The Principle of Coherence: The Coherent Principal, 5(12)

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Abstract

The practices of school leaders who apply the principle of coherence to their decision making were studied. The principle of coherence translates reflective practice into a framework for analyzing a school leader's decision making. A case study of a Catholic school principal provides an explicit example of the principle of coherence. An analysis of the case study provides insight into contemplative practice (Schuttloffel, 1999b). Next a public school principal personifies school leaders who adhere to beliefs central to democratic citizenship. The principle of coherence portrays how school leaders purposefully transmit a moral code to members of their school community.

Introduction

Historically, families and communities in the United States accept the belief that moral development serves a crucial role in preserving the American democracy (Goodman & Lesnick, 2001). Complicating this implicit belief, Americans vacillate emphasis between a student's private moral education rooted in the family, or a more public moral education for youngsters based in supporting institutions (McClellan, 1999; Wynne & Ryan, 1997). Emphasis on moral development based in religious faith or moral development rooted in civic integrity reflects the fundamental difference between constituents of parochial education and public education in the United States (McClellan, 1999). Over time, curricula, extra-curricula, the hidden curriculum and daily life for school leaders portray the various perspectives in this conflict (Eisner, 1985). Recent American history demonstrates that due to its implicit religious underpinnings proponents of individual legal rights continue to challenge moral character development as a curricular standard in American education, leaving both camps with a moral emphasis under siege (Goodman & Lesnick, 2001; McClellan, 1999).

American education as a system differs widely with other national educational systems in that there is no federal system of education. American education falls under the purview of the

individual state's (i.e. Texas, California, New York). Traditionally, local school districts (i.e. townships, counties, or city) held considerable authority over the implementation of state regulations. In fact, the intrusion of the state into the local district is a relatively recent phenomenon. Growing state authority is tied directly to the American system of school finance which is a shifting balance between state and local funding, with only about seven percent (7%) of funding coming from the federal government. Federal funds are typically tied to specific programs and are not subject to local discretion. Under the current site-based restructuring efforts of many school districts, often mandated by state policy, local principals wield increasing responsibility within the local school.

The principle of coherence portrays the connection between a school leader's beliefs and their behaviors as demonstrated through their decision making in this local milieu peculiar to American education. School leaders certainly may include a variety of players such as counselors, assistant principals, deans, resource personnel, curricular specials and teachers. But since the current site-based management movement places special demands upon the principal's role, this study focuses on the behaviors of the school leader as principal. Studies of principals continue to showcase their influence on the formal operations of a school (Lightfoot, 1983, Wolcott, 1984) as well as their influence as an exemplar of moral development (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993).

Beliefs, a practitioner's undergirding values and philosophical dispositions, provide the foundation for decision making in classrooms and schools (Schuttloffel, 1999b; Sergiovanni, 1992). Noting the current American educational landscape, inquiries into a school leader's role in fostering moral development often highlight the core beliefs school leaders treasure as integral to their practice and their being, but these beliefs remain modestly articulated within the public education sector (Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schuttloffel, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1994). If tacit beliefs often drive schoolhouse behavior, the principle of coherence challenges principals to practice reflective decision making in order to explicitly model and articulate moral maturity.

This article attempts to answer two questions: First, what are the implications of my definition of the principle of coherence? And second, what is the relationship between the principle of coherence and a school principal as a leader of moral development? First, I introduce elements of reflective practice and leadership. Van Manen's (1977) three levels of reflection integrate with Sergiovanni's (1992) leadership schema to create a reflective leadership model. This discussion showcases the principle of coherence as the backbone of reflective practice. Second, a case study of a Catholic school principal provides an explicit example of the principle of coherence in a nonpublic school. Next, an analysis of the principal's decision making provides insight into contemplative practice, a model of reflective practice designed specifically for Catholic school leadership that features the principle of coherence (Schuttloffel, 1999b). Third, a second principal's case study characterizes moral leadership within the context of public schooling. A closing reflection affirms the principle of coherence as a potential tool to analyze a school leader's role in moral development.

