FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMPLIANCE: THE NEED TO BUILD ETHICAL RESILIENCY WITHIN CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

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INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate in 2002, the need to comply with federal and state mandates has steadily grown. Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia give standards-based tests to children in grades 3-8 (Olson, 2006). Except for the states of Iowa and Nebraska, children in the rest of the United States of America yearly experience one or more high-stakes accountability measures to ascertain their academic performance. The accountability mandates within NCLB have resulted in a $2.3 billion dollar industry annually that is largely unregulated (Toch, 2006). Within 2006, over 35% of the 48 states administering high-stakes assessments reported significant errors in the accuracy of the creation and scoring of these high-stakes exams (Toch, 2006). Yet, educators are required to comply with the accountability mandates within NCLB regardless of the obvious pitfalls that abound. The results of these high-stakes exams often dictate the futures of educational institutions, the adults that work within these institutions, and the children who these adults purport to serve. To begin to address these ethical dilemmas, and the multiple influences vying for attention, the educational leader must become aware of what is morally and ethically at risk and must possess reasoning and other reflective skills that lead to judgments about what ought to be done in the best interest of the student (Stekovich, 2006). These reasoning and ethical reflective skills may provide the educational leader with the resilience capacity to recover and to become stronger in the face of future ethical dilemmas within the high-stakes educational environment that currently exists (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).
THE CASE STUDY

In the spring of 2006, thousands of children in Illinois took the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. For many schools and school districts, this high-stakes test would not only allege to measure their students’ academic achievement, it would also determine whether their school or school district had made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and whether or not their school or school district would be put on Academic Watch, Academic Warning, or be taken over by a private institution.

However, in the spring of 2006, the State of Illinois chose a new vendor, Harcourt Publishers, to create, administer, and score the ISAT test. Harcourt was chosen for its reputation as being one of the few companies that serve 90 percent of the statewide testing requests across the United States (Toch, 2006). Despite Harcourt’s experience in high-stakes testing construction, and a $45 million dollar multi-year contract with the Illinois State Board of Education, during the 2006 Illinois testing week, accounts began to surface detailing cases of improper testing materials, administration books with serious errors, student books with missing pages, answer sheets that did not correspond to the student testing booklets and a host of missing materials for special education and language minority students (Chicago Tribune: March 10, 2006; March 17, 2006; November 6, 2006; November 17, 2006; Education Week: March 22, 2006; www.isbe.net: March 6, 2006; March 7, 2006; March 10, 2006; March 14, 2006). School district administrators, teachers, and Illinois State Board officials began to scramble to rectify the situation. Additionally, stories began to surface (personal communication, March 6, 2008) detailing questionable behavior by school administrators that seemed counter to the education profession and to the code of ethical conduct for school administrators (AASA, 2008). This type of phenomenon is a classic example of Campbell’s law (1975). Campbell’s law states that: “the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor” (p. 36).

Yet, despite these serious problems, the ISAT administration went forward and the results were published in the fall of 2006. The student outcomes for the 2006 ISAT resulted in an increase of 16% in reading and math scores across the state of Illinois. These results were five months delayed. However, for those schools that did not see such
remarkable increases in their students’ scores, sanctions were incurred (retrieved May 18, 2007, from www.isbe.net).

Concurrently, during March of 2006, one of the authors was teaching a course entitled: The ethics of human resources in schools. This doctoral level course intends to provide future and practicing administrators with a mindful framework for constructing the questions necessary to realize the moral and ethical dimensions that are currently at stake in today’s educational institutions. Students in this course are usually department chairpersons or building-level administrators. During class discussion, these students shared their concerns about the 2006 ISAT administration with this professor. As the discussion evolved, it became apparent that many of the students were uncomfortable with the professional decisions that were being made for them, or that they had made themselves, concerning the 2006 ISAT. Many expressed regret for the way they had handled the situation and vowed to do differently next time. However, many students expressed profound sadness and seemed to be at a loss as to what to do next.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aforementioned suspect behavior on the part of some school administrators prompted these researchers to investigate the situation in order to understand how school leaders dealt with the controversy. In particular the following research questions were asked:

1. What happened during the 2006 ISAT administration?
2. How did school administrators behave during this stressful period of time?
3. What can university leadership preparation programs learn from these behaviors of practitioners in the field?
4. How might university leadership preparation programs respond to the ethical challenges that today’s educational leaders confront?

