explain, ‘Strategic timing affects all the people in the school community. If the strategic timing is wrong it can have devastating effects on the school. People will be divided, and realizing the strategy will therefore be impossible’ (2005: 17).

Developing strategic capabilities is the final key activity, according to Davies & Davies (2005). Building a learning community (Sullivan & Glanz 2006) in which individuals are committed to a larger goal than themselves and are willing to share, collaborate, take risks, problem-solve, agree to disagree in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect, and so on, is essential for strategic capability.

Although these activities or phases are important for successful strategic planning, no strategic initiative is complete or even possible without effective leadership. Davies & Davies (2005) identify four characteristics that successful strategic leaders display:

- ‘Strategic leaders have a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present’ (2005: 20)
- ‘Strategic leaders prioritize their own strategic thinking and learning’ (2005: 20)
Strategic leaders are rarely, if ever, satisfied with the way things are, the status quo. They are imaginative and restless. They continually seek better ways of doing things. They enjoy planning for the future. These leaders constantly spend time in reflection about their goals and plans for their school. Realising the complex nature of school life, they reach out to others to enhance their own understanding because they build and sustain meaningful partnerships or networks of individuals who can advise them or support their ideas and initiatives. Davies & Davies underscore this point: ‘strategic leaders place a high importance on networks and networking to draw in ideas and inspiration for strategic change and development’ (2005: 22).

The literature in strategy in education is replete with other suggestions for implementing and monitoring strategic initiatives (see, e.g., Mittenthal 2002). However, strategic planning, above all else, is predicated most fundamentally on an articulated, well-established and accepted vision, mission and series of goals for the school that is filtered through and monitored by an ethical and moral lens. This moral lens is embodied in a collaboratively developed conceptual framework, as sampled in the above sections. The time it takes to draft such a document is time well spent. The framework need not be as elaborate or long as the one above. Most vital, rather, is that it articulates the moral vision and ethical principles that will guide the strategic initiative every step of the way. The conceptual framework is available at every turn to ensure that vested interests that may corrupt or derail the initiative are kept at bay. The framework is the map that ensures that the ethical vision that was collaboratively developed is adhered to and implemented properly.

**Thinking Ethically about Strategic Leadership**

The ethical implications of rights, obligations, fairness, and integrity are essential ingredients of any strategic planning process. The future of our organizations, the people they represent, and the wider community can only be strengthened by embedding ethics into the strategic planning process. (Bowman 2008)

Theorists of strategy in education have been content to develop research models and proposals, including formulating new models of strategy development, without articulating, examining and explaining the ethical basis for their work. Practitioners do a bit better, but not much. Ethics is given lip service in some practitioner-based proposals without adequate depth of analysis of ethical foundations and their implications for best practice, or moral practice for that matter. The prevailing atmosphere in the field has been to seek ‘quick-fixes’ rather than attempt to understand complex and dynamic strategic issues related to strategic planning and development, as a whole. By relying on a few empirical studies and, in the main, basing their judgements and visions on experienced-based or personal assumptions, educators have created programmes and strategic plans without the benefit of scientific research to guide practice. The schism between research and practice in the field of strategy in education is marked, perhaps more so than most. Moreover, because the field suffers from what I call ‘ethical indifference’ proposals and plans have not been thoroughly analysed in terms of their ethical worth. Ethics in education is not merely idiosyncratic but must rely on
commonly held values and beliefs that undergird ideals of democracy, justice and caring. Under best practice, strategic plans and proposals would undergo the lens of a conceptual framework that has been proffered in this paper, as one model among others, to ensure that articulated visions reflect the best interests of children, and not the vested interests of political groups.

The treatment of ethics as serious study for better understanding strategy in education has been abysmally insufficient (Bowman 2008). First, a number of practitioners and theorists ignore or take for granted the role of ethics in educational practice. Certainly they acknowledge ethical codes of behaviour and other general guidelines. But these documents are not usually referenced in decision-making. A perusal of many textbooks addressing strategy in education and selected journal articles demonstrates the generalised and simplistic treatment, at best, of ethics. Second, the field characteristically remains overly pragmatic and highly prescriptive. A climate of urgency prevails in which ‘to do’ is more valued than ‘to know’. Ethical analyses are usually made in short shrift in almost perfunctory fashion. Those who do consider ethics do so in a way that lacks specificity, nuance and power. The lack of attention to ethics in education has been amply documented (see, e.g., Campbell 1992), as discussed earlier in the paper.