An Introduction to Reflective Practice

Reflective practice acknowledges that central to teaching is a process of mindful decision making (Seifert, 1999; Zumwalt, 1989). The act of reflection provides teachers a vehicle to examine daily life within the classroom, to consider the various messages teachers send to students, and to respond with more mindful choices. The concept of mindfulness infers that teachers critically ask *"why?"*– before, during and after decision making. School leaders also require mindfulness during their decision making process (Schuttloffel, 1999a, 1999b; Sergiovanni, 1991). Reflective practice, as a mindful process, makes it possible to examine the thinking that precedes decision making (Schön, 1983,1987), thinking that occurs during decision making, and thinking that examines previous actions (Killion & Todnem, 1991, 14-16). This thinking about action is what distinguishes mindful school leaders from those that act merely as school managers. The principle of coherence contends that thinking reflectively about decision making also distinguishes moral leaders.

Figure 1. Van Manen's three levels of reflection

3. Critical level of Reflection

- *Why is a decision is made?*

2. Interpretive level of Reflection

- *What meaning does the decision create or what message does the decision send?*

1. Technical level of Reflection

- *How is the decision implemented?*

Adapted from Van Manen, M. (1977)

Building upon Van Manen's framework for reflection (1977), it is possible to investigate the importance of coherence in leadership practice. First, school leaders reflect on their schoolhouse experiences as student and teacher. By delving into their tacit beliefs, leaders begin to understand how their beliefs about the role of teacher and the teaching profession develop. After reflecting on these sources for their teaching beliefs, school leaders recognize how these beliefs ultimately impact decision making. A school leader's examination of their beliefs about teaching, learning, students, and their roles exemplify the critical level of reflection. Critical reflection reveals an individual's values, philosophy of education, and substantive moral beliefs. The nature of coherence in decision making points to what should be the obvious connection between a teacher's, or school leader's, deeply held beliefs and their daily practice.

The interpretive level of reflection illuminates the messages sent or the meaning created by the connection between beliefs as isolated theory or ideals and daily practice. School leaders begin to see that beliefs seldom remain idle but most often communicate through symbolic signals that create meaning for those under their influence. Messages may portray the leader's moral beliefs

or messages as inconsistent or incoherent. Interpretive reflection is a pivotal step in understanding the significance of the principle of coherence. For example, if a school leader believes that the classroom should replicate experiences of democratic citizenship, but that same principal does not provide students (or teachers) an opportunity to participate in decision making, the message sent is incoherent with the leader's beliefs. This "mixed-signal" undermines attempts to transfer an important democratic belief to students. The crucial role of interpreting beliefs, values, and educational philosophy into messages that are coherent points to the heart of teaching moral behavior. Beliefs that remain theoretical do not impact students' lives unless there are practical experiences with these beliefs. Otherwise, students do not internalize beliefs.

At a technical level of reflection, school leaders examine those behaviors that not only send substantive messages, but typify their beliefs. Technically, the challenge is to do that which is coherent with what is believed. The necessity of coherent action is the core of transferring beliefs from one believer to create another believer. Beliefs must make the transition from words into action in order for coherence to be credible.

The relationship between reflective practice and leadership is illustrated by Figure # 2. Sergiovanni's leadership schema parallels Van Manen's levels of reflection creating a framework for leadership analysis. Reflective leadership practice sets the stage for school leaders to make mindful moral decisions. The interactive nature of the levels of reflection and the elements of leadership provide insight into the complex nature of a reflective leader. The principle of coherence serves as a useful tool for analyzing reflective leadership practice.

For school leaders, the heart signifies the beliefs and values that guide one's mindfulness. The heart illustrates the why of critical reflection. The head symbolizes how school leaders view their world—a "mindscape" (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 8). Their professional knowledge as well as their schooling experiences shape this mindscape. To create meaning and to deliver the intended message describes mindscape. Mindscape portrays interpretive reflection. Finally, the hand represents actions and responses, the outcomes of the decision-making process. Actions are the results of decision-making; the how of implementation, earlier described as the technical level of reflection. As Figure #2 suggests, both heart and head influence the hand.