However, before addressing the methodology, findings and conclusions surrounding this case study, it is necessary to situate this research within the context of today’s educational leadership preparation programs, and the current state of the educational leadership profession itself; as well as, provide a conceptual framework for understanding applied ethics within the work of an educational leader.
THE STATE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION PROGRAMS

As the educational leadership profession examines the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to become a successful school leader, the field of ethics has become primary to the conversation. Questions as to what should be taught—ethics, ethical decision-making and/or social justice—who should teach the subject matter—philosophers or applied ethicists—and how it should be taught—as a spiraling thread throughout the coursework, as a stand-alone course, or as an applied concept to a particular facet of educational leadership—result in worthwhile queries to consider. Within the 2008 Final Report of the Illinois Joint Research Taskforce on Educational Leadership Preparation, the teaching of ethics to future and current school administrators is seen as a vital area for education, inquiry, and research within five of the ten taskforce study domain areas. Spurred on by the 2005 Levine Report, professional organizations within educational administration have come together to chart an agenda for research and teaching within the field of educational leadership. Meanwhile, practitioners within the field find themselves navigating within the murky waters of high-stakes testing, collective bargaining, and fish-bowl accountability while simultaneously acting in the “best interest of the student” (Stekovich, 2006, p. 3). As philosophy, pedagogy and methodology are debated, future and current administrators need to engage in this critical learning and conversation immediately in order to lead in today’s educational institutions (Israel, 2007).

STANDARDS AND PROFESSIONALISM

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards together with the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Standards, developed for the National Council of the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) under the auspices of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) are the building blocks for educational leadership course creation and subsequent educational leadership preparation. ELCC Standard 5 states that: An educational leader promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (ISLLC, 2008; NPBEA, 2002). Additionally, the American Association of School Administrators’ (AASA) professional code of ethics provides guidance to ethical decision-making for the novice and experienced educational
leader in the field. The components of the AASA code that pertain specifically to the dilemma central to this case-study are the following:

- Makes the education and well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision-making.
- Fulfills professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity and always acts in a trustworthy and responsible manner.
- Advises the school board and implements the governing board of education's policies and administrative rules and regulations.
- Pursues appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies and regulations that are not consistent with sound educational goals or are not in the best interest of children (AASA, 2008).

However, the educational leader can find him/herself in a situation that results in a very real ethical dilemma—that is often to honor one part of the code is in direct conflict with honoring another part of the code. Additionally, the discrepancies between espoused beliefs and actual practice need to be examined and discussed by future and current administrators as they appraise situations in their own school buildings and organizations. Like any necessary skill or disposition, this discussion needs to occur frequently in order for the educational leader to be well practiced at resolving ethical dilemmas at a moment’s notice. Because ethical dilemmas will occur—just as they did in the Spring of 2006.

**TEACHING ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

Future school administrators need to have a basic knowledge of ethics and the ethical codes that currently govern the profession so they can formulate their own ethical dispositions to solve ethical dilemmas that occur within schools (Begley, 2004; Edmonson & Fisher, 2002; Strike, 2007). It cannot be assumed that students and practicing administrators have this knowledge or that they are conscious of why they do what they do (Israel, 2007). Unless future school administrators examine the assumptions and rules that pertain to leading school communities, they will be ruled by other's rules. As Tom Donaldson (1993) advised: “A course on ethics is not like a polio vaccine. We can't inoculate students against doing wrong and the temptation to do wrong. However, at least we can offer the diagnostic skills and the tools for ethical critical thinking” (p. 25). Additionally, if educational leadership preparation programs are going to be relevant in the real-world of school administration, educational leadership preparation coursework must
bridge best practice theory with the facts on the ground (Murphy, 2005). However a definition of what this ethical leadership behavior looks like is necessary in order to provide a roadmap for educating aspiring, as well as reminding current, school leaders.

**ETHICAL RESILIENCY AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Similar to the Illinois case study being discussed in this paper, in Georgia, the 2009 state standardized tests appear to have been doctored, displaying “an unusually high number of eraser marks” (Lohr, 2010, para 1). Indeed, “as many as 250,000 incorrect answers were changed to make them correct” (Lohr, 2010, para 1). The supposed motivation of the cheating was to ensure schools continued to receive federal funding. Investigators into this matter do not conclusively know if there was a concerted effort to cheat or which parties were responsible. Even though the responsible parties are unknown, many are concerned that a cheating culture has been created in Georgia school leadership. There is fear that a cheating culture may spread to schools in other states (Lohr, 2010), especially in this high-stakes testing climate created by the No Child Left Behind Act (Guisbond & Neill, 2004). McGee and Nelson (2005) describe how three Texas principals “fell from grace” as they too felt that they were trapped within a “culture of compliance and fear” (p. 367). Reports from: CBS Baltimore, MD: June 2011; The Associated Press, Los Angeles, CA: June 2011; The Washington Teacher Blogspot, Washington, DC: April 2011; The New York Times, Houston, TX: June 2010; The New York Times, Springfield, Mass: May 2009; The New York Times, Norfork, VA: March 2009; and USA Today, San Deigo, CA: 2007, detail the illegal and unethical behavior of educational leaders, who previously had been exemplars of model citizenship and educational stewardship, found cheating or promoting cheating within their school districts on high-stakes student accountability measures. Across the country there are school districts where students are underperforming on standardized tests; thus, resulting in some state’s federal funding being endangered. Thus the temptation to act unethically to secure funds may become overwhelming, yet the pressure put on schools to perform does not appear likely to decline in the foreseeable future. Instead of pressure declining, Guisbond and Neill (2004) argue that NCLB—because of its inauthentic accountability standards—continually and unfairly adds weight to the burden on public schools (Guisbond & Neill, 2004). Thus, developing educational leaders who can be ethical in the face of
adversity—adversity in this case resulting in the loss of federal funding, jobs, and prestige—may be essential to long-term, sustainable institutional success. To better inform this understanding of how preK-12 educational leaders can be ethical in the face of adversity—or ethically resilient—resiliency, ethical decision making, and finally ethical resiliency must be fully explicated.

