

## **EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOUNDED ON ETHICS**

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### **Introduction**

Educational research in the twenty-first century has highlighted social justice as one of the major concerns due to the shift in Western society and economic gaps amongst different populations that include a large number of displaced persons, immigrants, and refugees (Shields, 2013; Wait, 2016). Cribb and Gewirtz (2013) stated that these problems created a call for impartial school practice as well as fair learning that is sensitive to different cultures and racial backgrounds. With the presence of corruption in politics and business, the effects of unethical behavior done in organizations have been given attention to for being a hindrance in achieving social justice (Hassan et al., 2013). This has led to the surge of studies with the aim to understand different leadership ethical dimensions which include education (Langlois et al., 2014).

### **Dimensions of Ethical Leadership in Education**

Kohlberg's moral reasoning based on justice together with the theories of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) stimulated numerous studies focusing on the ethical dimension of leadership in education. Early studies included Hodgkinson's (1978) suggestion of moral foundation rehabilitation in educational leadership theories and Starratt's (1991) comprehensive and cohesive educational administration theoretical model.

Consequently, ethical leadership in education has been addressed by several pieces of research that provide organized structure in identifying practice of educational leadership that is ethnic-oriented (Aksu & Kasalak, 2014; Norberg & Johansson, 2014; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

Lately, the difference on the influence of culture and social contexts and their impact on meaning and practice of educators worldwide with regards to ethical leadership has been the topic of several studies (Aksu & Kasalak, 2014; Norberg & Johansson, 2014; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). Langlois et al. (2014) pointed out that finding the commonalities of culture and language that ease and impede the development of ethical leadership will promote a better understanding of it.

Farquards (1981) proposed an antithesis to earlier approaches stating that a single ethical posture and multiple ethical paradigms should be adapted in solving ethical dilemmas in educational ethical leadership (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). The ethical perspective of practicing utilitarianism and fairness should always be included as school leaders can always examine and utilize different ethical approaches that can be most fitting to a situation at hand. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) suggested that ethical paradigms should take the ethic of the community in part. Moreover, Aksu and Kasalak (2014) cited a professional ethic aspect that could be applied to all the given aspects.

### *The ethic of care*

School leaders who practice the ethic of care, while considering human relations important in the school system operations, are individuals who are effective under pressure as they use stress to empower them in making decisions. Starratt (1991) indicated that the ethic of care requires the willingness to accept a person's individuality with openness to authenticity and loyalty to a relationship that is built from engrossment, receptivity, and relatedness.

The definition of the ethics of care by Starratt (1991) is anchored on the insights of ethical theorists in the field of education whose original work pertained to a feminist approach to morality and ethics in education (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). For Nodding (1984), the basis of every

decision that educational leaders must make should be caring. As a consequence, the ethics of care is considered as a representation of the feminist approach to morality and ethics in education (Gotlib, 2015).

### *The Ethics of Justice*

The ethics of justice originated from a philosophical perspective on the nature of the physical world and the relationship between human beings and their place of abode. It can be split into two distinct viewpoints. The first viewpoint puts emphasis on the rights of persons, where these rights are anchored on the idea of equity and fairness, that is, that every person must be treated equally (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). The emphasis of the second viewpoint, on the other hand, is on the rights of the majority even if specific persons may not benefit from them.

### *The Ethics of Critique*

This dimension is closely related to the ethics of justice because critical evaluation often leads to the determination of injustices (Starratt, 1991). Specifically, however, the ethics of critique is focused on confronting power structures and norms that discriminate against the weak and offer better ones (Langlois et al., 2014). According to Starratt (1991), “their [leaders] basic stance is ethical because they are dealing with questions of social justice and human dignity” (p. 189). The basic proposition of the ethics of critique is that leaders must deal with questions of human dignity and social justice and that they must take into great consideration the individual rights of the different stakeholders in the field of education (Norberg & Johansson, 2014). As such, the ethics of critique is mostly needed in institutions or societies that are multicultural in nature. Ethical leaders in such settings must be able to give solutions to ethical dilemmas and conceptualize efforts aimed at effecting changes within the institution (Langlois et al., 2014).

## Conclusion

Ethical leadership dimensions are rooted from and shaped by social and cultural influences. Transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and spiritual leadership overlap with ethical leadership. To provide a clearer perspective on the concept of ethical leadership, many scholars working on educational leadership have developed significant frameworks and approaches. In the field of education, it is Starratt's (1991) multi-dimensional framework that is being used more often. Its three dimensions are ethics of care, ethics of justice, and ethics of critique. While there have been many studies about ethical leadership in the field of education, its impact on educational institutions has not yet been fully explored. Moreover, the effect of decisions that an ethical leader makes on his or her subordinate is a subject yet to be examined.

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