

*The Importance of Ethics Instruction  
In  
Teacher Preparation Courses*

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**As we prepare educators for the new world, it is incumbent upon us as teacher educators to understand that our students will be more diverse, more technologically savvy, and more**

media-molded than in the past and, as a result, both we and our students will face a different array of challenges in the work place. We must understand that with technological advances, societal pressures, and seemingly increased options for “correct decisions” facing our students, we must equip them with the critical thinking skills, a framework for ethical decision-making, and controlled practice in dealing with possible problem situations.

Several authors (Keith-Spiegel, Whitley, Balogh, Perkins & Wittig, 2002) have pointed out that people studying for the medical and human services professions take courses in professional ethics; but, for the most part, people preparing for teaching careers receive no systematic education about ethical issues related to teaching. Other authors (Sergiovanni, 1996; Beckner, 2004; Starratt, 2004) have made passionate pleas for an infusion of ethics and increased moral leadership in our schools. Unfortunately, various media sources report examples of unethical practices by school administrators and teachers all too frequently.

Challenging our educational workforce to view themselves, their motives, and their character has been a mainstay of teaching institutions. Our society has come to expect that teachers and school leaders will make ethical decisions for the common good (Shapiro & Gross, 2008; Starratt, 1991) and that their actions will be driven by a commitment to moral and academic excellence. It would follow then, that people preparing for teaching careers should receive systematic education about ethics related to teaching. Unfortunately, such instruction has not been the norm.

It is proposed (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2009) that teacher and educational leader preparation programs provide a process by which professors, practitioners, and students can come to grips with their own ethical codes and then learn to apply these codes in practical situations. In addition, it is proposed that these programs give serious consideration to the inclusion of a framework for making ethical decisions, overviews of codes of conduct, and examinations of case studies of ethical and unethical behaviors as an intentional component of every teacher education class and program. Providing a framework for making ethical decisions is not about teaching a set of values. Rather, it is about teaching a process of analyzing and understanding behaviors and teaching respect for the perceptions of others, subject matter which should be part of the curricula of our educational preparation programs.

During the session several examples of unethical decisions/behaviors by teachers and educational leaders will be shared with attendees. While some of these are rather humorous, many are quite sobering in that it is possible to place oneself in similar situations under certain conditions. Also, several procedures and tools (such as codes of conduct and case studies) for analyzing and understanding behaviors and promoting ethical decision-making will be discussed.

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### Objectives for the Session:

- (1) Examine surprising examples of violations of ethical principles
- (2) Promote an increased awareness of the process necessary for making ethical decisions
- (3) Provide case studies and a brief hands-on experience in the decision-making process
- (4) Develop an increased inclination to include ethics instruction in all our courses
- (5) Discuss best practices in embedding ethics instruction in classes