Resiliency

Resiliency means being able to bounce back from adversity, to be confronted with great strife and still overcome. In fact, resiliency cannot be displayed unless “suffering precedes the show of strength” (Masten, 2001, p. 228). Resiliency has been described as an adaptive process—causing one to become more able to confront future stressful occurrences (Masten, 2001; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Even though resiliency has been placed in this category that denotes an extraordinary amount of human strength, Masten (2001) concluded that resiliency is actually quite ordinary and commonplace. If resiliency is common, then even those who have not encountered adversity early in life or do not fully understand the tools it takes to be resilient still have the capacity to become resilient in the face of new and unfavorable circumstances. The educational research on resiliency has rested on this assumption, that resiliency can be taught or enhanced through interventions. Because resiliency can be learned, many studies have been conducted on children to understand what circumstances caused them to become resilient and how those circumstances can be created for others.

A resiliency framework has been utilized for decades to understand how children manage to thrive after encountering obstacles that would appear insurmountable. In primary and secondary education research, some focus has been on developing interventions that help at-risk students, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and underrepresented students develop the resiliency to persist (Hall, 2007; Morales, 2008; Thornton, Collins, & Daugherty, 2006). Resiliency models have also been utilized to enhance career development of young adults and students who face an increasingly complex job market (Fleish-Palmer, Luthans, & Mandernach, 2009; King & Madsen, 2007). Teachers, because more than one-third leave the profession in three years, have also been the subject of many resiliency studies (Bobek, 2002; Yost, 2006, p.59). Studies on resiliency in educational leadership have focused on women and their efforts to overcome adversity that may stem from the traditional social and cultural roles assigned to them—roles that may be
stifling to their progress and effectiveness as leaders (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Pankake & Beaty, 2005). Not only has the resiliency of individuals been studied but also the resiliency of communities.

Recent research on community resiliency has examined how communities work to prevent, and also bounce back from, natural disasters and health crises (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008, p. 128). Educational leaders will certainly be confronted with crises, like the Georgia cheating scandal and the other high-stakes testing scandals in Baltimore, MD: June 2011; Los Angeles, CA: June 2011; Washington, DC: April 2011; Houston, TX: June 2010; Springfield, Mass: May 2009; Norfolk, VA: March 2009; and, San Diego, CA: 2007. Understanding the resiliency topic from a community perspective is important because the educational leaders who are responding to various crises will come from specific communities. Indeed, educational leaders are a part of a community in their profession—a specific school in a specific district in a specific state. And both individual and environmental factors will determine the ability for the leader and the institution to be resilient (Masten, 2001). In fact, a resilient leader should be in the business of creating not only a resilient self and organization but also a self and organization that acts ethically (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

The studies on resiliency cited here assume or imply that the actions resulting from a resilient person or community will be ethical or at least strive to be ethical. Instead of acknowledging resiliency and ethics as two separate constructs, studies of resiliency have appeared to seamlessly incorporate ethics as a matter-of-fact result or dimension of resiliency. However, resiliency alone does not make a person or organization choose to be ethical in its dealings (Youssef & Luthans, 2005, p. 16). Indeed, the case of cheating in Georgia schools illuminates that resiliency and ethics are two separate ideas. Georgia schools found a way to be resilient for a time by doctoring test scores that would help them be able to continue receiving federal funding (Lohr, 2010). However, the means by which Georgia schools showed resiliency was unethical. Therefore, it is important to consider ethics in educational leadership separate from resiliency.