Figure 2. Parallel elements in leadership and reflection

The HEART	The HEAD	The HAND
(what I value and believe)	(my mindscape of how the world works)	(my decisions, behaviors, and actions)
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The HEART	The HEAD	The HAND
Critical Level	Interpretive Level	Technical Level

Adapted from:
Leadership schema: Sergiovanni, T. (1992).
Levels of Reflection: Van Manen, M. (1977).

Conversely, the hand also influences both the heart and head. For Sergiovanni, school leadership personifies this dynamic synergy involving the heart, the head and the hand.

Next, two case studies open the door to a principal's daily school life and dramatize the moral dilemmas school leaders face (Cuban, 1992). The principle of coherence helps to illuminate each principal's decision making. The first case study describes the dilemma of a Catholic elementary school principal. In her school-parish context, the principal acts as the pivotal source of a moral code based in Gospel Values as defined by Christian theology and Catholic Church teachings (Schuttloffel, 1999b).

The second case focuses on a dilemma encountered by a public school principal. This school leader perceives his role as setting the tone for the school including appropriate behavior grounded in the tenets of good character necessary for democratic citizenship. This second principal confronts the challenges of decision making within a complex school organization often with ambiguous allegiance to moral development.

Methodology and Participants

These two case studies from two distinct school settings provide two pictures of school leadership that exemplify the principle of coherence and its relationship to moral development. I chose case studies as my reporting methodology in order to portray the unique characteristics of each context. A case study provides an opportunity to describe the particular setting's uniqueness and at the same time connect that setting with similarities in the larger educational context. These two case studies shed light on school leader decision making by illustrating a principal's daily life and the typical dilemmas that they encounter (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993; Schuttloffel, 1999a, 1999b).

Data collection methodology included long conversations with the two school leaders to provide the substance of these case studies (McCracken, 1989). Extended observation time with the participants also adds to data richness. The first principal was observed in a variety of settings over the course of three years. The second principal was also observed in multiple interactions over a three-year period. My extensive interaction with these two participants increases my confidence that they will bring the principle of coherence to life. Each principal had opportunities to discuss their vision, philosophy of education, and other topics relevant to this study.

Lastly, as Peshkin and Eisner have so eloquently clarified, I was the central instrument for this study. My eyes observed the actions and my ears heard the spoken words, and the results bear the mold of my emphasis (Eisner, 1998; Peshkin, 1988). This statement is not a confession, or an impediment to the study, but rather another example of the principle of coherence. My own reflective practice brought me to this topic and my own decision making leads me to the conclusions I proclaim. The intent of this study was not to validate the principle of coherence.

Considerable research exists to provide an adequate rationale for the concept (Killion & Todnem, 1991; Schön, 1987, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1992; Van Manen, 1977). This study illustrates how a significant concept integrates from a theoretical principle to practical implementation. My insight into the principle of coherence helps to explain the dramatic role school leaders play in moral development within schools. This research responds to Schoenfeld's challenge that "educational research . . . help make things better and contribute to theoretical understandings (1999, p.10). The necessity to seek more lucid ways to explain the significance of coherence to students, colleagues, and all who assert an interest in the next generation's moral welfare and the preservation of American democracy legitimizes this study.

Finally, this study also serves as a window to those non-United States readers who seek a greater understanding of our different and complex system of education. The two case studies will acquaint readers with real principals, struggling with real dilemmas, within a paradoxical education system. American Catholic schools are not government funded and require great personal sacrifice by those who support them as school leaders, teachers, and parents. In spite of this handicap, Catholic schools have demonstrated great success in preparing students of all economic strata for American citizenship. At the same time, American public schools face an increasingly diverse student body, parents with their own problems, and pressing financial strains. While more students move through public schools into mainstream American society, the needs of that same society increase the demands on the schoolhouse. I hope that this peek through the window reveals our challenges.