To recognise the import of an ethical framework to guide strategy development, both theoretically and practically, has been a leitmotif of this paper. Researchers need to examine closely the role ethics plays in strategy development. Qualitative studies are needed to help us better understand how practitioners manage the school world of power, politics, and ethical behaviour in regards, in this context, to strategic leadership initiatives. Researchers need to help frame ethical frameworks or models from which practitioners can best make decisions about their school or district. To consider the ethical frame means to be concerned with questions, among others, such as:

- To what extent are current strategic efforts in practice grounded by an articulated ethical frame?
- How might educational researchers identify key variables for the study of ethics and strategy?
- What significant ideas, events or people influenced our understanding of ethics and strategy?
- What are the social, economic, philosophical and political forces that have shaped the field’s theories for strategic leadership?
- What other models of ethics can be framed to guide strategy in education?

Realistically, the field does not have the luxury to wait until researchers develop theoretical models to guide their own research and to inform practice. Still, my hope is that we can draw greater attention to the need to filter strategic endeavours through an ethical lens. One way to think ethically about strategic leadership is to utilise extant research and theories in consonance with a model, such as the one proposed in this paper.

Other research-based models are useful as well to help practitioners think ethically about their strategic initiatives. Komives, Lucas & McMahon (1998) investigated James Rest’s (1986) decision-making model, which presents four stages of a model based on ‘moral reasoning and an ethic of care’ (Komives et al. 1998: 265). This discussion is also informed by a study conducted by Klinker & Hackmann (2004). Although space limitations in this article do not allow me to explicate the Rest model, suffice it to say that it is useful as a construct for
strategic planners to heighten their moral sensitivities, moral judgements, moral motivations and moral actions. Although the model has been researched and applied in the context of the moral dilemmas faced by educational leaders, its relevance for strategic planning is pertinent.

Ethical and moral deliberation by strategic developers is episodic and haphazard. Without a theoretical or conceptual ethical model specifically designed for strategic decision-making, school people are left to their own devices and personal constructs. Thinking ethically, therefore, requires deliberate attention to creating research-based models. Strategic planning is not a simple technique or strategy that a school leader employs to accomplish a particular objective. It emerges from a deep commitment to improving schools and the experiences students have in them. It is screened through an ethical lens to ensure that the goals and objectives are in sync with the larger vision of the moral community. Given the model affirmed in this paper, strategy in education serves the highest ideals of education so that all students, regardless of background or ability, can achieve their potential in an atmosphere of support, opportunity and justice. Such affirmations are trite and true, but in the realities and exigencies school people confront daily such ideals are easily muted or forgotten. Thinking ethically about strategy in education requires vigilance, commitment and moral sensitivity.

**Conclusion**

Going beyond a review of the field, this paper views strategic leadership, in its various stages or manifestations, through a paradigm of social justice and an ethic of caring absent, for the most part, in writing and research in the field. Additional voices, perspectives and, especially, research efforts are necessary to advance knowledge about the relationships between power, politics and ethics in the field of strategic leadership.

Insufficient investigation into the role of ethics in strategy development has thwarted, in part, the efforts of the field to move forward with a solid conceptual and methodological base. Overly influenced, even driven, by pressures or expectations to apply strategic initiatives in rather prescriptive ways without attention to the theory and research base informing practice as well as an absence of an ethical lens, the field continues to wallow in mediocrity. Such mediocrity is evidenced by an absence of an agreed-upon conceptual framework to guide research and practice, a plethora of prescriptions for practice without apparent research and justification to advocate said practice, a dearth of research conceptualisations to further professional knowledge in the field, and by prescriptive practices that are, at times, both commonsensical and contradictory. However, the most egregious sign of mediocrity, at least to this reviewer, is the absence of an ethical lens to guide strategic decisions. Researchers and those who write in the field of strategic leadership can better inform theory, research and practice by accentuating an ethical conceptual framework around issues of justice and caring, one approach discussed in this paper.

The importance of strategy development in schools is axiomatic. Strategic leadership, in the transformative sense, is about change. Transforming schools is easy if done superficially. Such change, however, is ephemeral. Unfortunately, much change, writes Fullan (2003c), occurs at this superficial level. In fact, he argues that many of the changes in schools in the 1960s in the USA and elsewhere around innovative instructional and curricular practices were short-lived because they were implemented on the surface without a deep change in people’s beliefs and behaviour. Both Fullan (2003c) and Starratt (1995) concur that change without addressing a change in core beliefs and values as well as an ethical foundation is
doomed to remain temporary and superficial. ‘Transformational leadership’, writes Starratt, ‘is concerned with large, collective values’ (1995: 110). Fullan (cited in Fullan 2003a) has identified ‘five crucial mind and action sets that leaders in the 21st century must cultivate: a deep sense of moral purpose [italics added], knowledge of the change process, capacity to develop relationships across diverse individuals and groups, skills in fostering knowledge creation and sharing, and the ability to engage with others in coherence making amidst multiple innovations’ (2003a: 35).

The importance of strategy in education is clear, and avenues for future work suggested. Now, mindful attention and careful work by individual scholars are required to yield an ethical framework and direction for work in the field of strategic leadership.

References


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