**ETHICAL DECISION MAKING**

When unpacking the ethical decision-making process that an educational leader engages in, one examines the assumptions underlying
the professional’s thinking. The ethical decision-making lenses of justice, care, critique, and profession and the values that underscore these ethical viewpoints are considered (Shapiro & Stekovich, 2005). Questions of consequences, due process, what does the one who is cared for need?, and what voices are not heard?, lead the conversation. However, further digging into these questions, and the values underlying these questions, often leads one to a “values audit” (Begley, 2006, p. 26). This values audit attempts to identify and understand the multiple voices and constituencies that an educational leader must be accountable to. But if one delves even deeper, one finds that an educational leader’s ethical decision-making process can, and should, be more than an activity in self-analysis and accountability. Rather, an educational leader must be ethically “proactive” and understand the ethical responsibilities he/she owns when facing the leadership challenges in today’s society (Starratt, 2005, p. 124). Renowned educational ethicist, Robert Starratt envisions the educational leader’s domains of ethical responsibility as the following:

- Responsibility as a human being;
- Responsibility as a citizen and public servant;
- Responsibility as an educator;
- Responsibility as an educational administrator;
- Responsibility as an educational leader (p. 125).

Using Starratt’s (2005) ethical responsibilities as a framework for understanding past decision-making and for proactively reflecting on future ethical dilemmas provides the educational leader with a more nuanced viewpoint of what ought to be. Specifically, this ethical framework has the potential to move the ethical decision-making process and conversation from one of accountability and the status quo—to one of responsibility and the possible outcomes that might transpire. A conceptual framework of ethics based on responsibilities can provide the educational leader with a tangible framework for moving beyond moral awareness and acting ethically, to a stance of moral imagination and being ethical (Begley, 2006; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thomas, 1999).

Frick and Gutierrez (2008) conducted a study to determine what ethical issues are specific to the practice of educational leaders in secondary schools. The authors found that the responsibility that administrators have to children and youth and to the advancement of teaching and learning were the two primary unique ethical issues specific to preK-12 administrators (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008). Education administrators additionally are guided by federal regulations. Additionally, educational leaders work for institutions that have many...
stakeholders—some vocal, as evidenced by the reaction of a parent who questioned the source of cheating in Atlanta schools (Lohr, 2010, para. 9). When examining the uniqueness of preK-12 schools, what can be argued is that educational leaders should work in the best interests of students, of teaching and learning, and of their community while adhering to federal regulations.

ETHICAL RESILIENCY

An argument for ethical resiliency is that indeed leaders and organizations need both ethics and resiliency to be sustainable. As already noted, resilient behavior may be unethical. But ethical behavior may be fleeting (Youssef & Luthans, 2005, p. 16). The combination of ethical behavior and resiliency allows for viable sustainability. If the responsibility that educational leaders have to students and to teaching and learning are truly the ethical dimensions that distinguish the education profession from others (Frick & Gutierrez, 2008), then those interests have to be in the forefront of educators’ minds as they learn and practice to be ethically resilient and create ethically resilient institutions. Specifically, teaching applied ethics in leadership preparation coursework may provide aspiring leaders with the opportunity to build “resilience capacity” through the constructs of “core values, educational values and program values” (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005, p. 4). Additionally, for the purposes of this research, ethical resiliency as a conceptual framework was employed to categorize and make meaning from these data that emerged from the following three-tiered qualitative research design in an attempt to understand the events and behaviors of school administrators during the 2006 ISAT administration.

LIMITATIONS

The research methodology for this case study and the display of data can be found in appendices one and two respectively at the end of this paper. In reviewing these data it is important to note the limitations of this research study. The qualitative questionnaire that was created was distributed to only the list-serve membership of the Illinois Principal Association with viable email addresses (IPA). Respondent rate (24%) is not particularly high. This may have been due to the very sensitive nature of the topic. Transfer of findings may be possible through replication of this instrument to a larger population of building-level administrators.
within the state. Additionally, of the 14 questions that comprised the questionnaire, only two directly focused on ethical decision-making. To compensate for this instrument deficiency, follow-up in-depth interviews were conducted with nine of the questionnaire participants in order to probe deeper into the ethical decision-making that school administrators employed during this stressful time. Documents surrounding the incident were also analyzed. Through data reduction, data display, conclusion creation, and triangulation, verification and trend identification of these data were achieved (Berkowitz, 1997; Stake, 2010).

However, the reader is cautioned that this research is confined to the state of Illinois and the relatively small sample size. Additionally, it is acknowledge that due to the controversial nature of the topic, self-reporting by the respondents could be emotionally based rather than factually accurate. Yet due to the very nature of this emotionally charged ethical dilemma, the continuous revelations of questionable behaviors surrounding this issue across the country, and the current accountability-driven, politically charged context of educational leadership, these data that have been revealed deserve to be analyzed in order to make-meaning of the very real lives and decisions that educational leaders are faced with in today’s society.