Case Study # 1: Mrs. Vickie Featherstone, principal, Holy Angels School[1]

The Dilemma

The fall term was nearly ready to begin when Mrs. Jones approached Mrs. Featherstone with a request to admit her son, Charlie, for the fall term. The Jones family are members of Holy Angels Parish. Charlie's mother was well aware that the sixth grade was not fully enrolled and she was prepared to pay the full tuition and fees. Charlie had attended the local public school the previous six years and his mother admitted that Charlie had been a mediocre student. Mrs. Jones explained that she believed Charlie's problems stemmed from a lack of structure in his previous classes and a lack of willingness on the part of teachers to modify assignments. Charlie had been diagnosed with dyslexia and was placed part time with a special education teacher. As Charlie approached high school, Mrs. Jones' awareness of his academic weakness grew and she believed that her intervention was required immediately to get Charlie on track. Mrs. Jones told Mrs. Featherstone that she was committed to making Charlie's education at Holy Angels School a success, whatever that required. Mrs. Featherstone knew that her middle school teachers would not be enthusiastic about accepting a student requiring special modifications and extra assistance.

Mrs. Featherstone's own son has a learning disability. She knows that he had made tremendous progress over his school career with the help of caring teachers. She also knows that failure to achieve weighed heavy on his self-confidence. With her own son successfully attending college, Vickie's reputation was as a recognized advocate for learning disabled students. She also knew the importance of appropriate resources and faculty cooperation for a special needs student's success.

Analysis of the dilemma

As the case study portrays, Vickie faced a dilemma, a conflict between two deeply held values (Cuban, 1992). One belief was a commitment to serve all parish children who desired to attend Holy Angels School. Her second belief included a commitment to offer the best quality and most appropriate education to all the students in the parish school. Vickie's dilemma centered on the conflict of these two beliefs. How should she respond to Mrs. Jones so that Charlie is best served? How does she balance her personal belief in supporting learning disabled students with each child's individual needs? How does she maintain realistic expectations for her teachers and their resources?

Figure 3. Critical level of reflection: Schuttloffel's definition of Gospel values

Scripture		The cardinal virtues prudence justice temperance
+	**Gospel Values**	+
Chruch tradition		The theological virtues faith hope love

Schuttloffel, M. J. (1999b).

As principal of Holy Angels Catholic School, Vickie Featherstone espouses that the fundamental core of Catholic school leadership rests on a belief in Gospel values (Schuttloffel, 1999b). Her long term as a Catholic school teacher (15 years), and as a principal (3 years), affirmed this belief. For Vickie, as well as most school leaders, her dilemmas arose from efforts to translate her beliefs into the school's daily administration.

Through reflective practice Vickie explicitly examines her beliefs, the messages she sends and those she wants to send, and she determines the response she will give to Charlie's mom (technical level). The principle of coherence sheds light on why Vickie chooses to resolve the dilemma with a particular response (critical level). The reflective process also points out how others, in this case Charlie's mom, Charlie, teachers, and other members of the school community, might interpret Vickie's response in a way that does not convey the message she seeks to send (interpretive level). These mis-messages potentially create ill-will within the community and lead to misunderstandings about the school's central purpose. Vickie must carefully craft her response so the school and parish community receive her intended message.

Figure 4. Three levels of reflection

Critical level of reflection:
Beliefs about Catholic school leadership

Interpretive level of reflection:
Message sent to Charlie's mom, Charlie, teachers, other parents and students

Technical level of reflection:
Vickie's response

Van Manen, M. (1977). Linking Ways of Knowing with Ways of Being Practical. Curriculum and Inquiry 6, 3, pp. 205-228.

In resolving her dilemma, Vickie attempts to seek coherence with each of her beliefs at the technical level of reflection. She has numerous possible responses including no admittance for Charlie. Vickie chooses to admit Charlie with several specific conditions to which his parents must agree. By admitting Charlie, Vickie remains coherent with her beliefs about parish children and their attendance in Holy Angels School. At the same time, Vickie is realistic about the progress Charlie will experience after so many unsuccessful years. As principal, Vickie must balance Charlie's needs with those of the other sixth grade students. She must also balance the demands she places on the sixth grade teacher. For this reason, Vickie requires Charlie's parents to become actively involved with his education. She also leaves open the possibility that if Holy Angels School does not prove to be the best educational environment for Charlie, he will be asked to leave for a school with more appropriate resources.