**DISCUSSION**

**Accountability vs. Responsibility**

Kenneth Strike in his 2007 book entitled: *Ethical Leadership in Schools: Creating Community in an Environment of Accountability* states that: “Ethics concerns the question: How shall we live well together?” (p. 19). The remorse displayed by the doctoral level students in this researcher’s ethics class, which was the impetus for this study, along with the frustration expressed by the nine volunteer interviewees, demonstrate a deep longing to do better and to manifest a level of integrity that could allow the school community to “live well together.” But in age of accountability is this possible? Strike (2007) states what is possible by the following:

There are multiple forms of accountability. There is accountability to the legislature for meeting prescribed benchmarks, to professional norms, and to members of the community. Good leaders recognize all of these and find ways to make them work together to improve their schools (p. 148).
These data paint a picture of a high-stakes testing environment in shambles and building-level administrators attempting to clean-up the mess in dubious manners. One wonders if these educational leaders ever envisioned themselves behaving in this manner when they first applied for the position. Within educational leadership there are multiple influences that have the power and authority to “lead us away from the path that best embodies who we were meant to be” (Neafsey, 2003, p. 2). It seems that this was exactly what happened during the 2006 ISAT administration and in the aforementioned recent cases in Georgia, Texas, Los Angeles, Baltimore, San Diego and Washington, D.C.

A need to expand beyond ethical lenses and values clarification seems to be needed as school leaders wrestle with the very nature of their work. In an age of high-stakes accountability it is not enough to account for one’s ethical decision-making skills. Accounting may lead to compliance; but as this case illustrates, compliance may not be enough. One must also own one’s ethical decision-making skills. Robert J. Starratt’s (2005) mutual relationships among the ethical domains delineate these multiple levels of responsibility. One wonders as these educational leaders complied with the 2006 ISAT testing procedures could they honestly say that their decision-making and subsequent actions were ethical in the context of Starratt’s ethical responsibilities: “being a human being; being a citizen and public servant; being an educator; being an educational administrator; and finally, being an educational leader” (p. 131). While the questionnaires and documents do not address these issues of ethical responsibility specifically, the follow-up interviews allowed for these questions to be considered as demonstrated in the interviewees’ own words:

I knew I was doing the right thing as the law dictated. I also kept my school district out of the media spotlight. But did I do the right thing by kids… Of course not. This (the ISAT) is not what it means to be an educator. But what choice did I have… no one would back me up… who says no… I would have broken the law and lost my job… And then I wouldn’t have been there for the kids anyway (personal communication, 10/7/08).

The whole testing process is a scam… it doesn’t measure what kids know. It is an NCLB requirement that we all must follow. So, don’t ask me about ethics. Asking did I think if I would not give them… I don’t ever want to give them. You know what happens… you go to jail. It isn’t worth it. I do more good on a
You professors don’t get it. You live in your ivory tower and ask what is right and what is wrong. You don’t get in trouble for asking that. Well we do when it comes to the state. You follow the rules. You follow the rules... And hope you don't get too beaten down (personal communication 10/10/08).

When reviewing the mutual domains of ethical responsibility, one wonders if in an age of high-stakes accountability: are today’s educational leaders facing an untenable situation? Additionally, in this age of high-stakes accountability, how might educational leadership preparation programs create a culture of compassion and understanding for school leaders which enables them to ask for assistance and guidance when confronting ethically difficult situations? Furthermore, once beaten down, as expressed by the aforesaid respondent, how could leadership preparation and continuation courses provide current and aspiring educational leaders with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to become ethically resilient?

**Ethical Resiliency**

As one reviews the responses of the principals in both the qualitative questionnaires and in the follow-up in-depth interviews, one is struck by a sense of isolation and hopelessness in the voices of these leaders. The awareness of the ethical problem is evident. What ought to be done seems obvious. Even the choices that should be made in the best interest of the student seem apparent to the practitioners in the field. And yet, in almost every response, compliance was chosen over ethical responsibility which could result in civil disobedience. The educational leaders in this case study seemed to lack ethical resilience.

The most common form of resiliency within the literature is that of psychological resilience. The definition of psychological resiliency refers to an individual’s capacity to withstand a stressor or stressors and not manifest psychological dysfunction, such as mental illness or a persistent negative mood (Luther, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). In particular, resiliency is seen as a two-dimensional construct concerning the adversity and the positive adjustment to such adversity (Luther & Cicchetti, 2000). In studying children, Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990) found that children who had experienced childhood stress due to parental divorce or parental drug use exhibited psychological resiliency by demonstrating:
1) good outcomes, regardless of high-risk status; 2) constant competence under stress; and, 3) recovery from trauma (p. 429). These resilient behaviors have been documented in such populations as Head Start preschoolers, children of poor Vietnamese parents in the U.S.A, children of American farmers during the farm crises of 1980s and 1990s, and adults after the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centers (Bernard, 2004; Block & Block 1980; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin 2003; Luthar, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982).