Figure 5. Vickie's technical response

Technical level of reflection (implementation):

- *Charlie is admitted*
- *Parents must have Charlie tested for learning disability*
- *Parents must provide tutor*
- *Charlie's status will be evaluated each grading quarter*
- *Charlie's parent(s) will monitor homework*
- *Charlie's teacher will keep parents apprised weekly of his performance*
- *Charlie's parents will support the classroom teacher's strategies*

Vickie also recognizes that some parents in the school community may not support enrolling a "problem" student. With interpretive reflection, Vickie carefully crafts the message she wants to send to the school community. She consistently looks for opportunities to focus Holy Angels School on its mission as a faith forming community. She reminds each person that questions her decision about this fundamental faith-enriching mission. She believes that Charlie deserves an opportunity to become a successful member of the school and parish.

Figure 6. Vickie's messages

Interpretive level of reflection:

- *Holy Angels School is a parish school*
- *The school's primary purpose is faith formation*
- *The school's obligation is to serve all parish children appropriately*
- *Students must take responsibility for their education*
- *Parents must guide their children as students*

Next, Vickie's leadership schema illustrates her integration of the heart, the head and the hand. The value she attaches to learning-disabled students, together with her experiences with how the world of a learning-disabled student could work, shape her decision and actions. Vickie's leadership schema demonstrates the interactive nature Sergiovanni (1992) intended to portray with his leadership schema.

Figure 7. Vickie's leadership schema

The HEART	The HEAD	The HAND
(what I value and believe)	(my mindscape of how the world works)	(my decisions, behaviors, and actions)
Learning Disabled students are	My son is	As teacher/principal, I
- intelligent - capable - deserving	- bright - a good student - required extra help student needs	- seek resources - provide opportunities - advocate for all

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1992)

Vickie's case study demonstrates the mindful, reflective efforts a school leader uses to bring coherence between theoretical beliefs and daily practice. Vickie guides her school community from a position of critical strength. Her beliefs and her decision making are coherent because her school has a clear moral purpose and values are openly expressed. Nor is she burdened by the cumbersome bureaucratic structures of public schooling. Technically, Vickie should make decisions that are coherent and reflect shared values. The second case study presents a school leader within the public school context. This principal illustrates the principle of coherence within an environment often considered value-neutral, yet this school leader also has fundamental beliefs that guide decision making.

Case Study # 2: Harry Newton, principal, Rocky Creek Middle School [2]

The Dilemma

When Harry was assigned to Rocky Creek Middle School, he was a rare minority principal that had made it into a successful suburban school. He enjoyed the benefits of an active Parent-Teacher Association populated with affluent parents and numerous business partnerships. To claim places in America's affluent mainstream lifestyle was clearly the purpose of Rocky Creek's student community.

Harry's school enrolled many middle and upper class minority students. He also had a cadre of poor minority students bused from the city's public housing projects. While the economic status and opportunity enjoyed by the minority children of professionals appeared to direct these minority students in a positive academic and social direction, their performance on state-wide achievement tests was not consistent with their white counterparts. The achievement performance of the disadvantaged student population was even more dismal.

Harry was troubled by this achievement gap that clearly fell along racial lines. He believed that economics should level the playing field for minority students, but he had plenty of evidence to the contrary. Even Harry's own son suffered from educational experiences that left him struggling to reach his potential. Knowing the political and social climate of his school community, Harry knew there would be questions about his efforts to assist students with what was perceived by many as a social problem beyond the school's purview. Most of the school community, including parents and teachers, were not comfortable with discussions of an achievement gap that focused on race.

Within this contextual understanding, Harry decided to do something radical. He believed that at the heart of the achievement gap were unresolved racial images that led to underachievement or antisocial behavior. Harry contracted the Kids Circus, a professional circus troupe dedicated to enhancing self-concepts and behavior. Harry's intention was to demonstrate that students, white or black, could individually and together perform in ways that would astonish everyone. With the assistance of the Kids Circus staff, Harry provided all students who were willing to do the work an opportunity to participate in this unique event. He arranged after-school transportation for those who were bused. He provided food for the two weeks of evening practice. He recruited sponsors from the business community to fund his expensive venture. Harry put himself outside the boundaries of typical school leadership in order to lay the groundwork necessary to attack the achievement gap.