Researchers have found that these aforementioned groups demonstrated psychological resiliency when certain protective factors were present. These protective factors seem to include but are not limited to: 1) personal attributes that lead to a positive self-concept; 2) family and close bonds to family members; 3) community support from peers; and, 4) involvement in affinity groups and organizations. These internal and external supports seemed to provide these groups of children and adults with the tools necessary to be resilient in times of great stress and deprivation (Bonanno, Galea Burciarelli & Vlahov, 2007; Werner, 1995).

In the case of the building principals within this research study, one finds that ethical resiliency was and is lacking. The respondents in this study did not have the ethical resiliency to do the right thing in 2006. And in subsequent interviews two years later, these educational leaders articulate that they have not “bounced-back” from this experience nor do they see a new way to address this issue if it were to arise again. In short, they seem to lack resilience capacity. Paterson & Kelleher (2005) postulate that this resilience capacity consists of the following sources: “personal values, personal efficacy and personal energy” (p. 4). The review of the literature and these case data indicate that the foundational constructs of personal and professional ethics may be missing from these resiliency capacity sources. The mindful teaching of personal and professional ethics within educational leadership preparation coursework may provide the needed foundation to build resilience capacity within tomorrow’s educational leaders. The authors believe that building ethical resiliency within these administrators, like building psychological resiliency, may result in future positive ethical outcomes producing decisions that are in the best interests of students despite adverse circumstances. The construction of ethical resiliency might result in ethical competence, as demonstrated by following one’s professional ethical responsibilities, even when experiencing external stress. Providing these principals with ethical resilience capacity building skills might result in these principals recovering from decision-making that was not in the
best interest of children (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). In the case of the principals in this study, ethical resiliency could manifest itself as not only a desire to do better next time, but also a determination to change the system and not accept the status-quo.

Therefore, if universities seek to promote a dialogue of compassion and understanding, and build ethical resiliency in its aspiring educational leaders the following questions must be asked:

- As we examine the efficacy of educational leadership preparation programs, are we considering whether or not we are creating preparation environments that appreciate the realities of the work of today’s educational leaders?
- As we examine the efficacy of educational leadership preparation programs, are we providing structures within our higher education institutions for creating and maintaining ethical resiliency so that our graduates might be able to behave professionally and ethically under pressure in the field or at least be able to grow ethically as time progresses?

**CONCLUSIONS**

Today’s educational administrators face enormous ethical challenges in their work everyday. “The stakes are ‘high’ because of the life-changing significance of the consequences attached to these test scores” (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 5). Therefore, it is necessary for leadership preparation and continuing education programs to build the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to create and sustain “moral literacy” within the educational leadership profession (Begley, 2004). Current research posits that this can be done by building ethical awareness; teaching ethical decision-making; and developing moral imagination (Ozar, 2001; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thomas, 1999). However, educational leadership preparation must be more than value-added or value-laden. Educational leadership preparation programs must specifically teach the multiple domains of ethical responsibility that an educational leader must demonstrate. The work of preparing leaders and supporting educational leaders in the field must be driven by the profession’s values. To do this, universities must take a proactive, collaborative role with future educational leaders and practicing school leaders in the field. This proactive collaborative role must foster ethical resilience capacity building in the face of increasing outside demands on education. Not one educational leader in this study reported consulting a
professional organization or a university of educational leadership preparation for advice during the 2006 ISAT debacle. This is a sad commentary on both the professional organizations and university leadership preparation programs.

Sharon Nichols and David Berliner, in their 2007 book entitled: *Collateral Damage: How High-stakes Testing Corrupts America’s Schools* evaluate the current state of the education profession.

We should be asking why so many competent and decent professionals think the system they are in is so unfair to their students, their schools, and themselves and, as a result, feel justified in doing direct test preparation violating standardization procedures, and cheating. We should ask, ‘What sort of educational system have we developed in which some teachers and administrators worry so much about their jobs that they would cheat to be sure they have work in the future?’

Management through fear seems archaic and is repudiated by virtually every business school in the country. Yet it appears to be the case that management by fear is precisely the kind of system we have adopted for our schools when we passed NCLB. Is this what want? These are the questions that ought to be debated. The conditions fostering the corruption of students, teachers, and administrators should receive a great deal more attention (p. 56).

Universities must be the champions for underscoring that educational leadership is comprised of an ethic of profession that demands that “one places students’ at the center of the ethical decision-making process” (Shapiro & Gross, 2008, p. 35). As a profession, no one needs to act alone. As professors in educational leadership, we need to build compassionate cultures for understanding the realities of the work of today’s educational leaders. It is only through promoting the knowledge base and the ethical responsibilities of the profession that universities can move the profession from one focused on accountability to one centered on responsibilities. Schools of education must create purposeful collaborations with practicing educational leaders in order to provide the structures and supports necessary to build and maintain the ethical resiliency within each practitioner that works in today’s educational institutions. It is through this collaboration and advocacy with and for current and future educational leaders that university educational leadership preparation programs will find their purpose in shaping tomorrow’s educational landscape.
NOTES

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APPENDIX 1 - METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire

Instrument: A 14-item self-administered qualitative questionnaire was developed and tested with a focus group of school administrators who were not included in the study. Item development was based upon school improvement, values-based leadership, leadership ethics, communication literature and context-specific issues (Begley, 2004; Ciulla, 2003; Furman, 2003; Senge, 2005; Starrat, 2005). The first seven items sought descriptive details of what occurred with the ISAT administration within the respective schools. The next four items sought to understand what building-level administrators did under adverse situations. The final two items sought to understand the ethical decision-making processes that the Illinois school principals engaged in during the administration of the 2006 ISAT.
Participants: Once the tool was refined, the procedures for administering the research tool were approved by an Internal Review Board and the Illinois Principals’ Association (IPA) legal team. The questionnaire was then sent via the IPA’s list-serve via the internet to the membership with viable email addresses (n=361). This list-serve was comprised of K-8 building-level principals throughout Illinois excluding the City of Chicago. Kindergarten through eighth grade principals were chosen as the sample as that it is in these grades that the ISAT is given. A description of the Illinois Principal Association follows:

The Illinois Principals’ Association is a professional organization dedicated to professional development by increasing the knowledge and enhancing the skills needed to meet the demands of principals' increasingly complex jobs. It is our fervent belief that better principals foster better schools. We are resolute in our responsibility to assist in solving problems, and trained staff members—with years of experience as elementary and secondary school principals—and an attorney are always available to answer your legal questions and offer professional advice.

The association stands for honesty and integrity in a position where trust is paramount to continued success. Every member of the Illinois Principals Association is dedicated to promoting sound values, beliefs and attitudes that inspire others to higher levels of achievement. As the association moves into its 36th year of existence, our personal and professional standards will continue to enhance the image of our schools and our profession in every town throughout the state of Illinois (IPA, 2005).

Completed questionnaires were returned anonymously through “Survey Monkey” 2005 edition. Eighty-seven completed questionnaires were returned for a 24% return rate. It is felt that this low return rate was due in part to the sensitive nature of the questionnaire content.

Data analysis: The questionnaire data were entered in Microsoft Excel 2005 edition for analysis. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe closed-ended responses. Through inductive analysis (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001) “categories and patterns emerged from these data gathered rather than being imposed apriori” (p. 462). Additionally, quantitative data were then used as a reference point to verify and triangulate the open-ended feedback (Denzin, 1989).
Follow-up Interviews

In-depth interviews lasting from 60 to 90 minutes were conducted with nine out of the 87 (10%) educational leaders who had completed the on-line questionnaire. All nine of these interviewees voluntarily indicated on their return questionnaires that they wished to be contacted to further discuss their questionnaire answers. An additional institutional IRB was requested as that this was not part of the original protocol but was a worthwhile development that had occurred voluntarily and spontaneously.

Participants were contacted by the email addresses or phone numbers that they had provided voluntarily on their returned questionnaires. Interviews were held at a mutually convenient off-site location between the dates of October 6, 2008 - October 10, 2008. The interviews consisted of reviewing the original on-line qualitative questionnaire. Interviewees were than asked to expand upon each question. The interviews were taped and then transcribed. All identifying information was scrubbed from the transcriptions. The responses of the interviewees were then analyzed in light of the questionnaire, the subsequent document review, the conceptual framework on ethical decision making and ethical resiliency and the research questions.

Documents

Documents were obtained from local newspapers, the Illinois State Board of Education website and archives, and the Illinois Principals’ Association website. These documents served as verification points for communications that were referred too within the questionnaire and within the in-depth interviews.

APPENDIX 2 - DATA DISPLAY

Qualitative Questionnaire

Demographics: Eighty-seven completed questionnaires were returned for a 24% response rate. The demographics of these 87 Illinois building-level principals consisted of the following:

- 31 were from suburban Cook County.
- 56 were from other counties in Illinois excluding Chicago.
- 4 schools reported being on the “watch” list
- 3 schools reported being on the warning list.
The reader will note that the following descriptive data percentages will equal more than 100% as that respondents often noted issues within multiple categories.

Testing conditions: Of the 87 respondents, 62 respondents (71%) reported that materials were not delivered on-time. Forty-four respondents (50%) reported that there were errors in the following student materials: fourth grade student books; seventh student grade books; special education student books; math rulers; student answer sheets and test booklets were not aligned to each other; student demographic stickers were incorrect; and, there was not enough space provided on answer sheets for “extended response” items. Nine respondents (10%) reported that administrative test booklets contained errors such as: directions that did not match student directions and pages missing. Additionally, 14 respondents (16%) reported that they were unable to administer the test within the approved timeline. Finally, 37 respondents (42%) reported that they believed that their students’ performance was compromised due to the testing conditions.