Analysis of the Dilemma

Harry faced a dilemma based in his belief in social justice (Starratt, 1994). Harry recognized that no one in the school community was deliberately restricting a minority student's opportunities, but Harry was convinced that shallow understandings of those who look or act different led to unconscious beliefs on the part of the teachers, on the part of majority students, and even on the part of the minority students themselves. Many teachers held the belief that unmitigated socio-economics shaped minority student performance. While any lack of performance of the part of

middle- and upper-class minority students was attributed to a lack of effort on the student's part, or perhaps an innate lack of ability, or perhaps a subconscious acceptance to minority inferiority. In any case, teachers were relieved of their responsibility to improve the situation. In turn, minority students too often succumbed to self-doubt that became a self-fulfilling prophecy of underachievement. This scenario was especially common with males. Harry's dilemma centered on how to reconcile his beliefs for the students' benefit. How would he respond to teachers who viewed his focus on the achievement gap as befriending "his kind?" Meanwhile, how would Harry deal with successful parents of minority students who did not want to hear that economic status would not protect their children from failure? Harry knew the risks he was taking in his school community and in his career, yet he believed that all students, would benefit from improved interracial understanding and self-confidence.

As principal of Rocky Creek Middle School, Harry Newton espouses a fundamental belief in public education as a site of social reconstruction. His years as a school teacher (10 years), and as a principal (13 years), affirmed this belief. Harry also believed in the equality of human beings and for that reason could not accept racial deficiency as an explanation (Starratt, 1994).

Harry's leadership assumptions are similar to Vickie's. Harry considers school leadership a moral activity. While Harry cannot promote religious values in a public school, he does let his integral moral beliefs guide his behavior. The achievement gap dilemma first attracts Harry's attention because he is capable of asking why the current structures of schooling, teaching, and learning occur (critique). Harry subsumes what might be a more advantageous decision for himself (allying with the common cultural explanation) in order to choose an activity that supports his belief in social justice for all students (justice). Harry's concern for the long-term welfare of his students drives his behavior (caring). Similar to Vickie, Harry's dilemma arose from efforts to integrate his critical level (ethical assumptions) into the technical level (daily administration of the school).

Figure 8. Critical level of reflection: Starratt's multidimensional ethical framework

Three assumptions providing the foundation of Harry's leadership practice.

Educational leaders respond to

1. Ethic of critique;

   Who controls? What legitimates? Who defines?

2. Ethic of justice;

   How shall we govern ourselves?

3. Ethic of caring

   What do our relationships ask of us?

Starratt, R. J. (1994)

Through reflective practice Harry explicitly examines his beliefs, the messages he sends and those he wants to send, and he determines the response he will give to the school community (technical level). The principle of coherence also sheds light on why Harry chooses to resolve the dilemma with a particular response (critical level). The reflective process also points out how others, in this case teachers, parents, and students might interpret Harry's response in a way that contaminates his actions. Harry carefully sends out the message he wants to communicate about student performance through specific behaviors (interpretive level). He also deliberately works to create a new meaning for student achievement that includes all students.

Figure 9. Three levels of reflection

Critical level of reflection:
Beliefs about an ethical school leadership

Interpretive level of reflection:
Message sent to teachers, parents and students about student achievement

Technical level of reflection:
Harry's use of the Kids Circus

Van Manen, M. (1977)

Harry seeks coherence with each of his beliefs at the technical level of reflection. He could have overlooked the achievement gap by focusing on his school's current successes. Harry chose to explore ways to raise students' self-confidence and their public image within his school community. Harry recognizes that the Kids' Circus is the first in a series of steps he must undertake to solve the achievement gap problem. Harry had tried numerous other activities including Saturday School, after school tutoring, and inner-city parent involvement. Harry was convinced, from his own experiences with his son, that part of the problem was a conscious or unconscious lack of confidence and a poor racial image. For this reason Harry believed he had to try something beyond the traditional activities used to raise student performance.