Response to problem: Of the 87 respondents, 84 respondents (96%) reported that they asked for guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education. Nine respondents (10%) reported downloading new administrative books from the publisher’s website. Thirty-nine respondents (44%) reported “borrowing” extra test books from other schools. Thirty-five respondents (40%) reported having the students “redo” answers after an error within the student book was found.

Perception of the problem: When asked how the parents and community responded the answers resulted into three categories: “they never knew;” “they were supportive;” and “they were anxious for us.” When asked if they (the school administrators) felt that the test was valid the answers fell into four categories: “are they ever;” “of course not;” “I’m not sure;” and “they are if my scores went up.” When asked to rate the overall ISAT experience the average for the 87 respondents was a 6.5 rating with a 1 as “most positive” and a 10 as “most negative.”

Questionable ethical behavior: Respondents were then asked that if they reported problems with the administration of the 2006 ISAT, did they ever consider not administering the ISAT, or at least postponing administration until all materials were correct, for the 2006 school year. Only three respondents (3.4%) indicated that they considered not giving the ISAT, or at least postponing the 2006 ISAT administration, until all the materials were correct.
Follow-up interviews

Demographics: All nine volunteer interviewees served in schools in North Cook and Lake counties. None of the principals served in schools that were on the academic watch or warning list. Six of the interviewees were women and three were men. All nine interviewees had served in their buildings for more than three years with the longest serving principal having a tenure of 12 years. Three of the interviewees served in K-5 buildings, one served in a K-8 building, and five served in a middle school building ranging from either 5th - 8th or 6th - 8th grades.

Testing conditions: All nine principals indicated that they had experienced all of the testing condition problems that were reported in the questionnaire. These problems included errors in students’ materials, answer sheets not aligning with test booklets, and receiving late materials. Five of the nine principals reported administering the test after the official testing window. All nine believed that their students’ performance was compromised—most specifically within the mathematics section where space on the answer sheets for the extended responses was not sufficient.

Response to the problem: All nine principals asked for guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education. Additionally, all nine principals mentioned asking for guidance from their superiors in the district office. This finding was not reported in the qualitative questionnaire. All nine principals noted that considerable conversations did occur between themselves and the district office. Four of the nine principals reported borrowing extra test books from other schools within their own district. Most notably, all nine principals noted that they had to “redo” answers for students on answer sheets after an error within the student book was found.

Perception of the problem: All nine principals stated that while the problem was known at the district office, it was not officially communicated to the public. None of the principals were sure if the information had been communicated to their boards of education. Five of the nine expressed serious doubts concerning the reliability and validity of the 2006 ISAT. All nine principals expressed that they felt the 2006 ISAT test experience rated a 9 or 10—with 10 being the most negative.

Questionable ethical behavior: All nine respondents wanted to clarify their responses concerning the following on-line questionnaire probes: “Did you ever consider not administering the ISAT, or at least
postponing administration until all materials were correct.” “Why or why not.” A sample of these statements follows:

- We discussed the situation at the district office. We felt we could contain the problem and make it work for everyone.
- My superintendent instructed all of the principals that we were going to make this work to the best of our abilities.
- None of the other principals stated that they were having any problems. I was not going to be the only one in the district that didn’t comply.
- We do not have a choice. This is the law.
- I wanted to pull the plug. I even talked to our legal department. But with all of the memos from ISBE coming out daily telling us how to make this work … legal told me to give the test.
- My teachers were totally freaked out…. … this was a major morale problem. The union said that it was up to the administration to make this work. We had just gotten by without a strike and my superintendent told us to make this work and not bother the teachers.

Documents

Reports concerning the 2006 ISAT surfaced in the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago Sun Times, the Daily Southtown, Education Week, and the Pioneer Press New Service beginning in March of 2006. During the period of March 6-14, 2006, seven email notices from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) were sent to all K-8 Illinois principals concerning the 2006 ISAT administration. The final notice on March 14, 2006 ISBE detailed instructions concerning the extension of the testing window from March 6-17 to the 21st of the month (retrieved Sept. 8, 2008, from http://www.isbe.net/assessment/listserv/2006/mar14_006). The Illinois Principals’ Association November 2006 Practitioners Bulletin was devoted to the 2006 ISAT experience with a reprint of the 2002 article by James Burgett entitled: Ethics, Politics and Morality: Essential Leadership. Additionally, within the editor’s note by Jason Leahy, of this same IPA bulletin the following was stated:

There is little doubt that navigating the ethical waters you face daily can be difficult considering the political forces that exist in every school. Know that the IPA is “only a phone call away” to provide guidance, support, and encouragement for the tough decisions you make (pp. 4 & 6).