Figure 10. Harry's technical response

Technical level of reflection (implementation):

- *Harry contracts Circus of Kids*
- *Harry provides transportation and food for participants*
- *Teachers assist Harry with program*
- *Parents assist Harry with program*
- *Local businesses assist Harry with program*
- *Harry clears path for program with central office*
- *Harry initiates media publicity for program*

Harry also realizes that some parents in the school community may not want to address the achievement gap. At the interpretive level of reflection, Harry uses the admonition and inspiration of a preacher to deliver the message he wants to send to the school community. He regularly seeks opportunities for Rocky Creek Middle School to focus on its mission of helping students to reach their full potential as future citizens. Harry exhorts each person that questions the relationship Harry has drawn between a good self-image and student achievement. He believes that each student at Rocky Creek deserves an investment in their success.

Figure 11. Harry's messages

Interpretive level of reflection:

- *Rocky Creek serves all its public*
- *The school's primary purpose is citizenship formation*
- *The school's obligation is to serve all children appropriately*
- *All students can succeed*
- *Teachers must support the development of all students*
- *Parents can contribute to the self-image of all students*
- *Community members help shape students' self-image*

Harry's leadership schema illustrates his integration of the heart, the head, and the hand. The value Harry attaches to students who exhibit the achievement gap, together with his experiences with how the world of an under-achieving student works, shape his decision to incorporate the Kids' Circus into his plan. The premise of the Kids' Circus resonates with Harry's belief that students need a positive self-concept to have successful achievement. Harry's leadership schema also demonstrates the interactive nature that Sergiovanni (1992) intends to portray with his leadership schema.

Harry's case study exemplifies the mindful, reflective efforts a school leader who engages coherence between theoretical beliefs and daily practice. One of Harry's challenges is to seek coherence at the critical level for his school. His school has a clear purpose and citizenship values are openly expressed, but the actual implementation of these beliefs remains unfulfilled at a technical level. It is difficult for Harry to make decisions that are coherent and reflect shared values because of the school membership's inconsistent understanding of critique, justice, and caring (Starratt, 1994). Harry could more easily choose the "course of least resistance" rather than take a risk with his own status in the school community. However, school leaders committed to the moral leadership are not satisfied with their own success. School leaders, like Vickie and Harry, boldly move their school community closer to their vision because of their own moral character. Their vision conforms with their educational philosophy, their values, and the beliefs they espouse.

Figure 12. Harry's leadership schema

The HEART	The HEAD	The HAND
(what I value and believe)	(my mindscape of how the world	(my decisions, behaviors, and

	works)	actions)
Under-achieving students are	My son is	As teacher/principal, I
- intelligent - capable - deserving	- bright - under-achieving - feels unsuccessful	- seek resources - provide opportunities - advocate for all student needs

Adapted from Sergiovanni, T. J. (1992).

Final Reflections

The principle of coherence serves as the backbone of moral school leadership by requiring a leader to act upon their own moral beliefs. The principle further argues that it is possible to analyze a principal's moral leadership by examining the relationship between decision making and moral coherence through reflective practice. The presence of moral behavior in schools is not a new argument (McClellan, 1999; Wynne & Ryan, 1997; Jackson et al., 1993; Goodlad et al.,1990). However, the two case studies of leaders who confront routine administrative dilemmas point to the complexity of coherent moral decision making in human organizations. School leaders must rely on their own character, or moral maturity, to lead others in the school community toward moral development. Vickie's moral character had its roots in her faith. Harry's character traits were publicly found in democratic citizenship, though privately, he was also a person of faith. Both school leaders recognized the importance of student moral development in preparing future leaders and citizens.

Contemporary schools continue to increase in responsibility for student growth and development. Moral development is an obvious thread that holds this holistic process together. Citizens and school people might easily forget how profoundly leadership impacts the moral development of students through their decision making. Vickie and Harry would say that students learn to be moral leaders from the leaders they encounter in school. Featherstone and Newton take this responsibility very seriously. The coherent principle challenges school leaders to be coherent principals. Coherent principals examine their actions for messages to determine if their behaviors translate into an example of the moral character each school community subscribes for its students as future citizens. Today, differences in perspectives on how to foster moral development may still exist, but there is little disagreement about why moral maturity is a significant educational goal.

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Endnotes

1. Mrs. Featherstone is a pseudonym for a real Catholic school principal. The school name has also been changed. The dilemma is based on an actual event.

2. Mr. Newton is a pseudonym for a real public school principal. The school name has also been changed. The dilemma is based upon an actual event.
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